

Correspondence

by belle4life

A mystery admirer begins a correspondence with Hermione. When she learns who it is, they develop a friendship, which morphs into something more than that. Written for the HermioneBigBang.

Obsidian

Chapter 1 of 19

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His obsidian eyes scanned the grounds, watching the quiet movement of trees and birds like a hawk. A shadow began to crawl over the hill at the base of the castle, and his eyes honed in on the new addition to the scenery. A beautiful young woman climbed up the hill and stopped at the entrance, placing her hand on the cast iron gate. A wide smile spread across her face; she was obviously fond of the old castle. She looked familiar, but he couldn't quite place her. And then it hit him. Hermione Granger. Minerva had told him she had been hired and would be the new librarian. He had forgotten until now.

There was something different about her. She showed her age; one could tell by looking at her that she had lived, not just coasted through life. He knew how it was to coast through life. It wasn't a life at all.

This year was going to be different. He would make sure of that.

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She walked through the front gate of Hogwarts. Taking a deep breath, a slow smile spread across her face. No matter what she had to deal with in her life, whether it was the drama of Harry and Ginny's explosive relationship, Ron's inability to maintain a girlfriend for longer than a minute, or even Luna's random announcements of a herd of Crumple-Horned Snorkacks heading towards Surrey, this place would always be her safe haven, her place of escape. Glancing around, she took in the sights of the repaired parts of the castle and released a sigh of contentment.

"I'm home," she whispered to no one in particular.

And indeed she was. After the war she had followed Ron and Harry to the Ministry of Magic. Their plan had been to fix what was severely broken. And they had. She had worked in the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures for three years, changing the way many treated house-elves, centaurs and other magical creatures. The boys had become Aurors, two of the best the Ministry had. They helped track down the last of the Death Eaters, capturing them and placing them in Azkaban under maximum security.

One day she had gone into the High End District in Diagon Alley to look for some new robes. When she had walked into one store, she had been asked to leave due to their choice not to serve "her kind."

Hermione had been so disturbed that she had asked to speak to the manager. The snooty sales witch had sauntered to the back of the shop and called out to a man. He came around the corner, and his hawkish eyes zoned in on Hermione's face.

"We do not serve your type here. I reserve the right to serve who I want, and I refuse to serve anyone of tainted blood. Leave my shop."

This incident had led to her deciding on a career change. She had transferred to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement so that she could abolish the prejudices that Voldemort's death should have destroyed. It had only taken her two years to completely turn the Wizarding World around in its old prejudicial views.

She'd left the Ministry after that, knowing it was in capable hands with Kingsley as Minister and Harry and Ron as Aurors. In the back of her mind, she had always longed to return to the place she had left entirely too soon, Hogwarts. Now, she had that opportunity.

One day when having tea with Minerva, the older lady had brought up the sad and joyful news that Madame Pince would be retiring. Hermione was ecstatic. She had asked the Headmistress if the job had been filled, and Minerva had given her a knowing look.

"Of course not, Hermione. I wouldn't even think of hiring someone else until I had consulted you. Would you be interested in taking the position?" The words had barely left her mouth before Hermione shrieked a definite yes at her.

After the battle had ended, the Trio had gone back to the Shrieking Shack to rescue the body of Severus Snape and bring it into the Great Hall with the rest of the casualties of Voldemort's war of prejudice. When they had crawled through the tunnel and shoved the boxes aside, they were shocked to see him sitting up on the sawdust-covered floor, looking about as if scared to even move out of the ramshackle building. In his lap sat Fawkes and the puzzle pieces clicked together. She'd taken the next step, and the creak of a floorboard drew his attention away from the beautiful phoenix in his lap and to the three Gryffindors standing before him. His obsidian eyes met her misty brown ones. Her tears over Fred, Tonks, Remus, and all the other unnecessary deaths reflected in her eyes.

At first the adjustment to the truth behind everything in his life was difficult for Harry. He had to come to terms with the truth about Severus, about his mom, about his dad, and about Dumbledore's deception and human weakness. After all, everyone has at least one weakness; no one was perfect. But he got through the heavy weight of deception and emotion.

Severus Snape had been exonerated; that had been the first action that the trio had taken in their abolishment of corruption in the Ministry. He had returned to Hogwarts, but stepped down as Headmaster, returning to teach Defense Against the Dark Arts, his true passion. He had always longed to teach it so that he could teach the students what was really out there and what the real world was like, a lesson he had learned all too early on. This choice had shocked all; after all, being Headmaster was quite an honor. But when questioned about his choice, he simply stated that, "Minerva deserves it and will do a much better job than I ever could." The truth of it, though, was that he had been doing so many things for the past twenty years, all he really wanted was to sit back and relax, not have a large pile of responsibilities resting on his shoulders. And now, he only had to deal with dunderheads every day. Sometimes he questioned if that was worse than what his life had been like before.

She walked through the enormous front doors of the castle. Her heels clicked on the ancient stone, and her hand danced down the walls of the long hall leading to the library. She had sent a message to Minerva telling her that she was on her way and would be in the library if she was needed. A loud cackling bounced off the walls, flowing down the hall. Recognizing the familiar sound, she hid in an alcove. A few seconds after she was covered in dark, the haunting figure of Peeves flew by, a water balloon in one hand and a burlap sack in the other. She could only assume that the sack contained more water balloons. Hermione let out a breath, thankful that he hadn't noticed her.

When she was sure he was gone, she stepped back out into the hall, continuing her walk down memory lane.

Hermione reached the end of the hall, facing the doors of her beloved library. Her small hands rested on the door, all the memories of entering this sacred place flooding back to her. She gently pushed the heavy doors open. When she stepped inside, she paused. The doors shut with a familiar thud, and she took a deep breath of the familiar scent of old books.

She was brought out of her reverie by the feeling of something dropping on her head, quickly followed by the sensation of her clothing soaking up a liquid.

"Peeves. One, that balloon had better have been filled with water, or else I will figure out some way to kill you. Two, I'm assuming you don't remember me; otherwise, I know you would not have done what you just did."

"Ooooh, Missy thinks she so scary. I'm terrified. Who be you, girly, that I should be scared of what you consider threat?"

Hermione slowly turned around, looking up into the rafters of the library. The look on her face spoke of a retaliation so strong that Peeves gave an involuntary shudder.

"Peeves sorry. He didn't recognize you, Missy Granger. Peeves will leave you alone. He promises." And with that pronouncement, Peeves fled the library, leaving behind the sack of balloons and a soaking wet Hermione.

"Well, look on the bright side. At least no one saw that happen," Hermione said to herself, stepping further into the library.

The sound of clapping came from behind one of the shelves, and she closed her eyes in horror.

"I wouldn't be so sure about that, Miss Granger," an oh-so-familiar-snarky voice replied, followed by the owner of said voice stepping out from behind the bookshelf. Severus Snape looked like he always had, coated in black, buttons up to his throat, the only difference being the scar across his throat and up to his ear. Fawkes had been unable to keep the skin from scarring.

He gave her a once over, that familiar smirk in place, before leaving the library, a rather large tome cradled in his arm.

She ungracefully collapsed into the chair behind her new desk and released a heavy sigh. She was still glad to be back, for the most part anyway.

First Day

Chapter 2 of 19

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Hermione walked into the library on the first day of classes, thankful that it was indeed the first day because most likely the library would be empty. She walked to her desk and placed her notes and such on the empty desk.

Pulling out the chair, she sat down and worked on figuring out how she was going to fix up and organize the library. Madam Pince might have been a stickler about talking in the library, and earlier in her life she might have been a stickler about organizing the books, but in her old age she'd become senile and the books had stopped being organized.

A few hours after Hermione had sat down, a piece of parchment began floating in front of her face. She brushed it away, assuming it was some prank by Peeves or even a student. When her hand touched the paper, it fell to her desk, unrolling. In an unfamiliar handwriting was the message:

Let nothing disturb you, let nothing dismay you. All things pass Saint Teresa of Avila

It was a message she needed to hear on her first day. She looked around the library, not really expecting to see anyone, but checking nonetheless. She gave a shrug and tucked the note into the bottom drawer of her desk.

When the note was deposited, she stood up and walked over to the center of the library. Pulling out her wand, she muttered the spell she had created to sort the books by subject and then by author. The genius behind the spell was that she had tweaked it so that the books would automatically return to their spots on the shelves.

She watched with wide eyes as the heavy tomes flew off the shelves and reorganized themselves. They floated about, barely missing each other, flying from shelf to shelf. She heard the whistle of one just missing her head and smiled. The air filled with whistling as the books flew, creating a breeze with their fluttering pages. A contented sigh escaped her at the beautiful sight of the books floating about.

When the tomes had finished organizing themselves, she went back to her seat, sitting down and smiling in accomplishment. The note in the bottom of the drawer was forgotten for now.

That night Hermione sat at the head table in the Great Hall, eating with the people she had once had as professors not that long ago. Somehow, she found herself between a chatty Minerva and a silent Severus Snape.

"How was your first day, Hermione? Did the children give you any troubles?"

"No. Actually, no one came into the library at all today. It was nice and quiet; I got a lot of work done. I reorganized all the books since Madame Pince left them in slight disarray."

"Oh, yes. I am so sorry. I meant to tell you about that. But you figured it out, so no harm done, right, dear?"

"Yes, no harm done. I spelled the books to organize themselves. So now when the students return them I simply place my full hand on the cover and it will fly right to its place. It will be quite handy. And it still allows me the liberty of placing them in the right spot by hand if I need some sort of calming device. Books have always been a good therapy for me." A snort from the dark man to her left had her quirking her brow.

"Is there something the matter, Severus?"

"No, nothing at all. Just remarking on how you haven't changed at all since you left here."

"Oh, I beg to differ. I have changed a great deal since I left this place my sixth year. You simply may not have noticed."

"Oh, I noticed," he mumbled, quiet enough that she didn't hear him.

"I'm sorry? What was that?"

"Nothing. Nothing. Go back to your conversation."

She gave him an odd look and turned back to Minerva who had a hint of a smile dancing across her normally stern features.

"Don't mind him, dear. He's just an old sourpuss." She smiled and patted Hermione's hand. She turned back to eating her food and started a conversation with Filius about his first day.

Hermione looked out over the crowd of children, remembering the days when she was sitting down there. She could feel the body heat from the man sitting next to her.

She turned and looked at him. He was hunched over his plate, eating his food with a scowl on his face.

"Is it ever not odd sitting up here and looking out to where we sat when we were students here?"

"I prefer to not look back on those days, so I would have to say it is never odd for me."

"Yes, I suppose you wouldn't want to remember them." He cringed at the reminder that she knew his secrets. He inwardly cursed Harry Potter for sharing his secrets with the world. If he had known he would have been saved, he wouldn't have been so generous with his memories.

"Yes, you suppose right," he stated with a tone of finality, mixed with sadness.

She left him alone for the rest of the meal; she felt guilty for bringing up his wretched past.

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A week later, Hermione was already settling into a routine. Luckily her rooms were close to the library. They were located on the fourth floor as well, just down the hall, in the other direction. Her commute could be a short one, especially if she skipped breakfast. Being only the second week of classes, she had not skipped breakfast yet.

She made her way to the library slowly, humming a tune to herself, when she heard a rustle up above her.

"Don't even think about it, Peeves. I can easily invent a spell that will glue you to a wall. Which wall though?" she asked tapping her chin, "Oooh, I know, Professor Binns' wall. You would love to sit through his lectures every day, wouldn't you?"

Her only reply was a loud screech of "No!" and the sight of Peeves flying back down the hall getting as far away from her as possible. She chuckled to herself and continued on to her destination.

When she walked up to her desk, there was a roll of the same parchment from the first day. She glanced around again and sat down. She lifted the page and it unfurled, revealing a new message:

Blessed are the hearts that can bend, they shall never be broken Albert Camus

"Who are you?" she asked out loud. Her only answer was the typical noise of the castle.

That day was as quiet as every other previous day. A couple of students entered the library to study. Hermione could see herself in them. They were eager students, the

ones longing to learn as much as possible, so curious about everything, longing to belong and understand a new world.

In the week that she had worked in the library, she had grown used to the silence. Her ears had adjusted to only hearing the scratching of her quill on paper, mixed with the ancient and familiar sounds of the castle. In the week she had worked in the library, she had grown used to the silence. When she entered the Great Hall, the loud murmur of a thousand whispers invaded her eardrums, overwhelming her. She took the same seat from the earlier meals, between Severus and Minerva.

"Are you alright, Hermione?" the Headmistress asked.

"Yes, just readjusting to noise, is all." Hermione chuckled softly as she sat down.

"You have no idea how lucky you are, Miss Granger."

"Why do you say that, Severus?"

"You don't have to listen to those dunderheads all day. You get to sit in the quiet library with your books and no students attempting to harm themselves in various ways," he stated as though it was completely obvious. Hermione and Minerva laughed at his statement.

"They aren't that bad, Severus."

"Miss Granger, I'm going to ask you something, and I want you to actually think about the answer, not answer out of loyalty. All right?" She nodded her affirmation, a little nervous about what she had just agreed to.

"Would you want to teach an entire class filled with people that have the work ethic of Ronald Weasley, the clumsiness of Nymphadora Tonks, the ego of Draco Malfoy, the forgetfulness of Neville Longbottom, and yes, your inability to not ask questions. Now honestly think about that. Would you want that class?" She looked thoughtful; she was really thinking about it.

"No, I wouldn't, but that doesn't mean that I don't love each and every one of them, well, except Malfoy of course. But, each of them has special qualities about them that makes them special. You have to take the good with the bad. You are there to help them learn, and to help them grow, so that they can become the good people that they have the potential to be."

"Well put, Miss Granger. However, they can still be nuisances," he said with a slight bow of his head.

"Call me Hermione. We are working together after all."

"Hermione," he said, his voice washing over her like silk.

She gave him a smile and picked up her fork to eat her dinner.

School

Chapter 3 of 19

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As the school year progressed, each week a new note would appear somewhere in the library. One was in her chair, another in a returned book, and another in her bag. Each one a different sentiment, each one sweeter than the last:

In thy face I see honor, truth and loyalty. – Shakespeare

When you do dance, I wish you

A wave o' th' sea, that you might ever do

Nothing but that – Shakespeare

I give away myself for you and dote upon the exchange – Shakespeare

He must have been reading Shakespeare during this time because all three quotes were from the renowned playwright. But the repetition didn't matter; each one meant something.

She had wracked her brain, thinking about who in the world it could possibly be. She feared it was a student. She honestly didn't know how she would handle the situation if that were the case. The logical conclusion was that it was another member of the staff. She had run through the list of all the staff members in the school. Flitwick was too old, Firenze was another species, Hagrid was a half giant, Slughorn, well, did she really need to say it, and Filch... she gave an involuntary shiver.

The only option that even made any sense was Severus Snape. Although the idea of him leaving her romantic little notes was almost laughable, she wouldn't be completely opposed to the idea. They had slowly begun to talk more over the past weeks. She was starting to learn about the man behind the bat. He had a wicked sense of humor and a wit that was as sharp as a knife. But she knew that it was an option that would never be realized.

During her sixth week of working as the librarian, instead of the customary note, she found a surprise when she entered the library. Sitting on her desk was a vase filled with deep purple irises. She smiled softly at the thought behind the flowers.

Hermione pushed the vase to the side of her desk and spread out her work. The flowers, sitting where they were, kept drawing her eye, and she was unable to ignore them. She worked for a while and then looked up. The flowers were still there, as pretty as ever. She gently brushed the tips of her fingers over the delicate petals of the beautiful irises. The petals tickled her fingers, and when she pulled back her hand, they bounced with the loss of her weight.

"Oh, my, Hermione! Who are those from?" Minerva asked as she walked into the library.

"I have no idea. I have been getting sweet messages for the past few weeks, and today I got these," she said as she waved her hand towards the flowers.

"You have a secret admirer, Hermione," Minerva said with a big smile on her face. "Do you know who it could be?"

"I honestly have no idea. I have thought on it and thought on it, and I have come up with nothing. Do you have any ideas?" she asked, looking up at the woman she had always respected.

"No, but as Headmistress I have spies all over the castle. I can see what I can dig up if you want?"

"Minerva, I do believe Dumbledore rubbed off on you," Hermione said with a smirk on her face.

"You just might be right. Well, I'm going to see what I can learn; I'll see you at dinner."

"Wait, Minerva. Did you want something?"

"I just wanted to see how you were doing up here and if you needed anything."

"Oh, I'm fine. I don't really need anything right now, but I will let you know when I do."

"All right. I will see you at dinner."

She left Hermione at her desk with a smile on her face. The irises still sat there, their color vibrant and illuminating.

She glanced up when she heard the rustle of clothing. A dark shadow fell over her desk, and she smiled at the looming figure of Severus Snape. He placed a book down on her desk.

"My, my, what do we have here?" he asked, touching the irises.

"I seem to have picked up a secret admirer. He sent – well, not technically sent since they were here when I got here – but I received them this morning. They are beautiful." She reached over and smelled one.

"Do you know what they mean?" he asked quizzically.

"No, although I've always found flower meanings fascinating."

"Irises typically symbolize inspiration. So you must inspire your admirer. Simply charming," he said with a slight curl to his lip.

"Wow, Severus. You almost said that with no disdain in your voice. Good job, you are making progress," she said with a laugh as she straightened a stack of papers on her desk.

"Yes, well, I have a class to teach. I just came to drop this off. Good day, Miss Granger." He left with a flick of his cloak, and she chuckled at his typical bat of the dungeons demeanor.

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The next week, they were yellow roses. Hermione smiled when she saw them on her desk. She knew what yellow roses meant, friendship. She loved roses, but they could easily be overrated, at least the red ones. The yellow roses had a certain happy quality about them. They seemed to be smiling at her, smiling with a secret, one she was just itching to know.

She was a hit with the students. They took to her much faster and easier than to Madam Pince. Whether it was because she was younger and much more relatable or a nicer personality. The library had taken on a much more friendly glow to it, becoming a place more students went to.

"Hermione, have you thought that maybe this secret admirer may be dangerous?" Minerva asked her that night at dinner.

"It crossed my mind, but it just doesn't seem that way. The notes weren't declarations of mad, passionate love. Nothing creepy like descriptions of what I do at night, or locks of my hair, or pictures of me in private. They have just been sweet little snippets, including lines from Shakespeare. It just doesn't seem dangerous. It seems more like a friendly admirer who could become more – if he ever shows himself, that is."

"I just don't want you to be one of those foolish, innocent girls who has a "secret admirer" and ends up with her throat slit, floating in a lake, and a block of cement tied to her ankle." A soft snort was the response to this, causing both Hermione and Minerva to look over at Severus, who gave both of them a look of pure innocence, something he wasn't able to pull off easily.

"Do you have something to say, Severus?" Minerva asked him, a familiar twinkle in her eyes.

"No, nothing important, simply that you may be overlooking the simplest possible explanation."

"And what might that be?" Hermione questioned, intrigued about where he was going with his line of thought.

"He may simply want to get into your knickers," Severus said bluntly with a shrug of his shoulders.

Hermione erupted in laughter, and Minerva sputtered at the shocking response he had given. Hermione turned towards the shocked headmistress.

"You know, he might actually have a point there," she stated through her laughter, pointing her thumb at the dark man behind her, who was hiding the smirk covering his face.

Routine

Chapter 4 of 19

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Sitting at her desk had become routine, and a bit monotonous, but that came with the territory. Hermione was happy to have a little monotony in her life. After ten years of insanity, a little dullness was welcome.

The doors of the library flew open, startling her slightly. Then a selection of Weasley Wizarding Wheezes levitated into the room and proceeded to explode, sending fireworks all over the room. She reacted quickly, casting a Protego to shield the books from the explosions, and then proceeded to sit back and watch the show, reminiscing on her fifth year and the Weasley twins' grand shenanigans. The dragon head came roaring towards her, covering her desk in sparks and lights. She released the giggle she had been holding at the memory of Umbridge fleeing the giant head with her pink dress pulled up, revealing her hideous pink tights encasing even scarier legs. When the fireworks were finished, she stood up and moved around her desk, picking up the trash left over from the explosions.

A giggle danced down the halls outside the library, and a smirk spread across her face. She had been wondering when the students would pull a prank on her. She glanced out the doors just in time to see the back of someone turning the corner, a green tie fluttering over their shoulder.

When she turned back to her desk, sitting in its place of honor was another vase, this one filled with black-eyed Susans. The yellow petals shone like the sun, and the tiny black center balanced them perfectly with just enough darkness to equalize the brightness, creating a startlingly beautiful and powerful image. She hadn't seen black-eyed Susans since she'd been a little girl.

Her mother had bought her a bouquet after her first and only dance recital. She had told her that they symbolized encouragement and that Hermione was to be encouraged by them. Although she had only been five, being Hermione, she'd known what encouragement meant, but just because she'd understood the word didn't mean she was encouraged to dance more. So she had stopped dancing, but she always remembered her mother giving her that bouquet of beautiful flowers that starkly contrasted with each other.

After her trip down memory lane, she took a trip down her childhood. She pulled one of the flowers from the vase. Certain flowers were good for the "He loves me, he loves me not" game, and black-eyed Susans were one of them. Their petals were perfectly separate and yet together, and when plucking one off, the others didn't fall off. She lifted the flower to her nose, taking a sniff of it. She then proceeded to pluck one petal after another, murmuring the ever popular, "He loves me, he loves me not."

While she plucked the petals, she wondered who it was that was sending her these things. Was he as kind and thoughtful as he appeared through his gifts? Or was everything merely a show to get into her knickers like Severus had said? Did she really care if he loved her or not? She didn't really; after all, she had no idea who he was. But some part of her did because she continued to pluck those petals, repeating the ever-present mantra, over and over again.

She sat down next to a worried Headmistress at dinner.

"Are you alright, dear?" Minerva asked, placing her hand on Hermione's shoulder in what would have been a comforting gesture, if Hermione needed comforting.

"I'm wonderful, Minerva. Why do you ask?"

"Well, I heard about the fireworks in the library, and I was worried that something had happened to you or any of the books."

"I'm fine as you can see, as are the books. I was able to get a shield up in time to protect them."

"You created a shield large enough to protect all those books?" Severus interrupted the conversation, startled by her revelation.

"Yes, I did. Why are you so shocked?" she asked, a little annoyance coming out at his ability to underestimate her.

"A shield of that size would take a great deal of power. Although it is you, so I guess it isn't that surprising," he said, a teasing bite of sarcasm hinting in his voice.

"Yes, well. I was ready for the prank. I knew they would try something soon. It was getting on in the term, so something was bound to happen."

"Yes, those Slytherins certainly do love their tricks," Minerva added with a maternal smile.

Severus gave a smirk on the other side, and Hermione picked up her fork to begin eating her meal. As she took the first bite of her roast, her appetite disappeared with a casual thought. If by some bizarre chance, her secret admirer was Severus, was it all a trick? Could it be him exacting revenge on her for all those years of annoying questions and thrusting her hand in his face? And if it wasn't him, could it still be a trick? Could someone be that mean?

Her happy heart was slowly sinking into a quagmire of darkness; she was leaving her typical petal world and submerging herself in the eye of the black-eyed Susan. A familiar sadness settled over her head, and she put her fork down, leaving the room quietly so as not to draw attention to herself. She needed to see her friends. They would know how to cheer her up. They always did.

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Hermione chose to walk off the school grounds before Apparating. She needed the time to think, to clear her mind. Walking allowed her some time to do so.

Pushing open the front door of one of her favorite places, she was immediately enveloped in the infamous, and crushing, Molly Weasley hug. Hermione knew that this was the smart decision; the Weasleys always managed to make everything better, even in cases whereon of them had caused the problem in the first place.

"Hermione, dear, what are you doing here?" Molly questioned, holding Hermione by the shoulders and inspecting her as if expecting to find a gaping hole in her body at some point.

"I just needed to get away, and I haven't seen any of you in a long time, so I decided to visit."

"Well, we have missed you, and you know you are always welcome here," Molly said, wrapping her arm around Hermione's shoulder and pulling her into the house towards the kitchen.

They walked through the door to the kitchen, and Hermione saw the family sitting around the table for dinner.

"Oh, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to interrupt your dinner. I can leave," she offered kindly.

"Don't be silly, Mione," Harry chastised as he stood up to give his best friend a hug.

"Yeah, don't be silly and sit down," Ron said around a mouth of food.

Everyone laughed at his typical Ron behavior, and Hermione sat down as Ginny whacked her brother over the head.

"How come only Ron and I get hit? Charlie, Bill, Ginny and Percy never get hit," George whined.

"That's because they never do anything stupid or deserving of a whack," Hermione muttered as she took a sip of the glass of pumpkin juice that Molly had handed her.

"So what brings you here?" Bill asked, leaning back in his chair.

"Everything," she laughed awkwardly. They all gave her funny looks, and she released a sigh, knowing she'd have to tell them.

"I've been getting gifts every Friday since school started. At first it was simple little notes; now it's flowers. It's nothing creepy or stalker-like," she said, soothing her Auror best friend, who had sat up straight at the mention of the gifts. "It's sweet, and more of a friend thing that could become more, if I or he allows it. The thing is that I don't

know who it is. I have wracked my brain, and the only logical conclusion is an illogical conclusion. So today the Slytherins pulled a prank with WWW fireworks in the library, and I was discussing it with Minerva and she said it was typical of Slytherins to play tricks, and then my brain went into overdrive, wondering if my secret admirer was playing a trick or prank on me. When I thought of that, I just had to get away, so I came here knowing I would be able to clear my head." She took a deep breath after giving her long explanation for her surprise visit.

"Who do you think it is?" Harry asked.

"Nevussap," she mumbled.

"I'm sorry. You want to repeat that louder and clearer so that we can actually understand you?" George chuckled.

"Severus Snape," she stated, blushing at the gawking looks everyone was giving her. "I know, I know. Like I said it is completely illogical, but he's the only one who fits, unless you prefer it to be Filch or, worse, a student?" she stated with sarcasm dripping from each word.

"So, let me get this straight. The Slytherins bought WWW products and set them off in the library?" Molly questioned, ignoring the secret admirer part of the story and zoning in on the mischief her son had once again caused.

"Yes, that is correct." The only response was the loud thump of Molly whacking George up the backside of his red head.

"But it's okay, nothing was damaged, and it was a rather good for a laugh for me. I'm just glad it wasn't a mean prank, but Slytherin house has gotten much better since we went to Hogwarts."

"Okay, back to Snape as your admirer," Ron said, waving a roll around.

"Ron, don't play with your food."

Everyone got a laugh out of the pouty face Ron displayed. Hermione looked around at her family and was thankful that they had gotten through those past few years. Fred's death had been difficult for them, one of the hardest blows they had ever been dealt, but they had survived. Now they were laughing, living, and loving. Hermione thanked whoever it was that had glued them back together. Every once in a while, a cloud of sadness would descend over their heads, but then they would remember with happiness and fondness and would go on living, just like Fred would want them to.

Sometimes when they were really sad, they would go out back of the house and launch WWW fireworks in memory of him; it was slowly becoming a family tradition.

She left the Weasleys with lots of hugs and love and a relatively relieved heart. She still didn't know who her secret admirer was, but she knew she was going to be careful no matter what. That way if it was a trick, she would be okay. But somehow, she didn't think it was a trick because the person with the most to lose in the twisted sort of relationship was him.

Next Friday

Chapter 5 of 19

A mystery admirer begins a correspondence with Hermione. When she learns who it is, they develop a friendship, which morphs into something more than that. Written for the HermioneBigBang.

The next Friday Hermione walked into the library, expecting a vase of flowers to be sitting on her desk only to find the space empty. She was a little disappointed. Had her mysterious admirer overheard the conversation at dinner last night? Had she hurt his delicate sensibilities? He obviously had easily woundable feelings; otherwise he wouldn't be communicating with her so secretly.

A book had been left from the night before; she had simply never gotten around to putting it away. She picked it up and walked towards its proper shelf. When she turned the corner, there on the floor was a beautiful black crystal vase filled with daisies. She smiled.

She placed the book on the shelf where it belonged and bent down to pick up the flowers. A tiny slip of paper was attached to them. It read:

My mother said that daisies were the happiest flowers. They could always put a smile on even the sourest of faces. I hope they keep a smile on yours.

The smile on her face grew when she remembered what daisies symbolized. While it was thoughtful that he thought of her as innocent, she most definitely was not. Her innocence had been spoiled by growing up in a world being destroyed by a madman, and her other innocence had been lost in an awkward fumble with a certain redhead garbage disposal that had never led to anything else. They had decided that they were too different to maintain a relationship.

Lifting the vase with her hands, she carried it back to her desk, placing the vase in the place of honor that the other two vases had held.

In her regular spot at the dinner table, she sat down, looking at Minerva who was giving her that look.

"Ask your question, Minerva," she stated with a humorous sigh.

"Are you okay, Hermione?" the concerned Headmistress questioned.

"Yes, I am fine, merely needed a quick little escape from everything, sorry for the inconvenience. It shouldn't happen again, I promise."

"Dear girl, I don't care if it happens again. I just want you to be okay," she soothed, patting Hermione's hand resting on the wooden table.

Hermione reached for the butter and found the dish being placed into her hand by a familiar pale hand with elegantly long fingers on it. She looked up into his deep obsidian eyes and gave him a shy smile.

"Thank you, Severus."

"You are welcome, Miss... Hermione." He stumbled over her name.

She let the smile expand wider on her face at his use of her real name. He was still having trouble calling her by her first name, but she was determined to fix that.

"I do hope that everything is all right and that your work won't be affected by any more problems."

"Why, how nice of you to be so concerned. Everything is fine, merely a moment of panic and hurt pride."

"Regarding?"

"Something Minerva said got me thinking about the fact that this whole secret admirer thing could be a trick. But I'm okay with it even if it is because now I am prepared for that option to be truth."

*

Hermione found an envelope resting flat on her desk the next week. No flowers in sight, just the simple plain white envelope, with no markings on it. Her thumb slid under the flap and ripped it open, pulling out the folded parchment.

10/11/09

Good Morning,

I assume you found this letter this morning and are reading it then, your curiosity would not allow for you to let it sit for a long time; if not, please forgive my assumption. I also assume that you have an inkling in regards to my identity, but I am still unable to present myself. After miraculously surviving that horrific incident that I would rather not mention, I discovered something about myself. The reason I am writing to you is to quite simply ask if you want me to stop. I can, just say the word. However, I have a feeling that you are as intrigued by me as I am by you.

For now.

She was intrigued. And even more now she was convinced it was Severus. The letter just read too much of a man with many problems. She reached into a drawer and pulled out a piece of parchment, writing on it simply,

Don't stop.

She placed it into an envelope on her desk when she left for dinner. When she came back later, it was gone.

17/11/09

Hello again,

I am pleased that you do not wish for me to stop, although I was half convinced you would ask me to. I must confess I'm not entirely sure where to go with this. Most likely staying simple will be best, at least at first. How about a question: What made you decide to come back to Hogwarts?

18/11/09

Hello,

I must say I was surprised to receive your letter. After the flowers and notes, I was expecting to find a box of chocolates or a giant stuffed teddy bear sitting on my desk. However, if I am correct in my guess as to your identity, then you would most likely not give a teddy bear as a gift as it would not only tarnish your reputation but completely negate the time you have spent building a specific image of yourself. I came to Hogwarts again because it has always been the place I am most happy, other than The Burrow. It is my home. I have some of my happiest, and saddest, memories here. I have always secretly imagined myself coming back here to work, and here I am. I had accomplished all that I wanted at the Ministry, and I made sure it was in capable hands. I knew that I could leave and there was no chance of a psychopath attempting to take over yet again, well, I hope at least, and after all that we survived, hope is one of our strongest weapons along with love. Also, here I am completely submerged in books, one of my favorite things in the world. What more could I ask for? And I also have the intrigue of you, my secret friend. Why are you at Hogwarts?

Hermione

21/11/09

Hello,

I hope you enjoy the present I left with this. I thought you might find it entertaining. It is comforting to me that you think the Ministry is safe from future psychopaths. It surely takes a lot to make you comfortable and to gain your approval; therefore I take trust in your assurance. I must confess I feel the same as you do. Hogwarts is the only true home I have ever known. My childhood home was one made up of neglect and abuse. And that abuse continued when I was at Hogwarts; I also had friends and what I, at the time, considered a family, though later I learned the truth. I returned due to necessity, and I stayed out of comfort. I honestly couldn't picture myself anywhere else. This is where my life is. This is probably not the best question to ask a librarian, but I am curious. What is your favorite book? After all, Francois Mauriac said, "If you would tell me the heart of a man, tell me not what he reads, but what he re-reads." Obviously that applies to both men and women.

Me

22/11/09

Hello,

Yes, you are a regular comedian. Thank you for the bear; it gave me a great laugh yesterday, and it definitely lightened up my mood. I wasn't depressed, merely just in a funk. I don't even know where to begin in answering your question. I would say it's a ridiculous question, but I believe you already established that in your last letter. I don't think I can honestly say I have a favorite book. I have a few favorite authors, such as Jane Austen, DH Lawrence, the Bronte sisters, Steinbeck, Hugo, Fitzgerald, Poe, Conrad and many others. If you want the answer to your quote, then the book I've read the most is most likely Pride & Prejudice. I know it's stereotypical. "Oh, she likes Pride & Prejudice, big surprise." But that book is special to me. My mom bought me my first copy of it when I was about ten years old. I remember sitting in my backyard, the wind blowing around me, the sweet smell of my mother's flower garden floating in the air. It was such a beautiful setting for my first time to read it, and I quite simply fell in love with the book and the strength of Austen's imagery. I have been rereading it every spring since, along with other times in between, so it would most definitely be my most read book. So that being said, what does my most read book say about my heart? And what is your favorite book?

Hermione

Hermione

Chapter 6 of 19

A mystery admirer begins a correspondence with Hermione. When she learns who it is, they develop a friendship, which morphs into something more than that. Written for the HermioneBigBang.

25/11/09

Hermione,

I am glad that you enjoyed the teddy bear. I would have to agree with your inability to pick a favorite book or even author. There are quite simply too many pieces of brilliant literature out in the world for a person to be able to decide on the best one. That is why it is so ridiculous to make those lists of the best pieces of literature ever. Every book is different, every piece an individual, every reader has different tastes. It would be like making a list of the best people in the world. It is just plain ridiculous. So while I may not have a favorite, I do have a book I have read more than others, Frankenstein by Mary Shelley. The brilliance of all the underlying themes behind it is simply amazing. It is also the home of one of the most recognizable characters in all of literature. People may not have read the book, but they still know the name of the Frankenstein, even if they think that Frankenstein is the name of the monster, and the image of the monster. Sadly, I must admit to having read Pride & Prejudice and actually enjoying it. But don't tell anyone my reputation is on the line. As for your love of the novel, I believe that it shows you are an intelligent, individual woman, who is comfortable with herself and doesn't need anyone telling her what to do. It also shows that you have an old soul. You are much more mature than your peers who would most likely not even know who Jane Austen is, let alone have read any of her books. Speaking of clueless peers, why didn't you go to University?

Me

26/11/09

Mystery Man,

Your secret is safe with me. Have no fear. Although I may start keeping a list of possible blackmail material, first the teddy bear, now Pride & Prejudice. Frankenstein? Really? I'm intrigued. If you are who I think you are, then I must say that is rather perfect for you. As for the Uni issue, I needed to make a difference. I needed to change the Ministry and make sure everything was running smoothly, and I couldn't do that from Uni. Changes needed to be made at that point in time, and there was no time for me to go to Uni. It was a sad fact, but a fact nonetheless. And of course by the time I was done at the Ministry, it was simply just not something that appealed to me. I had gotten the job I had always longed for, being librarian here, so I didn't really see the point. I know, I know, the ever thirsty for knowledge know-it-all doesn't want more chances for learning, but I just got tired. This job is perfect for me. I love it, I get to spend time in my favorite place, and I feel like I'm home again. There is no pressure of exams, assignments and essays to get done, I can pick up a book, read it and learn if I want. And that is a relief. Despite what many believe, I don't like to study and write essays. Yes, I enjoy learning, but learning is different from doing assignments and having the added pressure of grades and disappointing professors. In the end, Uni just wasn't something that ever really had an opportunity in my life. I'm taking a shot in the dark with this next question, assuming you are who I think you are. Why did you become a teacher?

Hermione

27/11/09

Hermione,

You do realize you just placed excellent material for the ruination of your know-it-all reputation into my hands, but fear not, I will not ruin you; although I too must begin a collection of possible blackmail material that may come in handy later. What you are telling me is that even after helping Harry Potter save the world, you still feel the need to rescue the Wizarding World. I do believe that Potter's hero complex has rubbed off on you. I think it's good that for once you are focusing on yourself and doing what you want. Bravo! As for me, I became a teacher because at the time it was the only option that was before me. I couldn't go anywhere else, so I came back to Hogwarts, much in the same way you did. It was the best decision I ever made. I have never regretted it, even though I regretted the circumstances that surrounded it. I am going to switch from the serious to the ridiculous. If you were any animal, what animal would you be?

Me

28/11/09

Mystery Man,

Intriguing. Very intriguing. You really are a mystery. And the teddy bear will be brought out into the open if you reveal my lack of desire for homework. Harry doesn't have a hero complex. The hero stuff simply seems to find him; he doesn't really have a choice. If he could, he would not have anything that happened to him happen to him. The more I hear from you, the more similarities I note between us. I find it oddly comforting. I believe, in answer to your question, I am going to have to follow after Minerva and be a cat. They are smart, small and have the best lives. They get pampered and don't have to take care of anything except using a litter box. That's the life. Continuing on your note of ridiculous, you can only eat one type of food for the rest of your life, what is it? And also answer your question as well: what animal would you be?

Hermione

29/11/09

Hermione,

Two questions, wow, we are the greedy one, aren't we? A cat, why am I not surprised? But I will say that I could definitely see it, your Animagus would most likely be a cat. I, on the other hand, am not sure what I would be. Many would say a snake, but I know for sure that is incorrect. Perhaps a raven, the image certainly suits, although my students tend to think of me as a different animal. Maybe a lion, but I think all of Gryffindor would be in an uproar about that. I think I'll stick with the raven; it suits me. I spent some time in Italy, and I have to say that I would have to eat Italian for the rest of my life. Italian food is so filling and delicious, and all the spices they use are simply brilliant. From ridiculous back to serious, and possibly painful? Why did you alter the memory of your parents?

Me

30/11/09

Mystery Man,

Mystery man is quite simply too long of a name for you. Do you have a nickname that I may call you by? Painful yes, but a necessary question nonetheless. The answer is quite simple. I needed to protect them. Altering their memories was the only way that I knew they could be completely safe. Granted, I didn't take into account their reactions when I restored their memories. They were so upset with me. I don't think they had ever been that angry before. But when I explained everything, they seemed to calm down, a little. To this day I feel like they are still holding it over my head. But they are my parents, I would do anything to protect them, and even looking back on it, knowing the outcome, I would still alter their memories. Speaking of which, if you could go back in time and change one thing in your life, would you and what would it be?

1/12/09

You may call me whatever you like, Hermione. We are probably to the point in these letters that you need not even write a name. But that is your choice. I am deeply sorry that you were put in the place of having to make that difficult of a decision. You were far too young to have to choose. To be perfectly honest in regards to your question, I don't think I would change a thing. Everything I did, every choice I made, everything I said was needed to get us to this point in time. I don't say that with conceit, believing the world revolves around me, but with knowledge that everyone affects the cycle of the world, and my choices seem to have a greater impact than others. It makes me sad to look back on my life, but I know that even if I changed one thing, it would cause the whole balance to shift, and I can't allow that to happen. I can't step on that butterfly. It comes down to what's better, making one person happy or making the world happy? Would you change Harry's fate, allowing his parents to live and Voldemort to continue his reign of terror over our world? It's a catchall question.

2/12/09

You have a point. It is difficult to choose a specific moment in time that I would want to reverse because it isn't just changing my life; it's changing the world and all the other people that were affected by my actions. Looking at it in that way, I would have to agree; I would change nothing. I would go through all the tears, the jeers, and the fears. Sorry for the rhyme. Those things are what make us who we are. They build our character. Can you believe that it is almost time for break? I feel like this term has flown by so quickly. It seems like I just started working here, but it has been several months. How strange! But I am very happy with my choice to come here. I made the right decision. If for no other reason than that I was able to make a friend in you.

Response

Chapter 7 of 19

A mystery admirer begins a correspondence with Hermione. When she learns who it is, they develop a friendship, which morphs into something more than that. Written for the HermioneBigBang.

She heard no response from him for several days. Fears plagued her that she had scared him off with her last letter, but deep down she knew that was wrong. Something else was going on.

One morning, as she was walking toward the library, she saw a shadow at the closed library doors. It moved, and a white envelope was attached to the door. She ducked back into a niche, hiding from their eyes, and watching as the figure passed by. With a breeze of herbs and musk, Severus Snape passed by her niche, his cloak gliding in the air. She smiled to herself, knowing that she had been right; she was positive he had been leaving a letter for her on the door.

When Hermione was positive he was gone, she snuck out of the niche, making her way quietly down the hall. She made it to the door, and sure enough, there was a plain bit of parchment with familiar handwriting etched into the soft skin in the form of her name. She gave a glance around to make sure that no one was there before pulling it off the door and quickly unlocking the door. She made her way inside, shutting the door behind her. Sitting down in the chair, she released the breath she had unconsciously been holding.

She opened the letter, the familiar heavy parchment caressing her skin. The scent of herbs and Severus wafted to her nose, and she smiled. She finally knew. It was him, and she was elated.

6/12/09

I know you think that you discovered who your secret admirer is, and while you did, it is me, you did not discover me. I allowed for you to discover me. I wanted you to. I was a spy for most of my life, of course I knew you were there. I thought it was getting to the point where you were positive that it was me and I might as well reveal myself. Yes, Hermione, it is I, Severus Snape. I am your note giver, your pen pal, your flower provider. I don't know why I did those things. They just seemed natural, something I needed to do. I wouldn't say it was me attempting to atone for my previous sins. They were all necessary, even if they were sins. I do apologize for upsetting you over the years. Something I was never able to tell you when you were my student was that you have one of the most brilliant and intellectually stimulating minds I have ever seen in my life. I think that's what drew me towards you when I found out you were coming back here again. There may be a physical difference between us, but intellectually we are equal. I know that I could sit down and discuss discoveries in the latest uses for dragon's blood and you won't stare at me, blankly asking, "Dragons have blood?" At the risk of sounding utterly ridiculous, I guess you could say that we are kindred spirits.

In my first letter to you I mentioned that I learned something about myself after my almost death. I realized that despite telling myself I was ready to die, I really wasn't ready. While the life I have led up to this point may be a sad excuse for a life, it is a life nonetheless. And I am eternally grateful that I have one and that I still have the opportunity to continue it. I have been attempting to look at life with a less sarcastic and acerbic mind, but I have once again learned that that is simply my nature. I need sarcasm to survive. But I have tried to be somewhat nicer. Most have not noticed. How shocking. But I have the distinct impression that you may have noticed. And for that I am thankful. It proves how correct my instincts were in seeking you out as a friend. Yes, your last letter is correct. You have made a friend in me. Do not fear that you scared me off with that statement. I was merely spending the proceeding days writing my long-winded response.

I believe now that you know the truth we can talk as we do in our letters in real life, although we have been talking more in real life. I look forward to our first encounter.

Severus Snape

She didn't really know what to say or even do after reading that letter he had left her. He was such an enigma. Severus Snape. There were so many things she didn't know about him, and she had been writing letters with him for the past several months; that's saying something. Even in the Voldemort-free world, he was still a dark, brooding mystery. She didn't think she would ever really understand him. There were just so many layers to him. Every time she discovered one and pulled it back to learn about him, she found another.

For the rest of the day she simply sat behind her desk, staring into nothingness, pondering what this shift in their relationship meant. After all, now she knew for sure that it was him. No more guess work. No more assumptions. She could talk to him about everything they had written in their letters. It was freeing and yet terrifying. Now there was nothing standing in between them. Her question was whether he would be as open in real life as he had been in his letters. She didn't want to be friends with the brooding bat of the dungeons, she wanted the warm, sarcastic friend from their letters. She dreaded the first moment seeing him after reading the letter for this reason. She did not know if he was going to shun her or truly be her friend.

A loud clang echoed through the halls, and her head snapped up when she looked at the clock on the wall. It was almost time for dinner. She had spent the whole day sitting there staring at a shelf of books. The library was empty; all the students were at dinner already. She stood up and made her way slowly to the Great Hall. The impending interaction was hanging over her head.

She went in through the teachers' entrance and took her seat between him and Minerva. Minerva was oddly quiet. Hermione stared at the plate of food in front of her. She picked up the fork in her hand and pushed the food around on the plate.

"I do believe you are supposed to eat that, not push it around like a tugboat." His soft voice caressed her ear, and she looked over at him, his piercing black eyes burning a hole right through her. A slow smile spread across her face and a smaller one mirrored on his face. It quickly disappeared, but she understood why: he had to keep up appearances for the students. They couldn't know the greasy git had a heart much less a sense of humor.

"I do believe you are right," she whispered back as she piled mashed potatoes and peas onto her fork and placed it into her mouth, slowly pulling the fork off, clean of any remnants of food. A weird sound filled her ears and she looked toward the source. Severus was sitting in his chair, looking out over the hall, a strained look on his face.

"Are you okay?" she asked delicately. He nodded and continued to stare forward. She gave a shrug and continued to eat her food.

"How was your day, Severus?" she asked, attempting small talk.

"It was filled with the normal dunderheaded behavior. Thankfully, no one was severely harmed. Pardon the pun."

"Pun pardoned. Yes, that would indeed make a horrible day."

"How was your day in the library? Learn anything surprising?"

"Nothing that I didn't already know or think I knew." She glanced at him slyly out of the corner of her eye. He gave a jerk of his head, and she knew he understood what she meant. They fell into a comfortable silence that was only interrupted by the soft chewing and whispers that filled the hall.

After she was finished, she left the hall and slowly made her way back to the library. The familiar stomp of booted feet filled her ears, and she turned around to see Severus walking towards her.

"So you are fine with it?"

"Yes," she said with a nod and smile. "Completely fine with it."

"Good."

At her desk

Chapter 8 of 19

A mystery admirer begins a correspondence with Hermione. When she learns who it is, they develop a friendship, which morphs into something more than that. Written for the HermioneBigBang.

She was sitting at her desk in the library, secretly rereading the last letter she had received from Severus. The loud sound of a book dropping on a desk startled her awake, and the book she was hiding the letter in went flying over her desk. She heaved a heavy sigh of annoyance at her jumpy behavior and stood up. She bent over the desk and reached down for the book, but her arm was just short enough that she couldn't reach it. She pressed herself further forward, lying completely flat on the hard wood of the desk. Her fingers brushed the worn leather of the book, and she stretched that little extra bit to grab the spine and lift it up. A strangled groan came from the side of the desk, and she looked up to find Severus standing there.

"Hello, Severus. May I help you with something?" she asked with a friendly smile on her face.

"I'm... umm... just returning this book," he stumbled, shocking her at the unheard stutter. He pointed to the aforementioned book down on the desk that had startled her and turned around, walking at a pace much quicker than his normal one.

"Thank you," she said quietly, giving him retreating back an odd look, completely confused as to why he was acting so weird.

*

"Hermione!" She heard the familiar dulcet tones of Severus Snape from behind her as she was locking up the library for the night. She turned, and her eyes took in the sight of him moving towards her. She hadn't seen him since the incident with the book earlier. He had skipped dinner.

He walked towards her, his boots stomping as he moved, the loud noise bouncing off the stone walls. His cape flipped in his self-made breeze, giving him his signature bat appearance. She couldn't help but giggle at the image he presented. She stood there, waiting to see what his next move was going to be. He reached her and stood close, his face mere inches away from her face.

"You will go to dinner with me," he demanded, his silky tone washing over her.

"Hello, to you too, Severus. How are you today? I am fine, thank you for asking, that was ever so considerate of you," she said, sarcasm filling her voice.

"Hermione, I will not do this anymore. I want you to go to dinner with me."

"Do what?" she asked, puzzled.

"Just be friends. There is something that is just not right. Something is missing. Go to dinner with me."

"Maybe you are just hungry. Food could be what is missing. Did you try eating?"

"Hermione, you are trying my patience."

"Well, I'm not really sure I understand what you are doing. You haven't asked me anything, so what are you wanting me to do?"

"I want you to go to dinner with me. What don't you understand? Why are you making this so difficult? It's dinner for crying out loud, woman! Just say you will go with me!"

"What am I saying yes to?" she asked coyly.

"Will you go to dinner with me?" he asked with a heavy growl in his voice.

"Wow, Severus. What a way to sweep a girl off her feet. How could I possibly say no to such romance and sincerity? Yes." She gave him a bright smile and stood up on her tiptoes to kiss his cheek. When she pulled back, his face was a mask of shock. She turned around and walked back towards her room.

*

"When?" she questioned him after they left dinner at the Great Hall the next day.

"When what?" he asked, his face twisting into a puzzled expression.

"When do you want to go to dinner? You asked me to dinner, but you never said when, or where. So I was simply wondering when and where?"

"Will this Saturday suffice? We can go to the new restaurant that just opened in Hogsmeade."

"That sounds delightful, Severus. I will have to make sure that it is okay with Minerva."

"Of course." He gave a nod of acknowledgment and turned around leaving her standing in the hall.

She stood there and stared after him, completely fascinated by the enigmatic figure that was Severus Snape. She heard a gentle cough behind her that broke her from her reverie, and when she turned around, she met the gentle smile of Minerva.

"Is there something you needed to ask me, Hermione?" she asked sweetly, almost too sweetly.

"I'm assuming that you heard us, but would it be alright if I was gone for a few hours on Saturday? I can lock up the library or find someone else to watch it if you want me to."

"There will be no need, I can watch the library for a few hours; it is not a problem."

"Thank you, Minerva. You don't know how much that means to me."

"No problem. I am just happy to see both of you happy, and if that means watching the library for a few hours, I think I can handle it."

*

She was looking in the mirror, her hands were gripped hard in her hair, and she was trying to figure out some way to make it look presentable. She blew a gust of breath into the curls covering her face and growled in frustration. She looked around her empty bathroom and chuckled at herself; she looked ridiculous.

A sharp rap on her door pulled her from her laughter. She froze and looked behind her, positive that the knock meant he was in her quarters with her. She realized how silly that idea was and called out to the front that she would be a minute. She threw her hair up in a tight bun and clipped back the few wisps of curls that were not behaving. She glanced in the mirror as she was leaving and nodded; it was the best she could hope to get out of the monstrosity that grew out of her head.

She grabbed her winter coat, putting it on and wrapping her scarf around her neck. She made her way to the front door and opened it slowly. Severus stood on the other side, a scowl on his face.

"Well, don't look so happy to see me."

He shook his head at her comment and met her eyes.

"Sorry, my mind was elsewhere. You look lovely, Hermione. Are you ready?"

"No, I'm merely standing here with my purse, dressed, and at the door for fun." She gave him a smile and took his proffered arm, leading her out of her quarters, pulling the door shut behind them.

They made their way through the halls of the school. They passed a gaggle of students who started whispering, startled at the image the beautiful librarian and the dour Potions master presented as they swept out of the school and down the hill.

The icy wind blasted them as they made their way towards Hogsmeade. The snow was falling around them, large flakes landing on their shoulders and falling on their hair. Severus' hair slowly was becoming white with the heavy blanket of snow that was falling. She looked over at him and let out a gurgling laugh.

"And what may I ask is so funny?" he murmured, turning his head to look at her.

"Your hair is covered in snow," she laughed, unable to hold it in. She reached her gloved hand up towards his head and brushed the snow off the obsidian locks that hung framing his face. Her fingers brushed the locks behind his ear, and her cloth-covered fingers traced the shell of his ear.

He released a gasp of surprise, and she realized what she had done. She quickly pulled her hand back, a profuse blush covering her already rosy cheeks.

"Sorry. You just looked so relaxed and calm. It was nice." She turned and started walking again.

His quick steps caught him up to her rapidly.

"No, it is I that should be sorry; you just surprised me. I am not used to being touched; most people avoid me like the plague. It was nice though."

"It was?" she questioned, turning towards him. She could feel her cheeks heating up even more.

"Yes, it was," he said as he gently brushed his fingertips against her gloved hand. He lifted her hand to his mouth and gently bit the tips of each finger, slowly pulling the glove off one finger at a time. When her hand was free of the confining glove, he entwined their fingers and tugged on her arm, pulling her forward as they moved towards

the village. He placed the glove in the pocket of his long coat.

They continued to make their way through the wintry landscape, simply enjoying the smell of freshly fallen snow and the brightness of the sun reflecting off the frozen surface. The wind whipped her hair around her flushed face, pulling the curls free from her hastily made bun. Her free hand reached up and pushed the curls behind her ear.

The date

Chapter 9 of 19

A mystery admirer begins a correspondence with Hermione. When she learns who it is, they develop a friendship, which morphs into something more than that. Written for the HermioneBigBang.

They walked over the last hill, and at the peak they looked down over the village of Hogsmeade. It was empty; everyone was most likely inside with a steamy cup of hot chocolate and a roaring fire. They made their way towards the newest addition to the small wizarding village, The Sparkling Wand. It was a nice restaurant, a step up from the Three Broomsticks and a few steps up from the Hog's Head Inn.

When they walked through the door, Severus stopped and helped Hermione remove her coat. He placed it over his arm and took a look at her.

"I was mistaken earlier, you are not lovely; you are breathtaking."

"Thank you, Severus."

"You are most welcome." He walked towards the maitre-d', handing him their coats and asking for their reservations. They were lead to their table by a simpering young girl, who was nearly brought to tears by the sight of Severus Snape holding out the chair for his date.

"Why was she acting so weird, Severus? Did you know her?" Hermione questioned when she had sat down and was comfortably adjusting to her seat.

"She was a student of mine. She failed my class and blew up more than her fair share of cauldrons. I believe I yelled at her about her stupidity at one point. I find that many students tend to be terrified of you once you yell at them."

"Yes, that does tend to happen. I still remember third year DADA with Remus and the Boggart. Neville's worst fear was you and he... he... oh God, I can't even say it, it is just too hilarious."

"What was it?"

"Remus told him to picture you in his Gran's clothes. The Boggart came out of the closet, and it looked like you, stalking towards poor Neville. He was shaking in his shoes, and then all of a sudden the Boggart-you were wearing a dress and a large hat with a feather and a bird on it. I was never able to look at you without that image of you in a dress coming to my mind. I think it's part of what made you not as cruel in my mind, at least until the teeth incident in fourth year."

"I apologize for that. I..."

She held up her hand to stop him. "I know, Severus. I'm over it. It was a long time ago, and it allowed for me to finally have an excuse to get my teeth fixed. So there is nothing to apologize for."

"I can't believe Lupin told Longbottom to picture me in a woman's clothes. If he were here, he would be paying for that, but since he isn't, I will simply have to let it go. There is nothing to do about it now."

"Indeed," she said with a pursed mouth; the fight to not let herself be overwhelmed by sadness was evident on her face.

Severus realized his blunder and searched for a way to correct it.

"Would you like to order? Or at least get your drinks?" a quiet voice asked them. They turned their focus from each other towards the mousy young woman standing at their table.

"Yes, I would like a glass of Pinot Noir," Hermione ordered.

"I will have the same."

"Would you like another minute or two to figure out what you want?"

"Yes, thank you."

"All right, I will be right back with your drinks." She turned and walked away.

"She wasn't as scared as the one who sat us down."

"Yes, I don't quite recall her, so she must have slid by without notice in my classes."

"Did you ever have any good students? Any students that were your favorites or that stand out in your mind?"

"Well, you were and still are the most intelligent student I have ever taught. Granted that you were frustrating with your constant need to share your vast knowledge of everything, but you have grown out of that phase of your youth. But I would have to say that if I could teach a class full of students like you, I would be very happy. And although he was a troublemaker, Draco Malfoy was a good student as well. He was smarter than one would think. In fact, many of the Slytherins that I had in the years that you were at Hogwarts were intelligent. Granted they were sneaky little buggers, lying, cheating, promoting the evil bastard, but intelligent nonetheless. In fact most students are good; it is just the few dunderheads that ruin everything, such as Longbottom, Weasley, and even Potter. But students are students. They come in cycles of bad and good. And to get the good students like you, I had to deal with those three and several others from that year."

"Wow, thank you... I think." She cocked her head to the side, giving him a somewhat questioning glance.

"It was meant to be a compliment. I'm sorry if it came out as something different."

"Are you ready to order?" their waitress asked as she stepped up to the table, quill and notepad in hand.

"Yes, I would like the lamb."

"I will have the same."

"All righty, I will put those in. Would you like more wine?"

"Yes, why don't you just bring the rest of the bottle. Thank you."

"You are a copycat." She leaned forward on the table, her arms folded under her.

"I don't understand what you mean."

"You keep ordering what I order. I'm beginning to notice a recurring theme here," she said as she smiled at him.

"You have good taste," he replied.

"As do you," she threw back with a smirk on her face.

"Now that's not what I meant and you know it. However, it is true."

"Yes, very true," she murmured. The waitress brought them the rest of the wine, and Severus reached for her glass, filling it to the appropriate level and then promptly filling his own. He handed her glass back to her, and they clinked the lips of the glasses, toasting to nothing and everything.

"May I ask a difficult question?" he prompted.

"Of course," she replied.

"Why did you always have to spout off your knowledge?"

"I was a Muggle-born; I had had no experience in the Wizarding World. The only sure footing I had in this world was the fact that I had read all the books and knew everything there was to know, so to prove to my peers that I wasn't a stupid Muggle, I spouted off my knowledge. I know it was annoying, but at the time it was all I had, especially at the beginning when I had no friends. I have fought to save this world, taking myself to the brink of consciousness to ensure that we could continue to live as we do. After going through that, I realized that I hadn't been looking for validation from my peers but from myself. And I found it. When I stood with Ginny and Luna against Bellatrix, I realized that I was vital, that there was something inherent in my magic and in my power, and I didn't need to prove it to anyone, I was perfectly happy with myself, and in the end that's all that matters."

"An astute observation to be sure, Hermione."

"Thank you," she said with a blush. Their waitress brought their food and placed it in front of them. They thanked her and began to eat their meals.

Hermione was eating hers as delicately as always, her manners impeccable. Severus stared at her, watching her every move. She cut the lamb into small pieces, speared a piece on her fork and gently placed the fork in her mouth, closing her perfect cupid's bow lips over the metal object and pulling it through her lips. He groaned at the image she presented.

"What is it, Severus? Is something wrong with your food?" she asked, concern in her voice.

He gave a shake of his head and picked up his fork and knife to eat his food. She gave an odd smile and continued to eat her meal, perfectly cut piece of meat after perfectly cut piece of meat.

The End of the Date

Chapter 10 of 19

A mystery admirer begins a correspondence with Hermione. When she learns who it is, they develop a friendship, which morphs into something more than that.

They finished their meal with a comfortable silence. No fillers or small talk were needed; they both understood that. Severus picked up the bill, and they left to find that the night had blanketed the sky and the snow was covering darkness. The sight was eerie but beautiful. The moonlight reflected off the snow that had already fallen. They began the slow walk back to the castle, taking each step carefully, mindful of the ice that had already begun to form.

Severus grew comfortable on the frozen snow and began to pick up the pace. He took the next step with his right foot, and when he put his boot down, he hit a patch of ice and his foot flew out from under him, landing him squarely on his back, air fleeing his lungs, and a loud "uumph" emanating from his mouth.

Hermione let out a giggle before stopping herself and jogging to catch up to him. She looked down at him, a black figure on the white snow.

"Are you alright?" she questioned, holding out her hand to help him up.

He gave a nod and gripped her hand tightly, simultaneously pulling her down next to him. "That was for laughing at me," he stated simply.

She gave him her best glare, but quickly lost it at the picture of him lying on the ground, covered in snow. She lay back on the ground, staring up at the dark sky. The falling snow fell right at her, flakes landing on her face and caressing her skin before melting with the warmth that her body released. She moved her arms and legs, making a snow angel. She laughed at herself and glanced over at Severus. He was staring at her, just watching her having fun.

"Try it, Severus. Have fun. Lie back and sprawl your legs and arms out. Then move them back and forth."

He did what she'd said, but he looked grossly uncomfortable. "Why am I doing this?" he questioned.

"Because it's fun, and you need to have fun every once in a while. Plus, it makes a cool design in the snow." She gave him a bright smile as he continued to make his snow angel.

When they were both finished, they simply lay there in the snow, the cold seeping through their clothes, but neither wanting to move.

"Well, now that we are both embedded in the ground, how are we supposed to get up?" Severus questioned.

"I don't know," she said with a shrug.

"I have an idea, but you will probably be averse to it."

"Why would you say that?" she asked as she sat up, snow falling off her back.

Severus sat up as well and brushed the snow off her back and then his. "Do you trust me?"

She nodded and he moved towards her, a pile of snow building between them as his body moved it like a shovel. He wrapped her in his arms and murmured a spell under his breath. They began to gravitate into the air, their bodies becoming light and lifting up until they were above the village, staring down at the snow covered roofs and streets.

She clung to him desperately, terrified of falling. He adjusted his hold on her, making sure that she was going nowhere, before he began moving forward, flying towards the school. The dark image of them flying through the light snow was shocking but beautiful. What had been pretty snowflakes when she lay on the ground were quickly becoming painful pieces of ice the higher they climbed into the sky. The ice balls were pelting them, so she pulled out her wand and cast a protective shield around them, rescuing them from the painful pelting balls of ice. They made their way over the winding countryside, watching the snow-covered trees fly by beneath them. She soon found herself being slowly taken down as he flew gently towards the ground in front of the castle.

He set them down gently in front of the doors. His arms remained holding her, and he whispered in her ear. "Are you okay?"

"Yes, thank you. I had a wonderful time." She turned around to face him, their faces close, breath mingling, steam rising.

"As did I," he murmured before leaning the last stretch of distance and placing a gentle kiss on her forehead. He pulled away and opened the large door, holding it open for her to walk through. She remained where she stood, stunned, before she shook herself out of it and made her way into the castle, heading towards her rooms. She left a confused Severus behind her, staring at her retreating form as he let the door shut behind him. The loud snap of the doors meeting echoed down the hall and followed her retreating form.

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"I just don't understand. I thought it had gone so well, why did he kiss me on the forehead?" Hermione complained, dropping her head to the kitchen table at Ginny's apartment.

"He's obviously interested in you; otherwise, he wouldn't have asked you out. Maybe he wasn't sure you wanted to be kissed."

"No, I was pretty obvious, we were really close, practically touching, and I was just staring at him, waiting patiently. And then nothing."

"Well, he is from an older generation; maybe he didn't think it was appropriate." She shrugged.

"Maybe, but it's still bothering me. I was so sure that he would kiss me," she heaved a heavy sigh laden with self-pity. She lifted her head from the table and froze. "Gin, is there something you need to tell me?" she asked with a shocked expression.

"No, why?" Ginny questioned, turning around when Hermione pointed her finger to something behind Ginny. She was met with the delicious sight of Draco Malfoy in a towel, droplets of water cascading down his body. He was running a comb through his blond locks and smiling unabashedly at the women sitting in the kitchen.

"Oh, yeah, about that. Ummm... we are sort of seeing each other." Ginny's pale skin flamed with a bright blush.

"How do you sort of see someone?" Hermione asked, sarcasm filling her voice.

"How do you get kissed on the forehead?" she threw back.

"Fair enough. But you are avoiding the ummm... delicious... I mean the topic at hand. How did this come about? What about Harry? I know you split up, but I guess we all just assumed you would be getting back together. Apparently we were wrong."

"Our teams were playing each other in a practice match. One thing lead to another, and here we are." She waved her arms about, pointing to Draco.

"How long?" Hermione questioned.

"A few months," she mumbled.

"How many is a few?"

"Eight," Draco stated as he turned around and left the room, heading towards the bedroom.

"You so owe me eight months' worth of details. I can't believe you let me complain about being kissed on the forehead by Severus when you had news like this. I can't believe you kept this secret. Okay, well, I can because your family would flip a shit, but you could have told me, I would have totally been supportive, especially having seen him in a towel. Damn." She fanned herself.

"Hermione Jean Granger! I am surprised at you!"

Hermione gave a cheeky grin and shrugged.

"Well, since apparently the only action I will be getting will be kisses on the forehead, I need to live vicariously through you."

"He meant it out of a sign of respect," that familiar drawl said.

"How do you know?" she asked, turning her head to see him dressed to perfection.

"He's my godfather. I grew up watching him. He may be viewed as the greasy git and the bat of the dungeons, but he has manners and respect. My advice would be that if you want him to kiss you, you are going to have to make the move because he is too emotionally shy and considerate to make a move like that. Why do you think he never did anything about Potter's mum? He was too scared and too shy. And believe me I know the idea of Snape as shy or scared is laughable, but when it comes to his emotions and his internal personality, well, he is. I am going home, Gin. I will see you for dinner tonight." He kissed her on the lips gently and gave a nod to Hermione before Disapparating away.

"Well, that was interesting," Hermione said, a contemplative look on her face. Ginny smiled and sighed.

"Yeah, isn't he great?"

"Okay, I will admit he's good looking, but, Ginny, this is Malfoy. Has he really changed that much?" she questioned.

Ginny sat up at the question that was the reason she had never told anyone about her relationship. "Believe it or not, but he really has. I think that fire knocked some sense into him. He is much less arrogant, and he cares about others, well, at least about me. Some things won't ever change," she said with a smirk.

"I can tell you are happy just by that great big grin on your face. Either he's changed or he's really good in the sack."

"Or both," Ginny stated, picking up her cup of tea and taking a sip.

Hermione heaved a sigh and looked at her longtime friend. She was truly happy, even if it was with the ferret, and for Hermione that was all that mattered.

"So this begs just one last question, when are you going to tell your family?"

"A week after never."

Hermione's laugh filled the room at the quick response.

What happened

Chapter 11 of 19

A mystery admirer begins a correspondence with Hermione. When she learns who it is, they develop a friendship, which morphs into something more than that.

Severus had no idea what had happened. They had had a wonderful evening, and now she was being evasive, and he didn't know why. But he was going to find out why. After dinner he made his way to the library, determined to discover the mystery behind her strange behavior.

He threw open the library doors, stomping inside and looking around. The library was empty, no students to be seen anywhere; the only occupant was the solemn librarian sitting behind her desk.

She glanced up, and her eyes met his; she gave him no sign of recognition and went back to reading the large tome in front of her. He made his way to the desk and stopped in front of her.

"Hermione, what in the hell is wrong with you? You have been acting oddly all week. You have avoided me and barely said two discernible words to me." He crossed his arms, emphasizing his angry point.

"I have no idea what you are talking about, Severus," she stated primly as she carefully shut the tome and lifted it, placing it on the corner of her desk for further reading later.

He leaned down, dropping his hands onto her desk and moving his body forward so he was bent halfway across the desk.

"Yes, you do. Don't play coy with me. It won't work. Try the truth. It will get you much further than anything else will." He arched his brow, an accent on his demanding statement.

"Fine, you want to know what's the matter with me? This," she said as she reached across and pulled his face towards hers. Her lips just brushed his; a taste of peppermint and spice filled her mouth. She nibbled at his lips, tugging the bottom one gently with her teeth.

He released a groan that filled her senses, causing her blood to flow, rapidly heating her body. He pulled her up from her position behind the desk, placing her gently on top of the wooden instrument. She was quickly nestled against his firm body, her hands splayed out on both sides of the desk. One hand on bare desk, the other on the tome she had been reading. His arms wrapped around her; their lips melded together. A magic neither had felt was flowing between them.

Their hair whipped around their heads, brown mingling with black. The blast of wind was so strong several strands of hair knotted together. They both yanked their heads back in shock at the strange wind; the knot of hair pulled them back together, tethering them together for the moment. Hermione held up the offending piece of hair, staring at it strangely. She picked her wand up and sliced the strands with a quick swipe of the familiar wood.

"What was that?" he questioned sharply.

"You ask as if I have any idea. I am just as clueless as you are in the current moment." He arched his brow and opened his mouth. "Don't even think about it; it would be too easy and too beneath you to say something that Ron or Harry would get." He cringed and nodded his head; his hand reached up, touching the spot that had been pulled on thanks to the knotted hair.

"Well, something just happened, we need to figure out what," he said with surety. Their bodies were still close together, drawn towards the warmth and comfort that they had found in each other.

"Thank you, Sherlock Holmes," Hermione grumbled sarcastically, leaning back and looking around the library for the source of the mysterious wind. Her neck and back were hurting her from leaning over the book she had been reading earlier. She arched her back and rolled her neck, attempting to stretch the aching muscles. Her breasts brushed against Severus' cloth-clad chest, and he groaned at the sensation.

He looked down at the little minx. Her eyes were closed, and she was completely oblivious to what she was doing and what effect it had on him.

"Hermione, stop," he growled. Her eyes shot open, meeting his glaring obsidian ones. She looked down and saw the position they were in.

"Does my touching you bother you, Severus?" she questioned.

"Yes," he said tersely, attempting to keep his mind off her petite body pressed against his.

"Well, I am sorry that I cause such bother to your person. I will not bother you anymore since I so obviously disgust you!" she stated with indignation as she scooted

backwards on the desk, jumping off when she reached the edge. "I think it's time for you to leave now. I no longer want to be in your presence since mine is so disgusting to you." She sat down in her abandoned chair and reached for the book that was no longer there. Her eyes lighted with the answer to the mysterious wind from earlier; the book must have caused the wind when she had placed her hand on it as it flew back to its place on the shelf. She called for another book. She kept her head down, unwilling to let him see the single tear that was slowly making its way down her cheek. All she heard was the rustle of his cloak and several stomps of his familiar black boots and then silence.

Her chair was pushed from the side, pulling her out from behind her desk. A pale hand lifted her chin, and her eyes met those ever-present black orbs.

"Never, ever doubt my attraction to you. It is that attraction that I am barely able to keep under control, and when you do things such as stretch, or even merely eating your food, it drives me insane."

"Is that why you kissed me on the forehead on our first date?" she queried quietly.

"Yes. I knew if I did more I wouldn't want to stop."

"But if I want you too, I don't see the problem."

"The problem lies in the fact that, though we may have known each other for many years, we do not actually know each other. And on top of that, we have only been on one date; it is not proper."

"Oh, screw propriety, Severus. After everything you've been through, do you really want to just sit back and let the world still rule your life? Have you ever actually done what you want? Or have you always had someone bossing you around, telling you what to do and when to do it? Can you do anything without being told?" she demanded, her ire at his stubbornness coming out.

"Yes."

"What?" she shouted at him, glaring at his blank expression, her hot breath passing over his face.

"This," he stated before dipping his head and capturing her lips with his. He slid his tongue to the edge of his mouth, gently swiping at her already moist lips. His hand under her chin moved around to the back of her head, and he pulled her up, pressing her full length against his body. Her arms wound their way around his neck, pulling him tighter against her. The weight of him pressed against her was too sweet. She had imagined kissing him, but it had never been like this. His heavy scent of herbs and spice filled her nose; it was a scent uniquely him, full of bite and a bit of sweet something that she couldn't quite place. Her fingers twined themselves in his hair. It was not as greasy as it appeared. There was still some slickness to it, but that was the natural oils that everyone had when they didn't wash their hair for a day or so. Her fingers buried themselves into his raven hair, tugging on the trapped locks, encouraging his exploring tongue to explore more. Her mouth opened over his, inviting him into her sweet mouth. Her tongue brushed his and he jolted, pulling away from her.

"I am so sorry, Hermione. I..." He stopped his rambling when she pressed her fingers to his babbling lips.

"Why did you kiss me in the first place?"

"To prove you wrong."

"Right. By apologizing you are proving me right, so, Severus, just shut up." She removed her fingers from his lips; his face was formed into an expression of pure shock. "Don't look so shocked. You needed a wake up call. Now, when are we going to have our second date?"

"Who says I want a second date?" he questioned with a quirk of his eyebrow.

"That," she said, pointing down to the rather prominent bulge in his pants.

"Oh, yes, a second date would be desirable," he said awkwardly, attempting to discreetly adjust himself without her noticing. He was failing at that attempt.

"Pick me up Saturday night at seven. I will arrange everything, just be at my door at seven."

"Yes, madam." Sarcasm dripped from both words. She gave him a sly grin, a kiss on the cheek and wave of her hand signaling his necessary departure.

Think

Chapter 12 of 19

A mystery admirer begins a correspondence with Hermione. When she learns who it is, they develop a friendship, which morphs into something more than that.

She paced back and forth in her room, trying to figure out what she would set up for them on Saturday. It had to be perfect; she didn't want another repeat of the kiss on the forehead, although hopefully she had pushed him past that passé notion. She thumped her fist against her forehead, muttering to herself.

Think, Hermione, think. If you were a man like Severus Snape, what would you enjoy doing on a date?

Well, I think I can safely say the zoo is out. And shopping.

Anything with large crowds of people is a no go.

A library? No, he'd be bored, especially since we have one of the best libraries here at school.

A movie? Maybe, but only as a last resort.

Tower of London? It's slightly far, but it could work.

The beach? Ha! Now there's a funny image, I bet his skin has never even seen the sun before.

I guess we could just do dinner again. But not in Hogsmeade. I don't want it to be the same as our first date. Oh my goodness, I'm going on a date with Severus Snape. Oh my double goodness, I'm going on a second date with Severus Snape. What is the world coming to?

She giggled to herself. If someone saw her, they'd probably think she was insane for talking to herself, but it was how she was able to figure things out. There was a lot of talking to herself when she made the decision to quit her old job and become the school's librarian.

What she needed was a male opinion. And she knew just the male to ask.

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She pounded her fist on the door of his flat repeatedly, continuing the annoyingly loud sound until he answered his door.

"Hermione, what the bloody hell is it?" he mumbled, wiping the sleep from his eyes with one hand and scratching his belly with the other. "Do you have any idea what time it is?"

"The better question would be do you have any idea what time it is? What were you still doing in bed, you lazy slug? I've already been up for several hours getting things done. What have you done besides scratch yourself?"

"Hey, that was uncalled for!"

"Sorry, Harry." She made her way around his spacious flat, meandering her way to the kitchen to make some tea for both of them.

"So what's the occasion?"

"What do you mean, occasion?"

"Well, you don't normally just stop by unannounced on a Tuesday morning, especially when I'll be seeing you in less than a week, considering the winter hols start Friday."

"Shit!" Hermione screamed. The pounding of feet filled the house, and a very naked and very startled Charlie Weasley came running into the kitchen, wand at the ready, prepared to battle the evil that was attacking.

"What's going on? Who screamed?" Charlie questioned, bleary-eyed.

"Well, Hermione screamed, though I'm not sure why," Harry stated simply.

"I had completely forgotten that the holiday started on Friday. Severus and I were supposed to have a date on Saturday but that won't work if I am here. That's also why I came here, Harry. I need your advice on what we should do for our da... Hold the phone! What is Charlie doing here? And why is he naked? Harry?"

"Ummmm... yeah. We are sort of seeing each other." Harry blushed as he glanced over at his naked counterpart.

"Oh, brother, not again with this sort of seeing bit, first Ginny, now you. What is going on? Is this the season for secret relationships or something? Good grief, people!"

"We kept it a secret because we didn't want to hurt Ginny. Although it sounds like she has moved on, so it doesn't matter. By the way, who has she moved on with?" Harry questioned.

"She will tell you and the rest of the family when the time is right, just like you and Charlie, I assume."

"Why aren't you freaking out about this? Why are you so calm?"

"Nothing can faze me anymore, and trust me, when you find out who Ginny is sort of seeing, you will understand. But back to the subject at hand. Well, first off, Charlie, while I am sure Harry is enjoying the view, would you mind putting on some clothing to make the rest of us a tad more comfortable?"

Charlie nodded his head and made his way back to the bedroom.

"Now, what did you want, Hermione?"

"I need advice. Where should Severus and I go for our date? You are a guy, where do guys want to go for dates?"

"Honestly?"

"Yes, please."

"Bed," he stated bluntly.

"Very funny, Potter. But sadly not going to happen. Severus seems to have an aversion to anything inappropriate, which does not bode well for the intimate side of our relationship, if you can even call it that."

"I honestly don't know. I'm sure dinner would be fine with him. I don't really know what he likes aside from potions, dark arts, my mom and apparently you, so I'm not much of a help. You would need to ask one of his friends, if he had any."

"Harry," she growled.

"Sorry, Mi-one, won't happen again. Keeping my mouth shut." He mimed locking his lips and throwing away the key.

"Don't keep your mouth shut, that means no more fun time," Charlie said, sauntering back into the kitchen, this time partially clothed.

"And on that perverted note, I am leaving." She hugged both of them and told them she'd see them in a week before Apparating back to school. She was making her way towards her rooms when an idea struck her. She quickly turned around and headed to the Headmistress' office.

When she stood in front of the familiar stone gargoyles, she murmured the password, "Siamese," and began to climb the spiral staircase. She knocked on the door and heard Minerva's voice tell her to come in.

"Hermione, dear, what are you doing here?" Minerva questioned kindly, standing up from behind her desk.

"I was wondering if I could have a word with Professor Dumbledore."

"Why of course! I will leave you alone, just inform the paintings when you are done, they will let me know." She patted Hermione on the shoulder and swept out of the room and down the stairs.

Hermione moved towards the frame sitting behind the abandoned desk.

"Professor Dumbledore?" she questioned the sleeping figure of her former Headmaster. Her only answer was a loud snore.

"Professor Dumbledore?" she questioned a bit louder, still nothing.

"Professor Dumbledore!" she screeched at an octave that only dogs should have been able to hear.

"Yes, I'm awake. What's going on? Is Voldemort back? What did I miss?" he replied, startled, as he snapped up out of his chair, moving forward in the frame to get a better look at her. "My, how you've grown, Miss Granger. You have become such a lovely young lady."

"Thank you, sir. And everything is okay. Voldemort is still dead, nothing to fear on that front."

"Good to know," he said with a yawn. "You had a question for me, I assume."

"Yes, as I am sure Minerva has told you, Severus and I have become rather close. We have gone on a date and are supposed to have another one this weekend, though how that's going to work when it's the winter holiday and we will both be gone, is beyond me."

"Severus has a house just outside of London," he informed her.

"Oh, well, then maybe we can work something out." She smiled at the thought.

"Your question, my dear?"

"Oh, yes, so sorry. I was wondering if you had any ideas about things for us to do. I don't really want to do dinner again, although I will if need be, but I wanted to plan something fun that he would enjoy. I couldn't come up with anything, and I thought since you have known him longer, maybe you could. Please, sir, I want this to be nice."

"Hmmm... let me think for a minute." The air was filled with a weighty silence as he contemplated her conundrum.

"I do believe I remember him expressing some interest in the Muggle history of London. I know that growing up, he didn't really get to experience any of that. You might consider taking him to the museums and the historical sights; he would most likely enjoy that, although he might never admit it." His eyes did that familiar twinkling thing, proving the artist's skill in painting the picture.

"Okay, so what? The Tower of London, Big Ben, Parliament, Westminster Abbey, the British Museum, and the Tate Modern? Would that be enough?"

"Most assuredly, that would be plenty. To fit all that in, you would need at least a week."

"Thank you, Professor Dumbledore! You were a big help," she said as she made her way towards the door.

"No problem, and please call me Albus. I am a painting after all. And child, feel free to stop by any time for a chat. I care for Minerva dearly, but seeing only her and the other paintings can be a bit monotonous. I don't get my daily bit of gossip anymore."

"You want gossip, Albus? Well, I have a great piece of gossip for you." She walked back towards his painting, whispering the news of the newly discovered relationship of her best friend. A large grin spread on his face.

"I always knew he was a boy after my own heart," he chuckled as Hermione said goodbye and left, telling the paintings to find Minerva.

Babbling

Chapter 13 of 19

A mystery admirer begins a correspondence with Hermione. When she learns who it is, they develop a friendship, which morphs into something more than that.

She made her way down the stone staircase, slowly descending into the dark dungeons that were home to many memories, both bad and good. When she got to her destination, she faced that familiar wooden door, leading to his office. She knocked softly and heard the gruff "enter."

She pushed open the heavy door and made her way inside his dingy, dimly lit office. He was hunched over his desk, scratching hastily over a parchment that was slowly bleeding red ink. She gave a little cough and he looked up from the essay, a scowl affixed to his face. The scowl fell when he saw that it was her.

"Hermione, what are you doing here?" he questioned, placing the quill down gently and folding his arms across his chest.

"Well, I realized that we made a blunder, although it's not really a blunder because there is a solution; it is just going to be different, and it's a blunder that I'm surprised we made, but it's okay, I am sure everything will work out in the end."

"Hermione you are babbling. Out with it, woman!"

"We forgot that the holiday is coming up. Neither of us will be here this weekend."

"The problem with that is?" he questioned, waving his hand around.

"Nothing, I guess. Never mind," she said, an odd expression crossing her features, a cross between hurt and shock. She turned to leave the room and heard an intake of breath from behind her.

"Of course, I'm sorry, I forgot. We had planned to see each other this weekend." She turned back to face him, a small smile on her face at the fact that he remembered.

"That's right. Do you wish to postpone or would you like to meet in London, if you will be near there of course?"

"That will be acceptable, to meet in London that is. I own a house outside of London, so meeting there will be convenient. Where will you be staying over the holiday? The Burrow, I presume?"

"You would presume correctly. Molly invited me to stay there since I sold my flat when I came to work here. I could always stay here over the holiday, but I really want to see all of the Weasleys again; it has been so long since I have seen all of them together." Not counting the time I ran to them when I was afraid this was all a joke.

“What?” he asked.

“What what?”

“You looked like you wanted to say something, but nothing was coming out of your mouth.”

“Oh, no, I was just thinking, is all. So how do you want to work this weekend? Do you want to meet somewhere and where? The Ministry would probably be the easiest, but then again, maybe not. They may try and hire me back again.” She gave an exaggerated shiver at the thought, and he let out a low chuckle at her antics.

“I will not meet you somewhere. I will pick you up on Saturday from the Burrow. You merely need tell me what time so that I can be there at the appropriate hour and not awaken the gaggle of redheads.”

“That’s so kind of you, Severus. I will let you know later in the week when I have my plans solidified. I will let you get back to grading, and I will see you at dinner.” She left the room, and he went back to grading the red essay sitting on his desk.

*

Thursday he found a note on his desk:

Severus,

I have made a plethora of plans for Saturday, so it would be best to get an early start. You should probably pick me up around nine o'clock in the morning, and plan to be gone all day. I'm not telling you what I have planned, for that would ruin the surprise. Since the holiday starts tomorrow, and all the examinations are finished, I have closed the library, and by the time you find this note and read it, I will most likely already be at the Burrow unpacking. Oh the glory of Apparition. I don't know how I survived the first seventeen years of my life without it. Anyway, enjoy the rest of today and tomorrow, and I shall see you on Saturday.

Hermione

P.S. Try not to kill any poor students. It won't look good for you, and then all the hard work we went through to exonerate you would be for naught, so just try to not kill them. Failing them is acceptable of course, and yelling at them too. Okay, I'm done now. See you Saturday!

He put the letter down and smiled.

*

She had arrived at the Burrow. The familiar home was the same as ever. Even though nearly every member of the family had offered to pay for it to be fixed up, Molly had refused. She didn’t want to change a thing. The home was just that, a home. She had raised all of her many children in it, had loved her husband, lived her life, and watched her children get married there; she was not changing anything about it. It simply held too many memories. Each stretch of wall had a meaning: a crayon mark from Ron, a scorch mark from Charlie’s stuffed toy dragon, a black area where Bill had fired his first hex, a Bludger drawn on the ceiling from the twins, a lightning bolt carved into the floors from a much younger Ginny, and the perfectly organized bookshelves in every room were evidence that Percy was home and had come back to his family for good.

The house always smelled of a collection of scents. Cinnamon, chocolate, fruit, meat, and somehow the mix never smelt bad. Hermione took a deep breath when she walked through the front door, and a smile flittered across her lips. This home would never change, and she loved the fact that it wouldn’t.

“Anyone home?” she called to what appeared to be an empty house. A loud thudding of feet from above her head filled the house and shouts of “put some clothes on, Ron, for goodness sakes!” filled her ears. Some things never changed. Molly came running down the stairs, wand in one hand and a set of bright orange sheets in the other. She must have been working in Ron’s room.

“Hermione, dear! What a pleasant surprise, we weren’t expecting you this early. Go on upstairs and unpack. You will have Ginny’s old room. Ron is here already for the holiday. Most everyone will be coming to stay here for the hols, so it will be rather crowded.”

“Good, that’s the way I like it.” Hermione gave Molly a hug and made her way upstairs. She had chosen to spend the holiday at the Burrow; she felt like she fit in more there. Plus since the memory incident in which she had saved her parents’ lives whether they wished to admit it or not, she had spent as little time with them as possible. Any visit always ended with fights and her in tears, storming out of the house. So this year she had decided to spare herself the pain and heartache and just skipped their house altogether. She was picking them up to come over for Christmas dinner at the Burrow, which was going to be interesting. She passed Ron’s room on the way to Ginny’s, and she glanced inside. He was hopping around, one leg in the leg of his trousers and the foot of the other caught in the pocket. She released a giggle and he looked up, his concentration moving from his predicament to her, and he quickly fell over. She burst out laughing at the sight.

“Ron, what in the name of Merlin have you done now?” Molly shouted from downstairs. His muffled response was unheard by his Mom’s enquiring ears, so Hermione responded for him with a loud shout of “nothing!” She walked over to her wiggling friend and helped him stand up. He managed to get his trousers on and gave her a hug, telling her he was glad to see her. She left him to finish dressing and went to her room for the holiday.

What did you do?

Chapter 14 of 19

A mystery admirer begins a correspondence with Hermione. When she learns who it is, they develop a friendship, which morphs into something more than that.

Hermione levitated her suitcase onto the bed, unzipping it by hand. She loved packing; it allowed her to just let her mind wander. She removed blouse after blouse, refolding them and placing them in the dresser in the corner. She and Ginny had divided up the dresser the first time they had shared the room. She pulled open her designated drawers and placed the blouses into them. Then her knickers, denims, and skirts followed. She had brought all the winter accoutrements that she would need for their day out on Saturday. It was probably insane to be doing everything that she had planned for them, especially when it was going to be freezing outside, but at least one thing was for certain: there would be no lines. Considering she was going to be with Severus, the man who probably invented impatience, no lines was definitely a good thing.

When she finished unpacking, she sat on her bed and fell backwards. Her hair fanned out around her. The ceiling loomed over her head, and she let out a laugh at the posters from Ginny's younger years that covered it. Images of seekers, the Weird Sisters and Harry stared back at her, doing ridiculous actions such as flips in the air, smashing magical guitars and blushing. *Ginny really should take down that picture of Harry, especially if she's still seeing Malfoy. I wonder if she will tell her family for the holidays. Oh, god, I hope I'm there to see that!* She heard a pop next to her and looked up into the grinning face of George.

"What did you do?" she questioned. That type of grin was never a good thing to see on the face of one George Weasley.

"I don't know what you are talking about, and I am insulted that you would even assume that I would do anything," he said with a shocked expression, holding his hand dramatically over his heart. She sat up and gave him a sharp stare, one of the many things she had picked up from Severus.

Fred sat down behind her on the bed and patted her on the head. "Oh, Hermione, sweet, sweet Hermione."

"Don't even think about it, George Weasley!"

"Don't think about what?"

"Testing something on me or pinning something on me. No one would believe that I would do anything you would try and pin on me, so just give up." At that moment Ron came running into the room, his cheeks flushed and his hair dyed black.

"What... did... you... do?" he demanded. Hermione looked back at George, and he had his finger pointing towards her, an innocent expression covering his face.

"Oh, yeah, right, like anyone's going to believe that," Ron and Hermione said at the same time.

"Well, look on the bright side, you aren't bright anymore! Ooooooh, wait, I have another one: at least no one will know you are a Weasley anymore. It always drives you insane when people just know you are a Weasley." He slapped his knee at his own jokes.

"George, just give it up. It's not funny. Now, how do we fix this? And how did you get it like that without him knowing?"

"Dying potions in candies. You want to be a blonde?" He held out the box of seemingly unsuspecting chocolates, and she shook her head in the negative.

"I'm good, thanks. Perfectly happy being a brunette."

"You aren't so much a brunette as you are a mudette. Is that a word? Well, it is now," George said, answering his own question. Hermione answered him by picking up her pillow and hitting him upside the head with it.

"Would you two focus! George, how do I fix this? Tell me now, dammit!"

"You just have to wait; it will fade out in a few hours or so." He emphasized the point with a shrug.

"For now, you can just be mistaken for Harry," Hermione said with a laugh as she fell backwards off the bed. Her back hit the floor and she just laughed harder. Her mouth was opening and closing like a trout caught on a hook, and George saw the perfect opportunity. He removed a chocolate and tossed it into her mouth when it was open. She closed it again, and it was too late when she realized what had happened; her teeth had already punctured the chocolate, and her mouth filled with delicious raspberry filling. Her laughter stopped and she looked up at him. A bright blonde color seeped from the roots of her hair to the ends of her hair, bleaching out her brunette color and morphing her into a totally different person with just the change of her hair color.

Her eyes smoked at him, almost breathing fire if they could. George saw the snarl slowly forming on her face and disappeared with a whimper and a pop. She looked to Ron and the two victims nodded their agreement. They would get him back, majorly.

*

She had told Severus to pick her up at nine, half hoping that no one would be awake and half hoping that they would. But after the incident with the hair, which apparently didn't disappear after a few hours like he'd said, she was hoping everyone would be asleep. His reaction was not something she was looking forward to. Her new hair color was something entirely too similar to the Malfoy brand of blond, and she feared it might evoke some bad memories for him. She was sitting in the living room, quietly awaiting his arrival, when she heard a soft and timid tap at the door. She opened it and there he stood. She stepped out of the house and shut the door behind her.

"Who are... Hermione? What in the nine levels of hell happened to you?"

"I'm staying at the part-time residence of George Weasley. I'll give you three guesses for what happened to me. But you'll only need one!"

"Ahh, I understand. You almost need a force field to be around him."

"This is true. But at least he is laughing again and getting into mischief. And that's what I have to remind myself when he does stuff like this," she stated as she pulled her hair away from her head, cringing at the color.

"So you are going to let him get away with it?" he questioned, a quirk of his eyebrow emphasizing his question.

"Oh, no, I didn't say that. I am getting him back, but I will do it out of love and with the thought in my mind that he is finally enjoying himself." She smiled brightly at him and took his arm, Apparating him away to their destination.

When they landed, he turned to her and said, "You know you can be quite scary."

"I know, Ron tells me that all the time. Now, let's go. We are going to be late." She grabbed his arm and dragged him out of the alley that they had Apparated into and out into a street in the historical area of London.

*

They sat down on a bench outside of the Tower of London, their bodies just barely touching. The heat from both of them formed a warm bubble around them, keeping them warm and toasty on the chilly winter day. She rested both of her hands at her side, clutching the wooden bench with all her might. She was just short enough that her feet didn't touch the ground, and she swung her feet back and forth like a child on a swing set.

The day had gone well. He had been shocked when she had led him to their first destination, Parliament. Then they had moved onto Big Ben and the London Bridge, spending hours just walking around London and enjoying the surroundings, not worrying about students, papers, or anything else stressful. They had just left the Tower of London, and he hadn't said a word to her. She was starting to get worried.

"I'm sorry," she apologized. She continued to stare at her swinging feet, watching them tick like a pendulum. He turned his head and looked at her, an astonished look on his face.

"What are you apologizing for?" he questioned.

"Well, you've been silent for the last half hour or so; obviously I did something so I am apologizing for it." She looked up at him for a split second and then went back to studying her feet.

"I have been silent because I have been pondering why you would take me to all these places."

"I thought of the idea, since we would both be near London, and then a normally credible source told me that you had always wanted to see all the historical sights of London, so I planned this. I am so sorry. Let's just pretend this day never happened." She heaved a heavy sigh and hung her head.

"No, I enjoyed it very much. Don't second-guess yourself. It has simply brought up difficult things."

"Like?"

"My childhood."

"Oh. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to dredge up such hard memories for you; I was trying to be considerate."

"Stop apologizing, damn it!" he exclaimed, startling her. She turned and looked at him. He was staring straight ahead, not meeting her eyes. "I'm sorry. I did not mean to raise my voice."

"It's alright, Severus. I understand. You know you can talk to me about it. That's what I'm here for." She placed her hand on his knee, a gesture of comfort. His long, pale fingers covered her small ones. He turned his head and looked at her, standing up and pulling her with him. They began to walk down the street, her hand still clutched into his, the lifeline that connected the two of them.

"Where to next?" he questioned without even looking at her, simply holding her hand and walking.

"Where else do you want to go?"

"When I was growing up, I had an aunt on my father's side. She was kind to me till my father yelled at her, and then she stopped coming to visit. But one time she brought me a book, and it became my favorite book. I could imagine it happening to me. I would lie awake at night blocking the sounds of my father beating my mother with thoughts of flying away to a magical land full of adventure and a family that would love me for me. Those dreams eventually disappeared, replaced with yelling and a verbal torture that not even Voldemort could match. But for those few years I had that hope, the hope of escape, of freedom, of love, of friendship and of safety."

"What book was it?"

"Peter Pan."

Christmas

Chapter 15 of 19

A mystery admirer begins a correspondence with Hermione. When she learns who it is, they develop a friendship, which morphs into something more than that.

She woke up the morning of Christmas with a heavy heart. She lay in bed gazing at the ceiling, pondering the multitude of tragic possibilities that could happen. Her parents, the Weasleys, and she had asked Severus to join them at the end of their London date. She could just see everything falling to pieces before her very eyes. And if Ginny brought Draco, lord save them all. This dinner was going to be a disaster.

Loud thuds echoed above her head and she knew that Ron was awake. He was running around his room for some reason, probably searching for the t-shirt that he was already wearing. She smiled at the image of familiarity.

The pipes rattled and water began running, flowing to the shower that was most likely occupied by Ginny, a veteran of living with six brothers, she knew to get in there early or she would never get to use the bathroom. A low singing voice began to fill halls, and her assumption was proved right.

Screams of delight were ringing throughout the house as the grandchildren made their way to the Christmas tree, eager to see what the mysterious Santa Claus had brought them overnight.

The clanging of pots and pans noted Molly's normal presence in the kitchen, beginning the largest meal of the year. The backdoor slamming shut mixed with clanging, and Arthur was probably making his way out back to fix up the yard.

She heaved a sigh and shoved the covers down the bed, climbing out and stretching as she stood up. Her eyes glanced out the window, and she noticed the falling snow. A perfect Christmas day. Fresh snow, friends, and family, she couldn't ask for anything else. A smile crept across her face. Okay, maybe she could ask for one more thing.

When she had dressed, she made her way downstairs. As she passed the living room, Victoire and Teddy pounced on her. The children were so eager for Christmas that they couldn't stand still for a second. They danced around her in circles, asking her what she wanted for Christmas and what she had gotten them for presents. She smiled at them and bent down to their level, pulling them together in front of her.

"First of all, Merry Christmas to you too. Second of all, I will be perfectly happy with whatever anyone got me for a present. Third of all, I am not telling you what you got because that would ruin the surprise. You will simply have to wait." Her statement was met with twin groans, and then they were off again, running around the house, screaming Christmas carols at the tops of their lungs. She shook her head at their antics and made her way into the kitchen. Molly was bustling about in her usual busy fashion.

"Molly, do you need any help?"

"Oh, dear, of course not. Sit down. Would you like a cuppa?"

"Yes, please. Thank you. Oh, and Happy Christmas!" she said as she gave Molly a hug and was enveloped in loving arms.

"Happy Christmas, dear. And may it be a happy one in deed."

"It will be. Have no fears." Hermione sat down at the kitchen table, holding the mug in her hands, the heat seeping through her skin and warming both inside and out. She sat there simply watching Molly move around the kitchen with precision and perfect movements. Nothing was forgotten and she never misstepped once. It was as if she were on a track that was moving her around. The sounds of the rest of the Weasleys moving about upstairs filled the kitchen, the room that took the brunt of the noise.

Hermione looked down at her watch and drank the rest of her tea quickly, placing the cup in the sink when she was done. She kissed Molly on the cheek.

"I have to go get my parents. We should be back soon. Don't start without us. Oh, and Molly," she said, wringing her hands in an un-Hermione-like nervous fashion. Molly glanced sideways at her from the stove and stopped stirring the pot that she was working over.

"What is it, dear?"

"I invited someone else to join us. I figured it would be okay since you are always saying the more the merrier, but I didn't want to completely spring him on you. So I thought I would let you know beforehand."

"That is perfectly all right. The more the merrier is certainly right. Do I know this man?" she questioned, searching for a sign of anything on the younger girl's face.

"Yes. It's Severus. He has no one to spend today with. I didn't want him to be alone. And I knew you wouldn't either."

"Well, as always, you are right again. I don't want that dear man to be alone on Christmas, and he is most welcome here anytime he wishes to visit. Now, run along and collect your parents. I assume that Severus will be finding his own way here. Make sure you are bundled up; it is snowing out. You don't want to catch a cold."

Hermione grabbed her coat and scarf and made her way into the backyard, Apparating away to her parents' home.

She landed on the street in front of the tiny cottage that her parents had purchased when they had returned from Australia. It sat on the edge of a forest area, so it was relatively secluded and safe for her to pop in whenever she wanted to.

She looked at the cottage, and a small frown covered her face. It wasn't her home. They had sold her childhood home and bought this. She knew they had just wanted a change of scenery, but a small giggling part of her felt that it was their way of trying to distance themselves from her.

Her feet pulled her forward, moving up the path towards the small little home. Lights shone through the windows, and she knew they were awake. Lifting her hand, she knocked on the wooden door and waited for them to answer the door.

A muffled voice said something and the shuffling of feet preceded the opening of the door. Her mother's smiling face looked up at her and her father was standing in the background, a similar smile on his face.

"Hermione, dear. We have missed you so. You never come see us anymore," she said as she pulled her slightly shocked daughter into the house. "I mean we know you are busy with work, but can't you make anytime to come and visit us?" She gave her daughter a big hug, passing her onto her father. He gave her a hug and a kiss on the forehead, then held her at arms' length, taking a look at her.

"You look good, Frizz," he said, using his pet name for her.

"Dad," she groaned in embarrassment. "Don't call me that. And what in the world is going on? Why are you two being so congenial and loving? What happened? What's wrong?" she questioned, terrified that something was wrong. Her parents hadn't been like this since before she had erased their memories.

"Nothing is wrong, dear. We, well, we need to talk. Come, sit down." Her mother moved to the couch and patted the spot next to her. Hermione made her way cautiously over to the couch and sat down.

"Okay, see the thing is... we... you know we love you very much, right?" Hermione didn't respond.

"Right?" Her mother asked a little bit more persistent. Hermione gave a weak nod.

"See, that right there. Your inability to see that we still love you. We never stopped loving you. We never will stop loving you. Yes, we were upset that you erased our memories without consulting us first. Yes, we were upset, but we got over it. You are the one who has been hanging onto it. You have been clutching the guilt you felt over doing something that you knew was wrong but that you knew you had to do. And while we were upset, we understand your motives and why you had to do it. Now, you need to let go of the guilt that you feel. You have nothing to feel guilty over." Anne grabbed her daughter by the shoulders and squeezed her. "There is nothing. Let it go. Release it. We have, and you should too. It will help you, I promise."

Hermione looked into her mother's familiar brown eyes. All she saw was love and sincerity. They really did forgive her, then why did it seem as if they were still mad at her? Was it really all in her mind? Just a guilty conscience? It would make sense. She looked at her father, sitting on the coffee table next to her. He reached out his hand and brushed it down her head, ruffling her hair like he always had when she was growing up.

"We love you, Frizz. Never doubt that. If nothing else in this world is for sure, our love for you is a one hundred percent sure thing, and you can take that to the bank."

"Oh, Dad," she groaned at his cliché statement.

"Your father is right, sweetheart. We do love you, no matter what." Hermione looked at both her parents, the love they had for her written across their faces. She was surprised that she had missed it for the past several years. It seemed so obvious, but guilt could do that to a person. She gave her Mom a tight hug, releasing her guilt with that simple gesture of love. Then she hugged her Dad, repeating the release and feeling good about her relationship with her parents, finally, for the first time since the Australia incident.

"Now, we better get back to The Burrow before Molly flips a gasket over us not being there," Anne said as she stood up and moved to grab her coat.

"Yes, we definitely should. I'm sure the kids have already torn apart their presents, well, the kids and Ron." Her parents chuckled at the added quip at her redheaded best friend. They made their way outside, and she Apparated them back to The Burrow, everyone arriving in one piece, no missing fingers or eyebrows or chunks of hair.

The Backdoor

Chapter 16 of 19

A mystery admirer begins a correspondence with Hermione. When she learns who it is, they develop a friendship, which morphs into something more than that. Written for the HermioneBigBang.

They walked through the backdoor and were greeted with Molly's shouts, children's squeals, and Ron's shouts of "Oi!" Everyone stopped when they saw the Granger

family and rushed to greet them, multiple cries of Happy Christmas passing around the room.

Arthur immediately captured John and dragged him to another room, pestering him about what a printer was and what it did. Anne offered her help to Molly, who leeches onto her companionship and help. Hermione stood in the kitchen watching her family bustle around each other, and she smiled. It didn't get much better than this. Victoire came running up to her. The little girl reached up and tugged on Hermione's jumper. She picked up the squirming child and held her in her arms, at perfect eye level.

"And what are you doing?"

"Hiding from Teddy," she said as she placed her thumb in her mouth.

"And why are you hiding from Teddy?"

"He pulled my pigtails. It hurt." She pouted, pulling one of her curly blonde braids in front of her and holding it against her, protecting it from Teddy's grasping and tugging hands.

"Well, now, that wasn't very nice of him, was it?" Her only answer was a shake of the head resting on her shoulder and the sound of a slurping thumb. "Why don't we go find him and make him apologize?" She carried the child out into the living room where Teddy was playing with his new magical train on the floor. Harry was sitting on the couch watching his godchild; his face spoke of his happiness and content feeling with life. She walked toward the little boy, placing Victoire down next to him.

"Teddy, do you have something to say to Victoire?" Hermione asked gently but firmly.

"Sorry," he mumbled as he played with his train and making his hair change from blue to red.

"Is okay," Victoire said back. "That's a cool twain."

"Thanks." Hermione smiled as she stood up and moved over towards Harry, sitting down next to him on the couch.

"Hey, Harry. How you doing?"

"Pretty good. Happy Christmas, Mione. How are you doing?"

"Good. Happy Christmas to you too. How's the Ministry? You miss me being there?"

"Everyday," he said with a grin.

"Oh, yeah, I'm believing you." She grinned back.

"Any news on the secret admirer?"

"Well, actually yes. It's..." Her statement was interrupted by a knock at the door. Ginny went flying through the living room, running towards the door screaming, "I'll get it."

"What was that about?" Harry asked.

"I have no idea. But I have a hunch." They could hear voices in the hall, and then Ginny came back into the living room on the arm of Draco Malfoy. "And my hunch is proved correct," Hermione murmured.

"Malfoy," Hermione said with a courteous nod of acknowledgement. "Happy Christmas."

"Happy Christmas, Granger."

"Malfoy, what are you doing here?" Harry asked.

"If you must know Potter, Ginny invited me," he said as he took her hand in his and gave it a gentle kiss.

"Ginny?" Harry looked at her with that unspoken question in his eyes.

"Yes, Harry, I invited him. We are seeing each other," she admitted hesitantly. "And I want everyone to be nice to him," she said with a raised voice. "That includes you lot hiding behind the kitchen door." At her statement, Molly, Bill, Charlie, George, Fleur, and Anne came piling through the doorway.

"Well, dear. This is certainly unexpected," Molly said as she walked toward her only daughter. She made a step toward Draco and stood face to face with him. Her eyes stared into his, searching for something that would soothe her. She nodded her head and patted him on the shoulder.

"I can tell you regret most of your life. It shows in your eyes. You are welcome to join us for dinner; we would love to have you," she said with a kind smile.

"Thank you, Mrs. Weasley."

"You are welcome." The couple walked further into the room and sat down on the couch next to Hermione.

"There now, that wasn't so bad, was it?" Hermione whispered.

"No, it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be," Ginny whispered back.

"What in the bloody hell is he doing here?" Ron shouted as he came down the stairs. "Malfoy, get the hell out of my house."

Hermione watched Ginny's face cringe in anger. This was not going to be good.

Before Ginny could stand up and yell at her red-faced brother, Draco had moved like lightning.

"I am here because your sister invited me because we are dating. She is fine with it. Hermione is fine with it. Your mom is fine with it. The rest of your family is relatively fine with it. And while Potter may not be happy about it, you do not see him acting like a five year old who didn't get his ice cream. So why don't you shut up and sit down. Oh and one more thing. This is not your house. This is your parents' house. Act accordingly."

Ron glared at him. His mouth opened, ready to spew a rude comment.

"Malfoy's right, Ron. Your sister is happy. The war is over. He has paid for what he did, and he has apologized. He never did anything bad, other than be a jerk to us. He didn't kill Dumbledore. He couldn't do it. He went through things just as bad if not worse than us by having Voldemort in his home. The war has been over for years. Can we just forget it and get over it? By lingering on it, we are destroying our lives just like Voldemort would have wanted. Please, can we just move on and be happy?" Hermione said.

Ron crossed his arms and stared around the room. His family stared back, waiting for him to make a move. He heaved a sigh and moved into the room, sitting down in the chair next to the tree.

"Good choice, Ronald," Hermione said, a hint of chastisement in her voice. She turned and looked at Ginny who smiled at her and mouthed, "Thank you."

"Is it present time?" Teddy asked. Everyone laughed at the little boy who stood with his train in his hands.

"You already opened your presents, little man," Harry said as he scooped the little boy up and placed him in his lap.

"But nobody else did."

"That is very true, Teddy. Why don't we do that right now," Molly said. "And you know what, Teddy? You can give the presents to people!"

"Really? Really? Really?" Teddy questioned with all the excitement in his little morphing body.

"Yes, really, really, really! Now, why don't you go fetch a present?" She pointed to the Christmas tree. Harry let him down, and he ran to the tree as fast as he could.

"This one's cool!" he shouted.

"Whose is it?" Harry asked.

"It says H-A-R-R-Y. That spells... Harry!" Teddy lifted the box and carried it over to Harry, dropping the heavy box into the savior of the wizarding world's lap. Harry released a loud groan and a silent tear fell down his cheek as he removed the heavy box from his body carefully.

"Thank you, Teddy." Harry unwrapped the gift, removing a thick, leather-bound album. He opened the cover and it read:

"To Harry: May you always know how much you were, are, and will be loved. Hermione."

He looked at her and she smiled. His hands traced over the beautifully written message and then flipped the page. The book was filled with pictures of him, Ron, and Hermione throughout the years, from when they had first met to a couple of months ago. He kept turning and came across pictures of him with the Weasleys, his teachers, and his friends from work. He flipped the next page and there was a blank page. He looked up quizzically at her and she motioned for him to flip the page again. He did and he was met with a picture he had never seen before. It was his mother staring out of the window of the Hogwarts train. Her face was one of peace and happiness. Then she turned and laughed at something. He kept looking, and there were more and more pictures of his mom, pictures of her time at Hogwarts.

"Where did you get these?" he questioned her. Her eyes moved about the room, and her concentration was interrupted by the loud sound of the Floo activating. A tall figure stepped out and dusted the Floo powder and ashes off of his cloak. When he lowered his hood, the room was met with the sight of Severus Snape.

"Oh, come on! This is ridiculous!" Ron shouted as he threw up his hands into the air. Hermione sent a sharp and terrifying glare his way, and he quickly closed his mouth, terrified by the prospect of ending up at the end of her wand.

"No, Mr. Weasley, what is ridiculous is your childish and bigoted behaviour."

Ron shrunk into his chair, those years of being out of school completely gone with a simple sentence. It was like he was back in Potions class.

Severus removed his cloak and moved toward Hermione, standing behind her position on the couch.

"Welcome, Severus! We are so glad you were able to join us. Here, I'll grab you a chair," Molly said as she *accio'd* a chair from the other room. She brought it over and placed it next to Hermione's spot on the couch. He looked at Hermione and gave her a shy smile.

"Hermione, you were going to tell me where you got the pictures from," Harry reminded her.

"Oh, yes. Well, actually I got the pictures of your mother from..." she trailed off, clearly nervous about telling her mystery source.

"I gave them to her, Potter. I had a feeling that they would be of better use to you than they would be to me," Severus said, picking up where Hermione left off. "I have been cleaning out my stores of memories, and I found them. I knew she was putting together a memory book for you, so I figured they would be a nice addition to the book. I apologize if they are not."

"No, thank you, Sna... I mean Severus. It means a lot to me. Thank you very much," Harry said sincerely. Everyone around the room let out a breath of relief. The presents were flowing, Teddy was running back and forth, carrying presents to person after person.

The laughter was shared. Everyone was getting shockingly along. It might have had to do with Ron sitting terrified in the corner, scared of the diabolic duo, Severus and Hermione. She could kill with a stare, he could kill with a sentence, together they were unstoppable.

There were still cracks in the happy façade. Every once in a while Molly would get a far away look on her face when she looked at all the stockings hanging on the wall and noticed Fred's hanging limply, empty of presents. Draco would recall the Christmas from so long ago when his house and family were surrounded by madness and death. Harry would remember all the Christmases at the Dursleys, hiding in the closet with his single sock that was his only present. George missed his twin and all the pranks they could pull on Christmas, pranks that he didn't pull anymore.

Despite the sad lulls in the conversation, they remained upbeat. They celebrated the holiday with cheer and love. There was no way that the day could have been more perfect. They were still healing, still surviving, but no matter what, they were still a family. All of them, even with the two new additions. Times were hard, times were easy, and they got along fine, with love and kindness and support. That's what it was all about. Being happy and being there for each other. Friends and family, cheesily enough, really did make everything better.

A Pinch of Hope

Chapter 17 of 19

A mystery admirer begins a correspondence with Hermione. When she learns who it is, they develop a friendship, which morphs into something more than that. Written for the HermioneBigBang.

After the dinner was over and the plates were in the sink being washed by invisible hands, the refrigerator was filled with leftovers, Hermione's parents were home safely, Draco and Ginny had disappeared to somewhere, the children were in bed, and everyone else was winding down, getting ready for bed. Hermione and Severus remained in the living room, discussing their Christmas and the past Christmases that they had had.

"I got you a present," she said, a slight blush creeping up her face.

"You didn't need to do that," he responded as he watched her reach behind her and pull out a small box that she must have been hiding in her pocket the entire night. She waved her wand and enlarged it, so that it was normal, rectangle size, and handed it to him.

"I know I didn't, but I wanted to. So take it and open it and don't complain," she said with a grin as she watched him open it carefully. He peeled the wrapping paper back and revealed a leather-bound book. He pulled it out of the rest of the wrapping and looked at the spine to see what it was.

"It's a copy of Peter Pan," he murmured in awe.

"Open it," she whispered. He lifted the cover and read the opening page.

"It's a first edition," he said with reverence in his voice and traced the front page delicately with his finger.

"I saw it when I was out shopping, and I knew I had to buy it for you. I hope you like it." He leaned over and kissed her gently, answering her question not with words but with actions.

"I don't just like it, Hermione. I love it. I couldn't have asked for a more perfect gift. Thank you," he said as he placed his palm against her cheek and traced the lines of her face with his thumb. "I got you a present as well, but I must confess that in my nervousness in coming here, I left it at my house. I can go and retrieve it if you would like."

"That won't be necessary, I can go with you, if you don't mind of course," she said, her face a question mark.

"Of course I don't mind," he said.

"Then let me go grab my bag and let Molly know I'll be out; then we can go." She left him sitting in the living room by himself. He sat there looking about the ramshackle but homey room. His perusal was interrupted by the sound of the kitchen door creaking as it was opened. He looked back and met the familiar eyes of Harry Potter with a cup of water in one hand and a newspaper in the other.

"Potter," he said with a nod of recognition.

"Severus, I wanted to thank you. For my present, for everything. I never really got the chance to thank you for everything that you did for all those years. I also wanted to apologize for how I treated you. I was unfair and judgmental, and I apologize. My only excuse is youthful stupidity. Please forgive me," he said, his eyes pleading for forgiveness.

"Only if you will allow me the same courtesy, Pott... Harry. I treated you with disdain that you did not deserve. I assumed that because you looked so much like your father that you would be just like him; obviously, I was wrong in that regard. You may look like him, but the heart that beats inside you is your mother's through and through."

"Thank you, Severus. One last thing." Harry paused as Severus nodded for him to continue. "Take care of her." He nodded toward the stairs that Hermione had run up not too long ago. "She is one of the most important people in my life, and I would hate to see her hurt, especially by someone that I have so much newly attained respect for." Severus nodded his understanding, and Harry tucked the newspaper under his arm and used that empty hand to shake hands with Severus, an offering of peace and forgiveness in a single handshake. He retreated up the stairs, and Severus returned to his perusal of the worn room.

"What did Harry want?" a quiet voice asked from behind him. He turned to see Hermione, who had snuck up on him, her shoes making no noise on the wood floors.

"Just to bury old ghosts," he said quietly. She smiled at him and moved next to him, grabbing his hand and pulling him up to stand next to her. He led the way outside and Apparated them to his house.

She smiled when she saw the little house. It suited him perfectly. The pure white of the house was matched by the deep black that the shutters had been painted. The gardens looked like they were kept but not obsessed over. It was a quaint place, yes, that was the word she was searching for, quaint.

"This is very quaint, Severus."

"Thank you, Hermione. I just recently purchased it. I sold my childhood house a while ago, and until recently didn't see the purpose of buying another, but I saw this one day and thought it would be nice to have a place that I could escape to every once in a while." He led her inside the small home, and she smiled when she saw the walls lined with shelves filled with books. He walked over and placed his newly acquired copy of Peter Pan on a shelf that housed only a select few books; they were severely old, their spines falling apart and the leather quite worn.

"Would you like anything to drink?" he asked.

"No, thank you, I'm fine." She smiled at his thoughtfulness. She sat down on the only furniture in what she guessed was his living room, a well-used couch.

He sat down next to her slightly awkwardly as if he couldn't be close to her. She heaved a sigh of annoyance; she had been so sure that they had finally gotten past this, but apparently she was wrong.

"Severus..." she started, turning to face him and finding her nose inches from his. She sucked in a deep breath and was preparing to chastise him for his ridiculousness when he bent over and captured her lips. A fire burned through her, filling her veins and flowing throughout her body. She brought her hand up and cupped his cheek, kissing him back with vigor. His hands dropped down and clutched her hips, squeezing her gently, enjoying the feeling of her beneath his hands.

She wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling him closer to her, longing to have his skin on her skin. She couldn't get close enough to him. She threw her leg over his hip, straddling him on the couch. He gave her a shocked expression when she pushed him down into the couch and pressed her body into his. Her tongue delved into his mouth, taking what she wanted and what he was willing to give. Her eyes closed, senses on overload, she didn't see him watching her. With one swift movement, he flipped her over, laid her flat on the seat of the couch, and flattened himself to her body.

His hands traced her body, defining her delicious curves. He slowly unbuttoned her sweater, distracting her with kisses that stole her breath. The sweater fell to her sides, exposing the deep green bra that she wore beneath it.

"Being festive?" he questioned with a quirk of that familiar eyebrow.

"Yes," she returned with a smile.

"This wasn't for me?" he pulled the strap of the bra away from her skin, letting it snap back causing her to gasp at the sting. "You didn't wear them thinking you were going to 'get lucky'?"

She giggled at his use of the popular phrase. "Maybe, but mostly being festive. Besides, is it wrong to have a pinch of hope?" she questioned, looking up at him.

"No, it is never wrong to have a pinch of hope," he whispered as he dipped his head back down to explore her luscious mouth.

A Million Things

Chapter 18 of 19

A mystery admirer begins a correspondence with Hermione. When she learns who it is, they develop a friendship, which morphs into something more than that. Written for the HermioneBigBang.

She knew that magic existed. That was one thing of the millions that she knew that she was positive of. Now, she was even more certain that it existed. There was no other way to explain what was happening between them. His mouth was igniting fire, his touch electrifying her, and his whispered words found something buried deep inside of her. She had never felt this way ever, that was for sure, and she was certain it was magic. Not that he was using magic on her, but that what they had between them was truly and certainly magical, a cheesy but true statement.

He had lifted her at some point, carrying her up the stairs and into what she could only assume was his bedroom. She was so lost in his kisses that she barely noticed the passing walls or the decorations of his room. Nothing registered except the warmth of his mouth and heat of his touch. She felt something soft against her body and opened her eyes to see him pulling back from laying her on his bed.

He methodically unbuttoned his coat, tossing it onto a chair, then continued with the shirt underneath that too found itself on the chair. His shoes were next, followed by his pants, and sooner than she knew he was on top of her. His weight was delicious, and she didn't want him to ever move. But he did; he moved down her body to her pleasure center, stroking her in a way that she had never felt before. His fingers traced her aroused flesh, and she gripped the sheets of the bed with her fingers, preparing for his assault. Nothing happened. She opened her eyes and looked down her body at him; he was staring at her face, watching her reactions. Right when their eyes met, he dipped his head and took a long swipe of her with his tongue, keeping eye contact with her the entire time.

His confidence and daring drove her wild. Her previous lovers had always shied away from this, only doing it because of obligation and only with their eyes closed. Severus seemed to enjoy it, enjoy her and enjoy her reaction to his ministrations. His fingers danced over her outer lips, and her mind snapped back to him, her attention focused entirely on those skilled fingers that had taught so many, brewed numerous potions and helped stop the most evil wizard of all time. Her body began to tremble. He was entirely too good at what he was doing, especially for a man as reserved as Severus. He inserted his middle finger into her pussy and rubbed her clit with his thumb, the synchronized actions sending her over the edge and making her quiver on the bed as the roar of orgasm rushed through her body. When she came back to earth, his mouth was on her, and he was lapping at her juices, reveling in her flavor.

He looked up at her and climbed up her body. She felt like his prey, and she was. His lips slammed onto hers, and she could taste a hint of herself, something that normally disgusted her, but mixed with Severus' flavor, it was strangely erotic. Everything about this mysterious man was erotic. He seemed to be oozing sex, although she had no idea where it came from. Not a few months ago, this had been the same man who had kissed her on the forehead for fear of being too forward. And now, he was casting a contraceptive charm on her and pressing her legs apart, preparing to fill her.

He slid into her silky depths, releasing a deep-seated sigh of contentment and pleasure. He filled her completely. She had never felt anything like him before. He seemed to surround her in every possible way. There was no manner in which to escape, not that she wanted to.

He pulled out, thrusting back in with enough force that she felt it. His motions rocked her world and her body. One hand was clutching the sheets beneath her quaking body, the other was gripping his arse, pulling him forward and into her. The sensation was delicious; there was no other word to describe it.

His thrusting increased, and her body began to burn, the fire licking her skin until she burst in another incredible orgasm. He could tell she had come, could feel her clasp around him, and the tight grip of her pussy sent him over the edge. He collapsed on top of her, emptying himself inside her as he nibbled on her neck.

He rolled to the side, pulling her with him, and she snuggled into his body. He brushed the hair back from her face and saw that her eyes were closed and a contented smile graced her lips. They soon fell into a deep-sated sleep.

*

She felt heat on her cheek. A warmth that caressed her and felt familiar. Her eyes squinted open with sleep, and she saw the sun shining through the window right above her head. The realization that she didn't have a window right above her bed hit her right before she recalled last night. She turned over to find the sleeping figure of Severus Snape. He looked relaxed and peaceful in his sleep, a Severus she knew well, but that many did not know and could not possibly understand.

His face squinted into a scowl, and she knew he was waking up. His eyes opened slowly, and he looked up at her.

"Is there a reason you are staring at me?"

"Yup, there's nothing better to do," she said calmly with a bit of cheer in her voice.

"Well, ha ha ha." Sarcasm dripped from each ha.

"Severus Snape. You are not a morning person."

"Ten points to Gryffindor," he growled, pulling the covers back over his head.

"Now, Severus, you know that no longer works. I'm not your student, and you can't punish me anymore."

"Care to try?" he asked, his voice muffled from under the covers. She blushed at his insinuation. The blush was quickly removed by a look of daring that would have scared even Severus if he had seen it crossing her face. She pulled the covers up over her head and joined him beneath the soft fabric. His eyes were closed once again, but his attempt to sleep more was failing.

"Is this why you were always such a grouch in class? Because you couldn't get enough sleep?"

"I was kept up late spending time with the Dark Lord or spying for Albus. Then, I would come back to Hogwarts, collapse into bed and have to get up two hours later to teach a class of students who loathed me and didn't listen. There were many reasons why I was a grouch as you put it, but yes, that was one of them."

"Well, let's see if we can make you more of a morning person," she said sweetly. Her hand danced down his chest and grasped him in her hand. It was actually the first time she had held him; he felt like silky steel. Her hand smoothed over his skin, and his breathing faltered as he woke up fully, opening his eyes and staring at the daring witch beneath the covers.

"Go ahead, I'm waiting," he stated with calm stoicism. But she could see through his façade; his eyes were filled with passion, and she could tell he longed to pounce on her. Her thumb traced the tip, and they were lost in each other again, this time beneath the covers.

Where have you been?

Chapter 19 of 19

A mystery admirer begins a correspondence with Hermione. When she learns who it is, they develop a friendship, which morphs into something more than that. Written for the HermioneBigBang.

She opened the door slowly, hoping to avoid all forms of confrontation. She had merely come back to retrieve her things and return to Severus, who was still waiting in bed, probably asleep again. She was hoping to be able to pretend that she had not spent the night out, but all hope was lost as she stepped into the living room and was confronted with the concerned face of Molly Weasley.

"Where have you been?" she demanded kindly.

"I was out getting groceries," Hermione stated confidently, hoping that Molly bought her lie, but it would seem the odds were against her.

"Nice try, Hermione."

"Fine, I was at Severus', and I am picking up my things and heading there again after that. Is that all right with you?" Hermione asked, pouring on the anger a bit too much.

"Yes, that is perfectly all right. I was just worried about you, is all," Molly grumbled, a little put out that Hermione had snapped at her.

"I'm sorry, Molly. I didn't mean to snap, but I am old enough to take care of myself. I don't need someone watching over me every second of every day, though I do thank you for worrying about me." She pulled the older woman to her for a hug, then hurried upstairs to grab her belongings.

As she passed Molly on the way out, she paused. "Thank you, Molly. For everything. Thank you," she whispered kindly, giving the woman a soft smile.

"You're welcome, deary. Now go have fun with that man of yours, and don't forget the contraceptive charm! I can show you how to use it if you don't know how," Molly called after the running figure of Hermione Granger, who had a blush that would rival any Weasley's covering her face. She stopped running and Apparated away.

Molly watched from the house, safely shutting the door when she was out of sight.

"That was cruel, Mum. Funny, but cruel," Ron said from behind her, moving to her side and pulling his mother to him for a big hug.

"Well, better safe than sorry," she mumbled as she turned and went back to cleaning her already spotless home.

*

To say that Severus Snape had changed completely would be ridiculous, and no one would believe it, as they shouldn't. Severus would always be sarcastic and rude; it was a part of his personality. But to think that being with Hermione hadn't softened him was ridiculous as well.

When they looked back at their relationship, they would argue about many things, but the one thing that they could remember and agree upon was the turning point in their relationship, the point at which they had fallen for each other. It wasn't anything complex or wildly romantic. There were no roses, no doves and no screaming declarations of love. The moment came when she went back to his place that morning the day after Christmas.

Hermione was carrying her suitcase by her side as she turned the knob in her hand. He had told her that he would change the wards to allow for her to enter, something she did not take lightly. She walked into his house quietly, not sure if he had fallen back asleep or not. She tiptoed through the house, heading for the stairs to put her suitcase away. When she passed the kitchen, she saw him sitting at the kitchen table; his back was towards her.

She walked up behind him to tap him on the shoulder and quickly found herself flipped over and lying on the table, a wand pointing at her chin. His face leaned over her, and his eyes were as black as the darkest heart. Her suitcase slipped from her hand as she realized that she should have announced herself when she saw him; he obviously had not heard her come in.

"Sorry, Severus. I didn't mean to give you a fright."

His wand moved an inch and his face dropped closer, their noses only a breath apart. He removed his wand and gave her a light kiss on the lips.

"Just be careful next time," he warned, brushing his nose against her cheek to move a strand of hair from her face. She heard a whisper that sounded like "I missed you." But she couldn't be sure she wasn't hearing things.

"Since you are in this position, we might as well make use of it," he said, quirked an eyebrow as he removed his wand again and vanished their clothes.

The kitchen table was never the same again, and neither were they.