

Would Like To Meet

by neelix

Two lonely hearts. One talented witch.

1. Apathy 2. Daily Grind

Chapter 1 of 19

Two lonely hearts. One talented witch.

A/N: Much love to Kizzy for her unending enthusiasm and cheerleading, and for sorting out my naughty commas.

To you, the reader. Please bear in mind that this story is very old, written at the beginning of my fan fiction experience. For this reason, it's not perfect and some of the chapters are short, therefore I have posted two each time. Thanks.

1. Apathy

Severus stared at Lulu. Her blonde curls were shaking around her head, and her scarlet lips wrapped themselves around various syllables of false enjoyment, giving the impression of an impending orgasm. She was bouncing around on the end of his cock with an enthusiasm that didn't meet her eyes, her surgically-enhanced breasts hardly moving, their nipples like two cherries atop a pair of large, round iced buns.

And Severus really couldn't be bothered.

'Lulu...' he sighed.

'Yes, big boy?' she purred.

'Stop. And get off,' he stated flatly.

'You sure?' Lulu dropped the pretence, and as she acknowledged his glare, she shrugged and clambered off him in an ungainly fashion.

Severus stood and fastened his fly. He opened up his leather money pouch and counted out 50 galleons, throwing them onto the bed.

'For your trouble.' He nodded at Lulu, whose eyes had brightened at the sight of his money.

'But we didn't finish up...' she pouted. She liked her clients to leave satisfied and took pride in a job well done.

'It wasn't you, Lulu, it was me. I'm bored with whores, even talented ones such as yourself.' He gave her a small, tight smile.

'Pity.' Lulu grinned. She had always enjoyed his visits; he could go for ages, and she was usually guaranteed at least one orgasm. It didn't happen with many clients.

'Indeed.' Severus nodded. He didn't understand it either. He just needed... something else.

Lulu sighed wistfully as he walked out of the room without even a backward glance. She knew she wouldn't be seeing him again.

Hermione closed her front door and sighed. She mentally counted in her head and realised with horror that she had just endured her nineteenth unsuccessful date. She smirked ruefully to herself. At least this one had been a bit different, although not in a good way.

The bad breath she had sort of expected. The poor dress sense, the boring conversation? She had suffered those before. His request for her to wear her school uniform on the next date? Now, that was a new thing. She took a deep breath and thanked Circe for the conveniently placed Apparition point in the ladies toilets, a useful escape route for a cornered witch.

Hermione lifted the magazine from her coffee table and read through the advert again. How false it all was. And how sad that she understood all the little abbreviations now without having to think about it.

WLTM = would like to meet.

GSOH = good sense of humour.

VGL = very good looking (Hermione had found this wasn't always true).

She put a large red cross through the last circled entry. With despair she realised she had come to the end of the list, and her eyes lingered on the half-page advert she had been trying to avoid for the past month.

'Valentine Passiflora's Lonely Hearts Inc.,' the headline read. The advert went on, in unnecessarily flowery terms, to say 'If you're not getting any, Get It Here.'

Hermione snorted. She had received plenty of offers of IT. Most of the dates she had been on had ended in offers of IT. She wanted more than just IT.

Not that she had ever had IT, but she didn't just want IT.

She wanted the works. Love, passion, and IT. Not fumbling, rushing and IT.

She read through the advert again and took a deep sigh.

'What the hell,' she muttered.

2. Daily Grind

Hermione pushed open the door of the shop and walked through to the back, shrugging off her cloak and hanging it on the hook near the door of the lab. His cloak was already there as usual. He always started early on a Monday. Checking her hair was securely tied at the nape of her neck, Hermione pushed the door open and walked confidently into the room.

'Good morning, sir,' she said, smiling at Severus, who was sitting by his work bench perusing a particularly interesting article on prolonging the effects of bezoars by distilling the essence of the stones as an antidote for poisoning.

'Miss Granger.' He smiled a little and nodded at her.

Hermione walked to the corner of the room and took two mugs down from the shelf. She looked at them and smiled, remembering the look on his face when she had Transfigured them in her first week. She spooned coffee into the green Slytherin mug which bore the emblem of his house and put a peppermint tea bag into her own red and gold mug, resplendent with a roaring lion motif. She waved her wand and filled them with water, and another flick had them steaming hot. She lifted them and carried them over to where Severus was still reading, ready for their Monday morning discussion.

Initially, their meetings had been purely functional. Sort out their schedules to ensure all of their private clients received their orders on time and ensure that one of them was able to man the front of the shop each day for passing trade. However, over the past year or so, their discussions had been less about work and more to do with touching base again after the weekend.

It had become a ritual, and they had formed a camaraderie of sorts, talking about their shared love of potions and the research they would love to do if they had the time. Occasionally, they would attempt to do the crossword in the Wizard Times, a highbrow broadsheet that Severus insisted on buying but rarely read. In fact, for a long time Hermione had suspected he only bought the paper for the crossword, and she was thrilled when she had found a book full of them on the shelf in Flourish and Blotts. She had wrapped it for him as a birthday gift, and he had been touched, although he didn't show it too much. She had also brought in Muggle cream cakes and insisted they took a proper break to celebrate. He had been too embarrassed to tell her he had actually forgotten it was his birthday.

'Here you are, sir.' Hermione handed him his coffee.

Severus took it without looking up and paused slightly, murmuring 'Thank you,' and bringing the hot liquid to his lips. Finally, after two sips and a shake of his head, he thrust the magazine towards her.

'Tell me what you think of this.' He looked at her, his eyes dark.

Hermione quickly scanned the article, and her eyes went wide as she reached the end.

'You get a mention.' She raised her eyes to his and saw the nerve jumping in his cheek.

'I know. Without my permission or knowledge. It would appear I am to be a scapegoat for my use of bezoars,' he grumbled.

'Well, you did become famous for using them, sir. The normal wizarding community would never have realised how useful they were if it hadn't been for you. More people would have died.' Hermione's logic was spot on as usual, and he gave a deep sigh.

'I have grown quite tired of being famous. The perks were useful for a short time, but now, I just want an ordinary life. He looked at her, his face blank and emotionless.

Hermione laughed softly. 'I think you would be bored with ordinary, sir.'

'You're probably right. I know I'm boring myself right now. I'll do the morning shift out front if that's okay with you. I have an appointment and need to leave early today.'

He stood and shook his robes around himself, taking his coffee with him.

'No problem, sir.' Hermione smiled at his disappearing form. She shook her head and giggled.

Severus Snape have an ordinary life? Never.

3. What Are you Looking For. 4. Find My Love

Chapter 2 of 19

Two lonely hearts. One talented witch.

3. What Are You Looking For?

Severus walked in long strides along the busy London street, clutching the small, rectangular piece of cardboard in his hand. He paused for a moment, checked the address, and looked up at the building in front of him. This was it. He took a deep breath, and before he could change his mind again, he stepped up to the door and rang the bell.

'Yes?' a disembodied voice came from somewhere.

Severus coughed slightly. 'I have an appointment.'

'Name?' said the voice.

Severus closed his eyes a little before looking around slowly. 'Snape,' he replied

'Right hand wall, second brick down. Two wand taps and a push,' the voice instructed.

Severus did as he was told and heard a soft 'hiss' as the double doors opened in front of him. He walked into a large, opulent entrance hall lit by the biggest crystal chandelier he had ever seen. The marble floor swept up to an equally impressive staircase, and he looked around himself uneasily. He hadn't been expecting this.

'What are you looking for?' A young, squeaky-voiced and very skinny witch sat behind the reception desk, her short, crimson hair tight to her head and her matching crimson glasses a little wonky on her nose.

Severus lifted the card from his pocket and handed it to her, avoiding her gaze as she pointedly looked him up and down.

'Lonely Hearts, second floor. Up the stairs, then take the lift...' She was still staring at him. 'Why on earth would this Adonis need a dating agency?' she thought to herself.

Severus smirked. Adonis? He puffed his chest out and looked down at her, his lips curling in a sneer.

'Thank you,' he drawled, his voice like smooth, dark chocolate, his tongue snaking out and running across his bottom lip a little.

The witch sucked in so much air she started to choke. Severus chuckled and walked towards the staircase as she whispered 'You're welcome' after him.

Ten minutes later and Severus was sat in front of Valentine Passiflora herself. He didn't know what he had been expecting, but it wasn't this.

'Call me Val,' she whispered hoarsely, her voice the result of a seventy a day habit. She had auburn hair and a rounded face. Her facial features were non-descript, but her eyes were smiley and bright and when her lips matched them, curling upwards, she wasn't at all unattractive. She was wearing an oddly shaped black dress, and although she was sitting behind her desk, Severus knew she wasn't very tall. He relaxed a little. Despite the luxurious office, there were no airs and graces here.

'Just a form to fill in first... Severus, is it?' She smiled a little at him and handed him a parchment and quill. 'Need to know what it is you think you want.... Then I will see what I've got.'

'How quickly... before the first date, I mean?' Severus took the parchment and quill from her, scanning it.

From somewhere deep inside her, Val let out a loud, deep and surprisingly fruity guffaw.

'You will only have one date. No one ever needs more than one. I know my job, Mr Snape.'

Severus raised his eyes at her. 'Very confident,' he murmured.

'No. Just a talented witch. I have Romany blood, Mr Snape, and my mother was a great Seer. All of the couples I have introduced have been soul mates. That's what I do. It does mean, however... you could be waiting a while. No guarantees your soul mate is also searching for you, you know. She could be shackled up already with a low life who doesn't appreciate her, not realising that here you are, ready and willing.' She smiled at him brightly.

'I'm not looking for sex,' he snapped at her. 'I can buy as much sex as one man could cope with.'

'I know.' Val looked at him appraisingly. 'I've seen enough lonely men in my time, Mr Snape. Sometime sex just isn't enough, is it?'

She stood and went to walk from her office. 'Do your form; I'll be right back.'

Severus had been right. She was short.

4. Find My Love

Hermione was waiting outside Val's office, having been told there was already a customer in there. She had closed the shop and ran home quickly to change. She wanted to make a good impression, and she didn't know if they would need photographs and such. She had emptied her bottle of Sleekeazy's hair potion, and her long locks were wavy and lustrous. She had pulled on her favourite black jeans and a pale pink blouse covered with tiny flowers, applied a little lip-gloss and a spray of perfume, and then ran back down the street to Apparate into the centre of town.

She lifted a magazine and flicked through it. It was *Teenwitch*, full of photographs of the latest Quidditch players posing shirtless and flexing their muscles and flashing cheesy grins to the camera. Hermione laughed and put it down again.

The door to Val's office opened, and Hermione looked up. The small lady was standing in the doorway, holding it open for her customer to leave. She saw Hermione sitting there and smiled at her.

'You're next, come on...' She waved her forward as the man left the room.

Severus looked at her in horror, his face burning with embarrassment. He turned to Val, his jaw clenched tightly.

'I suggest you consider the privacy of your clientele, Ms Passiflora.' he snapped at her. 'I have no wish to share my private life with my employee, and yet.... It would appear she now knows everything.'

He glared, first at Val and then at Hermione. Without a word, he turned on his heel and walked down the corridor, and Hermione and Val stared after him in shock.

'Oh, gods. He will be insufferable tomorrow.' Hermione murmured.

Val looked at her sympathetically before patting her on her shoulder.

'Let's not think on it, my dear. Now, you're young and very pretty, so lets find you someone to share your life with.'

Hermione sat with her legs curled beneath her and re-read her copy of Valentine Passiflora's form. It consisted of a list of attributes she was looking for in her soul mate and ranged from 'Incredibly Handsome' to 'Useful around the house.' She ran through her checklist slowly.

'Intelligent' This was imperative. She couldn't stand boring conversations.

'Kind / Selfless' Hermione hated selfish people but admired compassion.

'Fun' She liked to have a giggle now and then.

'Not too handsome but not butt-ugly' Hermione didn't really mind about looks; she was no oil painting herself.

'Able to take control in the bedroom' Hermione blushed but agreed she needed guidance. Her experience was limited to a fumble with Viktor and a quick roll with Ron, and he had come before she had taken her knickers off.

'Risk taker' She needed someone who would keep her on her toes.

'Willing to commit' Hermione still wanted the works, and she wasn't going to put out for less than love.

'Wants children' Hermione wasn't broody yet, but she wanted the option for later.

She read through her list again and nodded before placing it on the coffee table.

Her mind drifted back to Severus, and she wondered how he was feeling. She had never considered his private life before; the subject had never come up. But he was obviously looking for love, the same as she was. Hermione felt bad for him; he had been so embarrassed. She pondered for a while. Should she pretend it hadn't happened? Or mention it and tell him not to be embarrassed? She shook her head and grabbed her glass of wine. She would worry about it in the morning.

Severus was drunk, his eyes unfocussed as he stared into his fireplace. He was contemplating not going into the shop tomorrow, but he had a complicated batch of potions to brew for St Mungo's that he couldn't put off.

Damn it. Why? All he wanted to was a little company, some pleasant conversation, and perhaps, if things went well, a longer term arrangement at the end of it. It had taken him ages to pluck up the courage to go for his appointment. He had cancelled two previously. Typical that he couldn't even do that in private and Granger was where she had no right to be.

Why had she been there, anyway? She was smart, intelligent, pretty (especially so when she had her hair loose, like today, he mused), and at times, she was a delightfully amusing witch. Why she was still single, he couldn't fathom.

He brooded on it a while longer until he fell asleep in his chair and started to snore.

5. A Day Of Unspoken Things 6. Fixing What Breaks

Chapter 3 of 19

Two lonely hearts. One talented witch.

5. A Day of Unspoken Things

Valentine Passiflora had moved into her back room. This was her private place, and no one could gain entry but her. The wards she had set up were so complicated she had to reset them each day; otherwise, she could lock herself out.

She walked over to the small altar she had set up on the back wall of the room and removed the cards detailing her most recent clients. There were six in all, including Severus and Hermione. Valentine knew not to question the reasons people came to her. It was Fate. Fate was powerful and beyond even her own comprehension, and Valentine was grateful for the business it brought her.

She shrugged off her black dress to reveal a tight-fitting, pale blue robe with long sleeves. Lifting her pendant from the altar, she placed it over her head, letting the dark sapphire stone nestle between her small, round breasts. She lifted her wand and touched the stone. It came alive, and its brilliance shone around the room, casting a sparkling blue glow on the altar. Lighting the candles, she began her incantation and stared into the mirror, watching the faces of her clients swim before her.

She smiled knowingly. It hadn't told her anything she hadn't already seen.

Hermione pushed the door of the shop with her foot, her arms laden with books and sheaves of parchment.

Severus was behind the counter, and without looking at her he muttered, 'You're late.'

'I know. Sorry.' Hermione walked and put down her cargo with a thump in front of him. 'I've had a brilliant idea...'

She was a little breathless and pulled her cloak off roughly, loosing her hair in the process so it tumbled in a curly cloud around her shoulders. She walked quickly to hang it up, focussing her mind to forget their last encounter and concentrate on work related communication. She walked back to the counter and looked at Severus.

She couldn't contain the sharp intake of breath as she took in his shocking appearance, and he stared back at her through the dark curtains of his hair, his eyes black and flashing dangerously.

'You look awful, sir,' Hermione whispered, her resolve already faltering. 'Are you ill?'

Severus leaned forward, not breaking eye contact. 'No, Miss Granger, I am not ill,' he hissed at her. 'Don't you have work to do?'

Suddenly, Hermione Granger was back at school, and her Potions master was staring disdainfully at her for speaking out of turn. Hermione caught the distinct whiff of Firewhisky on his breath and stepped back, her lips twisted in a grimace. Combined with the stubble and the crumpled appearance of his robes, she realised he must have had a rough night. She had expected him to be a little spiky today, but she suddenly felt sympathy for him. Their impromptu meeting last night had obviously affected him more than she had thought. She pulled herself as tall as she could.

'I think, sir, it might be better if I man the shop today. Without meaning to be too personal... you might put the customers off.' She glared at him firmly as if daring him to argue.

Severus knew she was right. As it was, he was finding being in her presence uncomfortable. He couldn't bear the memory of last night, and he needed coffee. He shrugged without looking at her and walked into the lab, slamming the door behind him and leaving an icy silence in his wake.

Hermione sighed and walked behind the counter. Pulling forward her books and taking a sheet of parchment, she opened the first tome to the marked page and began to take notes.

Severus was leaning against his workbench, his eyes closed. Gods, he was tired. His throat was aching a little from the copious amount of Firewhisky he had consumed, and he turned to his shelf, unstopped a pain potion, and swallowed it in one. Grabbing his mug, he made himself a strong, black coffee and, out of habit, made a peppermint tea for his assistant. He stared at it for a moment. He would have to take it to her now, and he felt ashamed at being so harsh with her. He didn't want her to look at him with those amber eyes full of pity, knowing he was lonely, knowing he was searching for someone. Severus was feeling so sorry for himself that it didn't occur to him that Hermione was also lonely and looking.

With a huff, he grabbed the mug and took it to her in the front of the shop. His hand was trembling slightly from the alcohol still coursing through his veins, and as he turned to place the mug on the counter, Hermione tried to take it from him and proceeded instead to knock it from his hand. As if in slow motion, they both watched as the murky, hot liquid flew from the mug and onto the front of his robes.

'Fuck!' Severus cried out as the mug smashed on the stone-tiled floor.

'Oh, bloody hell! I'm so sorry... I was trying to help!' Hermione wailed as she grabbed her wand. *Aguaamenti!*

A cold jet of water flew from Hermione's wand, soaking through Severus' robes and cooling his scalded skin beneath. He gasped and stared at her in disbelief.

'What the fuck are you doing?' he hissed incredulously at her.

'Cooling your skin down. We should look at it, sir, make sure there is no permanent scarring...' Hermione walked towards him and put her hands on the top of his robes, starting to unbutton them.

Severus grabbed Hermione's hands, and she stopped suddenly as she realised what she was about to do. Her face went pale, her mouth fell open in shock, and she looked up into his eyes in horror.

'Are you a witch, Miss Granger?' Severus asked her smoothly.

Hermione nodded, not trusting herself to speak coherently.

'And have you not worked in the finest, most highly regarded Potioneer's shop for the past three years?' He still held her hands in his tightly, emitting breaths in short bursts as he tried to control his anger.

'Yes...' Hermione closed her eyes. Gods, she was stupid. 'I'm sorry, sir...' she trailed off, her shoulders slumping. 'I just reacted. I didn't think.'

Severus watched her as the penny dropped. He let go of her hands as water dripped slowly onto the floor where he stood.

'If this unfortunate incident should happen again, what course of action will you take, Miss Granger?' Severus's voice was a whisper as he calmed down and looked at her.

'I would cast a Cooling spell, then a Drying spell, and finally obtain some healing ointment from the stores, sir.' Hermione was looking at the remnants of her mug, too broken to fix, and felt tears pricking at her eyes.

As Severus turned and walked back into the lab, Hermione knew without a doubt that bumping into him at Lonely Hearts Inc. had changed their relationship forever.

She just didn't know how right she was.

6. Fixing What Breaks

When Severus walked into the shop the next day, he had a slight spring in his step. He had slept really well, had a nice, hot shower and a shave, and was dressed in clean robes. He was ready for the day ahead and had all but forgotten the previous days' debacle.

But Hermione hadn't. She hadn't slept a wink, her mind going over the events again and again. Severus had upset her deeply. It wasn't her fault she had been at Lonely Hearts Inc. She hadn't known he was going to be there. It wasn't her fault he had come to work stinking of alcohol and looking like a vagrant, and it wasn't her fault he was in a bad mood that had just worsened over the course of the day. Naturally, he had taken it out on her.

After the mug incident, she had walked into the lab to make another cup of tea and had opened the door quickly, not realising that Severus was leaning against the wall behind it. He had heard her open the door a second too late, and she had hit him squarely in the face. His nose had bled, and she had searched in vain for dittany, only to realise they had run out. He had roared at her then, blaming her for not keeping the stock up to date. Hermione had pointedly checked their schedule for the week and had smiled a little when she saw his name in his own spidery writing next to 'Stock Check' on the list. She had shoved the schedule under his nose, and his eyes had narrowed. Hermione realised she had made a mistake when he lifted his wand and incinerated the list before her eyes. She hadn't needed to be told twice to get out of the lab.

They had spent the rest of the day in frosty silence, avoiding each other, and Hermione had left the shop before him, tears in her eyes and a hurt, dragging feeling in the pit

of her stomach. It was still there the next morning as she walked dejectedly into the lab, her hair pulled into a tight bun and dark shadows under her eyes.

Severus looked at her as she walked in and would have smiled had she caught his eye, but she didn't. Puzzled, he watched her, expecting her to make his coffee as normal. She didn't do that either. Instead, she walked over to the stock cupboard and walked inside, and in a few minutes, her heard the familiar clink of bottles being shifted around. Severus sighed. He had been a real bastard to her, and it really hadn't been her fault. He should apologise, but he wasn't sure how. A knot was forming in his stomach, and he decided to make a coffee while he thought about how to resolve the situation.

He pulled his mug from the shelf and smiled slightly. She had made this for him, and he loved it. He went to get her mug and then remembered with horror that it had been smashed to smithereens. He took a plain, white mug from the shelf and took his wand from his pocket. Concentrating, he pointed the wand at the mug and turned it Gryffindor red, edging the lip with gold and making the handle into the tail of a lion. The body and head appeared roaring on the side of the mug, and as an extra flourish, he put her initials on the base of the mug, knowing she wouldn't see them until she had finished her tea.

'Miss Granger,' he called to her. He noticed with a pinch of guilt that she stiffened at the sound of his voice.

'Yes, sir?' She turned to him, avoiding his eye and looking instead at his boots, which, she noted, were particularly shiny today.

'You forgot to make your tea. Here...' He placed the tea on the workbench and sat down in his usual space, watching her as she walked out of the cupboard.

'I'm sorry. I forgot about your coffee...' Hermione drifted off as her eyes fell on the new mug in front of her. She raised her eyes to his. She saw a glint there and a small smile playing around his lips.

'A peace offering. My behaviour yesterday was...'

'Unforgivable,' Hermione whispered, and her eyes filled with tears.

'Yes. Exactly that,' he murmured. He had never seen her this upset in all of the years they had worked together.

Hermione lifted her mug and drank her tea, not looking at him and not speaking. As she drained her mug, her initials appeared, and she smirked a little. He always had to go one better.

'Does that mean I am forgiven?' Severus watched her as she relaxed and shrugged her shoulders.

'Do I have a choice? I don't enjoy feeling like this, you know.' Hermione looked at him, her eyes wide.

'I am truly sorry. It really wasn't your fault,' he replied.

'I know that!' Hermione snapped, and before she knew it, all of her thoughts from the last two days came spilling from her mouth.

'It wasn't my fault you were at Valentine's office on the same day as me! I know you were embarrassed. Don't you think I was too? I mean, you're older than me, and your reputation, well... Not many women would be happy to date an ex-Death Eater, regardless of your being cleared of all charges and being a hero and a genuinely good person after all. At least you have a good reason to join a dating agency. Of course you should if you're lonely and you need someone in your life. Why not? But me? I'm only 29; I'm not too ugly, I am a nice person; I can have intelligent conversations... but the only men I have ever met just want me for sex or to have their babies. Not one of them has wanted me for me, and I get lonely too, sir... Very lonely, actually....'

Hermione stopped talking, her bottom lip trembling slightly as the reality of her little speech hit her. She really was lonely, and no amount of study or throwing herself into work could take away the fact that she went home to an empty flat and slept in a bed only warmed by her own body.

Severus stared at her, his mouth open. He had no idea what to say to her.

'I'm going out front,' Hermione mumbled, walking past him quickly. Without knowing why, Severus grabbed her arm as she passed, and she stopped and stared at him.

'I am sorry, Hermione,' he whispered as he stared into her sad eyes.

'I know you are, sir.' She shrugged her arm away and walked out of the lab.

At lunchtime, Hermione closed the shop and went to grab her cloak. Severus, waiting for her, had the door of the lab open, and as she stood, fastening her cloak, he approached her with caution.

'Where are you having lunch today?' he asked her conversationally. It was normal for him to ask her, and she smiled him.

'I don't know yet. I thought I would just go where my feet take me.'

Severus coughed. 'I thought, perhaps... you may like some company?'

Hermione looked at him. They had never had lunch together, although in the beginning, Hermione had offered. She had assumed he preferred to eat alone and stopped asking him after the first week. His eyes looked wary and a little desperate, and she knew he was still feeling guilty. She smiled at him warmly.

'Fine, lets go and eat. But do me a favour, sir...' She grinned at him.

'Anything.' Relief washed over him as he grabbed his own cloak.

'Stop giving me that guilty look. It's worse than your detention stare!' Hermione giggled, and Severus raised his eyebrow at her.

'Did I have a detention stare?' he asked her as they walked out of the shop.

'Yes you did... You had other stares as well; we got to know them all so well...'

Severus smirked at her. This was better, he thought. This was normal.

7. Valentine's Day and the Arrival of Owls 8. Of All The

Gin Joints...

Chapter 4 of 19

Two lonely hearts. One talented witch.

7. Valentine's Day and the Arrival Of Owls.

It was just before six in the morning, and Valentine Passiflora entered her back room, her lips set in a thin line of determination. She had so much to organise today. Four of her recent clients had surfaced as soul mates, and although she knew with one couple it would be fairly plain sailing, the other two.... She shook her head ruefully. She would have her work cut out with them.

Walking over to her altar, she unwrapped her fortune cards from the purple silk scarf she kept them in and put the scarf around her neck for safekeeping. Taking the first couple, she placed their name cards in front of her mirror side by side. She waved her wand quickly and lit the two candles. Lifting a small pot of sage, she sprinkled two pinches into the flames and watched as they crackled, and the aroma began to fill her nostrils. She murmured a few words and tapped her fortune cards with the tip of her wand. Three cards lifted themselves from the pack and fell, face upwards.

Valentine looked at the cards thoughtfully and then smiled. This was going to be easy. The garden, heart, and ring cards told her everything she needed to know, and with a little planning, there would be a very happy occasion within the next six months. She sighed deeply. She loved pink and fluffy, and this couple were definitely going to be that.

Wrapping the cards back in her silk scarf, Valentine replaced the candles with new ones, cast a cleansing spell over her altar, and started her ritual all over again.

This time, she placed the second couples' cards in front of the mirror, sprinkled her sage, and murmured her spell. With her wand tap, four cards leapt from the pack, and her eyes widened. That didn't happen very often, but given the complex nature of this joining, she thought perhaps it made sense. As the cards fell, Valentine frowned.

The bear and the coffin signified the end of a friendship, and then the tree, signifying learning and growth, next to the heart, which was self-explanatory. Valentine was a little reassured, but she had no idea where to go with this match. She closed her eyes a little and murmured again. She began having a conversation, and to the uninitiated, it would have seemed she was talking to herself. At the end of her muttering, she opened her eyes and tapped the cards again. Two further cards fell out. A man and a woman. Valentine's eyes widened, and she started to laugh, a low chuckle in the pit of her stomach.

'Oh, my goodness...' Valentine started to blush furiously. She blew out the candles and wrapped up her cards. This was going to be interesting, if nothing else.

Valentine put down the Muggle telephone in her office and ticked a small notation on the parchment in front of her. It had taken her no time at all to organise her first couple, and their owls were on their way already. The second couple, however. Now that had taken some sorting out.

She prided herself on planning unforgettable first dates for her couples. Her first match, Sylvia and Horatio Smythe, had shared an interest in fishing, so she had organised a weekend on a boat, complete with champagne, a delicious picnic, and a house-elf with sea legs to serve them. When they had returned, they explained they had actually not got around to doing any fishing, but that was okay. Their honeymoon would be a chance to catch up on that. Valentine had been thrilled, and it had gone on from there.

The Muggle telephone rang again. She answered it quickly, laughed a little into the phone, and put it down with a satisfied click. Summoning two owls, Valentine scribbled her instructions quickly onto a piece of parchment, duplicated it with her wand, and wound the two tightly, attaching them to a leg of each owl. She opened the top floor window and released the owls, watching them as they faded into the distance. Closing the window, she looked at her clock. It was almost 5 pm. But at least it was done.

Valentine closed up her office, locked and warded the door, and when she stepped out onto the still-bustling street, she pondered her latest couple for a few moments. She had an uneasy feeling she was heading for choppy waters, particularly with him. Oh, well. She would just have to deal with that when it happened.

Hermione and Ginny were sitting at her kitchen table, about to dig into the huge bowl of pasta between them, when Valentine's owl arrived and tapped politely at Hermione's window.

'Sorry, Gin, dig in while I get this...' Hermione stood to open the window. The small, grey owl hooted at her softly, and she removed the parchment, gave the owl a treat, and sent it on its way.

Returning to the table, Hermione put the scrolled parchment down next to her and took a huge ladleful of pasta and spooned it onto her plate. She was feeling ravenous.

'You going to open that?' Ginny looked at her, her fork paused before her mouth.

Hermione shrugged. 'In a minute I will.'

'But it's from her, isn't it?' Ginny probed a little. Hermione had shared her quest for a life partner with her friend because she had no one else to talk to about it. Ginny thought Hermione was being fussy. Surely one of her nineteen dates should have been successful?

Hermione ate three mouthfuls before she looked up at Ginny again.

'This is serious, Ginny. Valentine Passiflora doesn't just give you dates with hopeless losers. She uses her magic to match you with your soul mate *Soul mate!* She emphasised the point with the bit of garlic bread in her hand.

Ginny sighed. 'What if she's a fake?'

Hermione shook her head. 'No, she's not. She gives all of her clients a list of previous couples, and you can contact them to check her out. I spoke to five couples Ginny, and they are all still together and happy and don't regret it one bit. She's no fraud.'

'What about all of us other couples then, who haven't been to Valentine bloody Passiflora?' Ginny was a little irked. 'Are you saying that Harry and I aren't soul mates and probably won't be happy forever?'

'Don't be silly!' Hermione looked at her friend incredulously. 'You and Harry are the happiest, most meant-to-be couple I know! I think you probably are soul mates, but you found each other. You didn't need any help with it. Not like me.'

Ginny softened a little. A guilty part of her felt bad for Hermione. They didn't see each other very often because, well, she never had anything new to say, and anyway, Ginny liked being with Harry. It was awkward.

'Open it, Hermione. Let's see if she has good news for you!' Ginny beamed at her friend, and Hermione smiled back, relieved.

'Okay!' She laughed and grabbed the parchment, unrolling it and spreading it out on the table in front of her. Ginny watched as her friend put her hand to her mouth as she

read.

'Well?' Ginny prompted her. 'What does she say?'

'She says my soul mate has been revealed to her. She's arranged for us to meet at the weekend,' Hermione whispered.

'This weekend?' Ginny looked at her.

'Yes... oh, gods, that's only three days away...' Hermione went pale.

'Where this weekend? The whole weekend, or just dinner on Saturday night?' Ginny was starting to get excited for her.

'She doesn't say where, but I have to bring an overnight bag. She has arranged a Portkey to take me to him.' Hermione lifted the parchment and re-read it, her hand trembling slightly. 'I'm not to mention it to anyone. You won't tell Harry, will you, Ginny? Please?'

'Of course not!' Ginny had more interesting things to do with Harry than talking about Hermione's love life. 'What if you don't like him? What if he's ugly?' Ginny was grinning at her now.

'Stop it, Ginny!' Hermione giggled. 'It is ridiculous, isn't it? But, if he's my soul mate, I suppose I'll have to at least try.'

'You had better tell me everything on Monday!' Ginny demanded.

'Maybe not everything...' Hermione murmured, and as their eyes met, they collapsed into giggles.

Severus was reading his parchment with more detachment than Hermione. He wasn't one for butterflies in the stomach and roses around the door romance. He did hope the woman wasn't boring, but then he assumed if they were truly soul mates, she wouldn't be. Severus had more faith in Valentine's magic than Ginny Potter, and he trusted that if his soul mate had indeed been revealed to her, then his soul mate she most certainly was.

It was intriguing to him, and he wondered what she would look like. If Severus had been looking for sex, then looks would have been of paramount importance. He liked large breasts. Real or fake wasn't an issue, as long as he could rest his cock between them occasionally. He liked rounded bottoms too, and pussies that were pretty, their clits visible so he didn't have to search too much. He also liked full lips, should he decide that kissing was appropriate. Given that he most recent encounters were with whores, there had been no female lips against his for some years.

Severus folded his parchment and placed it in his inside pocket, patting it slowly. The weekend would tell all, he had no doubt.

Hermione was in the lab. She had taken her robes off and was in her Muggle jeans and a white t-shirt, her hair tied back from her face as she read and then re-read her notes.

Severus had closed the shop and was puzzled. She was usually getting ready to leave by now.

'I have closed the shop, Hermione,' he murmured, not wishing to startle her.

He had been using her given name since their argument. It seemed appropriate. Hermione hadn't plucked up the courage to call him Severus yet, but he had encouraged her to do so.

'I heard you. I just wanted to finish looking through this. It's the idea I had. I never did get a chance to tell you, actually...' Hermione looked at him and smiled. 'If you have the time?' She held her notes out to him.

Severus smirked. 'Always the student?' he teased her. 'Don't tell me you still want my approval?'

'Well, I never did get it in class. Sir,' Hermione held his gaze, and he could see the truth there.

'It would have unprofessional of me to show favouritism, Hermione. Surely you understood that?' He frowned at her slightly.

'I was young, impressionable, and my favourite teacher made me feel that my best was never quite good enough. No, I don't think I did understand, Severus.' Hermione pulled her gaze from his and handed him her notes, walking past him to make some coffee.

Severus turned his head and watched her for a moment. Of course she hadn't understood; why would she? He looked down at her notes, her familiar handwriting pulling him back to the classroom. He felt as if he were marking her homework. He sat as he became absorbed in his reading, his hand automatically wrapping around the coffee she handed him as she waited for him to comment. His eyes went wide, and he glanced up at her, nodding a little. His eyes went down again, and he flicked over the parchment quickly, pouring over her formula with interest.

'Incredible...' he whispered and then looked up at her, her eyes bright and her face split in a wide smile. 'Is it too late to award points to my favourite pupil for excellence?' He smiled at her softly.

'Do you think it will work? I just thought... Well, the article said they were in the planning stages, but we could be ahead of them. If we got the patent, we could be the exclusive wholesalers... It would be ironic, don't you think? Severus Snape, selling bezoar extract? And the money... Well, we could extend, you know... make the lab bigger, perhaps. Even employ more staff...' Hermione paused.

Severus was chuckling at her, his eyes glittering as he watched her.

'Yes... I do think it will work. You are a bloody clever witch, Hermione.' He smiled warmly at her, and she grinned back.

'I always have been. Don't tell me you haven't understood that?' she said, giggling at him.

'Touché.' Severus nodded a little ruefully and looked back down at her notes.

'Did you get an owl, sir? From Valentine?' Hermione didn't know where the question had come from, but the atmosphere was relaxed, and she was interested.

Severus's eyes flicked up abruptly. He was searching her face for some sign she may be mocking him, but just saw open curiosity.

'I did, as a matter of fact,' he murmured, and then without stopping himself, he asked, 'did you?'

Hermione smiled at him. 'I did.'

'Good news, I take it?' he murmured softly, watching as her eyes brightened and her lips softened into a dreamy smile.

'Good news.' She nodded. 'You?'

'I hope so,' he murmured.

8. Of All The Gin Joints...

Hermione could hardly sleep on the Friday before her date. She lay in bed, watching shadows caused by car lights as they passed. Not only was she excited and nervous about meeting her soul mate, she had also started working on the Bezoar project with Severus.

She thought about today in the lab and realised that they had worked well together. Severus was methodical, and they had discussed in intricate detail each aspect of the process before finally acting on it, noting the positive and negative reactions. His movements had been graceful, almost fluid as he added the various compounds. His eyes had stayed alert to the changes within the cauldron, waiting for the optimum moment. Hermione sighed deeply. She felt she would always be in awe of his skills and ability and could never tire of watching him work.

Restlessly, she plumped up her pillow and pushed her curly head into it, forcing her eyes to close and her mind to still until she fell into a fitful sleep.

Severus was reading and drinking Firewhisky. He often found himself like this, drinking in his chair in front of the fire. It could have been a night like any other, but it wasn't. He couldn't concentrate, and his thoughts were a jumble he couldn't fit together.

Tomorrow, he would meet his soul mate, and he had cold feet. In the space of the last few hours, he had convinced himself that Valentine Passiflora was a charlatan of the first order and had used her straight talking manner to hoodwink him into believing she knew her stuff.

How could he-Severus Snape, ex-Potions master, ex-Death Eater, surly, sullen and sulky, not to mention snarky and sarcastic, with very little in the way of a bedside manner-how could he possibly merit having a soul mate? It was too preposterous for words. Why would any woman who was worth anything look at him as a potential life partner, one half to make a whole? Severus was seriously regretting not cancelling his third appointment.

In addition to his plague of self-doubt, Severus found himself thinking about Hermione more than was usual. Working on the Bezoar elixir had excited her, and her enthusiasm was contagious. He smiled as he remembered her relief when he had told her the first stage was complete and looked to have been a success. Her amber eyes had been bright, her mouth turned up a little smugly. Over the course of the afternoon, her hair had escaped the elastic band it had been tied in and had hung in long, curled lengths around her face. She had to hook it behind her ears, and more than once he had caught himself watching her as she did so.

He was aware he had become fond of her, and he hoped her weekend was all she hoped it would be. Because he had a feeling his would be a farce.

Late on Saturday afternoon, Hermione was walking along the busy street where Valentine had her office. Following her instructions, however, Hermione walked passed the door and into the 'phone box just adjacent to it,' her holdall clutched tightly in her sweaty hand.

She was early and took the opportunity to check her appearance in the glass door. Her hair was glossy and smooth, and she was wearing a little more make-up than usual. She was wearing her cream linen Capri pants and pale blue, gypsy top. She had teamed this with her gold, strappy sandals and her denim jacket. Not knowing where she was going had made her wardrobe decisions even harder, so she had packed an evening dress and a warm fleece, plus her jeans and trainers, just in case.

A two-pence coin started to glow blue on the shelf beside the 'phone,' and Hermione nervously touched it with her finger. The familiar and thoroughly unpleasant feeling of being pulled from behind her navel hit her, and she felt herself spinning and falling for quite some time until she fell gracefully, feet first, onto a wide expanse of lawn.

Hermione was a little disorientated and took a deep breath, looking out onto a vista of formal gardens as far as her eye could see. She heard a pop and turned around quickly. A house-elf stood formally, his hands clasped in front of himself, and he bowed slowly.

'You must be Miss Granger.' His voice was old and gravely, but his diction perfect.

Hermione smiled. 'That's me. And you are?'

'Hopkins, ma'am, here to serve.' He bowed again, and Hermione grinned as she saw his greying hair, smoothed and slicked across the top of his head tidily.

'Nice to meet you, Hopkins. Do you know what I'm meant to do now?' She smiled at him as he straightened himself.

'Indeed, ma'am, if you would follow me to your room. Dinner will be served in your private dining room in precisely one hour.' Hopkins stepped forward and took Hermione's bag, shrinking it so he could carry it comfortably, and she walked after him, her eyes curious.

As they walked across the lawn and around a line of topiary conifers, Hermione gasped. Previously hidden from her view was a large manor house with a Georgian frontage, the door flanked with two pillars of yellow stone. It was stunning. The interior didn't disappoint her either, and her room was actually a suite of rooms---a double bedroom with an en-suite bathroom, tiled from floor to ceiling in pale marble with gold fittings, and to her delight, a dining area set in a window recess and a large lounge with a huge marble fireplace. To Hermione's delight, a full library, containing both Muggle and magical reading material, could be accessed from her lounge. Only one room appeared to be locked, and she assumed it was a cupboard. Hermione glanced at the clock and went to run herself a bath, her stomach doing back flips. In an hour she would meet him, and she couldn't wait.

Severus was dressed in a new suit he had purchased for the weekend. The jacket was black and long, almost a tailcoat but with squared edges. His shirt was white and crisp, and he decided to forego his tie. Since his encounter with Nagini, anything too constricting around his neck was decidedly uncomfortable. He fastened his Slytherin cufflinks, checked his appearance a little in the mirror, and smoothed his hair with his hands. A lump formed in his throat as his eyes lingered on his own face. A face only a mother could love, he grimaced. He closed his eyes and swallowed, hoping there was Firewhisky in the dining room. He opened the door leading into the lounge and walked through into the dining area. His heart stopped. She was there.

Standing with a glass of champagne in her hand was a slim, chestnut-haired beauty. Her back was to him as she looked out of the window, and his gaze lingered on her red, satin dress, its scooped back skimming the top of her hips and hanging softly over her rounded buttocks. Her hair was pinned on her head to one side, revealing a slim and graceful neck. Severus could just make out the side of her face, her smooth, peachy skin and her soft mouth as she went to sip her champagne. Severus's mouth went dry. Gods, she was beautiful. Part of him wanted to turn and walk away. She would be so shocked to see what Valentine had matched her with. But instead, he found courage he would have attributed more to a Gryffindor and stepped towards her.

'Good evening,' he murmured.

Hermione turned and smiled at him widely.

'Hello, Severus,' she said softly.

9. This Thinking Woman's Crumpet.

Chapter 5 of 19

Two lonely hearts. One talented witch.

9. This Thinking Woman's Crumpet

One Hour Earlier...

Hermione was little shocked when the Floo activated and Valentine Passiflora appeared in her bedroom. For a brief moment, Hermione thought perhaps her date was travelling directly to her.

She had just stepped out of the bath and was wrapped in the complimentary fluffy bathrobe, a large white towel around her wet hair and a pair of over-large towelling slippers on her feet. As Valentine stepped out of the flames, Hermione had panicked. Had her date cancelled? Was there something wrong with him?

'Ms Passiflora? Why are you here? What's going on? I don't understand.' Hermione stood gaping at her before Valentine had a chance to open her mouth.

'Everything is fine, Miss Granger. Please, do not distress yourself.' Valentine walked over to the large bed and sat down on the edge of it slowly. She looked exhausted. 'Please take a seat; this won't take long as long as you're sensible. You're a clever witch, Miss Granger, but I hope you are also a logical one. There is the potential for disaster before the night is through, which is why I had to come.' Valentine shook her head solemnly. 'Your soul mate has the lowest self-esteem I have ever experienced, Miss Granger, and his thought processes are even at this moment undermining the work I have done.'

'Thought processes?' Hermione was puzzled, and her brow furrowed as she sat on the edge of the bed.

'Did you do well at school, Miss Granger? And afterwards?' Valentine looked at her kindly, a small smile on her face.

'I did,' Hermione acknowledged, smiling. 'I got great O.W.L.s, and when I finally sat my N.E.W.T.s, I got the grades I needed to undertake my apprenticeship, and now I have my Potion master's.'

'Now think, Miss Granger. When you were studying, did you feel in your stomach that you would pass or fail? Be honest... I already know the answer.' Valentine's eyes were boring into her.

'I knew I would pass,' Hermione said in a small voice. 'I was always confident of my abilities.'

'Exactly...' Valentine spoke softly. 'Now, what are your thoughts on the power of the mind?'

Hermione snorted, 'Divination, you mean? I don't hold by it.'

Val shook her head, 'No. Not divination. I mean the thoughts that shape reality... Just as what you eat shapes your body, what you THINK shapes your world and either repels or attracts, depending on your thoughts. This is the basis, the fundamental foundation for my magic. Without positive thought, it won't work. You have been looking forward to your date, haven't you? Imagining how wonderful it will be? How exciting to meet someone who is destined just for you?' Val smiled warmly at her.

Hermione blushed, her mind racing. How did she know? 'Yes, of course... Doesn't everyone?'

'Not your man, apparently. He almost loathes himself and cannot believe that anyone would want to love him or be with him or bear his children. Rarely have I seen such a fractured spirit, Miss Granger, and rarely do I take this course of action.' Val's face was serious as she looked at her.

'What can I do? I don't understand...' Hermione was confused.

'I need to tell you who your soul mate is, Miss Granger. You are strong enough for the both of you, and you will help him to fulfil his potential. You will complete him. But it is even more complicated. Your soul mate is someone known to you.' Valentine watched Hermione's face intently.

'Someone known to me who doesn't think he deserves love?' Hermione mused, biting her lip as she ran through her friends and acquaintances in her head.

Not Ron, that's for sure. His over-confidence had ended any chance of a lasting relationship, and he was now living with a French witch he had met at Bill and Fleur's wedding. Neville was married to Luna, and she knew they were very happy together. Dean Thomas or Seamus? No, not likely.

Valentine watched and smiled as Hermione's face dropped slightly, and she turned to look at her.

'Are you sure?' Hermione asked her, and then interrupted before she had a chance to respond. 'Don't answer that.'

She closed her eyes. In her own heart, she knew it was Severus as soon as his name popped into her head, like a piece of a jigsaw clicking into place. A faint, blue glow appeared over her heart as she acknowledged the truth and then disappeared.

'You know him,' Valentine stated. 'You feel him, don't you? You always have, actually. Sometimes, people just need a little nudge.' She smiled at her warmly.

'Does he know?' Hermione asked her, her voice a whisper, her mouth dry.

'Not yet, but he will. And that's when you will have your work cut out. Just be yourself. He will get there in the end.' Valentine stood and walked to the Floo. 'Good luck. But you know you don't need it, don't you?'

Valentine grinned at Hermione, who laughed softly.

'I'll let you know how I get on,' Hermione said softly, her eyes bright. She turned and fingered the silk of her dress after Valentine Floo'd away and smiled to herself.

Severus had stood staring at Hermione for almost a full minute, his face pale as he took in her appearance. Face on, she was even more beautiful, and she stunned him. The front of her dress had a plunging neckline, but his eyes were drawn from her cleavage by the black crystal choker around her throat. The red satin was gathered to the side and fastened with a matching crystal brooch, both gifts from her parents. He knew about them. She had mentioned them to him before and had said she would only wear them on a very special occasion. Suddenly, she was walking towards him, and he couldn't move as he watched her hips swing from one side to the other gracefully,

her breasts moving softly beneath the satin fabric.

'Here. You look like you need this.' Hermione handed him a glass of Firewhisky, and he downed it in one, the burning liquid bringing colour to his cheeks and ire to his tongue.

'Is this some sort of joke, Hermione?' he whispered quietly. 'Did you think it would be amusing to enlist Ms Passiflora in a little amusement at my expense?'

Hermione looked at him impassively. *He truly hates himself*, she thought. She stepped close to him; she raised her face a little, a soft smile on her lips. Resting her hand on his arm, she registered the involuntary twitch of his eyes as they looked at each other, a flash of hurt and embarrassment.

'Severus, I would never do anything to hurt or embarrass you. You know that. This is no joke. You are my soul mate.'

Her eyes widened in a small challenge, and she smiled warmly at him, showing her teeth a little before stepping back and taking his empty glass from his hand. She refilled it with Firewhisky from a small drinks cabinet at the side of the room, topped up her champagne, and turned back to face him.

Severus couldn't speak. Surely there was some mistake? She was so much younger than him; he was her former tutor, her current employer. How could this be right? But he knew she would not purposely embarrass him. That was not her way.

His mind raced back in time as his memories of her flashed in front of him. Hermione, all bushy hair at the back of his classroom, her work finished, their eyes meeting. He would politely nod his head in acknowledgement; she would smile a little shyly. Then later, she was older and dancing with Viktor Krum. She was laughing, and he smiled as he watched her blossoming. And then her request to become his apprentice. He turned her down twice until he realised he really did need help and no other student could come close to her skills. Her face, beaming as she showed him her degree results. He was the first person she had contacted as soon as they had arrived by owl, and she had been excited, flinging her arms around him, hugging him and then apologising as he chuckled at her. Then, Hermione arriving unannounced in his shop and offering to work with him, to help him build his business. He hated to admit it, but he had spent a significant part of the last fifteen years with Hermione in his life. And with a sudden realisation, he knew.

Hermione watched him and smiled as the blue light around his heart faded. She walked over to him and handed him his drink.

Severus looked at her, a small smile playing around his lips.

'Who would have guessed?' he said softly, gazing on her face as if seeing her for the first time.

'I know... It's a little overwhelming, isn't it?' she whispered, her heart beating loudly as she saw his newfound appreciation of her. Her eyes were on his mouth, and with a start, she realised he was moving closer to her.

Severus lifted his hand and stroked the side of her face, his fingertips softly brushing her full lips.

'You look beautiful...' he murmured.

Hermione could feel her stomach dancing. She was hit with a sudden urge to kiss him and was surprised by it. She had never felt it before. She didn't know what to do, but it didn't matter. Severus did.

He closed his eyes and leant forward, brushing her lips with his softly in a chaste kiss, taking her free hand in his as he pulled away.

Hermione sighed softly and heard him chuckle. She opened her eyes to see him smiling at her, his eyes glittering a little.

'Are you laughing at me, Professor?' Hermione winked at him.

'Oh, gods...' Severus closed his eyes. 'Promise me you will never call me that again. It makes all of this seem so seedy.'

'You didn't answer my question, Severus,' Hermione spoke his name softly, and he felt a tingle run through his body gently.

'I'm not laughing at you, Hermione. But I am suddenly starving. Shall we?' He grinned at her.

As he walked her to the table, his hand softly brushed the small of her back, and a pulse of electricity shot between them. They paused and looked at each other shyly.

'Wow...' Hermione whispered.

'Indeed,' he replied.

A/N: Just want to say a huge thank you to everyone for the really nice reviews I have been getting for this bit of fluff! They have made me laugh and grin like an idiot!

10. Moonlight in the Library.

Chapter 6 of 19

Two lonely hearts. One talented witch.

10. Moonlight in the Library

Hermione sat opposite Severus, the candles on the table providing the only light in the room. They ate quietly at first. This was a new situation for them, and although they were comfortable with each other, there were unknown variables to deal with, and they were both realising that they didn't actually know what to do next.

Severus was a little in awe of Hermione. She had an amazing ability to adapt to any given situation. He had seen her charm the most awkward of customers, pull people who were being disrespectful to her up short, and show kindness and compassion to those in need, both at Hogwarts during the war and also with her work in the shop. There were days she would take longer than was necessary to deliver the potions to St Mungo's just so she could call in on a few of the patients there. Severus knew for a fact that Hermione visited Neville Longbottom's parents each week without fail, even if she wasn't delivering potions.

He was also in awe of her beauty tonight, and he felt tongue tied around her. Twice, he had looked up to speak and to try and start a conversation. Twice, she had been looking right at him, and he had been breath-taken and could only smile at her. Twice, his stomach had flipped, and his mouth had gone dry, his face flushing slightly.

Hermione giggled a little nervously and broke the silence.

'This is ridiculous, isn't it? We talk all the time at work and now, when we have the time, we don't know what to say.' She laughed a little and lifted her glass. The champagne was going down very well, and she was warmed and relaxed, if not a little tipsy.

'We could talk about your elixir, if it would help.' Severus smirked at her and raised an eyebrow. 'Or I could bore you with the recent stock take and my ingredients' gathering trip?'

'How romantic that would be.' Hermione smiled sweetly at him, realised what she had said and blushed furiously, dropping her gaze. The champagne was loosening her tongue.

Severus laughed out loud. 'Good grief, Hermione, I certainly hope you don't think I am romantic! I am not much different outside work... Quieter perhaps, given that I live alone.'

'You haven't changed much since Hogwarts, actually... apart from the detentions, of course.' Hermione grinned at him, and he laughed at her.

'I would have thought I had mellowed a little? Was I really so awful?' Severus paused and looked at her thoughtfully.

Hermione put down her fork, her hand resting on the table as she ruminated her answer.

'You have mellowed, definitely, and looking back, I can understand exactly why you were so... well, so mean. Even scary sometimes. You were under so much pressure, and none of us knew. I'm sure the last thing you needed was to be teaching.'

Severus looked at her warmly and reached his hand across to hers. He held it, looking at his pale fingers as they stroked her wrist and ran across her open palm.

'I always noticed you,' he murmured, not looking at her directly but focussing on her small hand in his.

'I'm glad.' Hermione wrapped her fingers around his tightly and smiled softly. 'You were unforgettable....'

'Come with me?' He raised his eyes to hers in a question, and she nodded, biting her bottom lip slightly, butterflies in her stomach.

He looked amazing tonight in his suit. Hermione hadn't seen him in anything but his robes in a long time. That he was handsome was no surprise to her; she had always thought so. It was a little different now, though. When he looked at her with his indigo eyes, there was meaning to the look. When her eyes were drawn to his mouth, she was focussed on his lips and wanting them pressed against hers again. And her fingers twitched to run themselves through his hair.

Severus stood, still holding Hermione's hand, and they walked through the suite of rooms together side by side, not speaking until they entered the library. Hermione looked at Severus quizzically, and he smirked.

'I wanted to show you the view from the window.' He smiled and gently draped his arm around her shoulder, guiding her over to the huge bay at the side of the room.

It was a cloudless night, and the sky was deep blue and twinkling with stars. The moon hung like a huge, round light bulb in the centre of the sky and shone down, lighting the formal gardens, its reflection dancing on the surface of a large pond beyond the clipped lawn and rose beds. It gave an ethereal luminescence to the place, and Hermione's eyes started to prick with tears.

'Beautiful...' she whispered softly.

Severus lifted his wand, and with a flick, the lights in the library went out, and the moon's rays shone through the window, lighting their faces with a pale, silvery glow.

Hermione snaked her arm slowly around Severus's waist and leaned her head against him gently. He tightened his hold around her shoulder and bent to kiss the top of her head softly.

'Severus?' Hermione spoke quietly, her voice betraying a slight tremor.

'Yes, Hermione?' He pulled away a little so he could see her face, and she looked up at him, her eyes wide, the moonlight sparkling off them.

'Will you kiss me... properly, I mean?' Hermione turned and wrapped her other arm around his waist and stepped closer to him until their bodies were touching gently.

Severus's heart leapt into his throat. He had been thinking of nothing else since leaving the table, and his eyes lingered on her lips before gazing into hers. He didn't know what to say. There were no words. She smiled at him encouragingly, and he wondered if she realised how long it had been since he has kissed a woman. Even he couldn't remember exactly.

Tentatively, he wrapped his arms around her shoulders and slowly moved his mouth to hers. Hermione closed her eyes in anticipation, and he paused slightly. She looked incredible, her soft mouth tipped upwards, her eyes closed, her body in his arms. Closing his eyes, he kissed her mouth softly, pressing against her lips. Hermione made a contented sound, and he deepened the kiss a little, pushing more firmly and gently running his tongue over her lips. Hermione felt a shiver run down her spine and moaned softly, opening her mouth to him and kissing him back, moving her lips against his and searching for his tongue with her own. Their tongues touched, and they both groaned into each other's mouths at the sensation.

Severus pulled her closer to him, allowing his hands to run along her back, his palms splayed against her bare flesh. Hermione hooked her hands under the tail of his jacket and ran her fingers along his back, the crisp cotton shirt beneath her gentle fingers. They kissed passionately, and Hermione's hair began to fall loose as Severus cupped her face and teased at her lengths with his fingers. With a gasp, Hermione felt his erection growing against her, and she pulled away a little in surprise.

'I'm sorry,' Severus panted, pulling his lips from hers reluctantly.

'Don't be...' Hermione tried to catch her breath, pushing her hair from her face. 'I feel the same way, if I'm honest,' she whispered.

'We should slow down.' He smiled at her softly.

'Do you think you love me, Severus?' she asked him, her eyes intent on his face.

'That's a big question, Miss Granger,' he teased her gently. 'I only found out we are soul mates a few hours ago.'

'Could you love me, do you think? There is a reason I am asking.... It's important.' Her eyes were serious.

Severus looked at her for a moment. Could he love her? Is it possible he loved her already? He wasn't going to lie to her.

'I don't know the answer to your question, Hermione. I find you irresistible, especially in this dress. I have grown very fond of you while we have been working together, and I see you as a good friend. And I feel as if I could kiss you forever. But if that is love, I do not know. I'm sorry.' Severus bent and kissed her again.

'I asked because I have always promised myself I wouldn't have sex unless the man I was with loved me and was willing to commit to me fully. It's old fashioned, I know.'

But I never wanted to give myself to just anyone,' she murmured quietly, leaning against his chest as she spoke.

'I assumed that you and Ron...?' Severus asked her gently.

'We might have, but... well, he was young, and so was I. Neither of us had any experience, and afterwards, I decided to wait.' Hermione smiled softly at him.

'I would expect nothing less of you.' He stroked her face with his thumb gently.

Hermione stifled a yawn with her hand and laughed softly. 'I'm sorry, the champagne is starting to catch up on me.'

'I'll walk you to your room. We can meet for breakfast. And then, I am sure I will not be able to restrain you from wreaking havoc on these bookshelves for a few hours!' He chuckled as they walked, their arms around each other.

'I've had a lovely night, Severus... Thank you.' Hermione smiled and lifted her hand to his cheek.

Severus sighed and pushed his cheek into her palm. She had such a delicate touch. They kissed again, both of them holding back their passion, both aware of the double bed that sat behind the door they were leaning against.

Severus pulled away gently and smiled.

'Goodnight,' he whispered.

Hermione smiled a little dreamily. 'Goodnight, Severus,' she answered softly, watching as he walked towards the locked door next to the lounge and walked inside.

He paused, and they looked at each other for a short moment before slipping inside their rooms and closing the doors at the same time.

11. Wanting To Be Kissed

Chapter 7 of 19

Two lonely hearts. One talented witch.

11. Wanting To Be Kissed

Hermione awoke in her bed and stretched. There was sunlight peeking in through the window a little, and she looked around herself quickly, piecing together the events of last night. She had been so tempted to go and knock on Severus's door, her body crying out to be touched by him, but something had held her back. She closed her eyes slightly and ran her tongue over her lips, remembering the feel and taste of his kiss. She smiled to herself and threw the bedclothes back, ruffling her curls with her hand. She wondered if Severus was out of bed yet as she wandered into her bathroom and turned on the shower, and her stomach flipped at the thought of seeing him again.

Severus had sat up for an hour after Hermione had gone to bed, waiting for sleep to creep up on him. He had read his book for a while, but his mind betrayed him by drifting off to think about her. His erection was insistent as he remembered her kiss and the feel of her soft skin beneath his fingertips. Her hair was silkier than he had imagined it would be, and the scent of her vanilla and cinnamon shampoo lingered on him, teasing him and reminding him that he hadn't imagined it all. Not that Severus had ever imagined himself kissing Hermione Granger.

Severus was never one to plan ahead too far. Being in the service of the Dark Lord had taught him that each time he was summoned may be his last, and making plans would be futile. When he had finally gone to bed, however, his dreams were filled with images of Hermione. They were kissing in the library, then in his lab. He was showing her his home, and they kissed there, too. Then he was naked in his own bed and turned to see her curly head on the pillow beside his, and when he reached to touch her, she came to him willingly.

Severus awoke with a start; the sheets of his bed were tangled around his legs, his cock as rigid as a flagpole, sweat glistening on his chest. He relaxed against his pillow and sighed, running his hand across his brow. He wondered if Hermione was awake and decided to shower quickly and go and find her. He needed to kiss her for real. Dreaming just wasn't enough.

They exited their rooms at the same time, and as they turned to walk, their eyes met across the lounge. They both paused mid-step before walking faster, meeting somewhere in front of the large sofa that dominated the room. Hermione flung herself at him, and he wrapped his arms tightly around her as their lips met and tongues searched for each other. Severus spun her around as they kissed and used his legs to push her onto the couch, where he covered her body gently with his.

Hermione ran her hands through his hair as she became aware of his weight against her and moaned softly beneath his mouth. She gasped as his tongue plundered her, and she felt herself growing wet between her thighs.

'Severus...' she murmured.

'Shhh...' he whispered, smiling as he bent to cover her mouth again, running his hands along her body and gently cupping her breast in his hand. He ran his thumb across an erect nipple through her soft, cotton t-shirt. Hermione almost exploded, and her eyes rolled back in her head, her mouth falling open.

Severus sucked at her bottom lip gently and ran his tongue across it before moving to her throat, planting gentle kisses along her soft flesh. Hermione arched her back and pushed her breast into his hand, and Severus gasped as he felt her hand stroking along the back of his shirt and slip beneath the waistband of his trousers, gently touching the top of his buttocks with her fingertips.

He pulled away from her suddenly and stared down into her face, his eyes dark and heavy with desire.

'What are we doing?' he gasped hoarsely. 'You wanted to wait...'

'You don't have to fuck me to make me feel good, Severus... Just improvise...' Hermione panted, her eyelids fluttering as she looked at him above her.

She had never felt so turned on, and she needed release. Even her own night time activities had never got her this wet. Severus understood her need.

'Not here...' he said softly and stood, adjusting his trousers around his tight erection.

He bent and lifted Hermione into his arms, hooking one under her thighs and one around her waist as she snaked her arms around his neck. He walked to her room, and the door opened as they approached. Hermione looked at him and giggled softly as he arched his eyebrow. He quickened his pace and deposited her onto the bed, pushing his shoes off before joining her, their lips finding each other, their bodies pressed together. Severus could feel her breasts pushing into his chest and ran his hand to her waist, lifting her t-shirt a little. Hermione groaned and pushed him away.

'Too slow....' she muttered and sat up, pulling the t-shirt over her bushy hair, revealing a white satin bra which pushed her breasts up slightly.

Severus stared at her breasts as she turned back to him, his eyes wide as he flicked up to her face hungrily.

'Go ahead... I want this as much as you do.' Hermione sighed as she lay back, and Severus fell onto her with his mouth, tracing small circles on her flesh with his tongue, his hands cupping her and thumbs circling her erect nipples through the fabric. Hermione put her hands in his hair, rolling his face over her as she started to moan, her head tipped back. She had never felt this good.

Severus loved the taste of her skin and laved his tongue along her cleavage. He lifted her up softly, covering her mouth with his and kissing her sensuously as he unfastened her bra, slipping the straps slowly off her shoulders. He discarded it somewhere and gazed down at her. Her breasts were larger than he had imagined them to be, her nipples caramel in colour, small points erect and begging to be kissed.

Hermione smiled as she watched him drink her in, stroking his hair softly as he licked his lips.

'Do you like them, Severus?' she asked him gently.

Severus raised his eyes to her and smiled. 'You are exquisite, Hermione... Beautiful... I had no idea what you were hiding under your cloak...' He chuckled softly.

'It's not all I'm hiding,' she whispered meaningfully, and his eyes darted down to her crotch slightly. Hermione laughed softly.

'I think you are naughty, witch... Do you know what you're doing to me?' he growled softly and bent, nuzzling her neck with his lips and kissing her, sucking softly on her ear lobe as he crushed his erection against her leg.

'I don't need to fuck you to make you feel good, Severus... Oh, gods...' Hermione cried out as he covered her breast with his warm, wet mouth and ran his tongue across her nipple over and over again.

Hermione started to squirm beneath him and sighed as he moved his mouth, paying the same attention to her other delicious nipple and sucking at her gently.

'Please, Severus...' Hermione pushed her crotch against his leg and started to grind herself against him.

Severus's breath hitched slightly, and he moved his mouth back to her lips, adjusting his legs to give easier access as he plundered her mouth. He could smell her arousal already and let his hand drift to the waistband of her jeans. He deftly popped the button and slid down the zip, his fingers finding the elastic top of her knickers and slipping downwards until he felt her curls beneath his fingers. She was wet, her juices slipping across his fingertips, and he groaned, pushing his cock and grinding slightly.

'So wet, Hermione... gods...' he gasped, his fingers moving lower down until they were parting her lips slightly. Hermione gasped and started to move against his hand. Severus needed more room and withdrew his hand, much to her disappointment. He moved down the bed slightly and grabbed the top of her jeans, pulling them over her hips until they were gathered around her ankles, her white knickers caught up in the denim. Severus glanced up at her. She was all but naked in front of him, and he felt the urge to possess her fully. Her lips were parted, her breasts pert and full, her hair like a soft, curly cloud across the pillow and her thighs slightly apart, her pubic hair glistening from her juices. He had done this to her, and he knew with certainty that she was his. No other man had seen her like this, and he felt humbled.

He went back up the bed and kissed her furiously, forcing his tongue into her mouth as his hand covered her pussy, his fingers parting her labia and spreading her juices across her clit, his fingertips brushing firmly over the engorged nub.

'Ah... Oh, shit!' Hermione writhed against him. 'Again, Severus... Please...'

Severus smiled and ignored her request, moving his hand away and slipping his fingertip into her opening slowly. Hermione gasped as he tipped his finger forward and rubbed slowly, her eyes snapping open as she stared at him.

'Shall I stop?' he whispered, his eyes glinting as he enjoyed her surprise.

'Don't you fucking dare!' she gasped, and he chuckled, bending his head to kiss her again, his finger maintaining the pressure on her G-spot as she started to grind onto his hand firmly.

'Oh... oh, gods... oh, gods!' Hermione started to shudder, and he knew she was close.

He pulled his hand away quickly and moved his head between her legs. With no preamble, he fixed his mouth to her vagina and slipped his tongue inside her, swallowing her juices and closing his eyes as he revelled in the taste of her.

Hermione was in another place, his tongue snaking through her labia until he found her clit and inserted his finger again. He started to thrust into her firmly and flicked his tongue across her clit in a regular rhythm. Hermione grabbed onto his hair and rubbed her pussy over his face, her hips lifting from the bed as she started to moan loudly.

'Oh, gods... oh, shit... oh, oh... oh, my gods... oh, yes, don't stop, please don't stop... OH YES!'

Hermione bucked forward, and Severus tried to hold her down with his free hand as she came over and over. Her vagina clamped on his finger, juices gushing from her as he lapped at her, inhaling the scent of her orgasm. Her body went limp, her breathing heavy as she revelled in the afterglow of her orgasm. She had never experienced anything so intense, and a small smile played around her mouth as he crawled up her body and kissed her lips, letting her taste herself.

Severus smiled down at her as her eyes opened softly. 'Are you alright?' he murmured.

'More than alright. That was amazing.' She smiled at him. 'You ticked one of my boxes, anyway.'

'Did I indeed? I didn't see an option for 'earth-shattering orgasms' on my form,' he teased her gently.

'Funny man...' She smiled. 'It was the 'take control in the bedroom' box, if you must know.' She giggled a little as he started to stroke her breasts again.

'Oh, I think you may find I can be very controlling in the bedroom, if we get that far...' He smiled at her and kissed her again.

Hermione smiled under his mouth and pushed her tongue between his lips. Severus gasped, and she laughed, a deep, womanly sound that had his stomach in knots. She pushed him away slightly and stared into his eyes.

'Your turn,' she whispered.

A/N: Don't ask me where that came from. I have no idea... Hermione was meant to wait and be a good girl for a while, but the muse has its own wicked ideas!

Just want to say thank you for the brilliant reviews this story has recieved. I have been giggling... a lot!

And a quick 'High Five' to Kizzy, for getting rid of all my rubbish and making this readable.

12. Shocking The Locals

Chapter 8 of 19

Two lonely hearts. One talented witch.

12. Shocking the Locals.

Hermione had removed her jeans from around her ankles and was now fully naked. Severus lay on his back and watched her as she walked back to the bed slowly, pushing her hair from her face and hooking it over her ears, her tongue licking her lips softly, her brow furrowed.

'What are you thinking about?' he asked, smiling softly.

'How did you know I was thinking?' She grinned at him suddenly.

'You always push your hair behind your ears and stick your tongue out a little... It's quite endearing,' he replied, laughing, 'but don't avoid the question, Hermione.'

Hermione blushed and climbed up on the bed. His head was resting on his arm, his white shirt open at the collar, the top two buttons open and revealing a little tuft of dark chest hair. Her gaze went slowly down his body and rested on his crotch, where his erection was still evident. Severus smirked and twitched his cock. Hermione jumped. She caught his eye and giggled, covering her mouth with her hand.

'Come here...' Severus laughed and opened his arms. Hermione climbed onto him and snuggled against his chest, her fingers playing with his shirt buttons gently and flicking them open one by one, her hand stroking his chest softly. She could feel his muscles beneath his skin and raised her eyes to his.

'You're very strong, aren't you? It hadn't occurred to me,' she murmured.

'It was a necessity to maintain my physical strength. I would not have survived otherwise,' he replied quietly.

'Was he very cruel to you, Severus?' Hermione's eyes were a little wet with tears.

'Not as cruel as he was to some others, but enough. It was his way of controlling us. He certainly didn't have our admiration. Fear was his only way. But enough talk, witch... I seem to remember something about it being my turn?' His eyes flashed at her, and her face flushed prettily.

'I'm not an expert, Severus,' she said quietly.

'You are, however, a quick study,' he said, smiling encouragingly, 'and I know how you love to learn. Now, kiss me...' His eyes were heavy as he stared at her, and she sighed as she moved up his body, covering his lips with her mouth and rubbing her still damp crotch across his hard erection.

Severus groaned and pushed her hips until she lay by his side. He unfastened his fly, and with her help, he pushed his trousers down over his hips, revealing silky and very roomy boxers. Hermione looked at his crotch and gasped at the sight of his erection through the smooth fabric. He was a lot bigger than Ron, and she wondered just how that would be expected to fit inside a woman. As if knowing her thoughts, Severus chuckled.

'If a woman is ready... really ready, she can accommodate the largest of men. There are some larger than me... apparently...' He smirked, and Hermione hit him playfully on his arm.

'Size doesn't matter, or so they say,' Hermione licked her lips, unable to keep her eyes from his hard cock.

'We'll see if you still believe that one day,' Severus murmured as he watched her, and his hand went to cup her breasts, his fingers pulling and tweaking at her nipples firmly until she gasped. He was determined to have her fully now. Tasting her wasn't enough. Hermione kissed him and let her fingers stroke his hard length through his shorts.

'Harder,' Severus whispered beneath her lips, and she pushed her palm flat and ran it firmly up his length until she reached the waistband of his underwear. Slowly, she slipped her hand down and ran her fingers over his testicles, feeling them tighten under her touch. She pushed the fabric down and allowed the air to hit him.

Taking her mouth away from his, Hermione moved down the bed and lay with her breasts cushioning his balls as she looked intently at his cock for the first time. The shaft was pale and thick, the head darker and quite wide, and Hermione noticed droplets glistening on the tip. Out of curiosity, she flicked her tongue out and licked them off to taste them. They were a little salty, and it wasn't unpleasant. Severus hissed as he saw her tongue on his cock. Her eyes were wide as she looked at him, and he sighed. She was going to be amazing; he could just tell. Her nostrils flared as she inhaled his scent, musky and manly and she felt a gush of moisture between her legs. Taking her hand, she wrapped her fingers around him and started to thrust up and down slowly and then stopped. She removed her hand and grabbed Severus's, putting it on his cock.

'Show me... so I get it right,' she said softly, smiling at him shyly.

Severus raised an eyebrow and nodded slightly. He was feeling so turned on, he was scared he would come without her hands on him, and he didn't want that at all. He wrapped his slim, pale fingers around his length, and gasped a little as he began to move the skin over the purpling head of his cock. He increased the pace, and Hermione noticed that as his hand reached his head, he gave a slight squeeze and a small twist. A little pre-cum escaped the hole at the top of his cock, and Hermione covered it with her mouth, running her tongue over his head as he continued to move his hand quickly.

'Oh, gods... Hermione... move...' he gasped.

He couldn't allow himself to come in her mouth, not yet. He let go of his cock briefly and grabbed her hand, covering it with his own and holding tightly, and he began to move again. Hermione watched as the vein in his neck protruded and his hips started to buck upwards a little. Severus removed his hand and opened his eyes to watch as she continued to masturbate him. Hermione squeezed him suddenly, and he cried out as an arc of creamy sperm shot upwards from him and landed on her breasts

dangling over him. Without knowing why, Hermione continued to move her hand and ran the head of his cock between her breasts gently as more come shot from him in pulsing spurts.

Severus collapsed and lay still for a long time, his eyes closed and his mouth open slightly, his breath coming in short bursts.

'Gods...' he moaned. 'So good.'

Hermione smiled. He was so gorgeous, and she couldn't understand why she hadn't seen it before. It was only a short leap in her thought process for her to realise that she could easily fall in love with him, and she grinned to herself. Sitting up, she glanced down as long lengths of sperm joined them from his cock to her breasts.

'Eugh...' Hermione giggled a little. Severus opened his eyes and looked at her. He started to laugh, his body shaking until small tears were running down his face. Hermione laughed with him, and as they stopped, their eyes met, and he sat up to kiss her softly.

'You are wonderful, Hermione,' he whispered.

'So are you.' She smiled at him widely.

Severus reached for his wand and cleaned them up, still chuckling to himself as they dressed again.

'What time is it, do you think?' Hermione asked him, running her hand across his back as she watched him put his shoes back on.

'Still early, I think. Do you fancy going somewhere special for breakfast?' He looked at her, and his lips twitched up at the corners.

'That would be great! Do you know where we are, then?' Hermione bounced off the bed and put her trainers on her feet quickly.

'I do indeed. We are in Scotland.' He smiled at her and held out his hand, 'Come. I have a surprise.'

Hermione took his hand and grinned at him. She was suddenly very happy that he had turned out to be her soul mate.

They stood on the neat lawn, watching as the sun's rays dappled the pond.

'Ready?' he murmured, pulling her close.

'You don't need to hold me for Side-Along Apparition, do you?' Hermione looked puzzled.

'No. But I do need to hold you...' he drifted off as he looked into her eyes, and he felt the weight of his words as they settled squarely somewhere near his heart. He had spoken the truth, and he felt that if he left her side for a mere moment, the pain would be unbearable.

'That's lovely,' Hermione whispered.

'Hmmm.' Severus smiled. 'Hold on.'

With a small twist, they Apparated, and Hermione still had her eyes closed when they arrived at their destination.

'You can look now.' He laughed and stepped away, keeping tight hold of her hand.

'Oh!' Hermione grinned at him. 'Perfect!'

'I feel the need to scare some children... It's been so long.' He smiled slyly at her.

'Don't be mean!' Hermione laughed and looked at him. 'Severus...' She pulled him to her and he wrapped his arms around her tightly.

'What is it?' he asked her.

'What do we tell people? Minerva and the others?' Hermione looked at him closely.

'Tell them the truth. We are on our first date and so far... So good...' He lost himself in her eyes, and she gasped as he covered her mouth with his. They kissed for what seemed a very long time until the need to breathe interrupted them.

Hagrid was stood outside his hut, his eyes focussed on them and squinting.

'Goodness me, Fang... That looks like... an 'Ermione... and they're... good gods... they are... they're kissin'!' He rubbed his eyes and blinked, staring again.

'Yep... still kissin.' He shook his head in disbelief.

13. The Ties That Bind

Chapter 9 of 19

Two lonely hearts. One talented witch.

A/N: Hi all. Just wanted to say I am sorry this chapter has taken its own sweet time. I was on holiday. I did come back to 39 reviews, though. Thank you all so much! I was quite overwhelmed!

Huge hug to kizzy; she's a star.

Warning: this chapter is a bit weird... you will see what I mean!

13. The Ties That Bind.

Severus kept a tight hold on Hermione's hand as they walked up to the main door of Hogwarts.

'It feels a little strange walking into the school holding hands with my old professor.' Hermione laughed softly.

'I know what you mean, and yet, it feels like a lifetime ago. I haven't taught in almost five years. And I certainly don't see you as my student. Not after this morning.' He glanced at her from the corner of his eyes and saw she was blushing.

Severus paused and looked at her for a moment, stroking her face with his hand softly and hooking her loose curls over her ear.

'Don't be embarrassed. You were perfect... really.' He smiled warmly at her.

'You know that I have never been like that with anyone else, Severus, don't you?' Hermione met his eyes, and he saw defiance there.

'I know that,' he murmured.

'I wouldn't do that with just anyone, Severus. Just know that you are special to me, okay?'

Hermione stepped up and kissed him fiercely on his lips, and he felt his stomach tighten a little. As they pulled apart, Severus smiled, but it wasn't returned. Instead, he met passion and determination in her eyes, and he paled. He had a feeling he had unleashed something in her that wasn't going to be sated any time soon. He pulled her to him and wrapped his arms tightly around her, holding her close and stroking her hair softly.

'You're special to me too,' he murmured, a tight lump in his throat.

They squeezed each other until at some unspoken signal they let go and took hold of each other's hand.

Without speaking, they walked up the front door of the school, neither of them least bit surprised when it opened for them and revealed the thin, bespectacled frame of Minerva McGonagall.

'Albus said you were here.' She beamed at them. 'Severus, you look so well. I love the new clothes...you look almost...'

'....human?' Hermione suggested and giggled a little.

'Thank you... I think.' Severus stepped forward and took Minerva's hands in his. 'It's good to see you, Minerva.'

'And Hermione...' Minerva's eyes filled with tears, and Hermione walked forward to hug her old Head of House. 'My dear girl, how you have grown!'

Hermione laughed, and Severus grinned as he watched the two women smiling at each other warmly.

'Are we too late for breakfast?' Severus asked her.

'Of course not! I'm forgetting my manners... Come, we'll go to my office. The old man will never forgive me if I don't bring you up to talk to him.' Minerva waved them inside and unconsciously, Severus took Hermione's hand, and they walked in ahead of the Headmistress.

The movement wasn't lost on Minerva, and she paused, watching them as they walked down the hall. She closed her eyes and murmured slightly. She opened her eyes and looked again. Her eyes widened, and she let out a small breath, shaking her head in disbelief.

'Severus and Hermione?' she said softly. She shrugged and followed them. This was going to be interesting.

They ate a wonderful breakfast courtesy of the house-elves, and Hermione was delighted when Winky came to collect the dirty crockery. She hadn't seen the elf in such a long time and was happy to hear that she was actually enjoying her half-day off each week.

Severus had spoken to Albus at length, the old man animated and almost dancing in his frame as he smiled down on them both. They filled Albus and Minerva in on the shop and Hermione's bezoar project, and when all the news was shared, there was a gentle lull in the conversation that Minerva couldn't resist filling.

'Tell me about Valentine Passiflora,' she said softly, and her eyes shone as she smiled at them smugly.

Severus was drinking coffee and almost choked. Hermione gasped a little and then started to giggle hysterically.

'You can tell her, Severus,' Hermione sputtered between giggles.

'No... I think this is girl talk. I fancy a walk around the school for old times' sake.' He glanced up at Albus and grinned, 'Sorry you can't come with me, Albus.'

Albus looked down at him, his eyes twinkling merrily. 'No problem, my boy. I may go and talk with the Fat Lady; it's been a while...'

Once the men had left the room, Hermione fixed Minerva with a quizzical stare.

'How do you know about Ms Passiflora?' she asked.

Minerva chuckled, 'I knew her mother, Rose. Valentine inherited her mother's magical signature; that's how I knew. We were actually in school together for a short while, but her family were Romany Gypsy, and she moved on, but we were friends and stayed in touch. We used to practice together.'

'Practice together? But wasn't she a Seer? Does that mean you...? Hermione's jaw dropped.

'Oh, goodness me, I am not as talented as Rose or Valentine, but I have the basic ability. I can see your connection to Severus, you know. It's strong already. How long have you been... you know...' Minerva smiled warmly at her former student.

'Only since yesterday; it's our first date. Ms Passiflora believes we are soul mates,' Hermione stated. She started to fumble with the handle of her teacup, feeling a restlessness she couldn't understand.

'I would listen to her, then. I have never known her to be wrong. You would be good for Severus; he needs someone to show him love, companionship. And you certainly wouldn't be bored in his company; you would have a lot to talk about. But... what is it, child? You seem uncertain...'

Minerva narrowed her eyes slightly and murmured under her breath.

The visible connection she had seen between Hermione and Severus manifested itself as long, pale blue strings of light. When they were in the same room, the light was bright and the lengths thicker and stronger. Since Severus had left, however, the strands were thinner and stretched way beyond the door. Minerva nodded and smiled a little.

'You're feeling a little weaker since he left the room. I can see your connection has lessened. Being with your soul mate is different from any other relationship once you

have the knowledge of it. Should you ever be parted for a significant length of time, it would be painful for both of you. There are ways to keep your connection strong, however.' Minerva nodded a little and her eyes drifted up to Albus's empty portrait.

'I do feel strange, now you come to mention it. It's the first time we have been this far apart since we were revealed to each other. Do you think Severus is feeling the same way?' Hermione looked at Minerva, grateful that she had someone to talk to about the strange situation she now found herself in, pleasurable as it was.

'I would imagine so. Although Severus has learned to keep his feelings well hidden, even from himself. He probably doesn't even know how he feels,' Minerva replied.

'You said there was a way to keep the connection strong?' Hermione was starting to feel a little weak and put her teacup down on Minerva's desk, her hand trembling.

Minerva looked at her, and Hermione noticed two pink spots appearing on her cheeks.

'There is a way... It is very personal, Hermione, I wouldn't like to suggest... Oh, goodness me, where do I start?' Minerva was a little embarrassed. In her head, Hermione was still a child, not a young woman of twenty-nine years.

Hermione was feeling faint and started to sway a little on her chair.

'I think you're going to have to tell me, Minerva. I can't live a normal life if I'm going to feel like this each time Severus leaves the room for any length of time.' Hermione could hardly breathe and held onto the desk, colour draining from her cheeks.

Minerva stared at her in shock. 'I'll go and find Severus.'

Hermione nodded and laid her head against the desk. She was feeling exhausted suddenly and briefly wondered what Minerva had been talking about before she passed out.

Hermione awoke to find herself being cradled on Severus's lap, his arms wrapped around her gently as he stroked her hair from her face. Minerva was looking at her with concern, and Severus was pale as he gazed at her.

'Are you alright?' she murmured.

'I am now.' He smiled gently at her.

'Severus was almost as weak as you, Hermione. I found him half-collapsed near the dungeons,' Minerva spoke softly, shaking her head.

She walked around to the business side of her desk and sat down, staring at them over the top of her glasses.

'You know, you really will have to strengthen your bonds if you don't want this happening all of the time.' She tapped her quill against the desk softly. 'Valentine should have explained it to you...' she muttered almost to herself.

'Explained what?' Severus looked at her blankly. He was starting to feel stronger and tightened his hold around Hermione's waist as she leant her head against his shoulder.

'Minerva was telling me there is a way to strengthen the bond so we don't feel weak when we're apart for any length of time. She's a Seer, Severus, did you know?'

Hermione smiled at the Headmistress.

'No, I didn't know that!' Severus looked at her in surprise.

'I don't use it often. I prefer more tangible magic.' Minerva shrugged.

'How do we strengthen the bond, Minerva?' Hermione slid herself from Severus's knee and sat beside him, holding onto his hand.

Minerva pursed her lips and took a deep breath.

'You know how babies are made, I assume?' Her eyebrow arched a little.

Hermione's mouth dropped open, and Severus shifted uncomfortably in his seat. This wasn't the type of conversation he wanted to have with his old colleague.

'Well?' Minerva interrupted their discomfort abruptly.

'Of course we do!' Hermione snapped a little.

'We haven't got that far, Minerva. We're still on our first date, for God's sake!' Severus stared at her incredulously.

'Severus Snape, when have you ever been reluctant? Didn't you know that Lulu is my niece?' Minerva's mouth twitched in a smirk as Severus's face fell, and he closed his eyes.

'Gods,' he murmured.

'Who is Lulu?' Hermione demanded, jealousy flaring inside her.

'A whore,' Severus whispered, not looking at her.

'A good one, too... She has more money than I did at her age, and that's a fact.' Minerva smiled a little ruefully.

Hermione stared at them, her eyes narrowing slightly. She did not like this conversation one bit.

'Can we please change the subject?' Hermione's voice was steely and Severus looked ashamed.

'I apologise, Hermione... It was in a past life,' he muttered and glared at Minerva.

'You're saying to strengthen the bonds and avoid being ill, we need to have sex?' Hermione's voice was that of the student, serious, needing information.

'Regularly. It only lasts for a short time before the bonds weaken again.' Minerva nodded.

'I wanted to wait until someone loved me,' Hermione whispered, mainly to herself as she recognised she had been backed into a corner.

'How do you feel about Severus, Hermione?' Minerva asked her softly, her heart going out to her.

'I really care about him. And I find him very attractive, especially since yesterday.' She smiled at Severus wanly, and his eyes brightened.

'And you haven't had sex yet?' Minerva prompted.

'What does that have to do with anything?' Hermione frowned at her.

'Remember what I said before. Sometimes people don't know how they feel. Sometimes, it just has to be demonstrated, and the love comes afterwards. It's nothing to be ashamed of.'

Minerva looked at Hermione meaningfully. Hermione stared back at Minerva and then at Severus, who had cast his eyes down and was shuffling his feet.

Hermione smiled broadly at Minerva.

'I understand. Thank you, Minerva. I think we should be going, Severus.' Hermione pulled on his hand and encouraged him to stand up.

Severus couldn't look at her and risk exposing himself. He was feeling quite vulnerable, and the inference in Minerva's words had not been lost on him.

Minerva walked them to the front door and hugged them both tightly.

'Don't leave it so long to visit next time,' she murmured, 'and remember what I said.'

Hermione nodded, and Severus looked at Minerva, his eyes full of gratitude.

'Thank you, Minerva... I...' His voice broke.

'I know, Severus... Lily would be very happy for you.' She patted his arm and wiped away a small tear from his cheek.

As they walked down the long path to the Apparition point, Severus let his arm drape over Hermione's shoulder, and she snaked her arm around his waist, both of them deep in thought.

Minerva watched them for a moment and smiled.

They were lying on the bed in Severus's room, kissing softly and stroking each other's faces gently.

'If we can't spend much time apart yet, what do you think we should do, Hermione?' Severus gazed at her, taking in the tilt of her chin and the small, almost invisible freckles on her nose.

'Well, from what Minerva said, it sounds like we have no choice but to make love, but I hate the thought that we HAVE to.... I would rather do it because we WANT to, when we want to.' Hermione pouted slightly, and Severus covered her mouth with his, sucking in her bottom lip.

'I would hate for you to feel under pressure, but you need to know that I find you very desirable, Hermione. I will be ready when you are ready, and I am happy to wait. I have more than one bedroom, and you are welcome to stay in my house tonight if you wish. I don't think we would be able to go home separately yet. In fact, it's almost time for us to leave.'

'Are you sure you want to share your living space with me, Severus? It could get awkward,' Hermione whispered softly. She didn't want to be an inconvenience.

'Of course I want you there. That's why I joined the dating agency in the first place, Hermione. You gathered from Minerva that I used to employ the services of prostitutes. I gave that up when I joined the agency. Sex just wasn't fulfilling me any more. I need someone in my life and not just for sex. Having you share my home for a while would be just perfect,' he smiled down at her, 'especially if you can cook!'

Hermione laughed at him, and he gasped as she started to tickle him under his arms.

'No... Not fair...Stop it!' He laughed and pinned her arms above her head, kissing her passionately until they were both panting and flushed.

'Let's go home and try your real bed out.' Hermione grinned at him.

Severus stared deeply into Hermione's eyes.

'Good idea,' he replied seriously.

14. Darkness Rising

Chapter 10 of 19

Two lonely hearts. One talented witch.

14.Darkness Rising

Severus watched Hermione's face closely as they approached the front door of his home in Spinner's End. It was not a particularly welcoming dwelling, and the derelict houses on either side, accompanied with the ramshackle railings and grimy, smoke-covered windows of most of the houses in the terrace, made the whole thing seem unwelcoming. Severus was aware of this, and it had served him well during the war. It had also suited his mood. He hoped the inside of the house would be more reassuring to her, but he still felt a small knot of apprehension as he withdrew his wand and took down his wards. It had been a long time since another human being had crossed his threshold, and the last time... He shook his head ruefully as the memory of Narcissa's Unbreakable Vow washed over him.

Hermione was watching as the emotions passed across Severus's face like storm clouds gathering. She took his hand and squeezed it gently.

'Would you feel happier if we went to my flat instead, Severus? I don't mind, really....' She smiled at him softly, and he knew she could see his internal battles before he had even had to voice them.

'No... no. It's perfectly fine. I just... Well, my home is not a castle, nor is it beautiful, Hermione. It would not have been my intention for you to see it as it is.... I hope you will

forgive me.' Severus paused with his hand on the door handle a moment.

'Open the door, Severus.' Hermione nudged him a little and laughed under her breath.

Severus allowed himself a small smile. Now it was her turn to reassure him. He pushed the door open, and they stepped into a small hallway with narrow stairs leading up and one door off the cramped space that lead into a sitting room. With a flick of his wand, flames appeared in the small, Victorian fireplace and candles in sconces flickered on the walls.

Hermione stepped into the room and smiled. It was wonderfully cosy and suited Severus perfectly. Along with a soft, cream couch and a cream rug over dark-stained floorboards, a large armchair sat beside the fire. It was covered in dark brown leather and looked old and battered and cracked along the arms. It suited him, she mused. She squinted a little at an old, framed photograph on the mantle and stepped closer to see it. There was a woman with hair a little longer than Severus's and not quite as dark, holding hands with a small boy in an oversized shirt and shorts. She was smiling at the camera, but the boy had a slight scowl on his face.

'Eileen Snape...' Hermione whispered under her breath.

Severus had been watching her as her eyes had explored the room and started to relax a little as he realised she wasn't repelled, but he took a sharp intake of breath as he heard her say his mother's name.

'How did you know?' he murmured softly, and Hermione spun around, realising she had spoken out loud. She caught his eye and saw pain and a flash of irritation there.

'I'm sorry, Severus.... The Half-blood Prince....' She shrugged a little. 'You know how I love to find answers, and besides, you look like her.' Hermione smiled warmly at him and turned back to look at the photograph for a moment.

'I will show you your room,' Severus said a little stiffly and turned. Hermione heard him as he started to walk up the stairs and sighed, slowly following him.

Severus hated this house, if he was honest with himself, but it was the memory of his mother that made him stay. It held no pleasant memory for him, no happy family time spent reading together or playing board games by the fire. On darker nights when the Firewhisky was doing its worst, Severus saw his father in the shadows and drank more until he disappeared.

They reached the narrow landing, and Severus lit the sconces. The walls were cream, and a threadbare carpet ran the length of the floor, not quite reaching the walls and tacked to the boards with old, rusted nails.

'Parts of the house need attention. I try and look past it,' he muttered. He was starting to wish they had gone to her flat after all.

Severus walked to a room at one end of the landing and opened it, peering inside. He sighed.

'I was thinking you could use this room. I haven't been in here for years. I forgot how bad it was....' He shook his head.

Hermione peered inside the room. An old, iron-framed single bed sat along one wall, flanked by a large, dark, wooden wardrobe. A single window alongside it looked over the front street, and a small wicker chair sat along the other wall. The whole room was a little dingy, with dark, flowered wallpaper and cobwebs the only decorations, along with a layer of dust.

'Severus....' Hermione took his hand in hers, and he felt the warmth against his palm. 'Look at me...'

He looked at her, his eyes heavily lidded, his throat constricted as he saw the compassion in her eyes.

'Severus, why haven't you cleansed your house?' Hermione looked at him incredulously.

'What, you mean, employ a house-elf or something?' He was confused.

'No... I mean... the negative energy, Severus. It's so oppressive; I'm surprised you can even breathe in here.' Hermione frowned at him.

There was no wonder he was so sullen a lot of the time. Hermione was no Seer, nor was she psychic, but even she could feel the heaviness in the house.

'Something awful happened up here, didn't it?' she whispered softly as she looked around the dark room.

Severus let go of her hand and stared at her for a moment. Hermione saw tears in his eyes, and he turned, his shoulders slumped as he walked back down the stairs.

Hermione waited for a moment, not sure what to do. She closed the door of the bedroom and walked back downstairs and into the lounge. Severus was standing with his back to her in front of the fire, his hands against the mantle, his shoulders bunched up slightly. He was breathing deeply, and Hermione realised that he was sobbing.

Tentatively, she approached him and ran her hands along his slim back, her fingers stroking him and trying to soothe him.

'Is your kitchen through there, Severus?' she asked him quietly.

Severus nodded, his breathing relaxing slightly as tears continued to fall from his eyes, unwanted and ashamed.

Hermione gave his shoulders a squeeze and planted a small kiss on his arm.

'Back in a little while,' she said softly.

She could feel tears in her own eyes, and she realised that something must have triggered a memory for him. Hermione knew that while he was here on his own, he was safe. No one could ask him awkward questions; no one would comment on the feel of the house, and his memories could lurk and remain unspoken. She had prompted this, and she felt helpless. So she decided to do what her mother used to do whenever there was an emotional crisis. Make food and hot tea and help Severus back from the precipice.

The little kitchen was lined along one wall with old Formica cupboards in pale blue, with silver metal handles. An old electric cooker stood beside a single, stainless steel sink, and a battered table with two lemon vinyl-covered chairs sat along the other wall. Hermione found two plain, white mugs and smiled to herself. She removed her wand and Transfigured them to match his mug at work and made two steaming mugs, one coffee and one tea. She found enough cheese, ham, and bread to make sandwiches, and two tins of vegetable soup. She had a feeling Severus needed something warm inside him. She sat everything on the table and walked back into the lounge. Severus was sitting in his armchair, his face covered by his hands. He couldn't see her, but he felt her.

'Hermione... forgive me...' he croaked and rubbed his face before his hands fell into his lap.

'If you forgive me first.... I asked too many questions. It wasn't my place, Severus. I'm so sorry.' Hermione walked over to his and rested her hand on his shoulder.

'It was unexpected.... I knew you would be curious, but I didn't expect my reaction to be so extreme. I have never shared my childhood willingly.... Potter saw only what I allowed him to see. There was much more.... Voldemort was kind at times, compared to my father....' Severus stared up at her and took her hand in his.

'Come and eat.' Hermione pulled Severus's hand a little and smiled at him. He was emotionally spent and curled himself out of his chair, allowing her to pull him into the kitchen. He sat heavily onto one of the chairs and started to eat, realising he was ravenous.

Hermione smiled as she watched him eating but felt sad as she saw the dark shadows around his eyes. This house was not healthy for him, and she wondered if he would allow her to cleanse it for him another day. She pushed his mug of coffee in front of him and lifted her own, sipping slowly and chewing on a sandwich. Severus put down his spoon and lifted the mug, his eyes widening as he looked at it. He looked at Hermione and smiled at her.

'You're drinking out of a Slytherin mug?' He chuckled.

'It's your home. You would hex me into next week if I had transfigured a Gryffindor one.' She smiled widely, relieved as he seemed more himself.

'I'm starting to think a little Gryffindor might not be a bad addition to my surroundings...' He looked at her pointedly and smirked.

'Oh, well, in that case....' Hermione grinned and withdrew her wand, pointing it at Severus's mug and Transfigured it to Gryffindor colours.

Severus laughed at her and she smiled.

'Are you feeling any better?' she asked him, taking her hand and covering his softly.

'I am... Thank you.' He looked away from her again and took a sandwich.

They ate until all the sandwiches were gone, and Hermione stacked the dirty dishes in the sink and began to run the tap. She heard Severus push his chair back and shivered as she felt him stand behind her, his hands on her shoulders, his face nuzzling her neck.

'Leave them... I want to show you my room,' he murmured in her ear, his warm breath causing her crotch to moisten with a gush.

Hermione leant against his chest and closed her eyes, feeling his heartbeat under her for a second. She turned and snaked her arms around his waist, looking up into his dark eyes.

'Don't you mean you want to show me your bed?' she murmured, her eyes serious, her mouth parted a little.

'Yes... That was what I meant.' Severus bent his head slowly, never taking his eyes from hers as he covered her lips with his and pushed his tongue into her mouth.

Hermione gasped and melted her body against him as he kissed her with increased fervour, his hand coming up to cup her breast gently. She pushed him away purposefully and smiled at him.

'Your bed, Severus,' she murmured, smiling as he took her hand and pulled her from the room.

15. Adjusting and Accepting

Chapter 11 of 19

Two lonely hearts. One talented witch.

15. Adjusting and Accepting.

Hermione and Severus were naked and in his bed, curled around each other. Neither of them was sleeping but rather enjoying the comfortable silence. His room was the largest in the house and cosy like his living room. It occurred to Hermione that he probably spent most of his time in those rooms, and she imagined what life was like for him and what life would be like for both of them in the future. Going to Lonely Hearts, Inc. had turned both of their lives upside down.

They had explored each other eagerly, lips and tongues, kisses and soft caresses, followed by his fingers inside her, her fingers around his throbbing shaft, and her lips around his pulsing head. It was brief and frantic, and they were catching their breath until they were both ready to do it again, a little slower this time.

'What did you put on your form, Severus? What were you looking for?' Hermione murmured into his chest, planting soft kisses against his pale flesh.

'It doesn't matter,' he murmured, stroking her hair with his fingers.

'Don't you want me to know?' Hermione stopped kissing him and looked at him, resting her hand on her elbow and stroking his dark hair away from his face.

Severus regarded her for a moment. He really didn't want to tell her. He had ticked the box of 'lifetime commitment,' not considering he would be matched with someone as young as Hermione... Not considering it would be Hermione he would be matched with. It had changed things. He wasn't prepared to let her waste her life on him. She had too much to offer, and she was too brilliant. She would get itchy feet before long and move onto new things, perhaps another position more stimulating. The shop couldn't possibly hold her interest forever.

'There is nothing to say. I filled out my form, and Valentine matched me with you. Although I did say I wanted an adventurous lover.' He lifted his hand and started to stroke her inner thigh with his fingertips. Hermione stilled his hand with hers and looked him in the eye.

'You are changing the subject, Severus. You have already told me you wanted more than just sex. If we're going to continue with this, I think we should know what we both want out of it, don't you?' Hermione was serious. She had ticked the 'lifetime commitment' box, and she wasn't sure how Severus would feel about being tied to one woman for life after being on his own for so long.

'Why do you need to know all of the answers, Hermione?' Severus frowned at her, a little irritated. 'You asked me. I said it doesn't matter. We were matched; we know we're soul mates, and here you are, naked in my bed. What else do you need to know?'

Hermione looked at him, tears of frustration pricking her eyes.

'I just wish you would open up to me Severus. That's all. I know you, but I don't know what goes on inside your head, and I don't know what you want from me.' Her lip trembled, and she took a deep breath, not allowing her tears to fall.

Severus looked at her, eyes wet and biting her lip a little. He sighed deeply.

'I can't give you what you want right now, Hermione. But I do want you,' he said, sliding his hand back up her leg and started to stroking her labia softly with his fingers, 'if that helps.'

Hermione closed her eyes, and her mouth opened in a soft gasp as he started to circle her clit with his thumb. Her resolve was broken, and she sighed contentedly, dropping her mouth to his and letting him explore her with his tongue.

'I want you, too,' she murmured, and Severus felt his cock harden at her words. He had never been desired in this way before. Women had wanted him, certainly, but for his cock to fill them—not for him. And whether Hermione knew it or not, he had never touched a woman he had cared about deeply before. This was as new to him as it was to her.

Hermione brought her hand between his legs and tangled her fingers in his pubic hair, pulling and making him wince.

'What was that for?' he muttered into her mouth.

'For being so damn frustrating,' she hissed at him and moaned as he thrust a finger inside her.

'Better?' he growled, and Hermione gasped, wrapping her hand tightly around his cock and squeezing.

'Much,' she whispered, moving her hand up and down his length. She was starting to become an expert already, and Severus groaned as her thumb brushed pre-cum around his head.

Severus increased his thrusting, his thumb bouncing off her clit as he massaged her G-spot with his fingertip. Hermione increased her pace as she started to grind herself against his hand. Her head fell back onto the pillows as she felt her orgasm build, and Severus moved his head to hers, his body pressing against her breasts. His cock hit her thigh slightly as he thrust his tongue in and out of her mouth to match their movements. Suddenly, neither of them were able to kiss anymore; their mouths fell open, and they moaned and gasped against each other's lips.

'Oh, fuck!' 'Oh God!' 'Yes... oh, yes!' 'Harder... oh, gods, yes...' 'Faster... oh, gods, please!'

And then there were no words—just breathing, eyes closed, bodies arching. Hermione came hard, sheathing his finger tightly. She felt Severus pulse under her hand and squeezed a little tighter as his come spurted from him, hitting her rounded stomach, his balls slapping against her thigh as he groaned in her ear.

He fell onto her, and she wrapped her arms around him, holding him close and stroking his hair. His finger was still inside her, and he slid it out slowly. Hermione groaned in disappointment. She loved the feel of part of him inside her, and her resolve not to make love was waning with each encounter.

'You are incredible, witch,' he murmured softly in her ear, smiling against her.

'Gods, so are you, Severus.' Hermione laughed a little. 'Hidden talents they didn't teach you in Potions class...'

'Shhh, Hermione. You don't always have to talk,' he murmured. 'Go to sleep. We have a busy day tomorrow.'

Hermione smiled, recognising the tone of his voice and knowing she had better do as he said. She rather liked him taking control in the bedroom already.

The next morning, Severus rose early and immediately followed his usual pattern almost as if Hermione wasn't in the house. It was only when he was ready to leave that she reminded him she needed to go to her flat and find some clothes for work. Severus nodded and said nothing, but inside, he was irritated at having his routine broken. He walked ahead of Hermione to the Apparition point, and they Apparated separately to her flat. It didn't escape Hermione's notice that he hadn't wanted to hold her this time, and she pursed her lips. She knew he wasn't happy, but it was just tough. She wanted him; she really did. But she was determined not to make love to him until she really wanted to, and they would just have to cope with it.

Hermione unwarded her front door and invited Severus to wait in her small, bright living room while she changed quickly. He looked around as he waited and nodded a little. The whole of one wall was clad from floor to ceiling with a white wood bookshelf crammed to overflowing with textbooks and novels. Hermione had a Muggle television in the corner of the room, but he would bet money it was rarely switched on, particularly when he saw a large, squashy armchair next to a reading table with an extendible lamp. Like him, Hermione must spend most of her free time reading. There was no fireplace in the room, but a shelf on another wall held photographs, both magic and Muggle. Severus was drawn to one picture in particular of Hermione at Hogwarts on a snowy day, dodging a snowball thrown from an unknown source and laughing widely as it missed its target. Her hat was pulled over her bushy hair, and her Gryffindor scarf wrapped around her neck, and she grinned into the camera before the scene replayed itself. He stooped to take a closer look, and stroked her face with his finger gently. She was so much a part of his life that he couldn't imagine a day when she wouldn't be there.

Hermione leaned against her doorframe and watched Severus silently, a small smile on her lips.

'You can keep it, if you like,' she said softly, smiling at him.

Severus turned and looked at her. Her hair was tied back tightly, and she was wearing her usual working clothes: jeans, t-shirt and her robes. He smiled gently.

'Can I?' he asked her.

'Of course. It's yours.' She walked slowly towards him and took his hand in hers gently.

'So am I, Severus,' she murmured.

He looked at her and smiled again, not knowing what to say or, more to the point, what she wanted him to say.

Hermione realised he wasn't going to respond and busied herself then, trying to hide her disappointment. She grabbed a couple of books from her shelf, ran into her small kitchen to feed Crookshanks, and walked back into the lounge to find Severus still gazing at her photograph. Her eyes went a little steely as she watched him.

'You know, Severus... there is no substitute for the real thing. We had better go,' she muttered.

Severus slipped the photograph into his robes and didn't speak. He had upset her in some way, he knew, but he was really not very good at communicating where his emotions were concerned.

He couldn't tell her he was jealous of the photographer for eliciting the beautiful smile from her, and that he was jealous of the person throwing the snowball, simply because it wasn't him. He couldn't tell her anything.

So how on earth could he tell her he had fallen in love with her?

16. In Another World

Chapter 12 of 19

Two lonely hearts. One talented witch.

16. In Another World

It was Friday, and Hermione was again bending over her cauldron and stirring, counting carefully as she observed the colour of the swirling liquid and hoping that this would have her project complete. She suddenly started feeling a little odd.

'Severus!' she shouted through the open lab door. In a few moments, Severus appeared at the door and walked over to where she was standing. With a resigned look on his face, he kissed her softly.

'Thanks,' she murmured and then turned her attention back to the potion.

'No problem,' he murmured in reply and went back to the front of the shop.

Over the course of the week, it had become evident that Hermione suffered the effects of them being apart sooner than Severus, and they had got into a routine so that they would know to come together as soon as she started to weaken. In the beginning, it had been amusing and not unwelcome to share kisses while at work, but more recently, it had become a chore and had lost some of its charm.

Severus turned the sign on the door and locked it securely. He pulled his robes from his arms and hung them beside Hermione's on the hook by the lab door and went in to see how she was progressing. He watched her, crouched over the cauldron, brow furrowed in concentration as she bit her lip and continued stirring. Her hair was tied securely at her nape and revealed her long, graceful neck. Severus was reminded of the night they were revealed to each other and couldn't believe it was only a week ago that she had stood before him in her red dress, looking so beautiful that he had been speechless. He smiled softly and walked over to her, unable to resist planting kisses on her creamy skin.

'I'm feeling alright, Severus. You don't need to kiss me,' Hermione murmured as she stopped stirring.

Severus stiffened a little and stepped away from her.

'Very well,' he stated.

Hermione looked at him suddenly.

'Oh, gods, I'm sorry, Severus. I was so tied up with the potion. I didn't mean I didn't want you to kiss me....'

'It's perfectly fine, Hermione. Are you almost done?' Severus's jaw was set as the burn of her rejection settled in his stomach and tied knots.

'I just need to decant this. Next week, we can begin the trials.' She smiled unsurely at him.

'Good. I will help. Then perhaps we can go and eat? I'm hungry,' he muttered, avoiding her eyes and not returning her smile.

Since he had acknowledged his feelings for her, being in her company was becoming almost painful.

They had spent the first night in his bed, both of them so exhausted they had just fallen asleep. The second night, they had compromised and ate at Hermione's flat, spending an enjoyable hour on her sofa before Apparating back to Spinner's End. But something had to be done. Neither of them was used to spending so much time in another person's company, and the more she lay beside him, the more he wanted to make love to her. So much so that the previous evening, he had suggested she retire early so that she would be sleeping when he came to bed. Her hands on him were like a sweet torture, and he felt it would be easier if they didn't explore each other too much. It just left him wanting more, and he was so scared he would be pushed over the edge and end up doing something he would regret.

The irony of it was that he knew he only had to say the words, and she would be his. He had been close, tip of the tongue close, on a couple of occasions. But he just hadn't been able to do it.

Hermione started to decant her potion into the prepared phials, and as she did so, Severus stoppered and sealed them and moved them onto the storage shelf. Hermione was feeling very sad. Over the last few days, Severus had withdrawn himself from her, and she felt as lonely as she had done before her visit to Valentine Passiflora. They still kissed a little, through necessity, but he hadn't touched her in two nights, and she started to feel that he was regretting the whole situation. They were hardly talking. Most evenings they sat and read separately with no discussion, no debates like they used to have at work, and she admitted to herself that she was actually missing the way things were before. Hermione filled the last phial and Scourgified the cauldron quickly before turning to Severus.

'Where do you want to go tonight?' she asked him.

'I would prefer to return home this evening, if that suits you?' he replied, his gaze taking in her tight t-shirt and the knots in his stomach tightening slightly. His cock gave him away by becoming hard almost immediately, and he turned, walking to collect their robes.

'That's okay, Severus... I suppose we will need to decide how the weekend will go, too,' she murmured half to herself as she took her cloak and fastened it around herself.

Severus felt his heart drop. He had forgotten they would need to spend the whole weekend together. He felt as if his body would be on fire at the end of it.

'Let's go. We can go and get something to eat first. I'm too tired to cook,' he muttered.

Hermione gave him a small smile and took his hand in hers.

'I'm sorry, Severus, she said softly, her eyes a little glassy.

'For what?' He frowned down at her, his breathing a little stilted as her body pressed against his slightly.

'For everything... This whole situation. If you think it's a good idea, we could contact Valentine and see if there is a let out clause or something...?' Hermione bit her lip, hoping he would say no.

Severus stared at her, her words piercing his heart like small daggers with poisoned tips. She had obviously decided this was a bad idea. Damn her. He had let her get too close, and now, here was the rejection he had known would come.

'Whatever you think is best, Hermione,' he whispered hoarsely.

Hermione let go of his hand, and he saw anger flashing in her eyes.

'Fine. I'll owl her now, shall I? See if we can get out of having to spend the weekend together, because I know how much you hate this. I can see it in your face,' she spat at him.

'It was your suggestion,' he muttered. 'I get the feeling you are hating this more than I, Hermione.'

Severus's voice was dangerously soft, but Hermione was too furious with him to recognise the signs.

'I am hating it... I hate that you bristle every time we have to do something that's not in your routine. I hate that we don't talk any more. You are my best friend, Severus, or haven't you realised that? And now, this has thrown everything up in the air! The thing I hate most is that you haven't touched me in two days! Do I repel you suddenly, Severus? Because you certainly enjoyed it before!'

Hermione's mouth twisted into an ugly grimace as she snarled at him. She turned and walked to the other side of the lab, her fists clenched as she fought the urge to punch something.

Severus was on her in an instant, grabbing her shoulders and pushing her against the wall of the lab.

'OUCH! Severus, what are you doing?' Hermione glared at him, pushing against his hands to no avail.

Severus held her firmly and moved his face close to her, his lips curled in a familiar sneer she hadn't seen since her school days.

'You think it's been easy for me, do you, Hermione? I let you into my home, and within minutes, you were poking your nose into my memories, making me feel again. I let you into my bed, touch you, and please you. I have never touched a woman the way I touch you; did you know that? Of course not, because it's all about you, isn't it? And the more I touch you, the more I want you. But no, we can't make love until you're ready, because you don't know if I love you.' Severus glared at her, his eyes a little wild.

'It is torture, Hermione, to lie beside you and not make love to you.... Worse than being tortured by the Dark Lord himself,' he hissed softly.

They stood still for a long moment until Severus relaxed his grip and stepped away from her, turning his back, his shoulders slumped and trembling. Hermione was shaking, fear and anger battling inside her.

'Do you love me, Severus?' Hermione demanded.

Severus stiffened, his eyes closed, his hands clenched tightly. Hermione saw him tense, but like a dog with a bone, she wasn't going to let go, and she stepped closer to him. She wanted to touch him but was scared to, not knowing his reaction. She took a deep breath.

'I love you, Severus, if that helps... I don't want to end this; I want to make it work. Tell me, Severus.' Hermione saw Severus relax his shoulders a little, and he turned to face her.

Severus looked at her, her eyes bright, her hair hanging loose now around her shoulders. She was smiling at him, her face tipped upwards as she waited for him to speak. He opened his mouth, and nothing came out; his heart started to pound in his chest.

'Just say it,' Hermione murmured, stepping closer to him and sliding her arms around his waist slowly.

'Hermione....' Severus paused, and she smiled brightly at him. He took a sharp breath.

It was the smile from the photograph.

It's a while since I read this and I just remembered, the chapter title is taken from a Barry Manilow song...!

'In another world, I would walk away.

Pretend this was nothing... I wouldn't need you anyway.

In another world.

But not in this world.'

I think I might just be a genius! :p

17. A Kiss, A Rose.

Chapter 13 of 19

Two lonely hearts. One talented witch.

17. A Kiss, A Rose.

Severus stared at her for a short moment as she continued smiling at him.

'You are so beautiful,' he whispered, wrapping his arms around her gently. 'I'm sorry for losing my temper. Did I hurt you?'

'In more ways than one.' Hermione's face fell, and she looked up at him sadly. 'You can't say it, can you?'

Severus closed his eyes and sighed, shaking his head a little.

'No. I don't think I can. I wish I could...' He opened his eyes and looked at her, hoping she could see how he felt without him saying the words.

Hermione sighed deeply. This was what Valentine meant when she had said she would have her work cut out. Deep down, however, something inside her had clicked into place, and she knew, even though he couldn't say it, Severus loved her. And that was good enough.

'Kiss me, and then let's get out of here. We need to save our sanity.' Hermione smiled a small smile.

Severus bent his head, his brow furrowing. 'How's that?'

'Just kiss me, Severus,' Hermione murmured, her eyes on his lips.

Severus covered her mouth with his, and Hermione melted into his lips with a small sob as tears started to fall down her face. Parting her mouth with his tongue, Severus could taste the salty liquid and held her close, stroking her hair.

'I'm sorry... so sorry,' he murmured into her curls.

'It's not your fault; I just hate fighting, especially with you.' Hermione hugged him, wiping her damp cheeks against his coarse robes. She pushed him away a little. 'Can you get me a pain potion, Severus?'

Severus let go of her and walked smoothly to his shelf, grabbing a small phial and handing it to her, averting his gaze in shame as she rubbed at her shoulders. He didn't want to hurt her, but she had goaded him. He was a man of extremes, but he knew he needed to change. He would have to learn to talk to her somehow, or this could turn into a regular event.

Hermione drank the potion down and closed her eyes as the aches in her shoulders disappeared.

'That's better. Now... I need to go home and grab some clothes, and then we can go back to Spinner's End and get changed. I think we should go out to dinner tonight, as it's a special occasion.' She smiled at him softly, and he looked at her a little confused.

'Special occasion? What occasion?' He frowned at her. He didn't think it was her birthday, and Christmas was months away.

'You'll see....' Hermione's eyes twinkled a little, her stomach full of butterflies as she looked at him.

'Cheer up, Severus. I forgive you, okay? It was just a fight. Let's forget it and try and enjoy the weekend.' She took his hand in hers.

Severus looked at her with new eyes, amazed at her capacity for forgiveness. As they left the shop, he thought about that for a moment and realised she was the most compassionate and forgiving person he knew, and he hadn't noticed it before. He was aware of her kindness, but she had shown him so much more than that over the past few years. She deserved more from him. She said she loved him. She had given more of herself to him physically than she had to any other man. She had forgiven his abominable treatment of her and hadn't pushed him away. She really was incredible, and he intended to show her how much he appreciated her, even if he couldn't tell her he loved her. Severus felt himself full of resolve and pulled himself up to his full height, tightening his hold on Hermione's hand.

'Your place first, isn't it?' He smiled softly at her.

Hermione smiled. She was glad to see him almost back to himself.

'Is that okay?'

'As long as I can choose the restaurant....' He pulled her flush to his body and wrapped an arm around her. With a sharp twist, they Apparated.

An hour later, Severus was holding the door of the restaurant open for Hermione, glancing in appreciation as she glided past him. She looked very elegant and had chosen a cream cocktail dress with chiffon sleeves teamed with her crystal jewellery and patent black stiletto heels. She had a black velvet wrap around her shoulders and slipped this off, hanging it over the back of her chair. She had pinned up her hair softly, and small tendrils were caressing her face and neck. She had applied a little make up and a spray of very expensive perfume. She looked incredible, as if she was glowing.

Severus pulled his chair out and sat in front of her. He had showered and put on the suit he had worn the previous weekend, and Hermione's heart fluttered as she watched him lift the wine menu and hold it in his pale hands. They both felt a lot better after their argument, and the conversation started to flow easily.

Hermione flicked through the menu. She loved Italian food, and her mouth watered.

'What will you have?' Hermione asked him.

'I have a penchant for seafood... Perhaps the oysters with pesto dressing, then the linguine,' he murmured, his eyes scanning the wine list, 'and a bottle of their best white wine, I think.'

'I'll have the same... I love oysters.' Hermione grinned at him. 'They're good for you, aren't they?'

Severus looked at her over the top of the wine list and caught her eye. She winked at him sexily, and he burst out laughing.

'It depends what you're doing,' he chuckled.

'Well... I think they will be good for us tonight,' she whispered softly, not breaking his gaze.

Severus stared at her for a moment, and his mouth fell open as the impact of what she had said filtered through. His cock twitched in appreciation, and he was about to speak when the waiter arrived to take their order. Severus changed his mind about the wine and ordered a bottle of champagne instead. When they both had full glasses, he raised his to Hermione.

'For being a true friend,' he said softly, smiling at her warmly.

Hermione beamed at him and slid her foot out of her shoe quietly, letting it fall to the floor. She took a long sip of champagne, letting the bubbles explode in her mouth for a moment before swallowing and closing her eyes. She opened her eyes again and held Severus's gaze as she took another drink, finding his leg with her toes and tracing a path upwards.

Severus looked at her in surprise, his eyebrow arched and his mouth twisted in a sly smile. Two could play at this game, and he took his wand from his pocket and flicked under the table. He held his hand out and caught Hermione's silk panties as they flew out from under her dress, and she squealed, shifting in her seat, her face flushed with embarrassment. Severus chuckled at her and she heard him whisper a Transfiguration spell under the table. Bringing his hands into view, he presented Hermione with a pale cream rose edged with gold, chuckling as she took it from him, her face pink.

'Thank you, Severus,' she hissed at him, keeping a smile on her face as other patrons watched them with wide smiles. Some assumed they were getting engaged, and one woman nudged her husband and complained that he never gave her flowers any more.

They spent the remainder of the meal in quiet contemplation, both of them aware that Hermione was now knickerless and the rose now standing in a spare champagne flute was in reality her cream and gold panties that matched the bra she was wearing under her dress. To add insult to injury, Severus would occasionally extend a long, pale finger and caress the rose, dipping his finger in between the petals suggestively as Hermione watched, her face flushed, licking her lips. It was no surprise, therefore, that they decided to forego their dessert.

Hermione stood, and Severus helped her with her velvet wrap, kissing her neck softly as he did so. As they walked away from the table, Hermione remembered something.

'Oh! I need my shoe!' She looked at her bare foot in surprise. She knelt down and scooted to retrieve her shoe, not noticing that the draped tablecloth had caught the flimsy skirt of her dress as she shuffled beneath the table. She turned to find her shoe and heard giggling coming from the other customers.

Severus stared in horror at Hermione's bare arse as she shuffled back out from under the table. He walked quickly forward, grabbing her skirt and trying to pull it down. Hermione didn't see him, and as she felt a hand touch her bottom, she screamed.

'Oh, no you don't!' she shouted and spun around, grabbing his wrist as her skirt fell further up to her waist and flashed all that God gave her to anyone who was looking in her direction.

'Just get up, Hermione,' Severus hissed, 'and take your ROSE with you!' He looked pointedly downward, and Hermione gasped in horror.

'Help me, Severus!' she hissed.

Severus grabbed her skirts and pulled them down, and then grabbed her hands and pulled her to her feet. Trying to rescue her dignity, Hermione paused to put her shoe back on, fixed her hair, and smiled politely with her head held high as she walked towards the door. Slowly a round of applause went around the room, and Hermione bolted, not waiting to see if Severus was following her.

As they hit the fresh air, Severus caught up with her and grabbed her hand, pulling her to him and hugging her close, his shoulders shaking and his stomach sore from laughing so hard, tears streaming down his face.

Hermione hit him on the arm, then started to laugh too.

'That was your fault! You and the bloody rose!' She giggled at him as he started to nuzzle her neck.

'You started it with your foot!' He chuckled against her throat and licked softly with his tongue.

'We won't be able to eat in there again, anyway.' Hermione laughed softly, running her hands through his hair.

Severus lost it and started to laugh into her ear, and he pulled her tighter against his chest.

'Oh, gods, that was brilliant... You should have seen your arse waving out from under the table.' He laughed loudly. 'God, Hermione, I love you!' He lifted her and spun her around on the spot, and she giggled softly.

'I know you do.' She smiled at him.

Severus stared at her and put her back on her feet, cupping her face with his hands gently.

'Now we have a problem,' he whispered as she snaked her arms around his waist.

'What's that?' She tipped her head to his and smiled as her eyes met his twinkling black ones.

'Now I've said it... I won't be able to stop,' he murmured, his lips moving closer to hers. 'I love you, Hermione.'

Hermione sighed as his mouth covered hers, and he snaked his tongue into her mouth slowly. Around them, their bonds glowed brightly, but only those with the sight would have seen them.

Hermione gasped for air and stared at Severus for a moment.

'Severus, would you do something for me?' she asked him softly.

'Anything... as long as it involves you, nakedness, and my bed,' he growled and put his hand on her bottom suggestively.

'Well, yes... I want to make love to you, but there's something I need you to do first.' She bit her lip, her eyes wide.

'Go on.' Severus tipped his head to the side expectantly.

'I left my rose on the table... Would you?' Hermione grinned at him.

Severus looked at her for a small moment, his face flushed as he listened to Hermione's laugh echo down the street.

A/N: A little light relief from all the nasty angst! Big juicy lemons coming up. Thank you for being as patient as Severus!

Huge hug to Kizzy. She's such a good friend. She's pretty hot with comma's too.

18. Expense of Spirit.

Chapter 14 of 19

Two lonely hearts. One talented witch.

18. Expense of Spirit

Hermione hugged her wrap tightly around her shoulders as Severus unwarded his door in Spinner's End. It was getting a little chilly, and she shivered slightly. But it was not from the cold. The anticipation of being alone with him had been building all night, and now that they were finally here, nerves were starting to take over and threatened to overwhelm her. They stepped inside, and Severus quickly lit the fire and the candles before pouring them both a glass of Firewhisky.

Severus could sense her nervousness. She had become quieter as they Apparated back to the house, and he felt a small pang of guilt. He was aware of how intimidating he could be, and he couldn't imagine any woman choosing him to be her 'first.' Rather, it should be a young lover, inexperienced and fumbling and less likely to compare and contrast. Not that Severus would ever compare Hermione to anyone. She was unique. And she was perfect. He walked towards her and handed her a glass, then took

her hand and lead her to the sofa, where they sat side by side and let the heat from the fire warm them.

Severus put his arm around Hermione, and she laid her head on his shoulder.

'It doesn't have to be tonight, Hermione. We could just... wait until the mood takes us,' he said softly, bending to kiss the top of her head.

'Are you not already in the mood, Severus?' Hermione chuckled, aware of the growing bulge in his trousers as she gently stroked his thigh.

'I was trying to be considerate,' he chuckled. 'In reality, I could take you right now on the rug in front of the fire.' His voice was deep and a little raspy, and Hermione tensed as she felt a fluttering somewhere between her legs.

'You have a very sexy voice, Severus, did you know that?' she whispered softly and turned her head to his, kissing him gently on his lips.

'Is that right?' He raised his eyebrow and smirked. 'By that theory, I could just talk you into bed.'

Hermione adjusted her position and looked him in the face, stroking his cheek with her fingers. Severus pushed his cheek into the palm of her hand and caught her fingers between his lips, running his tongue over them softly as Hermione gasped, her mouth dropping open softly. Severus let her fingers slide from his mouth and took her glass in his hand. He stood and placed them back onto the side table, the whisky untouched.

He held out his hand to her, and Hermione blushed as she took it and followed him up the stairs and into his room. The whole house felt somewhat lighter, and Severus was sure it was Hermione's presence chasing away his demons. Now he was going to replace the bad memories with some new and definitely more enticing ones.

After lighting the sconces in the room, Severus pulled Hermione close and held her against his chest, not attempting to undress her, just content to feel her heart beating against him. Hermione closed her eyes and inhaled his musky aroma deeply, feeling his firm flesh under his shirt.

'I ticked the 'lifetime commitment' box, Hermione,' Severus murmured in her ear. 'I thought you might want to know that.'

Hermione smiled against his chest and tears filled her eyes as she took a deep breath.

'Yes,' she purred a little, and her hands reached up to the collar of his shirt. One by one, she unfastened his buttons, stroking his bare flesh under her fingertips and kissing his skin with her warm, moist lips, her tongue snaking out to caress his nipples, her breath making him shiver.

Severus tipped her chin with his finger, raising her face upwards. His eyes burned into hers.

'I am the one who is meant to take control in the bedroom, Hermione,' he reminded her, his voice rumbling a little.

Hermione gasped as she saw the passion in his eyes and nodded, dropping her hands to her sides.

'Okay,' she breathed softly. Gods, she really wanted him to take control.

She closed her eyes and opened her mouth in surrender. Severus recognised her submission, and his nostrils flared as he crushed her lips with his, plunging his tongue into her mouth so she could taste him and experience what he had been trying so hard to contain. His hands cupped her bottom, and he gripped her tightly, pushing his erection firmly against her leg so she had no doubt he wanted her tonight. Tonight, there would be no restraint, no holding back... and no going back, once he started. His body craved hers, and he trembled slightly as her lips began to move against his firmly, allowing his desire to fill her senses.

Severus groaned and pulled his lips from hers for a moment, his eyes drinking in her face, her lips swollen already from his kisses, her eyes heavy with lust, her chest rising and falling, and her hair, coming loose from its pins and falling in soft, tumbling curls around her shoulders. He suddenly wished he had a camera so he could take a 'before' photograph.... His lips curled into a possessive smile as he wondered how she would look 'after.' With a growl, he lifted her around the waist, raising her to meet his lips as he walked her to the bed and threw her onto it, not giving her a moment to collect herself but falling onto the bed beside her and finding her mouth again as his hands fell onto her hair. His tongue was inside her mouth, stroking, exploring, and his fingers, deft and accurate, located all of her pins and discarded them. He pulled at her lengths with his fingers, teasing them and letting them splay over the pillows like a halo.

Hermione was lost already; his kisses like a drug had her head spinning and her crotch soaking. He had never taken her like this before, with so much power. She knew he owned her now, and she didn't care. She wanted him to own her every night if this was how it would be. His fingers were in her hair, and she felt she might die from the feel of them, so gentle and so intimate, a precursor to what he would do with them in other areas of her body. Hermione moaned into his mouth, involuntary, deep and husky and letting him know she was his.

Severus bent his head to her throat and kissed her silky skin, laving with his tongue the sensitive area just above her collarbone. His hands roamed her breasts and felt her nipples beneath the fabric of her dress. He tweaked them between his thumbs and forefingers and watched her face as she arched her back, her eyes rolling back in her head and her mouth open in a gasp of pleasure.

'Gods, Severus,' she moaned his name, and his eyes flashed with lust, his cock pushing against the inside of his trousers insistently.

'Shall I make you come, Hermione?' Severus dropped his lips to her ear and spoke smoothly, as if he were asking her to pass the butter.

Hermione felt his breath on her ear, his proximity to her body clouding her thoughts, and she couldn't answer him. An incoherent noise slipped out of her mouth, and Severus grinned against her cheek, kissing her tenderly there as his hand reached for the bottom of her dress. He was touching her inner thigh, and Hermione held her breath as his fingers reached the wetness that had been slowly slipping down her legs.

'Oh, Hermione...' Severus groaned in her ear. 'I love you...' he breathed as his fingers brushed her labia and parted them. He couldn't believe how ready she was and how much she wanted him. Her desire almost matched his, but then, she didn't yet know what she had been missing.

'I love you, Severus... Gods... feels so good...' she gasped as he bit her earlobe sharply; he stroked his fingers along her pussy and moved his body quickly down the bed. He pushed his head beneath her skirts, and Hermione glanced down. She couldn't see him, but she could feel him, and she wrapped her thighs around his shoulders a little.

Severus breathed deeply and closed his eyes. He didn't need to see her to know how beautiful her pussy was, her soft lips curled and pink, her clitoris engorged and needing him. He nuzzled his face into her pubic hair and sighed as she pushed her crotch forward. Wrapping his hands around her waist to hold her still, he licked her, his tongue dancing a little inside her entrance then up to her clit. Hermione cried out her pleasure and rubbed his hair through her skirt.

'Please... more...' she moaned, biting her lip. Gods, but he was talented with his tongue. She was so close it felt more like pain than pleasure, and she pushed her pussy towards his face.

Severus could sense her want and struck up a gentle, teasing rhythm with his mouth. Kiss, lick, probe and suck, over and over until she was practically screaming at him, her thighs flung wide, her bottom lifting from the bed and her hands gripping his head so firmly she probably wasn't aware she had him in such a vise grip, so intent was she on reaching her orgasm.

'Oh... Oh... Fuck! Severus!' Hermione came, her body bucking wildly as Severus inserted his fingers at the critical moment, scissoring them slightly to stretch her for what was to come.

Hermione whimpered, her face covered with her own hair, tears mingling with sweat as she came back to the present to see him lying beside her, his clothes gone and a

soft smile on his face as he gazed at her. Glancing down, she could see she was also naked, and she smiled at him wantonly.

'Are you ready for me, witch?' he whispered softly, love shining out of him like a beacon as he stroked her breasts tenderly and brushed her nipples with his thumb.

Hermione pushed the hair from her face and leaned into him, kissing him feverishly and slipping her tongue in his mouth. Her hand drifted down to his crotch and found his cock.

'Can I?' she asked him quietly.

Severus closed his eyes and kissed her. 'I want you to,' he replied, and Hermione groaned into his mouth as she heard his need for her.

In seconds, Hermione was between his legs and taking his cock in her mouth, running her tongue under his glans and cupping his balls with one hand, the other tight around his shaft. Severus gasped as he felt her mouth on him and sighed as she swallowed him deeper. Hermione loved the feel of him in her mouth. She had to stretch her lips to accommodate him, but it didn't matter. The more he filled her, the wetter she became, and saliva dribbled down his length as she slurped and sucked at him.

Severus couldn't stand it any longer and pulled at her hair a little sharply. She raised her head and looked at him, her breath coming in short bursts, her mouth wet and open, her eyes dropping with desire. Their eyes met, and without speaking, they knew.

'On your back, Hermione,' he hissed at her.

Hermione did as she was told willingly. This was not the gentle, romantic deflowering of love sickly novels. This was the taking of Hermione Granger, powerful and cleverest witch of her age, who had fought alongside the Boy Who Lived. She had also taken on Severus Snape and was about to claim her prize. Slushy, pathetic fumbling wasn't what she had been saving herself for. Passionate need, desperate wanting, that was what she had waited for. This black-haired, black-eyed, seriously well hung and hard as a fucking rock man was what she had been waiting for.

Severus eyed her as she lay on her back and watched him. Like a panther, he crawled up between her legs, his eyes feral, his nostrils flaring as the smell of her sex hit him. He kissed her hard, his tongue forcing its way between her lips before she knew what had hit her. His hand found a breast, and he massaged her firmly, pulling at her nipple as his other hand found her wet nether lips. And suddenly, it wasn't his fingers any more, and she groaned as she felt the tip of his cock start to stretch her vagina. Severus paused and looked down at her, tears glistening in her eyes and in his. Almost there, they thought.... Almost complete...

Severus bent his head and kissed her tenderly, sucking her lip into his mouth.

'Need you,' he hissed at her, his eyes heavily lidded, deep pools of wanton lust.

Severus thrust hard and didn't stop at the hint of resistance but ploughed on until there was nowhere else to go.

'Oh, God!' Hermione squeezed her eyes tightly as the pain coursed through her.

'Oh, God!' Severus held himself still and revelled in her tight wetness, his cock throbbing against her walls.

Hermione ran her nails down his back, and he hissed at her.

'No pain, no gain,' she gasped as she tried to relax and accommodate his length and girth.

Severus stared down at her, hardly believing his luck

'It will be blissful, I promise you,' he murmured as he began to move slowly, slipping his length fully out and then filling her again firmly.

Hermione felt it like a burning pain that slowly melted as her vagina stretched and moistened around him. The pain was replaced by a longing for him to keep moving, keep filling her up. She realised she had been living a half-life up until this moment, that the missing piece was here, right now, her joining with Severus Snape.

Severus was increasing his pace and trying hard to keep his own desire at bay until he felt her come around him. He moved his hand to her buttocks and gripped her firmly, raising her off the bed slightly so the head of his cock could rub against the front of her pubic wall and her G-spot. Hermione groaned and grabbed his buttocks with her fingers, pushing her nails into his flesh and forcing him to push into her harder and harder, over and over. She started to writhe beneath him, and Severus stiffened slightly as her walls massaged him deliciously.

'Come, witch.... Fuck... Hermione!' Severus gasped as Hermione started to meet his thrusts with her hips, rolling her G-spot over the head of his cock with abandon and speed.

'Oh, gods... oh, gods ... oh gods!' Hermione couldn't believe what she was feeling. Her vagina was on fire, but it was more than that. Her whole body was starting to tremble, her legs shaking uncontrollably, and her whole core full of him as she started her orgasm.

Severus cried out as he felt her muscles contract against him, and he rammed himself into her harder and harder until he couldn't hold on any longer.

'HOLY SHIT!' he screamed, 'NUEGHHHHH!!!'

Hermione was limp beneath him, unable to move, unable to speak, her body coursing with electricity as she felt his sperm shoot from the head of his cock and burst against her vaginal walls, coating her, making her warm and slick as he continued to pump his length inside her.

Severus collapsed on top of her, his mouth beside her ear, wet tears on his cheeks as he continued to move inside her gently, not wanting it to end.... Never wanting to leave her body.

'Gods, Hermione,' he whispered softly into her ear.

'I know,' she murmured, stroking his hair, tears falling down her face as she sobbed uncontrollably. 'I know.'

A/N: I know, it's a bit cheesy the sex and crying this, but meh, they waited long enough. They deserved to be a bit emotional!

'Expense of Spirit' is stolen from Shakspeare's Sonnet No. 129. It's about having sex, funnily enough!

Hugs and smooches to kizzy. She's awesome!

19. Sharing.

Chapter 15 of 19

Two lonely hearts. One talented witch.

19. Sharing

They were lying together, naked in the candlelight, their bodies half in shadow and their highlighted skin luminous and glowing.

Severus had his head propped up on two pillows and was looking at Hermione, who was splayed across his chest, her hair like a chestnut waterfall running down her back. They were smiling at each other the way new lovers do, shy but amazed at how wonderful the other person makes them feel.

Hermione stroked Severus's cheek with a slim finger and felt a thin line of stubble. He smiled at her, and she traced his smile, then moved her hand to his chest, pulling at the smattering of hair around his nipples softly.

'Your eyes are amazing,' Hermione murmured as she stared at him and his eyes twinkled back at her.

'Are they?' he chuckled softly, stroking her hair with his smooth, pale fingers.

'Sometimes, I can't tell what you're thinking at all, then other times... it's obvious... like when you're angry. Or when you're turned on...' Hermione giggled a little.

'And of course, you have to know what I'm thinking.' Severus smirked a little.

'Not all the time... Just, well... sometimes... like when I'm worried about you....' Hermione smiled softly at him.

'Why would you worry about me?' Severus frowned at her.

'You're my friend, and you've been through a lot. Of course I would worry... I always did. Why do you think I came into the shop that day?' Hermione pursed her lips a little.

'I thought you wanted a job,' he muttered. 'I didn't know you were there out of pity.'

'It wasn't pity, Severus. I came into the shop because I hadn't seen you in such a long time, and I wanted to know if you were well. I cared about you.' Hermione frowned back at him. He was so incredibly touchy.

Severus relaxed as he saw the truth in her eyes. It would be so like her to visit someone out of concern, the way she does with the Longbottoms, he mused.

'What do want from your life, Hermione?' he murmured, softly pulling her up his body until her legs were either side of his hips, his erection resting along the inside of her thigh. He started to stroke her buttocks gently as she kissed him and then thought about his question.

'The war changed things for me, I think. Before, I wanted to study, University... travel a little... perhaps write, do some Potions research. All of that. There was so much. But then afterwards, I think my priorities changed. After my parents were killed, I realised how important family is... and friends, being with the people you care about, having conversations... being able to stay still, not having to keep moving to avoid being attacked or captured.' Hermione stared into his eyes and saw a look that said he knew exactly what she was talking about.

'Surely you didn't plan on staying in the shop for the rest of your life?' He looked at her and raised an eyebrow.

'Well... I might have moved on if I had been matched with someone else, but I didn't ever think about leaving, really. I love it. I can do all the things I wanted to do, and now,' she bit her lip as she looked at his mouth, 'there's an added bonus.' She raised her eyes to his and smiled a sexy smile before crushing his mouth with hers.

Severus moaned as Hermione shifted herself so his cock was resting at the entrance of her pussy, her tongue plundering his mouth as she rubbed her wet lips over him.

She pulled away a little and stared him in the eye.

'I love you,' she rasped, kissing him even harder and hissing as she started to push her hips down and slid his length into her slowly. Severus moaned into her mouth and put his hands onto her buttocks as she started to move her pelvis around on top of him in small circles, pushing her clit against his firm flesh. Hermione loved the thought of being in control and wondered where this wanton side had been hiding. She had no intention of going back, and part of her was intrigued to see what else Severus could show her.

'Sit up and fuck me, witch,' Severus hissed in her ear as she suckled his throat, marking him for the first time. She sat up and admired her handiwork, resolving to put one somewhere less noticeable next time. Severus tipped his pelvis upwards, and Hermione jumped as she felt him nudging her cervix.

'Gods, Severus... you are huge!' she gasped. 'It can't be normal.'

Severus grinned at her and moved his thumb to her clit.

'You are ruined for other men, Miss Granger,' he intoned throatily, gasping as she started to bounce up and down on top of his cock.

'I will never know, Severus. I will never want another man as long as I live,' Hermione gasped as she started to move faster, Severus's thumb now moving in circles as she neared her orgasm already.

'You should be careful what you say, Hermione,' Severus whispered as he looked at her face, her head tipped back, her eyes closed and her mouth twisted in a grimace of ecstasy. 'I may think you mean it.... Oh, shit... oh... oh, gods... don't stop.' He felt his balls tightening and closed his eyes slightly, his tongue sticking out from between his teeth a little as he watched Hermione's breasts bouncing up and down.

'Oh, fuck... oh, shit... I do fucking mean it, you idiot... Oh, shit, gods... MERLIN!!!'

Hermione sat down hard, and her orgasm exploded as Severus went stiff inside her, come shooting upwards and pulsing within her with such force, the sensations sent Hermione over the edge, and she came again as Severus kept his thumb working. Hermione moved her hips in small circles as Severus started to go flaccid inside her, enjoying the sensation of him. Severus pulled her close to his chest and kissed her face over and over, slipping his tongue into her mouth as he groaned her name.

'I love you, witch.... I love you,' he whispered softly.

'Mmmm... I know you do....' Hermione snuggled against his shoulder for a moment until his cock slipped out of her and she slid to his side. Severus turned towards her, stroking her hair from her face and pulling the bedclothes over them both. Severus let his arm slide around her waist, and they looked at each other for a long time without speaking.

'What do you want from your life, Severus?' Hermione asked him softly, tentatively, knowing how he hated sharing his thoughts and feelings.

'Interesting question,' he murmured as he watched her soft mouth, her full lips curving into a warm smile. 'I didn't know I wanted anything until recently. And that was when I went to visit Ms Passiflora.' He smiled at her. 'I suppose if her magic is to be trusted, it would seem that what I wanted,' he paused as he searched her beautiful face, 'what I wanted was you.'

'It feels so right... doesn't it?' Hermione's eyes widened in a question.

'It certainly does.' Severus smiled and moved himself forward until their bodies were touching.

Hermione gasped and giggled. 'Already?' she asked him as she felt his erection probing her pubic hair.

'Already.... Always, I think.' Severus chuckled softly. 'Let me make love to you one more time before we go to sleep?'

Hermione smiled. Severus took that as a yes.

20. Green-Eyed Goddess.

Chapter 16 of 19

Two lonely hearts. One talented witch.

20. Green-Eyed Goddess

Valentine Passiflora was sitting in front of her mirror watching the smoke from her incense stick swirl around. She would have liked to tell people she was interpreting the patterns and the shapes, but in reality, she was focussing on the images in the mirror beyond the smoke.

Initially, Valentine had been pleasantly surprised. Things seemed to be progressing very well, and the bonds between Hermione Granger and Severus Snape were strong enough now for them to spend a whole twenty-four hours apart if they chose to. Which, so far, they hadn't. Valentine shuffled a different set of cards, mystical images passed down from mother to daughter, their origins lost in the midst of time. Suffice to say the cards were accurate for the purpose. Withdrawing a card at random, Valentine placed it before her, followed by a further two. She stared at them for a short while and pursed her lips, shaking her head slightly.

'Men,' she muttered.

Hermione was in the lab. Her bezoar project was going so well, they were in the process of writing up their submission to the patent laboratory, and Hermione was sifting through her notes to make sure she hadn't missed anything. The past two months seemed to have gone by a blur, and yet everything was different. For one thing, she hadn't spent a night apart from Severus since the time they had consummated their relationship. Most of the nights had been in Spinner's End, but on a couple of nights, Hermione had convinced Severus to stay with her. Not that he had taken much persuading. She had discovered early on that licking her lips and showing a little cleavage was a sure-fire way to get his undivided attention.

Severus felt like a new man. He was having regular sex, but that was nothing unusual. It was, however, unusual for him to have sex with someone he was in love with. And it added a whole new dimension he had never experienced before. It made him more light-hearted. He felt joyous, happy. He enjoyed smiling. He had even smiled at a couple of his regular customers, and they had left thinking he had been sampling too many of his own potions.

At this very moment, Severus was laughing. Hermione could hear him chuckling in the front of the shop, and she frowned. It was unusual for him to be laughing without her in the room. Curious, she walked to the lab door and peered around it. Her mouth fell open as she stared. Severus was talking to a tall, dark haired woman, her hair tied tightly in a bun. Her makeup was perfectly applied, her lips like a tight, red rosebud. She was wearing a dark grey suit, tightly nipped in at the waist, with a red clutch bag and matching stiletto heels. Hermione stared at her. Her stockings had a black seam running up the middle of her calves, and it was perfectly straight. Hermione would never look so chic. She shifted her gaze. Severus was leaning a little forward, his eyes on the woman, smiling and laughing as she spoke to him. Hermione was too far away to hear what they were saying, but she could tell by the body language that there was a connection between Severus and this ... this woman. Severus murmured something, and the woman laughed this time, a tinkling laugh that sounded like nails on a blackboard to Hermione. She scowled as she saw Severus laughing back at her. Her eyes narrowed when the woman covered Severus's hand with her own and he didn't pull away. He didn't flinch. He just said something else, and the woman nodded and then left with a small wave of her perfectly manicured hand. Hermione scowled but wasn't quick enough to avoid catching Severus's attention when she walked back into the lab.

Severus raised his eyebrow and smirked as he followed her.

'How are your notes? Have you found everything you were looking for?' He smiled at her.

Hermione turned her cool gaze on him.

'I have everything I need, Severus, thank you. How about you?' Her words were clipped, loaded, and a little frosty.

'Are you okay?' He smirked as he turned his back and took their mugs from the shelf.

'Why shouldn't I be?' Hermione forced her voice to lightness and failed miserably.

Severus took out his wand unseen and waved it at Hermione's mug, murmuring softly under his breath. He grinned and put a peppermint tea bag into her mug and coffee into his own. When he was done, he paused and took a deep breath before pasting a smile on his face and taking her tea over to the workbench.

'Oh, no reason,' he responded smoothly, kissing Hermione's neck lightly. 'You just seem a little... tense. Perhaps you're working too hard?' He placed his hands on her shoulders and began to massage them lightly. Hermione tensed and closed her eyes and then gave in because dammit he was so good with his fingers. She lifted her tea and sipped it gratefully, glad of a chance to take a break.

'Did you lock the shop, Severus?' she murmured softly as his fingers felt their way down her back a little.

'Not yet. It's a little early... but you need a break, so relax, Hermione,' he whispered into her ear. 'Drink your tea...' He smiled to himself.

Hermione relaxed into his hands and drank her tea, tipping her mug back until the last drop was gone. Her eyes widened in surprise, and she almost dropped her mug.

'Well... what do you say?' Severus murmured in her ear, his velvet voice doing things to her she wouldn't be able to talk about in polite society.

'Now?' she whispered, staring at the mug, her hand trembling.

'Oh, yes... definitely now...' he murmured.

'Lock the door, Severus...' Hermione muttered, her cheeks flushed. Gods, what this man did to her without even trying.... She replaced her mug on the workbench, the red flashing 'Fuck Me' almost burning her eyeballs. She couldn't take her eyes off it, and when Severus returned to the lab and slammed the door closed, robes billowing, Hermione gave a little yelp.

This was a new thing, doing it at work. Hermione gulped as she saw him unbuttoning his fly as he walked towards her and put his hand inside, pulling out his erect cock.

'I'm ready,' he murmured, walking closer to where she was sitting, his eyes boring into hers.

'So I see.' Hermione gulped a little. Severus had become gradually more confident as their relationship progressed, surer of her feelings for him and surer of how to use his sexuality with her. She shivered a little. Gods, he really turned her on, and he bloody well knew it.

'Get naked, witch,' Severus hissed and ran a pale finger down the front of Hermione's t-shirt, lingering on her pert nipple as it sat proudly from her breast.

Hermione opened her mouth and gasped a little.

'You do it,' she whispered, licking her lips, her eyes drifting down to his huge erection.

Severus smirked, and with a wave of his hand for effect, Hermione was naked in front of him.

'I didn't know you could do that.' Hermione giggled a little. She had wanted a risk taker, after all.

'There is a lot you don't know about me. For instance... you didn't know I have been having fantasies about taking you on this bench right here,' he ran his smooth hand across the surface, his fingertips lingering a little as he met her gaze, 'since the first night I had you....'

'Fantasy doesn't always meet reality,' Hermione whispered, her heart beating fast.

'In this case... I think it will be better, don't you? Come here.' Severus flicked his hand out to her, and Hermione grabbed it, allowing him to pull her off the stool and bring her flush against his body. His cock was stiff and rested against her stomach as he bent his head to hers, licking her lips with his tongue and pushing it into her mouth. Hermione moaned as Severus lifted her and sat her on the workbench, sliding her pussy over his cock as he did so and hissing at how wet she felt.

Grabbing her buttocks, Severus pulled her closer to the edge of the bench, and she held onto the front of his robes for balance, gazing up at him, her eyes lust filled, her lips plump and open.

'How does your fantasy go, Severus?' she asked him softly.

'Like this.' Severus ran his hands down the front of her body, caressing her breasts and grazing her nipples until he reached her pussy and fingered her labia gently, inserting a digit into her vagina and thrusting.

Hermione gasped and put her hands on the bench behind her, leaning back a little, her breasts thrust forwards with the movement. Severus bent his head and took a nipple into his mouth, sucking gently and running his tongue over the caramel tip firmly. His other hand cupped her free breast, and with the touch of an expert, he caressed and massaged her until she started to squirm.

'Lay back,' he hissed. Hermione sighed and did so, her arms above her head. He lifted her buttocks with his hands and found her entrance with his cock. With a slight lift of his eyebrow as he caught her eye, he thrust firmly into her. They both sighed as he entered her and closed their eyes. Severus used Hermione's hips as a lever and started to pull her on and off his cock slowly, jerking her forwards as he hit her cervix, causing her to moan out loud.

'Touch yourself,' he demanded in a voice Hermione knew better than to ignore. Her hands drifted down her body, and she grabbed her breasts and started to pull at her nipples sharply. She let go of one breast and moved her hand to her clit, rubbing her juices around herself and moaning as Severus increased his pace and started grunting, pulling her hard against him, his balls slapping against her buttocks.

'Oh, gods, yes....' He tipped his head back and growled, his eyes closed as he continued to pump into her.

Hermione was close to her orgasm, and she was meeting his movements, rolling her hips and grinding herself against his cock. Severus glanced down at her and smirked a little before withdrawing his penis fully. Before she had a chance to protest, Severus flipped her onto her stomach and let her legs dangle over the side of the bench. Pulling her slightly off the edge and holding her thighs at waist height, he thrust into her from behind and heard her groan as the head of his cock started hitting her G-spot over and over. Hermione was splayed across the bench, one arm hooked over the far side for purchase and her other hand thrumming at her clit with a fierce urgency as she felt her orgasm starting.

'Oh, gods, Severus... now,' she moaned, 'now... oh yessssss,' she hissed as her orgasm washed over her in waves and she clamped down hard on his cock.

Severus felt Hermione rather than heard her muffled cries, but he knew she had come. He could feel her orgasm pulsing around him. Now, he just had to act out the last part of his fantasy, and he would be a very happy man indeed. Pulling himself out of her tight sheath, albeit reluctantly, he lay her on her back lengthways on the bench and Divesto'd himself of his clothing before joining her and laying on top of her.

Languorously, Hermione wrapped her legs around Severus's waist as he kissed her tenderly and murmured, 'I love you,' into her open mouth. Slowly and with great tenderness, Severus entered her tight vagina, pushed himself up to his hilt and stayed there for a long time as he kissed her. He wanted to savour this moment to be remembered on the days he would be here in the lab on his own.

Hermione squeezed his cock with her muscles, revelling in the feeling of his length inside her and his weight on top of her until at last, with a final kiss, he started to move, pushing himself up on his arms as she raised her hips to meet his thrusts. Severus kept his eyes on Hermione's face as he thrust, gasping each time he entered her fully and her bottom hit the hard surface of the bench with a delicious slap.

'Oh, that's it,' he hissed. 'That's right, witch... just like that...' he murmured as Hermione gripped his buttocks and dug her nails in a little.

Hermione came without warning and raised her hips from the bench as she met his hard cock on a downward thrust. Severus's eyes widened as he felt himself going over the edge, and with a roar, he pounded Hermione hard against the bench over and over until he spilled himself into her, grunting and bucking as he did so, his face in a tight

grimace.

'Ohhhhhh, shit,' he groaned as he collapsed onto her soft body and cradled her to him.

Hermione could feel bruises along her spine, and her vagina throbbed with a pleasant ache that meant she had been well and truly fucked. Her face was split in a wide smile, her eyes closed as she embraced Severus softly, tracing her fingers along his face and kissing his neck with her soft lips.

'Better than the fantasy?' she asked him softly in his ear.

'Oh, gods, yes,' he sighed and nuzzled her neck, and she felt him grinning against her throat. 'You should get jealous more often, witch...'

Hermione stiffened beneath him.

'Jealous? What ever do you mean?' Her voice was soft but with a dangerous edge that Severus heard and decided to ignore with a smirk. She was fun to fuck when she was angry too, and he could go another round with her if she so chose.

'I meant,' Severus lifted his head to look at her, 'Marcella...' He raised his eyebrow.

'Oh, you mean the customer you were laughing with earlier? The one who touched your hand and had you drooling like a newborn baby? I wasn't jealous of her.... Why would I be?' Hermione glared at him and tightened her fists into two tight balls, trying to push him off her.

'If you weren't jealous, why are you so angry?' he asked her smoothly, gripping her arms to her sides with his own.

'I'm... not...' Hermione tried in vain to roll Severus off her, ' ANGRY!' she shouted in his face.

Severus grinned at her infuriatingly and started to laugh.

'I like it when you're jealous. I know you really love me.' He laughed again and gave up trying to stop her struggling and climbed off her, pulling her to her feet smartly and hugging her close.

Hermione huffed against his chest for a moment until he started to stroke her hair, and she relaxed, snaking her arms around his waist and kissing his chest softly.

'I hate you,' she murmured and then pushed him away with a pout. 'Who was she, anyway?'

Severus looked at her with amusement in his eyes.

'She's a business associate. I have worked closely with her for almost six years, since I opened the shop, in fact,' he answered her honestly.

'Just business?' Hermione twirled a length of hair between her fingers.

'Oh, yes. Definitely. You would be more her type...' he sniggered a little and handed Hermione her clothes.

Hermione smiled at him. 'You mean she's...?'

'She prefers witches to wizards... pretty, dark haired witches with nice firm breasts... you would suit her perfectly...' He grinned at her.

Hermione fastened her jeans and walked over to Severus, kissing him on the lips firmly.

'Why was she here?' she asked as she let him go.

'Ahhh... That I cannot tell you; it would spoil the surprise.... But trust me, you will like it.' He smiled at her. 'Thanks for the fuck.... I'd better go and unlock the door.'

Hermione scowled at him as he walked out of the lab, and Severus chuckled to himself smugly.

21. Still Green.

Chapter 17 of 19

Two lonely hearts. One talented witch.

21. Still Green.

Ginny Potter stared down at the slightly crumpled sheet of parchment in front of her in disbelief. It had been quite a few months since she had seen Hermione, and she felt a sharp pang of guilt at being such a poor friend. She hadn't stayed in contact with her, and Harry was just as bad, Ginny mused thoughtfully. But she justified it. They were so wrapped up in each other and their growing family, and Harry was working such long hours in the Auror office, they never had time to see their friends. Weekends were precious family days, and, well, Hermione always had her head full of potions and the shop. What did they have in common, really? It was normal for school friends to drift apart, wasn't it?

So to receive an invitation to Hermione's birthday celebration was quite a shock. She glanced at the parchment again and the neat, angular writing. She wondered why Professor Snape was sending out the invitations, and her eyes widened yet again at the venue. Very classy indeed. Ginny smiled slightly. It had been ages since she had been out with Harry, and it would be lovely to see Hermione again. She was sure her Mum would be willing to baby-sit, and she had been waiting for a chance to wear the dress Harry had bought her for Christmas. With a grin, Ginny wrote a polite reply to Severus.

Marcella Leibowitz shook Severus's hand firmly.

'Thank you, Marcella. It is precisely what I wanted.' Severus smiled a little.

'A pleasure, as always.' She smiled at him.

'Until next time, then.' Severus nodded and closed his front door.

Suddenly, Severus was alone in Spinner's End for the first time in many months. It had taken a lot of persuading to convince Hermione to stay in her own flat for the night, and in the end, he had told her the truth. He frowned as he remembered the look on her face and her surprised response. He sifted through the sheets of parchment on his knee, carefully re-reading each word. He had almost committed them to memory, but he needed to be triply sure. Then he put his hand in his robe pocket and lifted out the dark green velvet box slowly. Flipping the lid, he examined the ring nestled within, and his stomach flipped over a little. It was very beautiful indeed, a dark oval emerald, not huge but very tasteful. It was sitting in a platinum claw and edged with tiny diamonds. He could picture it on Hermione's finger already, and he closed his eyes, taking a deep breath to calm his nerves a little. He had to ask her yet.

Severus placed the parchments into a large manila envelope and lifted another small pile of parchments that had been drifting in by owl over the past week. He looked through the replies, and his lip curled in a smirk. Most of them were ex-students. It was worth a few nerves just to see the looks on their faces, because he was sure that Hermione had not divulged their relationship to any of them, even though they had been a couple for seven months. In fact, it had surprised him to realise that Hermione had no contact with any of her so-called friends, and it was this that had prompted him to organise a party for her. There seemed to be no one else who would do it.

Severus looked around the lounge a little. He missed her, and now Marcella had gone there was no reason for them not to share the night together. He smiled and walked out of the house.

Hermione had decided that she hated Severus Snape with a passion. She was holding her wand and twisting it, desperate for something to hex as she paced her living room floor. It wasn't a large room, and her carpet was bearing the brunt of her pacing, the already threadbare patches being worn to baldness.

In the space of an hour, Hermione had realised that Severus was a liar, a cheat, and a man who used people in the worst possible way. Why else would he tell her he was going home alone because he had an assignation with another woman? How dare he! And, when she had expressed her shock, he had just laughed at her as if her feelings were so unimportant to him. Well, that was it as far as Hermione was concerned. It was over.

'It's over,' Hermione whispered, then collapsed onto her sofa and sobbed into a large, cream fluffy cushion. She was missing him already. Her hair muffled her ears a little, but she still stiffened when she heard her doorbell sound. She sat up, rubbed her eyes, and flattened the creases in her blouse as she walked to the door. Through the frosted glass she could see Severus's distinctive shape, and she paused for a moment.

'What do you want?' she called through the door.

'To see you, of course. Why else would I be here?' Severus sounded a little irritated.

'I thought you had a date?' Hermione hissed at him.

'I had a meeting, not a date! Why on earth would I have a date when I am with you?' Severus's voice sounded incredulous.

Hermione bit her lip. He hadn't actually said it was a date. He had said he had a woman coming around to the house.

'Hermione, let me in, or I will blast open your door,' he murmured in a low and quite determined tone.

Hermione opened the door slowly and peered at him through her bushy hair, her eyes red from crying, streaky tearstains on her face.

'Can I come in, or shall we argue in full view of your neighbours?' Severus muttered, glaring down at her.

Hermione opened the door for him, and he swept past her quickly. Closing the door, she followed him into her lounge.

'You have been crying.' Severus stared at her, his jaw working overtime. Hermione just nodded as she watched him. He was obviously angry, and she realised her jealousy wasn't fun this time.

'You thought I was seeing another woman?' he asked her quietly.

Hermione's eyes went wide in panic. She didn't like the sound of this at all.

'No, not really. I was a little jealous, a bit worried, I suppose. I didn't really think you would be seeing someone behind my back,' she pleaded, wringing her hands in frustration.

'I was honest with you. I have always been honest with you, witch,' he whispered softly, hurt in his eyes.

'I know, Severus. I'm sorry. I just couldn't bear the thought of you with anyone else,' Hermione answered him from the heart, her eyes filled with tears as an image of someone else wrapped around him sprang into her mind.

Severus was just staring at her, and Hermione felt her heart was breaking. What had she done? She covered her face with her hands and collapsed onto the sofa, crying softly. It seemed like she had been crying for an hour, but in reality, it was only a few moments before Severus sat beside her and wrapped his arm around her shoulder. He rested his chin on the top of her bushy hair and stroked her cheek, wiping her tears away as she clutched the front of his rough robes with her fists.

'I'm sorry,' she mumbled into his chest and sniffed a little.

'It's okay, Hermione. Perhaps I should have explained more fully.' Severus sighed.

Hermione twisted around to face him and tipped her mouth upwards. Severus kissed her gently and ran his tongue across her mouth. With a moan, Hermione opened her lips and allowed him to plunder her mouth, relief crashing over her as Severus deepened the kiss.

'Forgive me,' she murmured as he bent to nuzzle her neck.

'I think I'm forgiving you right now, witch.' He smiled and bit her neck a little.

Hermione growled. She loved make-up sex.

A/N: Apologies for the delay in posting. My lovely beta Kizzy has had to deal with real life, but she's back now, and so are the last three chapters of this bit of fluff.

22. What You Wish For.

Chapter 18 of 19

Two lonely hearts. One talented witch.

22. What You Wish For

Hermione awoke with the sun streaming through her bedroom window and Severus somewhere between her thighs, doing amazing things with his tongue. She stretched and spread her legs to allow him access and felt him smile against her pussy.

'Good morning,' he murmured before going back to his delicious task.

'Mmmm,' Hermione sighed and then gasped as he sucked a little on her clit. 'Oh, gods...' She felt a gush of moisture between her legs, and Severus slid up her body, kissing and teasing her breasts before moving to her mouth and slipping his penis inside her slowly.

'Happy Birthday, witch,' he hissed as he started to thrust into her with long, smooth strokes.

'Oooh, yes, thanks,' she gasped as she felt her orgasm building quickly, his balls slapping against her buttocks as she lifted her hips from the bed to match his movements.

'Come for me, my love.' Severus's silky voice caressed her ear and tipped Hermione over the edge as he drove her into the bed with his cock.

Hermione felt Severus's cock go harder inside her, and she hissed as he hit her G-spot.

'I'm coming,' she murmured and bit her lip as the waves of her orgasm crashed over her, and she arched her back, shuddering with pleasure.

'Oh, Hermione!' Severus cried out as he came, his sperm ejaculating out of him in creamy spurts as her muscles milked each drop. He collapsed onto her soft, limp body and kissed her face over and over, sucking her bottom lip into his mouth.

Propping himself up onto his elbows, Severus gazed down at her, and she smiled up at him.

'You know how much I love you, Hermione, don't you?' Severus looked at her with serious eyes.

'Yes, Severus. Of course I do. I love you too.' Hermione lifted her head and kissed his lips softly.

'I've organised something for your birthday,' he murmured. 'I hope you don't mind.'

'Oh, my god, really?' Hermione's eyes widened, and she smiled warmly at him. 'That's so kind of you. What is it?' She felt very touched.

'Dinner tonight at The Criterion. I thought you deserved a treat. You are thirty today, after all!' Severus grinned as Hermione closed her eyes and groaned.

'Don't remind me. But The Criterion, Severus? It's so expensive!' Hermione looked at him aghast.

'Nonsense. When do I ever get a chance to really spoil you?' He smiled at her. 'Do me one thing, though?'

'Of course.' She looked at him expectantly.

'Wear your red dress. I want you to look like you did on the first night.' Severus's eyes glazed over at the memory, and Hermione giggled.

'Severus, you old romantic,' she whispered.

Hermione checked her reflection in the mirror one last time. She looked almost the same as she had on the night they went on their date; the only difference was her underwear. Instead of the red thong, she had changed it for a Slytherin green one as a surprise for Severus. She couldn't wear a bra with the dress due to the low back, and she said a little blessing of thanks for being able to affix her dress magically to her breasts to stop them slipping out of the front of her dress.

Severus tapped lightly on her bedroom door and entered. He stopped as soon as he saw her, and his heart leapt into his mouth.

'Gods, Hermione, you look so beautiful,' he sighed, tears pricking his eyes slightly.

Hermione turned to look at him. He was wearing the same clothes he had been wearing the first night too. In fact, he looked exactly the same. Hermione smiled at him.

'Wow, Severus. You look gorgeous, so handsome,' she murmured and walked over to him, putting her hand in his.

Severus couldn't speak. He was nervous and madly in love, and the combination had rendered him a useless orator. Hermione could see the emotions playing over his face and kissed him lightly.

'I love you too, Severus,' she whispered, smiling gently. 'Let's go, shall we?'

They left the flat arm in arm, and Severus pulled her tightly to him as they Apparated to the dark alley behind the restaurant.

Holding her hand, Severus led her to the front door and insisted she went in before him. As she entered, the maitre de walked over to her.

'Miss Granger? This way, please.' He gestured for them to follow, and Hermione looked at Severus with a small frown. Severus smirked a little, and she knew he was up to something.

As she walked behind the maitre d', Hermione gazed around the restaurant in awe. It was exquisite, beautiful décor with high, vaulted ceilings adorned with crystal chandeliers and gilt edged mirrors surrounding the impressive banqueting hall.

Severus followed her, placing a guiding hand on her lower back. He was aware it had been quite some time since Hermione had seen her friends, and he hoped his presence would be reassuring.

The maitre d' walked to a set of ornate double doors, etched glass inserted into the gilded wooden frames. He pushed the door open to reveal a private room containing a table for two. The candles were lit, and the table was separated from the rest of the room by a delicately decorated silk screen, making it intimate and very romantic. The maitre d' pulled out a chair for Hermione, and as she sat down, Severus sat down opposite her, smiling a little.

'This is just wonderful, Severus. Thank you.' Hermione smiled at him, her eyes sparkling amber in the candlelight.

'You deserve it. There is something else, however.' He nodded at the maitre d', who withdrew a wand, much to Hermione's surprise. With a flick, the silk screen disappeared to reveal a long table attached to their smaller one, surrounded by many familiar faces.

Hermione gasped and started to laugh as her friends applauded amidst shouts of 'Surprise!' and 'Happy Birthday!'

'Oh, gods!' Hermione took a deep breath and looked over at Severus incredulously. 'Did you do this?'

Severus nodded. 'Is it okay?' he asked her quietly, his eyes twinkling in amusement at the look on her face.

'It's more than okay,' she whispered softly. 'Thank you so much.'

Hermione smiled at him warmly and stood up from the table. She walked to where he was sitting and without thinking, she snaked her arms around his neck and kissed him softly on his lips. She didn't notice the sudden silence in the room, but Severus did. He froze and pushed her gently away with a small nod in the direction of her guests, most of whom were gaping at them in shock. The only person who wasn't was Minerva, who had her head cocked to one side and a smile on her face as she marvelled at the beauty of their bright blue bonds.

Hermione turned to look at them and giggled a little.

'You would have found out eventually, anyway.' She shrugged and laughed again before walking over to hug Ginny and Harry.

'Good grief, Hermione. Are you shagging him?' Ginny asked her quietly while casting a sideways glance at Severus.

Hermione looked at Ginny in irritation.

'Actually, I've been seeing Severus for a number of months, Ginny. It's a shame we haven't had the chance to catch up recently. I could have told you all about it.' She smiled sweetly and felt a little smug as a deep pink flush of embarrassment spread across Ginny's face.

'You don't mean,' Ginny gasped, 'is he your soul mate? The one you went to meet?' She looked at her in shock.

'As long as you're happy, Hermione,' Harry intercepted smoothly. Hermione caught his eye and could see he was being sincere. She smiled at him gratefully, and the awkward atmosphere was broken when he grinned back at her.

'I've never been happier.' She grinned at him, not noticing a soft smile playing on Severus's lips as he overheard her comment.

'He's a good man, Hermione. You could have done a lot worse.' Harry looked at his friend and couldn't fail to see the joy radiating from her. It made her look even more beautiful.

From his seat, Severus watched Hermione as she walked around the table and stopped to talk with her old school friends. He smiled when she reached Minerva and watched as they hugged each other warmly. He smirked as he saw Hermione blush and then nod and gaze in his direction. They were obviously talking about him. When Hermione stopped to talk to Neville Longbottom, Severus noticed he cast a furtive glance in his direction, and he nodded and gave him a small smile. He was living a different life now, and he was big enough to let bygones be bygones.

Hermione had almost made her way back to her chair, and Severus motioned to the maitre d' to bring out the champagne and trays of canapés he had already ordered. In moments, everyone was eating and drinking and catching up on the gossip, occasionally glancing towards Hermione and Severus as if to convince themselves it wasn't a bad dream.

Hermione sipped her third glass of champagne, the bubbles going to her head a little. The main course had been served, and everyone was preoccupied with their meal and the conversation. Severus took his opportunity and reached inside his jacket pocket, taking out a neatly folded manila envelope.

'Happy birthday,' he whispered as he leaned forward and handed the envelope to Hermione.

'What is it?' she asked him, her brow furrowed.

'Open it. You won't have time to read the small print, but I'm sure you will get the drift.' Severus smiled, but inside, his heart was almost jumping out of his chest.

Hermione opened the envelope and pulled out two documents. There was a short note attached from Severus which said, 'Read this first.' She looked up at him briefly, and he nodded to her to carry on.

Hermione scanned the document and raised her eyes to Severus, her mouth open in a silent gasp.

'What have you done?' she whispered.

Severus grinned at her. 'It was your project, your idea. It's only right that the patent, and the resulting proceeds, will be yours.'

'But, you helped me. Without you, I wouldn't have completed it!' Hermione looked at him in shock.

'I don't think it will be an issue. Read the other document, Hermione.' Severus smiled at her again, and this time his heart was beating so loudly he was surprised she couldn't hear it. He held his breath as he watched her eyes skimming the page.

'No, Severus.' Hermione shook her head. 'The business is yours; I work for you. I won't let you do this.'

Severus raised an eyebrow slightly and leaned forward so that only she could hear him.

'Did you read the last paragraph properly, Hermione?' he murmured.

'Yes, of course.' Hermione bit her lip a little. 'Well, not properly. Hang on.'

Hermione reread the last paragraph of the document slowly and took a sharp intake of breath. The chatter around the table stopped, and all eyes drifted towards her.

'Read it out, Hermione,' Severus whispered.

Hermione's hands shook as she held the parchment, and her lower lip started to tremble slightly.

'It says that the Potions Emporium formerly owned by Mr Severus Snape will now jointly be owned by Mr Severus Snape and Ms Hermione Granger-Snape,' her voice went to a whisper, 'until such time as the agreement is jointly dissolved.'

Hermione's hands were shaking so much that she had to put the parchment down. She raised her eyes shyly and saw Severus looking at her with a pleading, hopeful look in his eyes. He held out his hand and gave her the green velvet box, and Hermione stared at him for a long moment without opening it.

Severus took a breath and swallowed a little.

'You're going to make me say it, aren't you?' he murmured.

'Definitely.' Hermione didn't move her eyes from his.

'Marry me. Please,' he whispered, his voice hoarse with emotion.

Hermione smiled softly, and gentle tears started to run down her cheeks. She opened the box and gasped as she lifted the ring. She held it to the light for a moment and then slipped it onto her ring finger.

'Beautiful,' she whispered and turned, smiling at her gathered guests.

'Hermione?' Harry laughed.

'Yes, Harry?' she responded dreamily.

'Answer the poor bloke,' he laughed.

Hermione put her hand over her mouth and turned to look at Severus, who was sitting with his hands running through his hair and a smirk on his face as he waited for her to respond.

'Oh, Severus, I'm so sorry!' she giggled. 'Yes, of course. Yes.'

Severus didn't care who was watching as he stood and pulled her from her chair, dragged her flush with his firm body, and crushed her mouth with his own. It knocked the breath out of them both, and everyone applauded. Some of the women were watching Hermione enviously and wishing they had been kissed like that at least once in their lives.

They pulled apart breathlessly, and Hermione smiled at him. He wouldn't forget that smile as long as he lived.

23. Epilogue

Chapter 19 of 19

Two lonely hearts. One talented witch.

23. Epilogue

The sound of clinking bottles could be heard from inside the potions store. Severus walked into the lab and over to his workbench, peered into the cauldron and looked down at the hastily scribbled note on the pad beside it.

'Shit,' a mumbled voice came from the store.

Severus folded his arms and waited. After a short moment, a tall, slim girl of fourteen walked from the potions store and stopped in her tracks as she looked at him.

'Dad.' She gave him a lopsided smile and tucked her long black hair behind her ears.

'Elizabeth,' he said flatly, and the girl groaned. She knew she was in trouble if he called her by her full name.

'Well, I was almost finished; I did exactly what you said. Then I realised I had forgotten the wormwood, and I went to get some,' Lizzie's voice got quieter, 'and we haven't got any.'

'Lizzie, remind me why I gave you this Saturday job?' Severus said softly.

Lizzie closed her eyes. Here we go, she thought to herself.

'So Mum can have the day with Marco, and I can do the stock take and make the healing potion for St Mungo's.' She repeated the terms of her employment.

'And have you fulfilled the terms of your job description recently?' Severus murmured and walked towards where Lizzie was standing.

'No.' She looked down at her feet and knew she had been rumbled.

'You didn't finish your work last week, did you, Lizzie?' Severus murmured, looking down at the top of his daughter's bowed head. 'Was there something more important, perhaps, that caused you to leave without finishing the stock take?'

Lizzie felt sick. Her father was intimidating at times, definitely frustrating and had a temper that could raise the roof, but this was the worst. His disappointment. And the fact he could see right through her.

'I was meeting someone,' she mumbled, not raising her eyes.

'Speak up, Lizzie, I cannot hear you when you mumble.' Severus smirked a little.

He knew exactly what she had done last week, but he loved to watch her try and squirm her way out of things. She may be Slytherin, but she wasn't a well-practiced one. In fact, Severus wondered if she would have been better placed in Ravenclaw.

Lizzie raised her eyes defiantly to her father, and he raised his eyebrow at her.

'I was meeting someone last week, okay?' she shouted, 'and don't ask me who, because I won't tell you. It's none of your business!'

Lizzie crossed her arms and glared at him, and Severus fought hard to force down the laughter bubbling in his throat. She really could be as stubborn as her mother.

Severus sighed deeply and shook his head.

'Ah, Lizzie. You've grown up so much, you really have, and that was why I gave you this job. I thought you were ready, but perhaps your mother was right.' He turned to walk out of the lab.

'What? What do you mean? Dad...?' Lizzie had to stride after Severus as he walked into the front of the shop and started to lock up.

'Okay, tell me. What did Mum say?' Lizzie glared at him again.

Severus felt a little spark of glee. Lizzie had an inner need to prove Hermione wrong and had done, ever since she was a little girl. He cast his mind back to a sunny day in the back garden, when at the age of five Lizzie had started to climb the apple tree. Hermione had admonished her and told her that she would fall and break her leg and that taking Skele-gro was disgusting. Lizzie had pouted at her, and as soon as her back was turned, she had shimmied to the top branches and been unable to climb down.

Hermione had ranted at her for ages afterwards, but Lizzie hadn't cared. She hadn't fallen out of the tree, and she hadn't broken her leg.

'Your mother felt that you would be too interested in meeting with your friends to be committed to this job each Saturday,' Severus replied smoothly and saw the light in Lizzie's eyes fade a little.

'That's not true. I love working here with you, Dad.' Lizzie's eyes pricked with tears.

Hermione had been right, at least about last Saturday, but that was different. She had been waiting for ages for Damien Longbottom to ask her out, and when he finally had, she hadn't been able to think of anything else. And when he had suggested meeting for an ice cream on Saturday, Lizzie had forgotten about her job and rushed through it so she could dash out and meet with him. But she hadn't finished the stock take, and now, she couldn't finish the healing potion for St Mungo's. The guilt crashed over her, and her pale cheeks flushed pink as she looked up into her father's eyes.

'I'm sorry, Dad. I promise it won't happen again.' Lizzie looked at him, her dark brown eyes watering and her pale pink lips being chewed to bits as she waited for him to respond.

Severus smiled and walked over to her, leant against the counter, and held his arms open.

Smiling softly, she snuggled against his robes as he wrapped his arms around her in a hug. He knew there would be a time very soon when his hugs would be unwanted, and he rested his chin on her head gently, musing at how fast his children had grown.

They were interrupted by a knock on the door, and Severus began to laugh at the screwed up face puckered up against the glass of the front door.

'We'd better let them in.' He laughed again, and Lizzie's face split into a grin at the sight of her little brother making faces at her through the glass.

Severus flicked his wand, and the door opened so fast that Marco tumbled into the shop and landed on the floor. He looked up and caught Severus's eye and laughed loudly before jumping to his feet.

'Where's your mother?' Severus asked, puzzled not to see Hermione following Marco into the shop.

'Just coming. Can I stir something, Dad?' he said to him quickly, his dark eyes bright and his sandy hair falling into his eyes lightly.

'Lizzie has a potion she is making; I'm sure it needs stirring. What do you think, Lizzie?' Severus winked at her, knowing that her ruined potion would be the ideal distraction for an inquisitive five year old.

'Definitely. I was looking for someone to help me. Come on, Marco.' She grinned at him, and he took her hand as they walked towards the lab.

Severus watched them with a lump in his throat and wondered if they would have been as close if Hermione hadn't lost her third pregnancy. The age gap between them meant that Lizzie had taken on a lot of responsibility as Marco's big sister, especially since Zach had gone on to University last month. Severus smiled as he heard Lizzie giving Marco careful instructions.

Hermione pushed the shop door open with her bottom, her hands full of shopping bags that she dumped with a sigh.

'Thank goodness that's over with. You wouldn't believe how busy it is out there today.' Hermione put her hands on her hips and tipped her head to Severus for a kiss.

He was happy to oblige and ran his hands along her body as he kissed her sensuously.

It wasn't what Hermione had been expecting, and she lost her balance a little. He caught her, and they laughed together, their eyes meeting and the familiar spark between them ignited something between her thighs. Severus raised his eyes at her and smirked slightly.

'Wait here,' he murmured to her.

Hermione smiled to herself and waited impatiently for him to come back.

'Lizzie is keeping Marco occupied. I warded the lab so they can't come out yet, and there is a double Silencing Spell over the whole shop.' He smiled at her sexily and took his wand out of his robes. With a flick, black blinds covered the doorway and the windows, leaving the front of the shop in a dim light but ensuring no one would be able to see in.

'You have the best ideas, Severus. Now hurry up before the kids get suspicious and try and get your wards down like the last time.' Hermione walked towards him and pulled her blouse over her head, unfastened her bra, and moved her hands to the top of her jeans quickly.

Severus watched her intently. He knew she only undressed this way to tease him, and with a flick of his wand, they were both naked.

Hermione walked up to him and ran a finger down his chest until she reached his erect cock, licking her lips a little. In moments, their lips were locked, and Severus lifted Hermione onto the shop counter. They knew from previous experience it was at the perfect height, and after a little caressing, stroking, licking and sucking, Hermione lay herself back as Severus pulled her hips forward and entered her firmly.

'Gods,' he hissed. 'After three children, you are still so tight, witch'

'Mmm, and you still know how to fuck me, Severus, now shut up and get on with it.'

Hermione squirmed as he started to thrust, and in a matter of minutes, they were both crying out their orgasms and holding on to each other, trembling and kissing each other softly.

'I love you,' Hermione murmured into his neck as he caught his breath.

'I love you too.' Severus kissed her cheek and climbed off her quickly, aware that the children were effectively locked in his lab.

They dressed, and Severus flicked his wand, removing all of the charms and wards and letting light back into the shop. He turned to Hermione and winked at her, and she brushed her hair back from her flushed face.

Hermione grinned at him and smiled as he went to fetch the children.

The End

A/N: Hi everyone. Just wanted to say a huge thanks to Kizzy, who has worked so hard on this and been a wonderful friend into the bargain. Also, thank you to you, readers. Your reviews have made me giggle and smile, and that's always a good thing. And to RobisonRocket here at The Petulant Poetess, for doing such a sterling job sifting out the errors Kizzy and I both missed!