

And so here was Severus, walking back to class when an owl whizzed by him and dropped a small scroll at his feet. He looked down at it, and then looked around him to see if there was perhaps someone else in the hall that the missive may have been meant for. He bent down and opened the small scroll. To his amazement, it actually was meant for him. The question now was: who would write such a thing?

My Dearest Severus,

I have been watching you for so many years, and I must confess that I can no longer keep my feelings to myself.

I love you.

I have waited so long to have the courage to say these words to you, but as of yet I cannot bring myself to say these precious words to you in person.

You are my life, Severus. How I long to feel my heart beat against yours. Can you hear my soul calling to you? Can you feel it, crying for your love? Wanting only to belong to you?

Soon, I will make myself known. Until then, accept this kiss that I enclose within this parchment window to my heart.

Your Secret Love

As soon as he finished reading the note, he felt a rush of air come up from the parchment. Suddenly, he was given the sweetest kiss from a pair of invisible lips. He was stunned for a moment, not knowing what to do. He then rolled up the scroll and looked around him to make sure that no one had been watching him. The hall was empty, and there would have been nowhere for anyone to hide. He thought for a moment about what he had just read, as well as the kiss he'd just felt. The only thing he could think of was it had to be a joke. Albeit a clever one but nonetheless another bloody joke at his expense.

He shook his head and threw the parchment in the air, setting it aflame with a simple wave of his hand.

"There, take that and kiss it," he said as the ashes fell to the ground. "Bloody pranksters." He walked away, mumbling curse words as he went. This was the last thing he needed with three months left for the end of the school year.

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I'll have another chapter up within the next day or two. I hope you enjoyed this so far.

The First Suspect

Chapter 2 of 9

Severus spots what he believes to be his secret love, much to his dismay.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thank you to June for all of her help with this story.

The first suspect

A week had passed since Severus received his note. For the most part he tried not to think on it very much, but every once in a while he found himself looking around, wondering if he was indeed being watched.

He sat at the High Table, while looking around the room full of students eating and talking. As Severus scanned the room, he came to a pair of blue eyes staring straight at him. Ron Weasley was looking at him from a small table alongside the wall, where the interns sat. After their eyes met for several seconds, Ron dropped his head suddenly and continued eating.

'Oh sweet Circe, no,' thought Severus in a panic. He looked away and down at his plate. After surveying the food on his plate for the tenth time he raised his eyes — luckily his hair strategically fell over them — and looked in Weasley's direction. Again the boy was staring at him. Severus put his hand over his forehead, as though to shield himself from the redhead's intense scrutiny.

'This has to be a dream. No, nightmare. Maybe I have something on my robes, or my hair doesn't look right,' Severus briefly thought, certain that there had to be another reason why Weasley was looking at him, other than him being his secret love. Severus looked down at his robes, and they were fine. He even went so far as to ask Hagrid if there was anything wrong with his hair. Hagrid happily told him it was very shiny and asked him what kind of shampoo he used. After promising the Gamekeeper his own batch of shampoo, Severus went back to his plate, wishing to every god he could think of that it wasn't Weasley who had sent him that note.

At the interns' table, there was some plotting going on.

"Hermione, are you sure about this? I mean, of all the people to fall in love with, you had to fall in love with Snape?" asked Ron, who was once again looking Snape's way.

"Ron, stop looking at him. He's going to become suspicious," snapped Hermione.

"I don't see why you just don't tell him you fancy him," said Draco.

Harry looked at him in disbelief.

"Are you mad? She can't do that," countered Harry.

"Harry's right. He'll never believe me if I just come right out and say it," said Hermione.

"Well, not to mention he'd probably try to embarrass you by telling you you're just a stupid little girl," Ron said as he stuffed a biscuit in his mouth.

"Thank you, Ronald." Hermione swatted him across the arm and continued with her note-taking. "Can you please swallow so that I can explain to you what you have to

do?"

Ron rolled his eyes and swallowed. The last thing he wanted was to be drawn into Hermione's plan to snag their old potions professor. He couldn't begin to see what she saw in the man. But if she wanted the git, then as her friend he had to help.

"Bloody hell, Hermione. Can I at least finish my lunch?" Ron looked at Hermione, who was now scowling at him. "Right then, what do I do?"

She smiled and handed him the small parchment, which he read.

"Are you mad?" he yelled as he slightly moved away from her.

"Quiet." She shushed him and moved closer to him.

"Calm down, Ron." said Neville.

"Calm down? Do you know what she wants me to do? She wants me to get into his rooms and steal one of his handkerchiefs," complained Ron. "Why can't Draco do it? He's his intern after all; he's already been in his rooms anyway."

"I've done my part; I gave Hermione the combination of wards. You've got the easy part," said Draco.

"Easy? Do you know what he'll do to me if he catches me in there?" Ron's voice was getting higher and higher.

"Hush, Ron," said Harry.

"And a handkerchief. Now I've got to go through the man's bloody drawers."

"Ron, I just want something personal of his. Is it so much to ask?" Hermione begged. She knew that once Ron saw the unshed tears in her eyes, he would easily say yes. And she was right.

Ron sighed and agreed to what she asked him to do, wondering which hex the former potions professor would use on him when he discovered a Gryffindor rummaging through his drawers.

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I hope you all enjoyed this chapter. Thanks for reading.

I feel the need to comment on something I have not addressed in this story. Yes, Draco and a few of our favorite Gryffindors are friends. I think by now we have all heard the several hundred different ways they may have become friends so I didn't want to spend time writing about something that could easily have happened. In my opinion, after the war and during their association in a place of higher learning, coupled with their maturity, there is a good possibility that at some point Draco and the others befriended each other.

Ron's Assignment

Chapter 3 of 9

Will Ron get in and out of Severus' rooms before getting caught?

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thanks to June for all of her help and suggestions.

Ron's Assignment

After making sure he ate what could very well be his last meal on this earth, Ron made his way towards the location of the DADA class. It was fairly well known that all of the previous DADA professors had made their rooms in the loft-like space leading up from the actual classroom. But Snape had made that his office and also personal potions lab. Even though he was no longer the potions professor, he still loved making potions, and would spend his free time doing research.

Snape did, however, have a large set of rooms just up the hall from the DADA classroom. The corridor leading to his rooms was a dead-end, so students never went that way, thus giving him the privacy he so loved. Unfortunately for Ron, this fact made any escape all the more difficult. If he took too long to get one of the professor's handkerchiefs, and Snape was on his way to his rooms, there would be no avoiding him. There wasn't any other classroom on the way or anything remotely looking like a broom cupboard for Ron to duck into. No, it was fairly safe to say that he was pretty well fucked.

Ron looked at his watch. It was one-fifteen on the dot. Snape's next class was in another fifteen minutes. That meant Ron had a good ten minutes to get into the man's rooms, look for the handkerchief, and get out with several minutes to spare and not risk running into the professor. He looked around the corridor and saw no one about. Quickly he walked down the hall and found himself at the end; there was no door anywhere. He raised his wand, and hoped that as soon as he brought down the wards that a door would appear. It took him two tries before he spoke the words correctly and the door opened. Ron wiped the sweat from his brow and ran inside. He had to stop a moment to take in the shock of what he saw.

While he wasn't quite sure if he'd truly expected whips and chains, Ron certainly wasn't expecting the way it looked. It appeared that Snape loved comfort. His furniture was oversized and covered in something that felt like velvet to Ron, and another fabric like something he'd felt at Hermione's parents' home. It was called chenille. The walls were the typical castle stone, but Snape had the loveliest art hanging on them — scenes of beautiful women, and knights on their horses kissing their damsels good-bye, as well as many scenic prints of ancient Egypt and Rome. Ron's reverie was broken by the crackling of the fire, reminding him of his task. He looked for a way that would lead him to the bedroom. He saw a small hallway and followed it; sure enough, it led to the professor's bedroom.

Another shock to Ron's system. The man had a huge bed. Silk curtains hung all around the bed, and large pillows were strewn all about. On the walls of this room hung all sorts of tasteful yet very erotic prints. The redhead had to admit that his former professor had good taste. Ron looked at the bed and found himself imagining Hermione and Severus doing all sorts of debauched things, then he shook himself out of his thoughts.

"What the hell am I thinking?" Ron shuddered at the thought of seeing either one naked — Hermione because she was like a sister to him, and Snape because; well,

I love you, Severus.

Your Secret Love

As with the previous note, he felt the soft caress of invisible lips upon his own; and this time a pair of invisible arms also wrapped themselves around him. The note disappeared on its own after its message and actions were received. Severus looked around him to make sure there was no one watching. He noticed he'd dropped a few packages on the ground, no doubt when he was being hugged. As he picked up his packages, Severus tried to figure out if he had ever heard the voice used in the Whispering Wings. But, he then remembered that one of the reasons they were used was for the sender to disguise his or her identity from the receiver. The voice was charmed to be non-recognizable. That made this particular way of communication easily used by secret lovers and often spies.

Severus sighed deeply as he made his way back to Hogwarts. After receiving the first note, he thought that it was perhaps just a joke. Now, he knew that whomever was sending these notes to him was serious, because a Whispering Wings note could only hide the sender's voice not their emotions.

Love was something he never thought would come into his life. As a youth, he did love a woman once, but she was in love with another man. While his love for Narcissa Black soon waned, he wondered what his life would have been like if she had chosen him instead of Lucius. Severus couldn't blame her for falling for his friend; Lucius was an attractive and outgoing young man, much the same as the man he grew into. Severus wondered if he would have had children, or if he would still have become a Death Eater. Then again, Lucius became one, so that argument didn't hold much water. He laughed to himself, thinking that no doubt his secret love was most probably some lovesick teenage girl. Deciding to put all thoughts of love out of his head, he continued his walk, wanting to get back to Hogwarts so that he would have enough time to put his ingredients away and read for a few hours before dinner.

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Back at the school, Neville was putting the finishing touches on a small bouquet of roses he was taking to his own secret love. He'd mustered enough courage to ask Madam Rosmerta to have tea with him that coming Saturday. Yes, she was older than him, but age didn't matter when one was in love. He also wanted to give her a present other than the roses he had grown, just for her. He decided the other day that a ring would be a wonderful gift for Rosmerta. Over the years, he'd noticed Hermione wearing an onyx ring on special occasions, although lately she'd been wearing it regularly; Neville thought the design of the ring was delicate, and he knew it would look lovely on Rosmerta's hand. He wanted to take it to Seamus Finnegan, who now had a small jewelry shop in Hogsmeade. Seamus could reproduce the ring with a different stone, as Neville remembered Rosmerta saying something about goldstone being her favorite; he thought it would be the perfect way to show her how much he cared for her.

Not wanting to lose Hermione's ring, Neville placed it on his pinky and took the small bouquet, then made his way out to the gates of the school. As he walked towards the gates, he noticed Professor Snape coming towards him with several packages. Neville steadied himself and tried not to be nervous. He wondered if he would ever be able to approach the man without looking like a bowl of jelly during an earthquake.

Severus drew nearer to the school and saw Neville coming towards him. His eyes grew wide as he noticed that Neville was holding what looked like a small bouquet of roses. As Neville got closer, Severus noticed a large onyx ring on the intern's finger, and he froze.

'Merlin's hairy arsehole, not Longbottom,' he thought, hoping to be struck down dead before he could hear Neville's words of devotion.

Both men stopped and eyed each other. Neither spoke for several very long moments.

"G...good afternoon, sir," Neville said nervously. He noticed Severus looking at his bouquet and quickly ducked it behind him.

"Mr. Longbottom," Severus said sharply. He looked at the ring on the intern's pinky finger and arched his brow. "That's an attractive ring. Is that an onyx?"

Neville's eyes became round as saucers. He slowly looked down at his own hand, and then looked up at Severus.

"Uh...I...I think it's, ah...yes. Onyx, sir."

"Interesting. I do not believe I ever noticed you wearing it when you were here at Hogwarts," stated Severus, hoping to get some kind of information from the young quivering man in front of him.

"Well, it's not mine." Neville stopped. *'Oh, no. I can't tell him it belongs to Hermione. She'll kill me,'* he thought.

Severus breathed a sigh of relief. If the ring wasn't his, then that meant the roses weren't for him either; thus, Neville wasn't his secret love. It was all Severus could do to keep himself from jumping for joy.

"And whose. . ." Severus was stopped short by Neville's sudden outburst.

"I found it!" shouted Neville. "I'm sorry, I...I found it, sir. I was walking out of the castle and um...I found it on the ground."

Severus wondered if that was the same ring that belonged to his "secret love." It was too much of a coincidence.

"Mr. Longbottom, since you seem to be on your way out of the grounds, perhaps I can do you the favor of taking it to the Headmaster. I'm sure that whomever lost it will be looking for it. And since lost items usually find their way to the Headmaster's office, the ring's true owner will surely go there."

Neville felt the blood drain from his face. Snape was asking for the ring, for Hermione's ring. She would have a fit if she knew Snape had it. But there was no way he could refuse to hand the ring over to his ex-professor without good reason. Neville silently weighed the scales of his dilemma. Would he rather face an angry Hermione, or an angry Professor Snape? Well, that was easy. He pulled off the ring and handed it to Snape, and decided to make a hasty retreat.

"There you are, Professor; I'll just be going. Good luck finding the owner." Neville practically ran towards the gates, with the roses still in his hands. He would just ask Seamus to design something else for Madam Rosmerta.

Severus smiled as he held the ring in his hands. He would keep it in his pocket until he decided what he wanted to do about his situation. He wasn't sure if he wanted to know who this secret love of his was, especially since he apparently already knew the person and ... from what the Whispering Wings said ... he wasn't overly fond of them either.

"Great," he rolled his eyes and shook his head, "someone I can't stand is in love with me. Oh, how the gods do smile down at me." He mumbled and shook his head, "Piss on me is more like it." He then continued on his way back to the castle.

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And so Severus has yet another close call. I hope you enjoyed this chapter. Thank you all for reading this story so far.

Whispering Wings is something I came up with. I figured, there would have to be something in the wizarding world that was like a Howler, but not as loud.

The Third Suspect

Chapter 5 of 9

Severus has yet another close call. This one however is almost too much to handle.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thank you once again to June for all of her wonderful suggestions and all of her help.

The Third Suspect

Two more days passed for Severus. He'd kept the ring that he duped Neville into giving him, and found himself playing with it absentmindedly. Sometimes, he stared at the onyx nestled inside the white gold setting. The fire in the hearth could be seen reflecting on the small stone, and he wondered if the ring's owner was feeling its absence.

As he readied himself to pour a second glass of brandy, he heard a knock on his door. Cursing whomever it was for interrupting his relaxing evening; he strode towards the door, ready to hex his unwelcome guest. He opened the door and saw Albus' outlined body standing in the low lit doorway.

"Severus, my boy. How are you?" Albus' words were clearly slurred, and as he walked past, the smell of what seemed to be tequila permeated the Potions master's nostrils. Severus rolled his eyes and shook his head.

'Wonderful,' he thought. 'Just what I need. A drunk lemon drop junkie.' Severus closed the door and turned to look at the Headmaster of Hogwarts leaning against his sideboard. He knew that Albus was either fighting with Minerva, or — as it was nearly time for the yearly Victory over Voldemort celebration — he was feeling nostalgic.

"Albus," Severus said as he walked towards the swaying Albus. "To what do I owe this visit?"

"Do I need a reason to visit?" Albus leaned forward and put his hand on Severus' shoulder.

Thinking it may be a good idea to steer the old man away from the fireplace, just in case the fumes coming from his mouth caught his beard on fire, Severus took him by the arm as they moved to the couch.

Albus fell in a heap on the far side of the couch and began to laugh.

"Ah, Severus. You always know how to make a person feel welcome. You know, I've been wanting to say something to you, my boy. Something...something I have felt for so many years." Albus moved himself to a sitting position and faced Severus. "It is difficult for me sometimes to discuss my feelings openly."

At that last sentence, Severus began to feel uneasy. 'Feelings? What the bloody hell is he on about?'

"Albus, perhaps I can get you some coffee, or tea?" asked Severus, hoping to steer the older wizard's thoughts from talk about feelings.

Albus waved him off and patted the cushion next to him. "Come over here, Severus, closer to me."

"Nnnnoooo, I ah...I'm rather comfortable over here, thank you." Severus moved farther back against the armrest where he'd been sitting on the other end of the couch.

"Severussss, as the Headmaster of this school, I order you to sit here next to me." Albus pat the cushion harder, and Severus thought he had also seen him pout.

Severus rolled his eyes and moved slowly next to Albus. He instantly placed his hands on his lap just in case. He wanted to make sure the only hands on his crotch that evening would be his own.

Albus immediately put his arm around Severus' shoulder.

"I remember when you were a young boy, Severus." Albus pat Severus' knee with his free hand. "So shy, yet I could see in your eyes, you wanted so much to be liked. I was glad that a few of your fellow housemates befriended you." Albus smiled as he remembered the thin, pale young man who had grown into the imposing figure of a Death Eater. "Not much different than the scared young man that came to me the night the Potters died."

"I know," whispered Severus as he remembered that evening. It was as though it happened yesterday. He'd heard about Voldemort's plan to raid the Potters' home. He desperately tried to get to the Potters with enough time to get them out of the home, but no sooner had Severus arrived than he heard the front door being blasted open. Lily pushed him into a closet, telling him to hide, yet she unknowingly tripped him and he hit his head against the back of the closet. When he woke up, all he heard was baby Harry crying in terror. He picked up the crying child and immediately Apparated him to Hagrid. He then made his way to Hogwarts, to give himself to the Order and help them anyway he could.

"I love you, Severus."

Severus would later realize that it was whiplash he felt when he turned so fast towards Albus.

"What?" Severus felt his body stiffen. His mind was reeling. 'Maybe I can tell the Ministry I had Albus under the Imperius Curse when he defended me. I can still get the Dementor's Kiss.' He backed away slowly, only to be held by Albus's strong grip.

"All I wish for is to make you happy, Severus," said Albus.

"Albus, I can assure you, I am quite happy." Severus wondered if it would be against his contract to Obliviate the Headmaster.

"No, no no. You need companionship, and I want to give it to you."

'Kill, me. Someone please kill me now.' Thought Severus.

"Severus, I never had children of my own. You are like a son to me. I want to see you happy. I have heard of a place called Club Med. It's in the Bahamas." Albus again patted Severus' knee. "I know, I know you don't much like the sun, but I have heard that many beautiful women go to this place. Take a holiday, have some fun, my boy. Meet some lovely women."

"Oh, thank the gods!" moaned Severus in relief.

"There! You see, I knew you would be willing to go. And here Minerva said you would sooner kiss Hagrids hairy bottom. She owes me five galleons." Albus stood. He swayed a bit, but once he got his bearings he walked towards the door. "Tomorrow I will bring you the brochures I received yesterday. You can leave after the yearly

celebration." Albus let out a belch that would have made Ron Weasley proud, then opened the door and walked out, leaving a still shocked Severus sitting on the couch.

"I need a drink," Severus said as he stood and grabbed the firewhisky from the sideboard. Not bothering with a glass, he took one long swig straight from the bottle, vowing to put an identity charm on his door. Next time a drunken Albus came down to his rooms, he'd know better than to answer his door.

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Well, I'd say Severus deserves more than just a drink after that.

I hope you all enjoyed this chapter. I'll have more up soon.

When Obsessions Collide

Chapter 6 of 9

Severus finds out who his secret love is, but not before he gets an eyefull.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thanks to June for all of her help and suggestions.

When Obsessions Collide

Hermione stood in front of her mirror, inspecting her reflection and thinking on the last several days. When Neville came back from his trip to Hogsmeade and informed her he had lost her onyx ring, she was furious. It had been an heirloom from her great-grandmother, and was something she treasured, especially since it was such a reminder of her love's eyes. She also pondered on her now dwindling days at Hogwarts, as her internship would soon be over. While Minerva offered her hope that there would be an open position soon, due to Professor Flitwick retiring, there was no telling when the Charms professor would make his final decision and actually leave. Hermione decided that the time had come for her to make herself known to Severus.

She didn't want to ask Harry for the use of Hedwig because Severus would know it was his bird, and then figure out his correspondent was her, or even worse, think it was Harry.

She laughed as she sat at her desk to write her letter. "Severus would never think a man was in love with him; how ridiculous." She would ask Severus to meet her in the school's rose garden; it was the perfect place to tell him how much she cared for him. After reading the letter over several times, she looked at herself one more time and then made her way to the Owlery.

Unbeknownst to her, there was someone else making plans to head that way as well.

Harry sat in his rooms, writing a letter of his own. He wondered what his letter's recipient would think about his request. For several years, he'd wanted to contact his own object of obsession regarding his feelings. He only hoped that this was not a mistake. He finished his letter, asking that they meet in his rooms. With one last look at himself in the mirror, he left his rooms and made his way to the Owlery.

Both friends walked down their respective corridors, not thinking on anything other than their soon-to-be meeting. Suddenly, two bodies collided with one another.

"Oomph!" Harry had enough time to grab onto Hermione before she fell back.

"Harry, I'm sorry," said Hermione as she steadied herself against him.

"No, it's my fault. I wasn't paying attention to where I was going." Harry smiled.

"Neither was I, actually." Hermione looked down on the ground and noticed her letter. She bent down and picked it up, then straightened her dress.

"That's a lovely dress. Planning to break some hearts tonight at the ball?" Harry winked at her as he chuckled.

"For your information, I plan on *ensnaring* one." Hermione smiled as she swung her hair back and walked away.

"Where are you off to?" yelled Harry.

"I have one last note to send. I'm going to the Owlery!" she yelled back. Harry then realized his own letter was missing from his hand. He looked down and saw it next to his foot. Bending down to pick it up, he then quickly ran to catch up with Hermione. He had his own note to deliver as well.

An hour later, the annual Victory over Voldemort ball was in full swing. Severus kept to himself, as was his usual custom. He looked around the room, wondering if tonight would be the night his secret love would reveal herself ... or himself. As though on cue, a large brown owl came into the Great Hall and swooped towards him. It flew just above him and dropped a note on his lap. He looked up at the animal, and thanked the heavens it wasn't anything else on his lap.

Severus looked at the note and sighed. He remembered that the last three individuals he'd thought were his secret loves were actually misunderstandings on his part. What terrible misunderstanding would there be now? Smiling at his own wit, he picked up the note and began to read it.

My Dearest Love,

I have decided that the time is right to tell you who I am. I know that you have always thought I hated you, but actually it is quite the opposite.

I also know that I am taking a big chance on you never speaking to me again, but it's a chance I am willing to take. I can't keep my feelings to myself anymore.

Please meet me in my rooms as soon as you get this note

All of my heart,

Harry

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thanks to June for all of her help and suggestions.

Not So Secret Anymore

Severus and Hermione sat in the Hogwarts rose garden for several minutes. They kissed a bit and talked a bit, and finally decided they should make an appearance as an official couple. They stood, and he offered her his arm, which she gladly took, and they walked out of the garden arm-in-arm. Being out in the chilly air, Hermione began to sneeze. She took out a light green handkerchief to wipe her nose, and Severus noticed it looked very familiar.

"Where did you get that?" he asked suspiciously. Realizing she had taken out his own handkerchief, she decided to tell him just how she came about getting it.

"Well," she said as she bowed her head and looked at the piece of raw silk material, then looked into his dark eyes. "I asked Ron to get it for me from your rooms."

Severus' eyes grew wide at the thought of having the redhead in his personal space without his knowledge.

"Weasley was in my rooms?" he asked in disbelief. "And how did he manage that?" He stood in front of Hermione with his arms crossed imposingly.

Hermione sighed, hoping that things weren't over with them before they had even begun.

"Draco gave me the combination of your wards."

Instead of being angry and blowing up at her, Severus decided to take it as a compliment that she would want something of his that bad enough.

"I should be angry," he said in his low waspish tone, "but the fact that you wanted something of mine with you — oddly enough, it makes me feel quite nice. My handkerchiefs were on my bed the day I caught him outside my rooms. At least I can feel relieved that Weasley didn't go through my drawers."

Hermione had to bite her tongue, as they continued to walk towards the Great Hall for the annual Victory over Voldemort ball. She didn't dare tell Severus that after Ron came back from his assignment, it had taken her all afternoon to convince her friend that he was neither thought of as being a tosser, as he so eloquently put it, nor did his rummaging through Severus' underwear drawer mean he had any deep seated infatuation with the Potions master.

Before they stepped through the doors of the Great Hall, Severus stopped them once again. He reached into the pocket on his frock coat, and took out the onyx ring he had taken from Neville and held it in front of her face. She smiled up at him, excited that her great-grandmother's ring was not lost to her.

"My ring!" she cried, as she snatched it from his fingers. "How did you get this?" she asked, warily.

"I saw Mr. Longbottom with it. He said he found it on the ground. Since your Whispering Wings note said that you often looked at an onyx ring you had and often thought of my eyes, I thought I might perform a locator spell on this and find just who my secret love really was." He looked into her own lovely brown eyes and smiled. "I wasn't sure if I wanted to know who had been writing me all of those notes. I am glad it was you that took the first step and revealed yourself to me."

"Are you saying you were afraid?" asked Hermione teasingly.

"Not afraid, just wary," he chuckled. "I have to admit, there were times when I thought almost anyone could have been writing those notes."

Hermione laughed. "Oh, no!" She pictured Severus looking at everyone with suspicion, thinking that a look from just about anybody was a declaration of love and lust. They walked through the Great Hall doors, both laughing and smiling.

As they walked towards the far end of the hall and towards the food and drinks tables, all eyes were on them. Hermione smiled as Severus scowled at the attention. Ron, who was standing next to Luna, immediately put his arm around her as his friend and former Potions professor walked by. He made sure to kiss Luna soundly as Severus passed in front of them. Severus rolled his eyes and suggested they get a room, then made sure to point out to Ron that he had reset the wards to his own rooms. Ron promptly fainted.

Neville, who had been dancing with Rosmerta, tried to blend in with the rest of the guests. However, Rosmerta and Severus had been friends for years, so she made it a point to say hello to both Severus and Hermione.

"Severus, wonderful to see you." Rosmerta smiled as Severus took her hand and bowed. "Miss Granger, I haven't seen you in some time. It's lovely to see you as well."

Hermione smiled.

"Rosmerta, you are looking lovely as always," said Severus, and then he looked towards Neville. He'd always thought the young man was totally inept at many things. But he had to admit, any man who could capture the attention of a pretty woman like Rosmerta deserved a bit of respect. "Neville."

"Hello, sir." Neville smiled, and seemed to stand up a little straighter.

Rosmerta squeezed her date's hand, and they walked away towards the dance floor once again.

"I'm so happy Neville finally got the courage to ask her out," said Hermione.

"You know, for Gryffindors, you two seemed a bit lacking in courage, wouldn't you say?" Severus decided he'd do a bit of teasing. After all, she deserved it because of the many close calls he'd had during the last few weeks.

She pursed her lips and lightly swatted him on the arm.

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed the Headmaster approaching them. He groaned inwardly, not knowing if the old man was sober or halfway to happy town by now.

"Severussss, there you both are." Albus swayed towards the couple. "Ah, and Hermione is here as well."

Severus sighed and drank down his cup of spiked pumpkin juice in one gulp. Happy town it is.

"Good evening, Headmaster," said Hermione.

"You know, I'm glad I found you and my boys, Severussss, here. There is something I would like to discuss with you all." Albus reached into his robes and took out several pamphlets.

"ALBUS!" shrieked Minerva from behind. The older witch walked quickly toward the old man and immediately grabbed the items from his hands. "Will you stop trying to get people to take those damnable holidays." She threw the pamphlets in the air, and with a flick of her wand they burst into flames. She then looked to Severus and Hermione, who had been standing with shocked expressions. "When I find out who talked him into this idiotic pyramid scheme, I'll turn the fool into a roll of toilet paper and put them in Hagrid's hut." With that, Minerva grabbed Albus and shoved him towards the back of the Great Hall.

Severus and Hermione looked at each other and burst out laughing. They wondered how many poor souls Albus had cornered that evening before Minerva finally found

Hermione wrapped her arm around his. Severus looked down at her worried face.

"You are quiet, more quiet than I have ever known you to be. Is there something wrong?" Severus wondered if she was regretting saying anything to him.

Hermione nodded, then looked at him.

"We didn't have much time to talk before we came into the ball, and I...well, there was something I really didn't ask you before."

Severus cocked his head slightly to the side. "Go ahead, then. Ask me whatever you like." He worried she would want to know what his life was like as a Death Eater. It was something he wasn't ready to discuss with her, not yet.

"Can you love me, Severus?" it was a simple question. But it was a question that she needed to know the answer to, now.

They stopped walking and he stared at her for a moment. He looked into her deep brown eyes, shining with hope. He looked at her curly locks cascading down past her shoulders. He'd known her since she was an eleven-year-old walking encyclopedia. She grew into a member of the Order, and with her help he had managed to create a potion to protect Harry as he went into the final battle. In the years after the final battle, Hermione would come and visit Hogwarts. She was always present at the Order meetings held twice a month, as it had been decided to have those continue, at the very least once a month.

She was now a grown woman on the cusp of a new life. In a few days, she would leave Hogwarts and graduate from her university. Where would she go, he wondered. Would she take a job with the Ministry? Had she been offered some other position, far away from him? Would she even decide to stay in the wizarding world?

He knew for certain that he would miss her, were she to leave him now. While it was only a few hours ago that he found out she was the one who'd sent all the letters, he had spent a good portion of his evening with her, imagining doing many things in her company. In Hermione, he would have a research partner. He would have someone with whom he could spend hours discussing any subject. Her conversations were intelligent and insightful. Hermione was a caring person. He found himself smiling in her presence. He wanted to be nice to her, to give her things; to...he wanted to take care of her. With her he felt comfort and yes, he felt her love.

She looked at him expectantly. In her mind she wondered why she had even asked the question. He could never love her. She was not the kind of woman men fell in love with. Yes, they'd had a wonderful evening, but after all, she'd been pursuing him for several weeks, sending him letters. He probably felt obligated to be kind to her. She resigned herself to what little time and attention he would allow her. He smiled, and she readied herself for his rejection.

"Yes, Hermione," he said softly as he held her face in his hands. "I most certainly can and will love you." He kissed her tenderly as she wrapped her arms around his waist.

And he did.

EPILOGUE

Seven months after their initial meeting in the rose garden of Hogwarts Castle, Severus asked Hermione to marry him in that same garden. Two months later, they became husband and wife in a small ceremony near the lake. Unfortunately, Severus couldn't avoid Albus completely after the ceremony, and so he and Hermione spent a lovely honeymoon in Bermuda, at the Club Med.

Albus retired and spent much of his holidays at Club Med. Much to Minerva's annoyance, he continued to accost students and guests during Hogwarts celebrations, trying wholeheartedly to make them purchase oceanside trips. Minerva never did find out who talked Albus into the pyramid scheme.

Neville married Rosmerta in a private ceremony at St. Mungos, where his parents, Frank and Alice Longbottom were still being kept. Even though he knew they would not recognize him, he wanted to be close to them on such a happy day. Rosmerta saw in Neville a gentle and sensitive man, who would be by her side during good and bad times. Rosmerta split her time between the Three Broomsticks, and the restaurant they opened together in Diagon Alley, called The Garden Spot. They served all sorts of vegetarian as well as carnivorous delights.

Neville made extra money by growing rare plants used in potions ingredients and for other medicinal purposes. He set all of his extra money aside in a vault in Gringotts. That money would be used for research he planned on funding, to find a cure for those afflicted with the madness caused from prolonged use of Cruciatius Curse on their system.

Ron married Luna. They had three children, two girls and one boy. He continued to wonder if he had a deep-rooted attraction to the Potions professor.

Harry, Ginny and Draco moved in together in one of the Malfoy estates. Lucius threw a fit when he found out his son was living not only with Harry Potter, but with a Weasley as well. He calmed down after he found out that Ginny was pregnant with Draco's child ... a grandson to spoil, just as he and Narcissa had spoiled their son when he was growing up. After Ginny had Anteus Malfoy, she became pregnant with Harry's child ... this one a girl. It was something Lucius was also happy about, as he had quickly warmed up to the idea of having a step-granddaughter.

Hermione took over the post of teaching Charms, just after Professor Flitwick retired, while Severus took over the job of being Deputy Headmaster. While they had discussed having children, they also decided to wait a few years. Severus wanted his wife all to himself before he had to share her with their children. Hermione had no complaints. She remembered the moments of doubt during those days before she told Severus her true feelings towards him.

Back then, she would write her letters to him and sign them *Your Secret Love*, and wonder if he would laugh at her or send her away angrily when he realized it was her sending the letters. For their fourth-month anniversary of being a couple, Severus finally told her the story of the many close calls and misunderstandings he'd had.

Severus confessed that when Harry told him it was her sending the notes, he was only relieved that a woman was sending them. But later, after talking with her, he realized that she was someone he had hoped all his adult life to have in his life. She happily accepted him with all of his faults. Every once in a while the strict DADA professor would receive Whispering Wings during class. Sometimes he took points from the giggling students, sometimes he didn't. His life was finally filled with love, affection and joy. What more could a man ever ask for?

Well, maybe a trip to Club Med now and then.

The End

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I hope you enjoyed this final chapter.