

# The Antidote

*by EchoLynn*

Voldemort is dead. As others around her comb through the bodies and help the wounded, Hermione Granger thinks of only one wizard. A wizard who gave everything and died without anything to show for it, but the lives of those who survived because of him. A wizard who deserved a second chance; something Hermione would go to great lengths to make that happen.

## Death of a War Hero

*Chapter 1 of 11*

Voldemort is dead. As others around her comb through the bodies and help the wounded, Hermione Granger thinks of only one wizard. A wizard who gave everything and died without anything to show for it, but the lives of those who survived because of him. A wizard who deserved a second chance; something Hermione would go to great lengths to make that happen.

Hermione stood motionless with a look of numbing distress as others around her moved in a blur. The smoke that hovered over the ground made things difficult while people searched the bodies strewn across the grass.

Voldemort was dead.

The carnage he left behind seemed to loom over her mind, preventing her from stirring from the shock of her surroundings. Mad-Eye, Dobby, Hedwig, Remus, Tonks, and Fred were among many of their friends and fellow Order members who were gone, but Hermione could only think of one person...a man who had sacrificed his life for the wizarding world, who had been hated and reviled by so many yet had never been given a chance to be happy.

*Severus Snape is dead; he will never get his chance.*

As these sorrowful thoughts swirled around in Hermione's head, her feet started to move without instruction. It was as if her soul was forcing her to go to him.

*I need to see him one last time,* she thought.

As she carefully stepped over the bodies of allies and enemies alike, she ignored the few who noticed her and called out to see if she was okay. *Of course I'm not okay!* she thought as she kept walking towards the Whomping Willow. It seemed only moments before she reached the entrance to the Shrieking Shack, where she paused briefly before carefully opening the trapdoor and stepping into the room. A sob bubbled up from deep inside of her as she gazed at the broken body drenched in blood; his eyes were open and staring at nothing. His body didn't move. He was gone.

Not caring that the floor surrounding him was covered in blood, Hermione knelt down next to his body and hesitantly reached her hand out to his head. With the utmost care she smoothed the greasy hair away from his face. With the gentlest touch she closed his eyelids, the coldness of his skin wrenching painful sobs out of her throat. *Why did you have to die? Why did you not get a chance for even a few seconds of happiness?* she wondered over and over.

She cried until finally her emotions were washed out. Gathering her strength about her, she pulled her wand out of her sleeve and proceeded to siphon the blood off

Severus. When his clothes looked cleaner, she levitated him for a few moments while she Vanished the large puddle and siphoned the blood off his back. Then she lowered him to the ground and cast a charm to repair the few rips in his robes around his collar, concealing most of the mortal wound from view.

When she had finished, she just sat there staring at her professor, wondering what could have been if he had lived, whether life would have been kinder to him. Suddenly an all-consuming idea came to her. She reached out to his neck and unbuttoned several of the countless buttons on his robes, revealing the whole of his fatal wound. She waved her wand over a broken picture frame on the floor near her, Transfiguring it into a glass phial. With a determination she hadn't known she possessed, she pressed the edge of the phial against his neck below the wound, with her other hand she pressed down on the skin and watched as a trickle of blood and venom started to flow slowly into the phial. When the wound ceased to ooze, she carefully stoppered the phial and re-buttoned his collar. With a last lingering touch to his icy cheek, Hermione Granger left the broken body of Severus Snape.

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Hermione breathed through her mouth to avoid the stench of death as she made her way towards the massive entrance to Hogwarts. People were still buzzing around her everywhere, cataloguing the dead and preparing them for disposal either on a massive pyre or by ceremonial burial, depending on who the deceased was.

As she made her way into the main entrance, she noticed Harry and Ron talking quietly with Arthur Weasley. All three of them bore looks of grief as they gestured to the body that was wrapped lovingly in a white robe at their feet. From the profile she glimpsed beneath the oversized hood, she knew it was the body of Fred Weasley.

Hermione held back the heart-wrenching cry that threatened to escape when she finally noticed George's pale face looking at the body as well. Swallowing her grief, she turned towards the hall that led to the Headmaster's office and slipped away from the scene without being noticed by those closest to her. When she reached the gargoyle she stared for a moment as she wondered what Severus' password could have been. Taking an educated guess, she asked quietly, "Albus Percival Wolfric Brian Dumbledore?"

The gargoyle looked at her strangely for a moment and then nodded and stepped aside, the wall opening to her. She thanked the gargoyle and stepped forward onto the rising stairway. When Hermione reached the top, the stairs stopped moving; she stared at the door for a moment, hesitant to go in. *Severus was the last person in this room*, she thought sadly, not bothering to wipe away the few tears that spilled over her cheeks at that thought. She opened the door and stepped inside, closing it firmly behind her and locking it with a flick of her wand.

The room was quite different from the last time she had stepped foot inside it. Long gone were the many mysterious silvery instruments that Dumbledore had placed around the office. The cheery, haphazard look was gone as well, replaced with an organized collection of shelves and a profuse quantity of books. Green velvet curtains were hung over the windows and large black candelabras provided an eerie light to the whole room. It was exactly the type of look Severus would create.

"Hem," came a sound from the right wall, startling Hermione out of her reverie. She stepped closer to the large painting and gazed sadly at its occupant, who smiled at her. His eyes normally showed a distinct twinkle, but for the moment it was sadly missing. "Hermione Granger. To what do we owe the pleasure of your visit? We expected that Professor McGonagall or someone from the Ministry would have graced this chamber by now."

Hermione conjured a chair and sat down before Dumbledore's portrait. "I take it you know there was finally a battle?" she asked quietly. When Dumbledore just nodded, Hermione continued. "You will be happy to know that we were victorious. But it came at a high cost to us... all of us."

"Who have we lost, dear girl?" Dumbledore asked her gently.

"Headmaster Severus Snape, Fred Weasley, Nymphadora Tonks, and Remus Lupin, of those closest to us... and there were many others," Hermione said, a sob escaping her as she said the names aloud.

As Hermione cried, her face in her hands, the portraits of past Hogwarts Headmasters and Headmistresses exclaimed amongst themselves over her news. It was several minutes before Dumbledore could hush them all and try to calm Hermione.

She sniffled and wiped the backs of her hands across her eyes. "Sorry, Professor," she said apologetically. "It's just hard losing so many, and Professor Snape is the worst of all. He did so much for all of us, even though everyone hated him. He never had his chance to live. He should be alive. He deserved a chance!" she said vehemently, nearly shouting the last words.

"Yes, he did. Alas, fate had a different journey for us all..." Dumbledore observed. The other headmasters murmured and nodded in agreement. Hermione sat there in silence for a moment, only brought back to the present by a polite clearing of the throat. "Hem. Miss Granger, I hate to interrupt your thoughts at such a moment, but I'm sure an official will be here quite soon; not to mention your friends will most likely need your assistance at such a time...."

Hermione collected herself and said, "Sir, I would like to formally volunteer to go through... through Headmaster Snape's possessions. I realize that a member of the Hogwarts staff would usually be delegated for such a task, but I feel very strongly about doing it myself. I feel I owe it to him, in a way...to make sure his possessions are taken care of properly."

"I will say that having someone who is not a member of Hogwarts' staff or a Ministry official perform this duty is unprecedented," Dumbledore mused, "but if I remember correctly, you had tentatively signed on to our Apprenticeship Program for a Masters in Potions... Therefore, I see no problem with you taking on the duty of clearing out his things. I can't make any promises, as I am no longer an active member of the staff, but you have my word that I will most earnestly recommend you," he said easily.

"Thank you, sir, I truly appreciate it. I guess I'll be going...like you said, my friends need me."

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Having just finished dressing for the mass funeral that would take place in one hour, Hermione appraised herself in the mirror. It had been two whole days since the end of the war, and after much discussion, it had been decided that only one funeral would be held, for the majority of those who had died; a handful of families had decided to bury their loved ones elsewhere and more privately. It was odd to think about, since the funeral would almost resemble a graduation ceremony; except the immediate family members of each of the deceased would step up to accept an Order of Merlin, First Class, on behalf of their loved one, then proceed with a Ministry official to their assigned plot.

Hermione was asked by the Weasleys to be with them when they were called to bury Fred, but asking their forgiveness, she had declined. They accepted her apology, although they did ask why she would sign her name to the list as family to Severus Snape. Hermione explained that she didn't feel it was right that he be buried without anyone other than the Grave Wizard at his side. The Weasleys, still torn up over their Fred's death, didn't question her again.

The graves themselves would be situated on the grounds of Hogwarts castle between the Owlery and the west wing of the castle. A lavish wall and cemetery entrance had been built within a mere twenty-seven hours after the Ministry had given approval. A temporary podium and hundreds of chairs had been situated just outside the new entrance. Sprays of flowers were strategically placed in honor of the deceased, each of them containing hundreds of ivory roses and lilies.

Pulling herself out of her reverie, Hermione walked to her dresser and pocketed her wand. With her head held high, she left her dorm room and proceeded downstairs to await the beginning of the service.

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Ron sat one row behind Hermione, having given her the cold shoulder after an argument they'd had just minutes before the Minister of Magic, Kingsley Shacklebolt, had called the service to order. Hermione had known Ron would not quite understand her decision to stand for Professor Snape as he was buried, but she had honestly not expected him to accuse her of indecency for "skipping out on his brother's burial to attend to the greasy dungeon bat." Harry had walked away from Ron to escort Andromeda Tonks and Little Teddy to their seats.

So without looking back, Hermione stood and walked forward when Snape's name was called. When she reached Kingsley, she couldn't help but hug him after he presented her with Professor Severus Snape's Order of Merlin, First Class. An elderly wizard by the name of Keneford escorted her through the entrance to the cemetery.

They passed row after row and turned right when they reached the last one. Severus' grave was all the way back in the corner. Hermione held back her tears at the thought of him being shoved off in a corner by himself. Mr. Keneford asked her to pull out her wand and point it at her late professor's body whenever she was ready. Hermione nodded and was barely able to mutter a simple, "I need a few moments, please." Mr. Keneford stepped back to give her a moment, and Hermione stared at the body draped in a rich emerald green, the crest of Slytherin House adorning his chest. Below the crest was his name. The wrap itself conformed to his body, being magicked to cover him perfectly.

"I'm so sorry, Professor. All I can say is that I'll do my utmost to give you that second chance," Hermione whispered, placing her hand on his chest. After composing herself and wiping the tears from her face, she signaled for Mr. Keneford to proceed.

"All right, miss. If you would hold out your wand and repeat after me." Hermione held her wand over Severus Snape's body; then she listened closely to Mr. Keneford's words and repeated them.

*"Mortuus Restan."*

A bright white light issued from her wand and encased Severus' body; then it burst into blindingly white flames, causing both onlookers to cover their eyes. When the light finally faded, a white tomb stood before them. It was simple and smooth. Across the area where Severus' chest was, the Slytherin crest and his name appeared carved into the white marble, along with his age and the date of his death.

Mr. Keneford excused himself to go back and help another family. Hermione remained at the tomb; she could hear other families near her and saw the occasional bright light as other victims were buried as well. But her eyes held firmly to the white marble that encased Severus Snape.

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The next morning a meeting was held for all Hogwarts staff, including the Head Boy and Girl and the Prefects. Among the topics for discussion was the idea of sending the students home early. The problem was how to go about the testing for each grade before the new school year started. It was finally decided that the students would come to school two weeks earlier than usual, at which time they would take their tests and then rest for four days before September first. In the meantime, it would be the students' own responsibility to study over the summer, so as to be properly prepared for their exams.

After the meeting, Headmistress Minerva McGonagall asked Hermione to accompany her to her office for a private discussion. Once they were seated, the Headmistress got right to the point.

"I understand you had a talk with Professor Dumbledore the day of the battle, and I have thought it over thoroughly. After consulting with the Ministry, I hereby grant your request to personally take care of... of Professor Snape's possessions. I, as well as the majority of the staff, will be staying at Hogwarts for the entire summer so that we may prepare for the tests and clear up a number of other issues that need resolving before next term. Since there will be staff here at the school, you are welcome to stay as well in order to perform this service for Professor Snape. As to your quarters, you have several choices. You may of course stay in your old dorm, or you can stay in one of the guest rooms that are in the staff quarters tower."

Hermione looked at her hands, then looked up at McGonagall. "Professor, I was wondering if I might stay in Professor Snape's old quarters. I mean, there is a lot to be done, and as I understand it, all of his things have been relocated to his old rooms. It would be easier, I think, to be near everything, since I have a tendency to stay up all manner of hours when I'm working on something as big as this... job... will be," Hermione said hesitantly. Before Minerva could reply, Hermione added, "Besides, the potions lab is down there. I know that Slughorn has already resigned, and I could be of use there as well. I can restock the classroom and help brew potions for the Hospital Wing, so things will be caught up before next term."

Minerva looked over Hermione's face and smiled gently. "That would be fine with me, Miss Granger. I'm sure Poppy would welcome the help, and it would certainly save me the trouble of taking care of the classroom laboratory myself. I will have enough on my hands filling the position before term begins. Very well. If that is all, I shall see you at dinner. I suggest you visit with Arthur and Molly before they leave. You may use the staff Floo if you need to stop off at home and bring any of your things for the summer. The password to the staff tower is 'Rowena Ravenclaw.' Also, before you go, the password to Severus's old quarters is 'Draught of Living Peace.' Good day, Miss Granger," she finished, and she pulled out a stack of forms that were waiting for her perusal and signature.

Hermione exited by way of the spiraling staircase and headed straight for the Great Hall to inform the Weasleys that she would not be staying at the Burrow for the summer as she and they had planned.

**A/N: Whew. The first chapter of my new Sevmione. I'm excited! Please remember to read and review! \*HUGS\***

## New Accommodations

### *Chapter 2 of 11*

Voldemort is dead. As others around her comb through the bodies and help the wounded, Hermione Granger thinks of only one wizard. A wizard who gave everything and died without anything to show for it, but the lives of those who survived because of him. A wizard who deserved a second chance; something Hermione would go to great lengths to make that happen.

Harry and Ron had, of course, fussed over Hermione and pleaded with her to stay with them for the summer before they went off to start their jobs in the fall. Hermione had insisted she needed the time to think about what she wanted to do, since she'd decided she didn't want to pursue being an Auror. Molly, of course, had protested right along with her, making Hermione promise to come "home" to the Burrow often.

Hermione had accompanied them to the Burrow for just long enough to retrieve her things; then she promptly returned to Hogwarts and headed straight for the Potions classroom. Upon entering the room she paused and looked at all the empty shelves, noting the disheveled look of the room in general. She knew some of the wounded had been cared for down here during the battle. She had figured Slughorn would take some of the supplies when he left, since most teachers brought a lot of their own stock and instruments. *But to clean the place out?* she thought incredulously. She was quite glad Slughorn had left to enjoy his retirement once again. He was a good teacher, but too much of a politician for her tastes.

She pulled out her wand and conjured a quill and a piece of parchment and made an organized list of the things that would need to be stocked before next term. When she was satisfied that the list was complete, she put the parchment on the chalk board with a Sticking Charm so she wouldn't lose it in the chaos of Severus Snape's quarters.

She approached the door that led to his office and said, "Draught of Living Peace." The door glowed green and opened for her. The office itself was in disarray similar to the classroom. Hermione tried to remember what it had looked like before, when Severus Snape had occupied it, but she couldn't. Ignoring the regret she felt for not remembering, she walked forward and opened the door to a hallway that led to the Potions master's quarters.

During the previous year these rooms had still been used by Professor Snape, since Slughorn had demanded nicer quarters, so all around her was the essence that was Severus Snape. After closing the door and waving her wand to light the candles about the room, Hermione stared around her, taking in each and every detail with a reverence that only Severus Snape could inspire.

The room was simple, yet it spoke volumes about the man who had occupied it. The only furniture that graced the room was two plain wooden chairs, a small black and green brocade couch, and a coffee table. Across the room was a vast window covered in heavy green and black velvet drapes. Behind it Hermione imagined there was quite a view of the lake. But it seemed from the stiffness of the material, as she brushed her hand over it, that he had preferred to keep them closed. Moving on to the fireplace, Hermione stared at the single picture frame that sat in the middle of potion bottles of different colors and sizes. It was a small picture of a woman and a little boy. From the shape of the boy's nose and the rough hair that hung over most of his face, Hermione knew at once that it was a picture of Snape and his mother. She picked up the frame and stared at it, wondering what life had been like for him in his youth, before Death Eaters and Voldemort had corrupted it.

She set the frame down and looked through a doorway that led to a small, curving hallway with three doors opening off it. The first door on the right led into his bedroom. Hermione's boxes of possessions, stacked at the end of the bed, seemed to stand out as if they didn't belong there. The bed was a four-poster made of black walnut, finely carved into a simple design of branches with an S on each post. The headboard was more ornate, featuring two S's surrounded by thorn branches. The other furniture in the room, two night tables and one large dresser, made a complete set with the bed. In front of the large fireplace was a brocade chaise lounge that matched the sofa out in the sitting room. Next to it was a small coffee table upon which sat an old vase of dead flowers and a silver tea service. Without thought for her actions, Hermione Vanished the dead flowers and conjured a simple arrangement of a few roses.

Satisfied with the small change, she grabbed a box that was labeled 'Clothes' and headed for one of the doors that stood on either side of the bed. The first door was the closet, a fairly large walk-in. There were three large dowels inside, but only a fraction of the left one was occupied by a few robes that hung there. Everything else was bare and a bit dusty. Hermione wondered, as she waved her wand and Vanished the dust on the right side, why the house-elves had not been in these rooms. Granted, she was happy that they had at least one less area to slave over; but it was odd to find a Professor's quarters in such disarray. Hermione emptied the box of clothes until everything was organized in an orderly manner.

Sparing one last look at the black wizard robes, she left the closet and fetched the box labeled 'Toiletries.' Hermione took the smaller box toward the door on the other side of the four-poster. She opened it and froze in the doorway as she took in the room before her. The bathroom resembled something out of the magazine *Home and Garden* that she used to read at home. The floor was exquisite with its black foot-square marble tiles. The cabinetry was of the same black walnut that the bedroom furniture boasted. The counter to her left, around the sink, was of the same black marble as the floor. To her right the tile continued up the walls behind the fancy glass doors of a large walk-in shower. And directly in front of her was a large, old-fashioned claw-footed bathtub. Every faucet, handle, knob, and hinge in the room was silver. Above her was a simple yet elegant black and silver chandelier. On closer inspection of the counter, Hermione saw a row of phials and bottles. She read the labels to herself: Healing Paste, Pepper-Up, Sleeping Draught, Headache, and Blood-Replenishing... were among the many potions, pastes, and salves that were cluttered together all along the back of the counter.

Opening the medicine cabinet, Hermione discovered magically enhanced shelves that appeared to hold vast amounts of bandages and several books about how to heal various ailments. She closed the medicine cabinet door, her breath coming out in shaken gasps; she knew all too well why Snape would have needed to keep such things handy in his personal quarters. She squatted low and opened the cabinet doors below the sink; the sight before her brought her to her knees, and the tears began to fall. The contents of the cabinets would, to some, seem to be a complete mess, but Hermione saw the organization before her. On the left were several crates containing empty potion bottles and phials which, when she examined them, proved to be clean and sanitized and ready for use. In the middle were several crates full of used phials and bottles that had not yet been cleaned. And to the right were his stock potions ready for use, some of them glimmering in protective spells to give them extra longevity. Hermione slammed the doors and fell against them in anguish.

This room refuted much of Severus Snape's apparent life: long hours of tedious potions classes followed by torturous meetings, attacks, plotting, and sacrifice. This was the room he came to when he returned from his own private hell on earth; this was where he healed himself over and over of the countless injuries his body went through in the act of spying for the Order. This was the room where he would heal the shell that contained so much sadness. Thinking of all the hells he had been through, Hermione wondered if anyone besides Dumbledore had ever tried to heal Snape's soul.

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She bit her lip in concentration as she carefully listed the order in which she planned to sort and pack the belongings in each room in the Potions master's quarters. Part of her knew that if she succeeded in her plan, it would be all for naught. But she knew if anyone was to check on what she was up to, she needed to appear to be hard at work with the task. So, to keep up appearances, she started with the sitting room; it only took her around twenty minutes. Next she decided to sort through the bedroom, closet, and bathroom so she could put her own things away, making at least one room less of a reminder of Snape.

When the bedroom suite looked more like a room she herself would live in, she walked across the hall to the room that she knew to be the library. Floor to ceiling bookshelves covered every inch of the walls. A large desk and leather chair were positioned at the other side of the room, with two loveseats, two chaise lounges, and matching small coffee tables in between. The shelves on her left and right contained volumes upon volumes of detailed information about potions ingredients, while the shelves behind the desk were enclosed with glass doors. Bypassing the hundreds of other books, she headed straight for the glass doors and waved her wand.

The power of the wards that clearly protected the contents nearly knocked her off her feet. Bracing herself against the desk, she proceeded to spin a weave of spells to bring the wards down. With sweat on her brow and twenty minutes gone, she finally succeeded. The moment the wards came down, the glass doors glowed an emerald green; then the light faded and there was nothing left between her and Severus Snape's most prized and dangerous books but the doors themselves. With cautious fingers she slowly opened the doors; inside were the books she instinctively knew were the ones that would help her bring him back.

*Pericoloso Potente* and *Viciousa Poisona* were but two titles among the many dangerous and rare books before her. So as to not lose her nerve, she Accioed her white bag and preceded to put every one of them into it for her own personal use later. It was at that moment, when her mind was aching to get started on those books, that a loud pop sounded behind her, startling her. She swung around to see one of the Hogwarts house-elves bowing. "Please excuse, Miss, but the Headmistress sent me to announce dinner. She is saying you have never had dinner here in summer and would not know of the earlier time for eating. If you please, Miss, I will be showing you a shortcut from here."

Hermione smiled and held her hands - and the bag that she was slowly closing - behind her back and replied, "Yes, that would be very kind of you."

"Is no trouble, Miss. I is volunteering on account of Miss's past behavior. Some of the others was a bit scared to be helping Miss Hermione Granger."

Hermione smiled at the elf and proceeded to follow him. "I understand I made a bit of a fuss in my fourth year, but you can let them all know I won't pester any of you again - unless you ask me to, that is," she replied carefully, still smiling and hoping she wasn't posing a threat to the house-elves' beliefs.

"I is glad to be hearing that, Miss. Though I is doubting any of us elves would be taking Miss up on such offers. We is happy with our work, Miss," the small elf replied confidently.

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Hermione smiled in wonder at the many changes when she entered the Great Hall. The tables where the staff usually sat were gone, as well as the House tables. In the center of the room there was one large, round table made of a beautiful cherry wood, with matching chairs all around. The table was set in the regular Hogwarts style, except there were candles on it as well as the enchanted ones that floated above. In the center of the table were four vases, each of them depicting one of the House crests. They were filled with a strange assortment of flowers and berries. Professor McGonagall was already there, as were Professor Flitwick, Professor Sinistra, Madam

Hooch, and Professor Sprout. When McGonagall saw Hermione standing awkwardly in the doorway, she motioned for her to join them at the table. Hermione chose a seat next to Professor Sprout, who greeted her with a friendly smile.

Professor McGonagall cleared her throat and said, "I would like to begin tonight's dinner by greeting Miss Granger, who has agreed to attend to sorting Professor Snape's possessions as well as preparing the Potions classroom for next term." Everyone smiled at Hermione before turning their attention back to the Headmistress. "Now, as to the students themselves, there will be some changes. We will no longer accept students who have proven themselves to be unmovably prejudiced against others because of blood status. I am currently working on several strategies to deal with this and would be happy to hear of any ideas you have that might help. Now, I am starving, and I'm sure you are as well. Let's eat," she stated with a sense of finality that only McGonagall would get away with.

Hermione enjoyed the meal and the small talk with her previous Professors. It was even distracting enough to take her mind off the rooms a few floors below.

**There you go, people. I hope you're enjoying this story. I know this chapter may have been a bit... I guess lacking in dialogue... but I thought it was important, and I liked it, so no Howlers, lol.**

## Formula

*Chapter 3 of 11*

Voldemort is dead. As others around her comb through the bodies and help the wounded, Hermione Granger thinks of only one wizard. A wizard who gave everything and died without anything to show for it, but the lives of those who survived because of him. A wizard who deserved a second chance; something Hermione would go to great lengths to make that happen.

**Speacial Note: Yes, this chapter is lacking in dialouge like the preivious two... except at the end which makes it all totally worth it!!! \*HUGS\***

Hermione stretched the muscles in her neck after placing the last book in a box and closing it up. For some people, packing up a library would consist of simply grabbing an armful of books and placing as many as possible into one box, then moving on to another. But for someone like Hermione, that would never do; she made sure to keep the books organized as she sorted through Snape's collection, packing it all away. Looking around the room now, she felt a bit sad to see it like this. Empty book shelves were almost as bad as a missing professor. Almost.

Standing up and stretching her aching legs, she left the room that was filled with empty shelves and nearly forty packed and organized boxes and headed for the laboratory through the door between the library and the bedroom. She had peeked inside last night after dinner with the professors, but as she really took it in now, she was amazed by how well planned out it was. Just from the tingle of magic she could feel at the entrance, she knew the whole room was reinforced as a precautionary measure with regard to the potions that were dangerous to brew. The room itself was very large, equaling the combined lengths of the library and bedroom. All along the walls there was counter space, broken only by the entrance to the room itself and a door leading to the supply room on the other side.

In the center of the room were two massive islands to her left and right, each with sufficient space for six cauldrons at a time. As Hermione pulled out a piece of parchment and quill to start her list, she had a brief vision of Severus Snape flitting around the room, tending to twelve cauldrons with the ease of a master: chopping ingredients, measuring, writing notes, stirring cauldrons, storing potions and salves. The smell in the air would sicken some people, but it wasn't so bad if one knew what he was smelling.

As she took stock of the room, she knew it would be a simple enough job to pack up its contents; it would be a waste to pack away his ingredients since he was currently dead. Her only job would really be to search it top to bottom for potion journals, notes, basically anything of a personal nature. After that, she would be able to start restocking the potions supplies for the next professor, for the classroom, and for the school. And of course, she would also be tending to her own personal project, which hopefully would make all of her hard work useless. Because if she succeeded, Severus would still be alive and all of her hard work would not have been done at all... but there. She didn't want to get ahead of herself. She still had a lot of research and experimenting to do before she knew if that could even happen. With a shake of her head she got to work searching for journals and notes.

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Hermione wiped steam off her forehead with her sleeve. She had three cauldrons going at once. She had already finished everything that needed to be packed. The ingredients for the classroom and the private lab were on order; the complete list of hospital wing potions was spread out before her, and she was working her way through it. *It will take me a month to complete this!* she thought tiredly, not even noticing the grumbling of her stomach since she hadn't eaten yet.

At intervals between working on the potions, when they were not in need of stirring or new ingredients being added, she was reading through one of the journals she'd found hidden behind a loose brick in the supply closet. It was filled with helpful observations and studies that Severus Snape had used to counter Dark potions and substances when he had worked undercover with the Death Eaters. The section she was currently reading was on everything he had ever studied, tested, and knew about Nagini's poison. Hermione had been shocked but quite thrilled to find such information because she knew it would help her so much in making an antidote. From his notes it looked as if, on three separate occasions, Severus had secreted away blood and venom obtained from victims of Nagini's fangs. He too had been trying to develop an antidote, but judging by the sparse list of experiments and the lack of opportunities, he had so far been unsuccessful. This made her research more important than ever; before she used the sample from the professor's wounds, she would need to have the antidote figured out. She wouldn't have another opportunity to accomplish this, she would have one shot and that was it.

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"Hermione, dear, it seems you are taking care of things quite swiftly. Is there any specific reason you're working so quickly?" McGonagall asked her. Hermione was just exiting the hospital wing after dropping off everything from the A-F part of the stock list she'd been working on.

"No, professor. I just enjoy the work, and most of the potions and such are simple, so it's not much work really," Hermione replied, hoping her face wasn't giving away the truth. "So," she said, hoping to divert the professor's scrutiny, "have you had any luck with hiring a new Potions professor yet?"

"No, I haven't. I've interviewed several candidates, but they were rather too green for such heavy responsibilities. I do have several more to interview in the next few weeks, so I'm hoping I'll find someone who will be able to live up to the standards of a Hogwarts Potions professor, though I highly doubt I will ever find someone as perfect as Severus was," McGonagall replied a bit sadly.

Hermione's brow creased as a question came to mind. She was quiet as she thought of a way to phrase it without giving away her secret intentions and getting herself in trouble. "Um, Professor, I was wondering if you might know something about illegal use of Time-Turners. I've been reading a few books about it in my spare time, and from everything I've read it seems that anyone who violates the law by changing the past and bringing someone back to life who had died gets caught. But how are they found

out? It almost seems as if the Ministry is able to detect it. Do you know anything about it?" she asked, carefully keeping her face smooth.

McGonagall stopped walking and faced Hermione, staring at her as if she would peer into her very thoughts if she could. Though she had never accomplished mastering Occlumency, she was quite good at reading body language. Though Hermione appeared a bit nervous, it was always a bit hard to tell since she always asked a lot of questions. After successfully making Hermione fidget a bit under her scrutiny, McGonagall replied, "Though I don't know exactly by what means the Ministry of Magic detects such events, I have heard rumors through the years that it has something to do with records and the Unspeakables. I really can't tell you more than that, though I will ask you to explain your interest in bringing people back from the dead by use of a Time-Turner. You're not planning to do such a thing, are you?" she asked sharply, studying Hermione's face more intently.

Hermione forced herself to answer with an even voice. "No, ma'am, I wouldn't do anything like that. I was just fascinated by the accounts I've read so far... in my spare time."

McGonagall started to walk again as she replied, "I'm glad to hear it. I would hate to have you risk getting in such trouble, no matter the reason. Well, I must be going. Try and slow down a bit; I should hate to see you overwork yourself. Goodnight, Miss Granger," she said, nodding as she turned to go to her office.

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Hermione smiled as she re-read the formula for the third time, calculating ever step and every factor of the complicated process. It all seemed perfect. She had researched every ingredient thoroughly, and she knew the ones listed would interact successfully. For four weeks she had worked endlessly to create the antidote in secret while also finishing her job at Hogwarts. Now, after the last of the potions for the hospital wing were made, after the classroom stock had been organized and sorted, after the last of Severus Snape's possessions had been handed over to the Headmistress--minus the few that Hermione had secreted away in her expanding white bag--she was ready to put her plan into action.

She had asked Professor McGonagall a few hours earlier if she could stay a few extra days to work on an idea that might help out with the new policy on prejudices. McGonagall had been thrilled with the idea of a Muggle-born's perspective to the problem and had allowed Hermione the extended stay... and the extended use of the private lab. Hermione had not gone into details about her idea, saying only that it might involve the need for potions.

Shortly after getting permission to stay, Hermione had successfully "borrowed" the Hogwarts Time-Turner. Years ago she had learned of its existence after researching *Hogwarts, A History*. The few mentions of the Time-Turner would have led a more casual reader to believe the Time-Turner was just one on loan from the Ministry--before they had been destroyed, of course, in her fifth year. But she had discovered that among the many things the Hogwarts Founders had done during the creation of the school was to create a special Time-Turner for the Headmaster's use. From what she could gather, it was hardly ever used and for the most part was ignored and even forgotten through the years by later Headmasters. So it was quite easy for Hermione to extract it from a well-hidden location in the school's massive trophy room. It was a bit tarnished and dusty, but a quick wave of her wand told her it was in working order and quite powerful.

Normally, Time-Turners were for meant for traveling short distances in time, mostly hours but sometimes a few days. But this one was specifically designed to take a person back as far as several years. Instead of turning the hourglass over a few times to go back a few hours, the user had to write down on a small piece of parchment exactly how far back he wanted to go and place the parchment inside the hourglass, which had a small opening, then turn it once.

Hermione had her strategy and her exact time destination and the formula ready. All she needed to do now was finish the antidote and test it on the bloody venom in the phial she had collected from Snape. If it worked, she would be able to give him a second chance.

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The fire under the cauldron went out with a quick flick of her wrist. A silver cauldron before her contained a potion that looked like dried blood, except it was definitely liquid because she could see it move as it slowly stopped boiling. With her dragonhide gloves Hermione carefully moved the cauldron off the burner and onto the counter. She took her gloves off and picked up a heat-proof eyedropper and sucked up a few drops of the potion with it. She had already done the same with the phial of venom and blood. With careful deliberation she squeezed two drops of the venom onto the bottom of a glass saucer and then released one drop of the potion on top of it. Her heart was beating frantically as she watched the reaction of the two substances. *Dear Merlin, let this work*, she thought as her eyes concentrated on the sight before her. Suddenly the two liquids blazed a violent red and then there was nothing left but what looked like a few drops of blood.

A few drops of healthy blood.

Her hope soared as she waved her wand over the blood and diagnosed it as if she were checking any regular blood sample for a problem. The glowing signal her wand produced announced that her wish had come true. Before her was a sample of blood that was clear of any problems. The antidote worked.

Hermione's mind went into overload at that moment. As quickly as she could, she bottled every drop of the potion, putting phials in every pocket she had that could conceivably hold them. She waved her wand, and the counter space was cleared and clean, then she rushed out the door to the bedroom to retrieve the Time-Turner, a dark cloak, and a letter. She fastened the cloak around her shoulders and raised the hood around her face. As she rolled up the tiny piece of parchment that would take her back to April Fourth, nearly a month before the battle, she ignored the fear that was welling up inside of her.

She left Severus Snape's rooms as fast as she could to head straight for the Headmistress' office.

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Hermione fidgeted as she waited, concealed behind a statue that gave her a view of the entrance to the office. Moments before she had sent an owl from the Owlery to request a meeting with Professor McGonagall at the Three Broomsticks, posing as an applicant for the Potions professor job. She smiled in relief when McGonagall exited her office moments later and headed toward the castle doors. It's now or never, she thought as she crept out of her hiding place and approached the gargoyles. She quietly said the password, "Love One And All", and made her way up the stairs into the office.

As soon as she shut the office door, she placed a silencing charm over herself and crept into the rather large closet on the far side of the room. She took the small rolled-up destination parchment out of her pocket and, opening the little hatch on the Time-Turner, placed the parchment within. Then she snapped it shut and held on to it tightly. For a moment it didn't do anything, making the wait seem even longer, but finally it glowed; the parchment inside was on fire, green flames consuming every bit of it. When the fire died down and faded to nothing, the hourglass started to vibrate in her hands a bit as it began turning over, faster and faster, until her eyes could no longer keep up with it.

FLASH!

Suddenly the world around her dissolved and she flew through time until finally she felt her feet on the floor of the closet once again, though now there were no robes with tartan accent. Everything was black, and she could hear someone talking on the other side of the door.

"What was that? Who's in there?" she heard Severus Snape say, his voice getting closer.

Though panic filled her very being, Hermione quickly cast a glamour spell to change her appearance.

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These past months had been hectic; Snape had hardly been able to leave the school grounds. His reaction time was quite swift as he rose out of his chair and called out to whomever was in the closet. He knew Apparation was not possible inside the school grounds, especially now, but at times like these, who knew what people were capable of. With his wand out, he quickly opened the door to find a person, a girl, he assumed from the shape and size of her.

"Come out of there this instant and explain yourself!" he demanded, pointing his wand directly at her and giving her a look that would scare anyone into complying.

Hermione cautiously walked forward, her head lowered despite being in disguise. It had never occurred to her that she could die doing this, but it was a bit late at that moment to dwell on the possible outcomes of this situation.

Clearing a throat that was suddenly dry, she said, "Please, I've got... something for you... to help you, sir. Please, I mean no harm!"

Snape assessed what he could see of this girl. She was trembling, making her dirty-blond hair move slightly. "Lower your hood. Who are you, girl?" he demanded.

**A/N: Please no Howlers... and don't hate me lol. I've started the next chapter because I couldn't stop writing. But I didn't want the chapter to be over 4,000 words, so I cut it up at this point... so please bear with me because you will have more to read soon, as I am on quite a roll! \*HUGS\***

## Speacial Delivery

*Chapter 4 of 11*

Voldemort is dead. As others around her comb through the bodies and help the wounded, Hermione Granger thinks of only one wizard. A wizard who gave everything and died without anything to show for it, but the lives of those who survived because of him. A wizard who deserved a second chance; something Hermione would go to great lengths to make that happen.

Hermione slowly lowered the hood, forgetting to breathe as she did so. *What if my glamour spell failed? What if he recognizes me?* she thought frantically as the hood fell onto her shoulders.

She couldn't breathe as she looked out from under her eyelashes to see if he seemed to recognize her or not. Severus stared at her a moment before repeating his earlier question. "Who are you?" he demanded.

"Sir, I can't tell you who I am. I... umm... I'm here to help you, as I said. That is, I have something to give you that will help, in the future. I... can't explain more than that, really," she stammered, slowly reaching inside her pockets for phials to hand him.

"What could a young girl like you have that could possible help me in the future? How did you get in that closet?" he countered, his patience growing thinner every second.

Hermione set several phials of the antidote on his desk, careful not to get too close to him or take her eyes off his wand, which was still pointed at her. "Sir, I came by Time-Turner. Like I said, I can't reveal more than that. Please, just keep these phials with you. In the... future... you're going to need them. I swear it... it's very important. Now, if you don't mind, I need to get back to where I came from before..." She stopped talking; her voice and hands seemed so shaky. Here she was, months in the past, standing before a man who was dead...yet alive here in the past. A man who had no idea he would soon be dead... unless this all worked and he was still alive when she returned. Mentally she told herself to shut up so her growing headache wouldn't get any worse.

Severus picked up one of the phials and looked from it to her face. "Why would you expect me to actually drink something that comes from some strange girl who arrived in my closet via a Time-Turner? Wherever you're from, you must think I'm a fool; but I tell you girl, *I am no fool*! Now, if you don't explain yourself further until I am satisfied, you will not go anywhere, do I make myself clear?" he asked coolly, backing her into the wall next to the closet and staring her down.

"I...sir...the...I can't!" she replied shrilly. "I told you, I came by Time-Turner. Those phials are to help you, if you...just keep them with you and, please, let me go. One day I'll explain this, but I can't now without ruining things in the future. Please believe me!" she pleaded, her voice giving away the fact that she was near tears.

Severus assessed her face. Something about it was familiar, but it was obvious from his non-verbal spell that she was under a glamour, so there was no telling what she really looked like. "I will test this...you realize that, right? So why don't you save us both some time and tell me what is in these phials that's so important."

Hermione looked into his eyes for a moment, unconsciously biting her lip as she contemplated the possible dangers of explaining at least that much. "Well, it's an antidote," she said carefully, staring at her hands. "I can't tell you more than that...and please just keep at least one phial on you at all times. There will come a... moment... when you'll need it. Please, may I leave?" she asked, pulling out the small sheet of parchment that had the return date written on it.

Severus stared at her for a moment. He had a sense that she was telling the truth and that she truly meant no harm. Before he could reconsider, he stepped away from her and lowered his wand. "Go. Now."

Hermione fumbled with the latch on the Time-Turner as she stepped backward into the closet. "Thank you, sir. You won't regret it. Thank you," she said again, and she vanished.

Severus stared into his now-empty closet and then at the phial that was supposed to be an antidote he would somehow need in the near future. It was only when he heard the tell-tale footsteps of the Professors Carrow approaching that he quickly put all but one of the phials away in a drawer. The last one he stuck in his pocket just before the door opened.

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As soon as the world stopped spinning around her, Hermione collapsed on the floor of the closet in tears. Seeing him again made her feel that same wave of depression she'd been experiencing from the first moment she laid eyes on his dead body in the Shrieking Shack. *But he could be alive now!* she thought suddenly. Without wasting another moment, she hurried out of the office and headed towards the cemetery at a run. Her lungs felt like they were bursting, but she didn't care about the pain. All that mattered was reaching the very last row of tombstones. As soon as she did, she turned towards the corner where he'd been buried before and stopped. Before her there was only grass. She looked all around at the neighboring tombs and saw that his name was not on any of them. *His tombstone isn't here!*

Hermione was so consumed with happiness over her success that she didn't hear the two wizards approach, or hear the two spells that hit her simultaneously.

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*\*The Day of the Battle--Inside the Shrieking Shack... After Giving Harry His Memories\**

Severus Snape would have laughed at himself if he could have breathed properly. *After all those missions, all those close calls, I'm going to die during the final battle*

*because of a snake bite*, he thought ironically. Granted, it was a very severe and painful bite from the Dark Lord's own pet snake, but a snake bite nonetheless. As his life started to fade away, his will to live reminded him of the phial in his pocket, the same phial that had given his mind a few moments of escape into speculation over the last month as things had gotten more and more hectic at Hogwarts. During those moments he had tried to verify exactly what was in the phial and how dangerous it might be, all in a vain effort to not to think of the mysterious young witch who had given it to him. With the Carrows creating havoc on an hourly basis, he'd never had the time to properly test and dissect the ingredients therein as a Potions master would naturally want to do.

But now, as his heart began to slow and the blood from the gaping wound in his chest was pooling around his body, he made the decision to throw caution to the wind. With the last bit of strength he could conjure, he felt in his pocket for the phial and finally retrieved it with a shaking hand. He uncorked the phial and poured the contents into his mouth, immediately starting to choke in his effort to swallow the liquid. As the potion absorb into his body, he felt a numbness overcome the throbbing pain in his chest. Gradually he felt his heart start to beat faster, almost normally. He felt the flow of blood slow, and the bubbling venom that felt like a river of needles stopped its assault on his veins. As he slowly slipped into trauma-induced unconsciousness, he wondered if he might live after all.

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Severus stood at the window in the Headmistress' office and stared down at the scene below as Hermione was arrested by two Unspeakables and was marched away from his own empty gravesite towards the doors to Hogwarts. Minerva McGonagall was sniffing quietly behind him from her chair as they waited for her to be brought up to the office before being carried off to Azkaban.

For the last few months, ever since he'd woken up in the hospital wing with little left of his injury but a splitting headache and a scar on his chest, Severus had thought of nothing but the potion that had given him this new found, if not exactly desired, existence. He was once again the Potions professor of Hogwarts, and he was now widely known to be innocent of all his supposed past evils. The newly appointed Minister of Magic, Kingsley Shacklebolt, had personally supervised the writing of the story that had been splashed across the front page of the *Daily Prophet* declaring how Severus Snape was a war hero, innocent of any murderous intent regarding Albus Dumbledore's death.

While all of that had gone on, Severus had hidden himself away in his personal quarters in the guise of normal summer preparation for the coming term. Though he had worked on those normal things, he had also spent some time trying to figure out the contents of the phial and who had delivered it. He had been quite successful with the former, but the latter had eluded him until earlier that morning when those same two Unspeakables had invaded his privacy and turned his hard-won peaceful existence upside down.

Hermione Granger had saved his life. She had broken the law, created an antidote, and saved his life. Now, because Little Miss Know-It-All's unfathomable impulse to save his life, she was going to lose her own freedom.

It was with these thoughts in mind that Severus was brought back down to earth at the sound of the two Unspeakables and Hermione approaching. They entered the office with Hermione bound and her head lowered. They sat her down in front of the Headmistress' desk and still she didn't lift her head. McGonagall rose and started to move forward to embrace Hermione, only to be stopped by the two wizards.

"No, I'm sorry," one of them said. "I cannot allow you to approach the prisoner. Now, if we could commence with this, I would like to get her transferred as soon as possible. You stated that you had something you wanted to say about this case, Headmistress? I suggest you start now," the wizard said briskly.

Minerva sat back down and folded her hands together and stared at Hermione, who still refused to look any higher than her shoes. "Very well. From what I understand, there is no way Miss Granger may be excused from spending time in Azkaban. But I was hoping we might come to an agreement about the length of time she spends there, and possibly consider an alternative punishment." She pulled out several pieces of parchment on which she had written possible alternatives to Hermione spending years in Azkaban.

"Headmistress, you have to understand the special circumstances in this case. Since it has fallen under our jurisdiction, she is not entitled to a regular case tried before the Wizengamot. This case will not be well known outside this room or the Department of Mysteries. The law clearly states that the illegal use of an unknown Time-Turner carries a minimum sentence of five years in Azkaban--and add to that the fact that the prisoner did this to change the past and bring someone who had died back to life. That makes her sentence a minimum of fifteen years," the taller Unspeakable said.

Severus approached the desk and placed an awkward hand on Minerva's shoulder. "I realize that five years in Azkaban is the minimum sentence for using the Time-Turner. However, the Time-Turner in question is not, in fact, unknown. When the laws in question were created, they took into account Time-Turners belonging to long-standing institutions and old families. These were recorded as pre-existing Time-Turners, and the law does *not* apply to them. So taking that into account, the only issue before us is the result of its use. For some reason unknown even to me, Miss Granger thought it was imperative that she take drastic measures to save my life. I think that, despite the idiocy of the choice she made, she was surprisingly lucky in that she did not change anything other than the fact that I survived that day. No one else but the people in this room know of this incident. You should also take into account her part in helping to win the war--not to mention that she's created an antidote to a certain type of snake venom that was, until now, rarely treatable. I think if we sit down and calmly discuss possible punishments, we can agree to something appropriate and not overly severe."

Hermione looked up into Severus' face and wondered why he was going out on a limb for her. It was obvious to her, after years of sitting in his classroom, that he was furious with her; yet here he was trying to help her avoid Azkaban altogether.

The taller Unspeakable conjured a chair and sat down. "Very well. I agree that, given the circumstances and the type of Time-Turner used, fifteen years would be quite harsh. What exactly do you suggest as a proper punishment for Miss Granger?"

McGonagall cleared her throat and said, "I suggest that she be stripped of her wand for a time, and also that she be made to stay here, at Hogwarts, under our supervision. I'm sure we can find several things she can do without the use of magic."

The two Unspeakables went to the back of the room and discussed it in whispers. Hermione looked back down at her feet after Severus gave her a furious look. After several moments the Unspeakables approached Hermione and indicated that she should stand. She could hardly breathe as she waited to hear what they would say.

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"This is what we have decided: Miss Granger will spend two months in Azkaban, after which she will be confined to Hogwarts for a year's time. During that period she will be stripped of her wand and a tracking spell will be placed on her to make sure she does not leave Hogwarts' grounds. While she is here she is not to be visited by friends or family. We will look to you to make sure these conditions are met...since we have to keep this quiet you will have to lie, of course...but I'm sure for the sake of her lessened sentence this will be agreeable to you, yes?"

McGonagall agreed and so did Snape.

"Very well. Miss Granger, you will need to be placed in a high-security cell so that you will be isolated, which will help us keep this all quiet; do you understand?" Hermione merely nodded. Her legs threatened to give out under the weight of it all. She was going to Azkaban prison for two months and then she would be stuck at Hogwarts for a year without her friends or family...without the use of her wand or any magic. And to top it all off, Severus Snape would be in charge of her Hogwarts incarceration.

**A/N: Well, my original plot changed a tiny bit... But I personally love it lol. I hope you guys enjoyed... Please remember to read and review! \*HUGS\***



# Welcome to Azkaban

Chapter 5 of 11

Voldemort is dead. As others around her comb through the bodies and help the wounded, Hermione Granger thinks of only one wizard. A wizard who gave everything and died without anything to show for it, but the lives of those who survived because of him. A wizard who deserved a second chance; something Hermione would go to great lengths to make that happen.

Hermione's knees shook as the two wizards guided her into the tower-like prison known as Azkaban. Even without the presence of Dementors, the place had a gloomy and forbidden feel about it. The door that Hermione was ushered roughly through was small; the dank hall ahead of her was narrow and empty of light except for a few sconces several feet above her that barely lit their way to a set of steep spiral stairs. She jumped as the small but heavy door clanged shut behind them and shivered when she heard magical locks snap into place. *It's only for two months*, she chanted over and over again in her head as they took the stairway up into the stony prison. Every few minutes or so they would pass by doors leading to different levels, but she never truly got to look through their bars to see a glimpse of what was waiting for her; this, of course, gave her the impression that she was being led inside from some kind of back entrance.

Her feet began to ache after ten minutes of climbing. Her breathe came in gasps as she tried her best to keep pace ahead of the two wizards, who would shove her if she faltered for even a second. Finally, when it felt as if her lungs would burst, they stopped at the top of the stairs and went through another heavy but small door. She had a brief glimpse of seven other such doors before she was shoved through the closest cell on the right. One of the wizards stood guard in front of the door as the other pushed her further into the cramped cell and shut the door behind him.

Hermione's bindings were magically released from her aching arms, and the moment she was free she backed away from the wizard, staring at him with frightened eyes.

"Miss Granger, this will be your cell for the duration of your sentence here at Azkaban. You will not be allowed to leave this room until two full months have passed; your time starts the moment I leave this room and the door is locked. Everything you need to survive will be provided. After I leave, food, water, and a blanket will appear. Whenever food appears at two appointed hours, seven A.M. and seven P.M. you will have fifteen minutes to eat before the food disappears. On your nightstand there is a tin cup for your water. If you are thirsty at any time, merely pick up the glass and it will fill as many times as you might need," he said. He took a breath and continued.

"Once a week a Mediwitch will visit and check you over to make sure you are as healthy as can be expected in such circumstances. If for any reason you become ill, a Mediwitch will be appointed to watch over you until you recover. There is one window in this room, though you will notice that it is too high for you to reach. The window is there for one purpose only: to allow you a minimum of light during the day and plenty of fresh air. As you know, this prison is located in the middle of the sea, and the weather can become rough now and then. When that happens you will temporarily be given an extra blanket. Last but not least, you are in a high-security cell. These cells are monitored for the prisoners' safety but are otherwise completely sound-proof, so you have no contact with anyone, especially the other prisoners," he said. He nodded once and abruptly left her.

As the magic locks clicked into place behind him, leaving her alone in the dark, Hermione sank down onto the floor and cried.

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Severus Snape settled down in the chair of his personal library with a glass of Firewhisky. It was only three hours since the two wizards had left Hogwarts to escort Hermione to Azkaban, but it felt like years. After they had left, Severus and Minerva had spoken at length about what Hermione could do during her coming time of incarceration at Hogwarts. Severus had immediately suggested that she become Minerva's personal assistant. But Minerva had had other ideas, much to his chagrin.

"Severus," she said, "I was thinking that given the circumstances she could assist you with the grading of the first through fourth year papers. You did demand that that duty be handed off to someone else to ease your headaches and allow you time to work on your own personal potions research...."

"Minerva, as convenient as that might sound to you, I would rather not. Miss Granger may have scraped a fair amount of O.W.L.s, but I believe it to be for the best all around if you assign her something else to do," he replied tightly.

"Severus, you made those demands on me, which I grant you is perfectly acceptable after everything you have done over the years for this school and for wizard-kind in general. But you did sign on for another five years as Potions master. Therefore you are under obligation to me, and I'm afraid that as Headmistress I must insist," she countered a bit smugly as he scowled at her.

"Why are you suddenly so set on her working with me, Minerva?" he asked stiffly.

"Because she saved your life, Severus. She has always admired you as a teacher, but you never gave her the credit she was due even though I realize you couldn't because of the war. But that is over. You no longer have to hold back your praise from worthy students and pupils just because they are not in Slytherin. She saved your life... the least you can do is act as a mentor for her," Minerva said, the chiding note in her words clear.

Severus was quiet for several moments, ignoring Minerva as she stared and waited for what she knew he wanted to ask. Finally he got up and headed for the door, only to turn and finally address the matter of the elephant in the room. "Why do *you* think she did it?" he asked quietly, his voice failing to hide his desperate curiosity and confusion.

"I honestly don't know why, Severus. All I know is that Hermione Granger is a bright young witch who shows an amazing amount of respect for you. Beyond that, I'm left to guess just as you are, unless she decides to confide in one of us... and I'm betting that if she worked with you on school work nearly every day for a whole year, that opportunity just might come up," she said with a slight smile.

Severus scowled again and left her office to drown his sorrows in hopes of forgetting it all. But here he was, several glasses gone, and still his thoughts went to a young witch who was now presumably situated in a dank cell in Azkaban.

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Harry and Ron were busily eating breakfast when they heard a whoosh from the fireplace and Minerva McGonagall being greeted by Mrs. Weasley. They both left the table and rushed into the living room in hopes of seeing their best friend. "Is she here with you?" Ron asked, looking around.

"No, I'm afraid not. That's why I've come over this morning. Hermione is gone for a while and she wanted me to express her regret for not being able to say goodbye before she left," Minerva said, only to be interrupted by their various exclamations. "Hold on and I'll tell you," she scolded as she took a seat and waited for the three of them to do the same.

"Where is Hermione? Is something wrong?" Molly asked in her motherly way.

"Hermione wouldn't just up and leave us like that, Professor," Ron commented as he grudgingly took a seat.

"Did she at least write us a letter or something?" Harry asked as he too sat down.

Minerva lifted her hand to forestall the continued onslaught of questions. "Nothing... is wrong. Hermione was visited by someone from the Ministry and offered a rather last minute position as an apprentice. Due to the secrecy of the job itself, she had to leave to start right away and was not permitted to contact you. She is now apprenticed to someone in the Department of Mysteries, but that is all I know about it. She promised that as soon as she could manage, she would write you all, though I doubt she will ever be able to share exactly what she is studying. The only thing that is widely known about that area of the Ministry is that they are quite regimented in their non-disclosure agreements," she said, hoping Merlin would step in and make them believe this tale she was spinning.

"The Department of Mysteries? That's quite an honor, isn't it? Only highly qualified witches and wizards are chosen for that kind of work," Molly said, her face beaming with pride.

"Hermione an Unspeakable? I don't think it would suit her. The thing she loves most in the world is to share whatever she learns with anyone who will listen to her. I bet it won't last," Ron said, a bit of a pout betraying his feelings.

"Wow. I can see why she would be chosen, but I'm with Ron. I don't think it will last. She'd miss us too much!" Harry said, saddened but at the same time excited for her.

Minerva visited with them for a few more minutes and finally escaped, claiming an appointment she couldn't miss. Despite the shock and confusion she left behind her, she thought her lie had gone over quite well.

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Lightning flashed through the small window far above Hermione's head, waking her from an exhausted sleep. When it flashed again she looked around and realized that she was still sitting on the floor of her cell. Trying to move was a bit painful, but slowly she stood up and stretched her aching limbs. Her throat was parched, and she remembered the tin cup on the plain wooden table next to the cot-like bed. Picking it up, she nearly dropped it as the cup filled with water. She took a tentative sip and was reminded of the tap water one would get at a public park in London.

Looking around, she wondered what time it was and whether she had missed dinner. She set the cup down, and suddenly her whole body froze and she found herself unable to move. Seconds later she heard the door behind her open and close; someone had entered. Slowly the paralysis lifted; she felt her head give way as her body was lifted an inch off the floor, and she turned her head awkwardly to face the person who had entered the room. The witch who stood there lowered Hermione back down to the floor and brightened the light that was coming from the tip of her wand, giving Hermione a good look at her visitor.

"I am Lola. I will be your Mediwitch during your time here. The Petrificus spell is standard for my safety and yours. I will remove it as soon as I leave," Lola said as she approached Hermione and raised her wand in a series of movements Hermione didn't recognize. "All right then, all done. You are healthy. I must warn you that unless you do some sort of exercise during the day, you may become quite weak while you are locked in your cell. I suggest jumping jacks, crunches, even running in place. I'll see you next week oh, and your dinner will pop in any minute now. Remember, you have only fifteen minutes to eat before the food is taken away. Good evening," she said, turning to leave just as abruptly as she had appeared.

"Wait, Miss... Lola," Hermione said hurriedly. "Can you tell me if there's some way to tell the time in here? I just don't know how else I'll know when it's meal time, and if I'm sleeping...I don't want to starve while I'm here," Hermione said, embarrassed.

"When the food appears, a sound like a bell will alert you in case you are sleeping," Lola answered. Then she departed, leaving the room in darkness once again.

After the locks clicked back into place the rest of Hermione's body unfroze and she nearly fell. As she made her way over to the cot and sat down, making out the interior of the room as best she could in the brief flashes of lightning, she heard a bell just as she'd been told and a plate with some gruel-like substance on it appeared on the table. Hermione sniffed at it gingerly and sent a prayer to Merlin that she would live through the next two months without withering away. She also wondered how much worse it would have been before the war, when Dementors still guarded Azkaban.

**A/N: Another chapter for you! Just so you know, I will be participating in NaNoWriMo this year, but I still plan to make time for FanFic writing. Please read and review! \*HUGS\***

## Incarceration

### *Chapter 6 of 11*

Voldemort is dead. As others around her comb through the bodies and help the wounded, Hermione Granger thinks of only one wizard. A wizard who gave everything and died without anything to show for it, but the lives of those who survived because of him. A wizard who deserved a second chance; something Hermione would go to great lengths to make that happen.

Severus Snape scowled as he casually flicked his wand, causing tapestries to fly open and statues to step momentarily out of place as he patrolled the halls at Hogwarts. Despite it being the early hours of the morning, he knew without a doubt that he could not sleep a wink, so he had chosen to spend his valuable time enforcing the curfew that overly hormonal teenagers tended to break more often at the beginning of each new school year. Though he had already sent three pairs of rowdy students to bed with the promise of harsh detentions, it did nothing to ease his mind or distract him. In only a few hours Hermione Granger would be arriving, fresh from Azkaban prison, to commence her year-long incarceration under his and McGonagall's supervision.

For two months he had distracted himself with preparations for the new term as well as preparing his personal lab for his own work. He cleaned his classroom and his lab from top to bottom. Stocked every conceivable shelf and drawer. Tested each and every cauldron, stirring rod, scale, and beaker. Still, when all was said and done, he thought of the year to come and the young witch who nigh haunted his every thought. Hermione Granger had saved his life, and in return he had helped her avoid fifteen years in Azkaban. Granted, that didn't quite equal her service to him, although he had hoped the act of shortening her sentence would clear his own conscience over the whole situation. But instead he thought about it constantly. He thought of the pain he had felt as he was dying and the relief that soon followed when he felt the antidote go to work and spare his life. He thought of the scared but determined young woman who had given him a second chance. Frowning in frustration, he shook his head and continued pacing the halls of Hogwarts...determined to distract himself from any thoughts of Hermione Granger.

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Hermione Granger opened her eyes the moment she heard the door unlock and the man walk in. Sitting up in a daze, she looked to at the wizard who swept into the room while another stood out in the hall looking around. The one who had walked in had a cloak over his arm that he held out to her. "Miss Granger, put this on and be sure the hood covers your face well. We need to ensure that no one sees you as you exit and when we arrive at Hogwarts. Please do not speak while we are traveling. Everything

that needs to be said can wait until we have you secreted safely in Hogwarts."

Hermione rose from the cot on unsteady feet and put on the cloak, making sure to pull the hood over her head and keep her eyes on the floor to help hide her identity. She gladly accepted this since she, too, did not want anyone to see her being escorted from Azkaban. The wizard motioned her forward and followed right after her. Both wizards walked quickly down the hall and through the door that housed the steep stairs, with Hermione struggling to keep up. She remembered arriving and how rushed they'd been then, but after two months of gruel and no exercise...except for a few times when she had run in place...she was weak and not up to the task that the stairs presented. She stumbled repeatedly and was held up and pushed forward each time. When she thought they might have to carry her the rest of the way, as her lungs begged for air, she finally reached the bottom of the stairs and walked out into the rainy morning, following the two wizards into a small boat that would carry her away from one prison and deliver her to another.

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Minerva McGonagall paced the large office as she waited for the flames to turn green and Hermione to arrive. Her escorts had kindly owed to inform the Headmistress that Hermione would be delivered into her hands promptly at nine this morning and that she would need to have the Floo connection to her private office open. The letter had also stated that she was to meet with the escorts as soon as they arrived about Hermione's incarceration and the conditions that were to be met in order for her to stay out of prison. So with nothing better to do, Minerva had spent the last three hours getting ready for this meeting. She ensured that she had an enchanted quill that would copy down every instruction the Unspeakable gave her. She also cast a slew of secretive spells on the parchment that sat at the ready on her desk, insuring that no one save Hermione and Severus Snape would be able to read those instructions, which would help them keep all of this as quiet as possible.

After instructing the other teachers and house-elves that she was not to be disturbed until dinner, she paid a short visit to Madam Pomfrey. Under the guise of following the Unspeakable's previous instructions, she had asked Poppy for an array of healing potions and instructions, stating that she had been asked to treat someone in confidence. Though Poppy had frowned and tried to nigger the truth out of her in hopes of "properly treating the patient", she had eventually given in and provided the Headmistress with everything she thought might be needed and then some. Minerva had thanked her and, with a promise to update the anxious mediwitch on the mystery person's condition the next day, had Levitated the box containing the potions and such. She was looking through the box and its contents, for the want of something useful to do with her hands, when the flames turned green and three figures stepped out into the room.

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Hermione stumbled as her feet found the floor and grunted in pain as her arms were held tightly and she was none-too-gently shoved into a chair. Though the action hurt, she was grateful to be able to sit down since her head was still reeling from the trip through the Floos and her stomach threatened to protest in the worst possible way. As her head stopped spinning, she lifted her head to take in the tartan furnishing and the anxious-looking face across from her. "Professor, it's so nice to see you," she said weakly, forcing a smile.

"What is the meaning of this? I know that conditions in prison are intended to punish, but is it the Ministry's intention to starve the prisoners to death? She is skin and bones!" Minerva exclaimed heatedly. She rushed to the box and started to pull out potions, only to be stopped by the Unspeakable who was standing next to Hermione.

"Please refrain from treating her with your potions just yet, Headmistress. We have some business to tend to, and then we will leave her to you. First I need you to tell me what story you have in place to help conceal the fact of her incarceration within these walls. I understand that her friends and family were told about a spur-of-the-moment job at the Department of Mysteries, so how do you plan to keep her whereabouts secret while she is here?"

Minerva frowned at the man as she took a seat, wishing to get the meeting over with...all the sooner to get rid of the two horrid Unspeakables. "Yes, they were told that story and I believe that it would still fit her... situation here. If anyone happened to visit and see her or hear word of her whereabouts here, then I will tell them she is under your Department's orders to remain here at Hogwarts for a time on assignment; that she will be doing sensitive work within the area of Hogwarts history and is not allowed to visit with others or leave during that time. I have placed strict conditions on visitors this year, and I've also worked out a schedule with Professor Snape that will ensure Hermione is not within sight of the students or the other professors whilst she is incarcerated," Minerva said. She reached into her drawer and pulled out the schedule and maps she was referring to. She handed them over to the men and looked at Hermione as she waited for them to approve her plans.

Hermione smiled slightly as she fought to stay awake; the journey had exhausted her physically and mentally. Though it took great effort to force her facial muscles upward, she had to try since she could not convey how happy she was to be back at Hogwarts any other way. After a brief moment the two wizards stood. The quieter one pulled out a piece of parchment of his own and proceeded to state their official edicts for Hermione's year-long incarceration at Hogwarts. Minerva nodded in agreement as the quill on her desk flew across the parchment, recording every word. When he was done, the Unspeakable rolled the parchment up and placed it back inside his cloak pocket. With a nod at the Headmistress and a snap of his fingers, which wrenched the borrowed cloak off of Hermione, they two wizards left in a swirl of green fire, leaving a very incensed Headmistress and her former pupil alone.

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Severus scowled at the stragglers who jumped out of his way as he hurried through the busy halls. His classes for the day were canceled, though he hadn't left his students free from work. Every class had been given potions research to do; the amount varied by their year. Most days he would say or do anything to give him peace, away from the grind of teaching the "dreadful little flobberworms", as he often thought of them; but today he could honestly say he would rather be in the classroom than on his way to take over as warden to Hermione Granger. Though McGonagall was the main person in charge of her, Severus was the one who would be doing all the dirty work, since as Headmistress Minerva could not afford to disappear at all hours of the day to tend to Hermione's incarceration. Severus very nearly growled the password that opened the rising spiral stairs up to McGonagall's office. With a flick of his wand he locked the door behind him, ignoring the curious stares of the previous headmasters' portraits as he made his way to the door at the top of another small set of stairs that led to the Headmistress' private office. With a prayer that Merlin would help time go by as quickly as possible, he opened the door and entered the office.

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Severus spotted Hermione immediately as he closed and locked the private office door; though it was not hard to miss the prone body of the young witch lying across Minerva's desk, apparently unconscious. "What is the meaning of this? What is wrong with her, Minerva?" he snapped as he approached Hermione and tried to absorb the scene before him. Hermione's hair, which was known to be quite bushy, was slicked with oil where it was not in masses of knots. Her skin was the color of death and there were dark circles under her exhausted-looking eyes, which only enhanced her gaunt look. Her clothes were filthy and worn. She looked utterly dreadful and very nearly dead, since her chest barely rose a centimeter as she struggled to breathe.

"She was just released from Azkaban, Severus, what do you expect? You know they only care for them just enough to keep them alive. Though I had wished they would make a bit of an exception since Hermione was in isolation during her stint there. I've given her several potions to combat the malnourishment and vitamin deficiency. She passed out moments after the Unspeakables left and I wanted her to lie down, but I knew I'd need your help secreting her up to the third floor rooms," Minerva replied sadly as she sat looking at the sickly countenance of her former student.

"How bad off is she?" Severus asked. He pointed his wand at the chair next to him and Transfigured a stretcher that would carry Hermione.

"Nothing that food, water, and time won't heal. It looks worse than it is, but I still want to be cautious and make sure she doesn't overdo things while she recovers. That means you will not be putting her to work on grading papers or anything else for several weeks," Minerva replied stiffly as she raised her own wand and carefully Levitated Hermione onto the stretcher.

"Minerva, I realize my attitude towards Miss Granger has not been pleasant since she saved my life last spring, but please do not assume that I would harm her further than she has harmed herself by her act of stupidity. Now, please, help me get her under Potter's cloak so we can get her into an actual bed. Filch has been made aware of the route we need cleared, so we shouldn't be seen; but I would rather we hurried and got this over with," Severus replied stiffly. They floated Hermione, safely hidden under the Invisibility Cloak, out of the inner office.

**A/N: Soooo sorry for the lack of updates but life as usual is crazy and plot bunnies can be tricky little blighters! More soon! Please remember to review!**

## Meet Snarky

*Chapter 7 of 11*

Voldemort is dead. As others around her comb through the bodies and help the wounded, Hermione Granger thinks of only one wizard. A wizard who gave everything and died without anything to show for it, but the lives of those who survived because of him. A wizard who deserved a second chance; something Hermione would go to great lengths to make that happen.

Hermione woke slowly during the middle of the night with the need to use the bathroom, only to discover that she was no longer in the dank, dark cell. She took a moment to look around the room, from the full-sized bed with its four posters and black hangings to the simple English oak furniture around it. Across from the bed was a massive fireplace with a small settee and a small table in front of it, next to a door that she assumed led out of her room. On the other side of the room from the bathroom door, there was a large window that flooded the room with the moonlight. Momentarily forgetting her need for the bathroom, she walked slowly to the window and looked out over the grounds that were obviously several floors below her. Her view was of the greenhouses and the dark forest beyond. Smiling softly to herself, she left the window and went to inspect the bathroom.

This room, too, was simple but more luxurious than the bathroom she'd been used to during her years as a student. There was a shower and a garden tub next to a marble sink and a massive mirror. Next to the small door that led to an enclosed lavatory was another door, which she opened to discover a walk-in closet that already housed everything she'd had with her before she was sent away to prison. Smiling, she stepped forward and picked out a simple pair of jeans and a black tee-shirt.

After relieving her discomfort, she started the shower and washed her hair. She winced again and again as her hands snagged in the tangles, and she wished she had her wand to untangle them. After her shower and a short search, she found her comb in a small drawer near the sink and went to work, attacking the numerous knots and mats that had built up over the last two months. After forty minutes of struggle her hair was quite bushy, but at least she could say there was not one tangle left.

With a grumbling stomach she left the bathroom and re-entered her room. She looked toward the door that had to lead out into the castle somewhere, but she hesitated, not knowing whether she was allowed to be seen or not. After several minutes of debating, another growl from her stomach made up her mind for her, prompting her to open the door and peek out into the hall. Shock crossed her face as she recognized the once-dusty third floor corridor on the right-hand side, the very one where she and her two best friends had found Hagrid's three-headed dog in their first year at Hogwarts. Knowing that this corridor was still off limits, though the massive beast was long gone from the grounds, she made her way down the hall, checking doors as she went, only to find them all locked...including the one that led to the main stairwell. Frowning, she went back to her room, knowing she would have to wait until the Headmistress came to visit to request some food.

She thought briefly of Flooing the kitchens and disturbing the house-elves, but that too seemed risky since she didn't recall whether the Unspeakables had said she was allowed to be seen by them. So with her stomach still grumbling, she lay back on the bed in her clean clothes and drifted back into an exhausted sleep.

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Severus was scowling and sipping his tea when the Headmistress caught his eye with a knowing stare and motioned at the door. After downing the rest of his scalding hot tea, he left his seat at the high table overlooking the students of Hogwarts and made his way through the castle to the third floor. When he reached the door that led to the off-limits portion of the third floor he waved his wand, opening the door...a security spell that recognized only him and Minerva...and entered the hall. His nerves were on end. Starting today he would have to see Hermione Granger on a regular basis, and due to their recent history he was at a loss as to how he should react and what he should say, outside of the obvious. Fixing an unreadable expression on his face, he approached the door to her room and knocked loudly. The noise startled her; he heard her stumble to the door, and then she was swinging it open as she wiped her hand across her face. Obviously, she had been asleep.

"Miss Granger, follow me," he said, turning to head for the door she had been curious about. He waved his wand again and stood back, motioning for the curious and nervous Hermione to enter ahead of him. She gasped audibly as she took in the two-story-high room she entered. It was almost like a combination of several parts of the castle, all put together. On the far left side was a wall of windows that seemed to reach around half the room on the circular walls; in front of them was a small dining table with four simple chairs and a cabinet that was low to the ground but quite long. Directly in front of her was a loveseat flanked by two cushy chairs and a low coffee table. Behind that was a massive shelf that conformed to the curve of the walls and reached to the ceiling two stories up; it was utterly stuffed with books and had a rolling ladder attached to enable one to reach the upper shelves. On the right were a beautiful desk and chair made out of more of that simple English oak. The whole room gave the impression of a loft, except for the fact that it was obviously in the magical world.

Hermione shook her head and turned to see Severus watching her closely with a pinched look on his face. Her cheeks flamed as she realized she had kept him waiting while she looked around, and she turned fully to give him her undivided attention.

Severus cleared his throat and shut the door behind him, motioning for her to sit on the loveseat. "Miss Granger, as I have no doubt your keen mind has picked up by now, this and the bedroom next door will be your home for the next year. Obviously, in this area of the castle you will be insured privacy, which will help the three of us keep your presence a secret from the world in general. You are no doubt aware that if you were to be discovered here, you would go back to Azkaban. So Minerva felt it prudent to see that you have these rooms to help you not feel so...imprisoned," he said, sitting down across from her awkwardly.

"Sir, if I'm not to leave these rooms, how would anyone discover I was here? I'm sure you and the Headmistress have cast some seriously powerful spells to keep everyone out of this area...."

"As I was about to say before you started to yammer on impatiently, Minerva is quite averse to the idea of you spending the entire year inside the castle walls, much less these two rooms. So on occasion, when I find I am not busy, I am to escort you on...walks, shall we say...outside of the castle so you don't get 'cabin fever', as the Muggles say." He sounded more than peeved at the idea.

Hermione nodded her head since she could not form the words to respond. She was about to push herself to ask about food when her stomach betrayed her quite loudly. Severus, to her surprise, smirked when he heard the sound of her stomach grumbling.

Clearing his throat again, he went on. "As far as meals are concerned, there will be a house-elf here shortly who will be in charge of tending to your needs. She will be the soul of discretion as far as your identity is concerned. Should you need to speak with me or the Headmistress, she will pop in to get us, though I suggest you limit that sort of thing to emergencies only, or during the nights, since we do not want anyone to become suspicious of a lone house-elf showing up to call me or Minerva away all the time."

He walked over to the desk and pointed to a stack of papers he had placed there while she slept. "This is some of the work the students in the first through fourth years have been doing. The Headmistress' orders are for you to take it easy, but I know you for the workaholic you can be and would rather not be disturbed simply because you

are bored. So...when you feel up to it, you have two weeks to read through these. Not only do you need to acquaint yourself with the work and what you will be grading, but I want you to pay close attention to the way I have graded these assignments.

"I have been known as a bully, and by other words I would rather ignore, for my harsh way of teaching. But I think you may truly understand the reasoning behind my methods if you study these papers thoroughly. I am placing a great responsibility in your hands, and I want to make sure you will not deviate from my method. Do you understand me, Miss Granger?" he asked suddenly, watching her closely.

"Yes, sir, Professor. I really do need to eat first, but I'll get started on reading those today. I promise to do my best to..." she began, only to be interrupted.

"Fine. I must be going, since I have class in less than three minutes. Good day, Miss Granger." Severus dismissed her without waiting to hear anything in return and swept from the room as only Snape could do.

Hermione watched the closed door in wonder for several moments as she considered the man who had just been standing there. If she wasn't mistaken, she would have sworn he was nervous in her presence. Moments later her wandering thoughts were interrupted by a loud pop behind her, announcing the arrival of her new companion.

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Hermione stood up and smiled at the small creature who bowed low until its ears touched the floor. "Hi, I'm Hermione. Nice to meet you," she said, ignoring the bowing as best she could.

The house-elf was not exactly what Hermione was used to. She was wearing the standard Hogwarts tea towel, but her looks were quite striking for a house-elf. Her eyes were a most unique shade of green, almost pewter in color. The house-elf was clearly female, since she spoke with a high, squeaky voice that reminded Hermione of Winky.

"Is an honor to meet Missy Granger. I is Snarky. I shall be having the honor of seeing to your needs while you are here, and Missy is not to worry...Snarky will not be saying anything about you's being here. The Headmistress is being a wonderful and deserved mistress of Hogwarts, and I would not be messing up a chance to make her be proud. Is there anything Snarky can be getting you for eating, Missy?"

Hermione smiled at the charming creature...especially after hearing it call itself "Snarky", a term that immediately brought Severus Snape to mind. "Yes, please, Snarky. I would love some breakfast. Whatever the kitchen is serving for the rest of the school is fine," she said kindly.

Snarky nodded and snapped her fingers, producing a large tray filled with dishes only seconds later which she carried over to the small dining table. "Is there anything else Snarky can be getting for Missy?" Snarky asked after arranging a plate for Hermione and helping her with the chair.

Looking at the bottles that accompanied her dishes, Hermione pointed and asked, "What are these, Snarky?" curious as to their contents.

Snarky handed the first one to Hermione and replied, "They be potions that Headmistress wishes Missy to drink to get better. Headmistress be saying you weak and not healthy, so you's be needing to take these for a few days to get you's strength up."

Hermione smiled at the implied order that was in Snarky's tone. She reached for the offered potion and started to drink under watchful eyes. She knew, as she finished her potions and started in on her food, that she would like Snarky very much.

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Students smiled timidly and appeared eager to rush on to their next classes as Minerva passed among them on her way down to see Severus. Her last class of the day was over, and there were several minutes until his last class started; and as she was about to attend a meeting with the Board of Governors that would surely take the rest of her afternoon, she knew now was the time to check in on Hermione and see how she found her new quarters. Minerva shooed two students on their way who were throwing paper airplanes with their wands, then rounded the corner and stepped into Severus' briefly empty classroom.

"To what do I owe this pleasure, Minerva? I thought you had a meeting with the Board," he said, sounding bored.

"How did this morning go? How is she?" Minerva asked, taking a seat in his chair behind the desk.

"She is alive and has better quarters than most who live here, Minerva. She is fine," he stated, irritation lacing his words.

He frowned down on Minerva as she replied, "That's all? She's fine? Severus Snape, tell me how she really is. I believe it would be a miracle of the highest kind if she was to be completely healed overnight. And how did she find her quarters? Did she have any concerns? Did you make it plain that she was not to do any work until she is fully recovered?"

"Yes, she is fine. She is not quite healthy yet, but she looked rested and clean...albeit her hair seemed fuzzier than I remember it. She seemed to like the quarters, and she didn't have any concerns. She was quiet and, I think, thankful. And, yes, I told her you didn't want her to do any work until she's better," he added hastily, knowing it wasn't a lie but omitting the fact that he'd left her some work to do anyway.

"When did you plan for your first venture about the grounds with her?" Minerva asked, smirking when his faced took on a pained look.

"I explained that I would be escorting her out of the rooms on days when I was not overly busy, but I didn't set a specific time. I figure by your own orders she should eat some food and regain some of her strength first, before she ventures out of her rooms," he hedged.

"Fine. I'll expect to hear daily reports about her well-being, even if you have to stop your own work long enough to Floo me, understand?" Minerva said stiffly as she rose from the seat and started for the door.

"Yes, Headmistress, will do," Severus replied, irritated all over again.

Minerva left him alone with his thoughts, which were frustrating enough that he found himself watching the clock, counting the minutes before his next class would start. Thoughts of Hermione Granger plagued him for the rest of the afternoon.

**A/N: I hope you guys enjoyed the update... more to come soon ;)**

## Settling In

Voldemort is dead. As others around her comb through the bodies and help the wounded, Hermione Granger thinks of only one wizard. A wizard who gave everything and died without anything to show for it, but the lives of those who survived because of him. A wizard who deserved a second chance; something Hermione would go to great lengths to make that happen.

Hermione's nose was buried in the papers that were scattered around her while her hand seemed to move of its own accord across a piece of parchment. Severus cleared his throat and held back a smirk when the papers and quill in her hand went flying. "P-professor, sir. I...didn't hear you come in," she said in surprise as she scrambled to pick up the papers and arrange them as she had had them before. She frowned in frustration when she noticed the messy ink blots on the parchment she had been writing on, knowing she would have to start that whole page over since she didn't have her wand to clean it up.

Severus noticed the frown and reached for the sheet of parchment without asking. After siphoning the ink away from the paper, he looked it over. He looked at her briefly as he walked over to one of the chairs and sat down to look over her work. His mind wandered as he read her thoughts, which were about him since the parchment was basically a report that studied the reasoning behind Severus Snape's method of teaching. The work was thorough and quite revealing, something that disturbed him more than he thought was possible.

Hermione, to her credit, sat as calmly as she could manage while she waited for his verdict on her work. But after five minutes clicked by on the clock above his head, she started to fidget, and finally had to speak up. "Sir, I realize this is a bit awkward, but I was only doing what you told me to," she blurted out, nearly stammering in her earnestness as she continued. "I hope you don't take it the wrong way...well, you shouldn't really; I mean, it's just a report, you know? To help me understand how you think and teach so I can do my utmost to help you when I grade papers and such...."

Severus put the piece of parchment down, avoiding looking directly at her. He stood up and started to walk around the room while he carefully considered his words. "Miss Granger, you have nothing to be worried about. I find no flaws in your work, which I'm sure you expected. I appreciate the work you put into understanding my... methods. I just hope you are not overdoing it, since I will be facing a very angry Headmistress if you fail to recover your health." He stopped walking and finally turned to look at her.

Hermione looked like a deer caught in the headlights just before she controlled herself and smiled lightly. "Thank you... sir...Professor. I... was just a bit worried you would take my research the wrong way, but I also wanted to do my best..."

"No need for any more of your stammering, Miss Granger. I think you're finished for today, so be sure to have the elf bring you some food, and get your rest. Good evening, Miss Granger," he replied stiffly as he made his way to the door.

Just as he was closing it, he heard a very soft reply. "Good evening, sir."

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As soon as the door closed, a pop sounded behind her. Hermione jumped up to see that Snarky was there to deliver a tray without having been asked. Hermione followed the little elf to the table and helped her uncover a delicious-smelling pot roast dinner. "Snarky, were you listening in just now... when the Professor was here? Is that how you knew to bring the food right away?"

"I is having a special spell attuned to Missy so I know when you need to eat. I heard Sir say you needed to eat, so I got the tray for Missy," the elf stated simply.

"Snarky, do you mind me asking how you came to have that name?" Hermione asked, motioning for the little elf to take a seat across from her.

"I is being a little elf when I be arriving at Hogwarts to begin life's work. I didn't yet have a name, so the great Headmaster Dumblydore be telling me to think of a name. I be spending days around the castle trying to find a witch or wizard that I would be liking to be named after. Not three days later I be summoned by the Headmaster and asked to look in on the new Potions Master. As I helped Madam Pomfrey tend to a wound on his head, she be telling him what a Snarky Troll he was. I liked Sir from the first time I met him because I had been knowing elves who worked for old friends of his and I be knowing he wasn't as bad a wizard as he be pretending. So I went straight back to Dumblydore and told him my name was Snarky," she replied, watching Hermione carefully since she seemed to choke a bit on a bit of food. "Is Missy okay?" Snarky asked suspiciously.

"I'm fine. Hmm, I uh, didn't realize you knew Professor Snape. That's all," Hermione remarked with a smile. *That is so...*! she thought as she considered the little elf who had named herself after an insult given to Severus Snape...like it was a true honor to name oneself after an intended insult. She smiled wryly at the little elf as she went on to eat her food under Snarky's watchful eyes.

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Severus swept through the castle halls in a confused and irritated daze, and before he knew it, he was back in his own quarters. The drawing room seemed different somehow as he entered his rooms. He had hardly spent any time in this room through all the years he had lived here. Mostly when he considered the bare and dusty room, it provoked only bad memories of him Flooing in and out of the fireplace to hell and back, meeting with Dumbledore after participating in horrors he would rather forget but having to regale the Headmaster with every detail of his evenings with the Death Eaters. Pain, plain and simple.

But standing there in that moment, he sensed that something else had happened in this room, or someone else had been in it. Waving his wand, he cast a few detection spells which revealed that someone had been here as recently as a few months ago. Panic started to seize him as he walked into his bedroom and, again, felt the presence. As well as in the closet, the bathroom, and even in his private laboratory and office. Incensed at the idea of someone intruding in his private haven, he left his room just moments after he had arrived and headed straight for Minerva's quarters. After knocking incessantly on the door, it was finally opened by an irate-looking Headmistress dressed in a tartan nightgown with a matching robe and hat.

"What is the meaning of this, Severus?" she asked, even as she tied the robe shut and pushed past him into her private office.

"I demand that you tell me exactly who was in my rooms this past spring. I've sensed it, and the spells all point to the presence of a stranger in my rooms, Minerva!"

"Oh, calm yourself this instant, Severus. There was no stranger in your rooms. Only Miss Granger," Minerva stated tiredly as she took a seat behind her desk across from the still standing Severus.

He stared at her with his fierce gaze while he tried to calm himself down. "You mean to tell me she stayed in my rooms *my private rooms* that were for *my* own personal use? What were you thinking?" he shouted.

Minerva scowled at his tone as she answered, "Imagine yourself in my place, Severus. Imagine I had died and you were still responsible for a school and needed to take the necessary steps to hire a new teacher. Wouldn't it seem prudent to have the previous teacher's rooms cleared out and made ready for use by a new tenant? That is what happened, Severus. I very much resent you barging in here and snapping at me over something as trivial as someone stepping foot in rooms you are lucky to once again call home."

Severus slumped down into the chair and pinched his nose in frustration. "Don't you understand, Minerva, that my entire life seems to have been invaded by... that know-it-all? First she stays in my private rooms, going through my private things, and then she saves my life. Now she is here under my supervision, writing detailed reports that reveal more about me than anyone has ever known. Surely you realize how a very private person such as myself would find the idea of someone knowing so much about me intolerable. Not to mention the fact that she saved my life, which means I owe her a debt! It's unbearable. I'm still...." He stopped the thought before he could voice it.

Minerva smiled kindly at him in understanding before finishing his words for him. "You still don't know if you would rather have stayed dead." She nodded her head in understanding, then waved her wand and conjured two glasses of Firewhisky. She took a sip of hers and waited until he had finished his own before she continued.

"Severus, I don't think for one second that you truly wish you were still dead. If you had, you would never have taken the antidote. That suggests to me that you wanted to live. The problem as I see it is that now, the war is over. Riddle is dead and the Death Eaters are no more. You are alive and you have every possibility available to you, not the least of which is life itself. You can truly live now, Severus. I think that frightens you because you are so used to dealing every moment with the next big danger lurking around the corner. Now that part of your life is behind you, and the future is a blank slate. Yes, you owe a debt to Miss Granger for that, but why should you fear it? You should be thankful; and I think if you meditate on that for a while you will realize you should seize every moment. Now, if you will excuse me, it's late and I have another early meeting with the Governors...so good night, Severus." She stood and headed for the door.

Severus left her office and made his way back to his empty drawing room. He spent the rest of the night contemplating Minerva's words.

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Hermione had her head buried in the books and papers around her, oblivious to the door that opened and closed. It had been nearly a week and a half since Severus Snape had seen her, choosing instead to summon Snarky should he wish to convey a message or send papers to Hermione to look over. She had been working for him officially for the past three days, grading essays and regular homework for the first through fourth year Potions students. After double-checking the papers that arrived en masse every day, he was forced to admit...only to himself, of course...that Hermione was doing a great job grading papers in his name. He could not fault her efforts. However, he had come to realize tonight would be the perfect night to escort her outside the castle walls; he could see the dark circles under her eyes that spoke volumes of the hours she was working instead of resting. He cleared his throat and held back a smirk when she jumped once again.

Hermione set her quill down before speaking. "Sir, I didn't hear you come in. Is there a problem?" she asked, carefully masking her nerves as best she could manage.

Severus ignored her and walked forward with his arm held out, a cloak draped over it. "Stand up. I need to Disillusion you before you put the cloak on so we can be sure you are not seen," he ordered as he pulled his wand out. Just as he was pointing his wand at her to cast the spell, he noticed that she was barefoot and dropped his wand. "Do you always walk around without shoes on, Miss Granger?" he asked, carefully masking his bewilderment with irritation.

"Oh, sir, I'm sorry. It's just that I've been in these rooms for so long. I didn't see a need to wear them. I tend to put my feet up while I'm working, and I didn't want to scuff the furniture," she replied. She bent down next to the loveseat to retrieve her sneakers and started to pull them on over her blue socks.

"Enough. Just hurry up, please," Severus said, sighing in frustration.

"Do you mind me asking where we're going to walk?" Hermione asked as she finished tying her laces and stood straight, waiting for him to Disillusion her.

He waved his wand and cast the magic that made her nearly invisible before handing her the cloak. "We are going to walk the edge of the Dark Forest," he replied. "If we happen to run into anyone in the halls, make sure they don't run into you while you are invisible, and make sure to be quiet. Once we reach the forest you may take the cloak off and I will temporarily remove the spell." When he reached the door, he motioned for her to go ahead of him.

"Sir, where did you come by Harry's cloak?" she asked as she waited for him to close her door, and they proceeded towards the exit into the main castle. "I can't imagine him giving it up without an explanation."

"The Headmistress persuaded him to give it to her. I am unaware of how she managed to convince him; you'll have to ask her," he rejoined with annoyance.

"Sorry, sir," Hermione countered, just as Severus was about to open the door.

He stopped to look where her voice had been, a look of confusion briefly crossing his otherwise stoic features. "Let's get this over with," he retorted as he opened the door.

**A/N: Hmmm, I can't see what else to add without making this chapter twice as long... and I just can't do that lol. Thank you for reading... I hope you enjoyed it! \*HUGS\* (the next chapter will pick up where this left off... so keep a look out! \*Smiles evilly\*)**

## A Walk in the Woods

### Chapter 9 of 11

Voldemort is dead. As others around her comb through the bodies and help the wounded, Hermione Granger thinks of only one wizard. A wizard who gave everything and died without anything to show for it, but the lives of those who survived because of him. A wizard who deserved a second chance; something Hermione would go to great lengths to make that happen.

Hermione walked quickly on tiptoes as she followed Severus through the castle halls. Severus was walking quite fast for Hermione, whose shorter (and much weaker) legs could barely keep up. Her breathing was starting to sound a bit labored from the sudden exercise when Severus halted and swung around, causing Hermione to slam right into him with an "*Umm!*"

"Either cease your breathing this instant or I will take you back to your rooms! The spell and the cloak are useless if someone walks by and hears your irritating breathing!" he whispered vehemently, and he brushed off his robes as if she might have gotten something on him during their brief contact.

Hermione was glad she was invisible since the heat rising in her cheeks had her blushing in embarrassment. "Sorry, sir," she whispered back. All the rest of the way out of the castle, Hermione was thinking about one thing: air. She tried to breathe slowly and quietly while also concentrating enough to tiptoe behind Snape and not fall behind...or fall, period. To her amazement she made it all the way out the castle doors and was halfway across the grounds when she tripped and fell on the ground. Severus heard a noise behind him and was about to start scolding Hermione again when there was a *pop!* that announced Snarky's arrival.

Severus raised his wand and performed an Invisibility Charm around all three of them so he could remove the spell and the cloak from Hermione and see what had happened. "Snarky, find her and remove the cloak," he spat after waving his wand to remove the spell. Snarky glared at Severus as she caught hold of the silky material and pulled the cloak off Hermione.

Severus took one look at Hermione's pale features before kneeling next to her and waving his wand over her to see what was wrong. "She not breathing well, sir," Snarky said as she poked and prodded around Hermione with her own magic. "Sir be walking too fast for Missy Missy be too weak to keep up. Sir should know better than to overwork Missy!" Snarky snapped at him as she cast magic over Hermione, forcing oxygen into every inch of Hermione's bloodstream. The shock of the sudden change to her system caused Hermione to cry out in pain.

"Miss Granger, are you all right?" Severus was unable to mask his obvious concern.

"I'm, better. I'm sorry, sir, but it's been a while since I've walked the long halls and down the steep stairs. If you want, I can ask Snarky to take me back to my rooms so I don't bother you further," she began, even more embarrassed by their awkward situation than she could have imagined possible.

"Don't be silly, Miss Granger. You are to be imprisoned for a year, and I would rather waste my valuable time escorting you on walks than see you go mad from cabin fever. It would be terribly inconvenient for me to have to babysit you for more than a year if you lost your mind, given that no one can know where you truly are," he snapped, his usual stern visage firmly back in place as he waved his wand and conjured a goblet of cold water for her. "Drink this, and when you feel ready we will get this over with," he ordered, handing her the water and turning his back on her for both their sakes.

Hermione drank the water in silence while trying to hold back a snigger. Snarky was facing Severus's back with a scowl so fierce Hermione was betting the little elf was just inches from cursing him into oblivion, no matter the consequences.

After handing the now-empty goblet to the still-scowling Snarky, Hermione carefully stood up and retrieved the cloak and put it around her, making sure her feet were not visible. "I'm ready, sir," she said quietly.

Severus tapped her on the head through the cloak, and the spell took effect once again just as Snarky disappeared with *apop!* "Stay close to me. I will try to walk slowly," he snapped in irritation. Hermione followed Severus in silence as they made their way into the edge of the Dark Forest that surrounded the school. As soon as they were safely out of view of the castle, Severus removed the spell and told her she could remove the cloak. "As long as we stay within a mile of the school, we will not be breaking any rules, since that is the legal extent of the Hogwarts school grounds. And since we have to be out here, you will assist me with gathering a few ingredients in the Dark Forest."

"What ingredients are you looking for?" Hermione asked as she started to pay attention to her surroundings and adjust her eyes to the darkness around them. The only light besides Severus's wand was the full moon that penetrated only sporadically through the thickly spaced trees.

"Fluxweed, hellebore, and caterpillars are my main concern, though I would be happy to find some Belladonna. That is a rare find so close to the castle, since desperate students find it useful to replenish their potion-making kits by picking it themselves instead of spending their spare Galleons on mail orders," he replied stiffly.

"Sir, if you don't mind me asking, why would you not just order those? They aren't the rarest or most expensive of ingredients, after all," Hermione commented quietly. She truly didn't expect him to answer and was quite shocked when he did.

"Yes, those and several others are quite common and cheap, yet there is an old magic not often taught in potions today. When one becomes a Potions Master, certain secrets are bestowed when one is preparing to strike out on his own as a Master of Potions. For example, just as our bodies are made of seventy percent water, we as witches and wizards are made of equal parts of magic. It flows in our blood and is part of us as a whole. When Potions Masters take the effort to procure their own ingredients, it lends more power to our own potions as we make or create them. This is why most of the wizarding community relies on Potions Masters for their potions instead of brewing their own. They are more powerful," he stated, just as if he was in a classroom.

Hermione watched him in confusion and awe as he stopped to collect leaves from the hellebore plant at his feet. His whole demeanor and tone of voice during the "lecture" were so smooth and almost...nice sounding. Not one word was spat out like he would do when irritated. She had never heard Professor Severus Snape sound so...normal.

Severus was too wrapped up in carefully harvesting his ingredients to realize this fact.

Hermione, hoping Severus would continue to be so easygoing, decided to press on with the many questions she had. "So I know that since I'm grading the first- through fourth-year work, it gives you more free time to spend on your own work. Would you mind sharing what sort of potions you are working on? I mean, what potions do you prefer to work on? And are you planning to publish? I've read hundreds of *Potions Monthly* journals, and I've never come across your name before," she said, her enthusiasm for the subject apparent.

Severus stood up and looked over to where Hermione was carefully picking up a caterpillar from the branch of a walnut tree. A part of him wanted to lash out at her and tell her to be quiet, while another part of him was piqued. He had never known many of his former students to be as studious as Hermione Granger, much less actually interested in Potions. For her to know he had never published irked him.

"I have no intention of wasting my time writing boring drivel about my work just so I can be acknowledged for it. I do not care to have people grovel at my feet because I am well studied and successful. I would rather share my work anonymously," he replied defensively.

"Sorry, sir," Hermione replied softly. "I didn't mean to touch a sore spot. I guess I'm too curious for my own good sometimes," she remarked as she spotted another caterpillar and started to stand on her tiptoes to reach it. It was out of her reach, though, and Severus scoffed as he walked over and leaned around her to get it himself. As he pulled away from her, his eyes met hers and he froze for a moment and then stepped back quickly and fixed a scowl on his face.

"Please try to restrain yourself from doing such things again. You've already fallen once this evening; I would rather you not lose your balance again," he stated angrily.

Hermione opened her mouth to snipe at him for being so mean and rude, but then she closed it, turned around, swung the cloak back on, and strode away from him without a word.

Severus pulled out his wand and did something he hadn't done since his youth. He pointed his wand where he could see footprints forming on the path in front of him and cried, "*Levicorpus!*" There was a scream and the cloak fluttered to the ground as Hermione rose in the air, dangling by the spell's hold on her ankle.

"Let me down!" she shrieked as she held onto her tee-shirt to make sure it didn't slip over her head and reveal anything.

Severus couldn't stop the smirk that flitted across his features as he approached his prey. "Settle down this instant, Miss Granger, and I will," he answered.

"I'll settle down when I'm safely on the ground! Now let me down!" she yelled.

Severus flicked his wrist and watched as Hermione crashed down on her side and grunted in pain at the hard landing. She sat up slowly and turned to look at Severus, who was watching her with an impassive face. "Now, let me get this straight, Miss Granger, because I'm quite tired of your badgering me with details that are not your concern. We will go on walks to give you fresh air. You will help me if I'm harvesting ingredients, since it's the least you can do to make up for interrupting my life as you are doing. You will not ask me questions; you will not blabber on about anything. You will be quiet, breathe fresh air, then I will escort you back to your rooms and you won't pester me. Do you understand?"

Hermione was furious. She got to her feet and faced Severus. "How DARE you *Forgive* me for asking a few questions and just being civil. *Forgive* me for pestering you. I *only* saved *your* life, after all. You know, I think I might prefer to be in prison if I can't even be with you for two minutes without you sniping at me! Would it honestly be worse for you to just talk to me like a normal person than to be dead?" she said, outraged and fed up.

Severus snapped his fingers and Snarky appeared. "Take Miss Granger back to her rooms. She's had enough fresh air this evening," he ordered.

"You is being rude to Missy. I be telling Headmistress on you, sir!" Snarky replied, even as she grabbed Hermione's hand and popped them back into the castle.

Severus stared at the spot where Hermione had just stood. He was ashamed of himself, he realized. Hermione had, after all, saved his life, and how did he treat her? Though part of him rebelled at the idea that he should have to be civil to anyone, the power of the debt he owed her seemed to nudge him somewhere deep inside, forcing him to realize that he would indeed have to be nice and civil, since it was the least he could do.

*I might be better off dead*, he thought tiredly as he walked deeper into the forest to gather a few more ingredients.



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Hermione paced by the wall of windows in the two-story common room; though common room was a loose term since she was the only person there. *What is his problem?* she wondered as she walked back and forth in front of the windows, the moonlight washing over the room behind her as she thought about everything that had happened that evening. *Severus seemed like he was actually trying to be civil before he stepped in and got that caterpillar, then suddenly he reverted back to his usual old self.* She pondered. Suddenly she stopped and just stared out at the grounds below as it hit her. *He only reverted to his old self after that moment when he was close to me and our eyes met...whoa!* she thought, and her eyes flared with a new sort of understanding of her old Potions Professor.

"Snarky!" Hermione called. She rushed over to the desk and hurriedly stacked the graded papers out of the way and pulled out several new pieces of parchment and a quill.

"Missy be calling me?" Snarky said after popping into the room.

"I was wondering if you might be able to help me. You see, Professor Snape and I had a bit of an argument earlier, and it's made me see that the next year might be hard for us both, what with me working for him and all. But I had a thought I wondered if you might be able to retrieve some journals for me, and maybe some memories from the Headmistress," Hermione said as she looked at the little elf with hope in her eyes.

Snarky regarded her curiously. "What kind of journals and memories is Missy wanting Snarky to get?"

Hermione smiled shyly. "Old journals of Professor Snape's, and any memories the Headmistress has of his youth...."

**A/N: I hope you enjoyed this update! \*HUGS\* Please review...**

## Changes

### Chapter 10 of 11

Voldemort is dead. As others around her comb through the bodies and help the wounded, Hermione Granger thinks of only one wizard. A wizard who gave everything and died without anything to show for it, but the lives of those who survived because of him. A wizard who deserved a second chance; something Hermione would go to great lengths to make that happen.

Hermione played the events of the past evening over and over in her head. Specifically the moment when Severus reached around her and froze when he realized how close he was to her. Her thoughts were interrupted when a knock sounded on her door.

"Come in," she replied, bracing herself for Severus's presence. But relief soon followed when the Headmistress let herself in instead.

"Hermione dear, how are you feeling? Snarky said you wished to speak with me," Minerva said as she sat down and helped herself to a cup of tea from the lavish tray Snarky had delivered only moments before she showed up.

"Something about journals and memories?"

Hermione smiled shyly and sat down to fix her own cup of tea. "Yes, actually. I was hoping you might loan me any journals or memories about Professor Snape. There was an... incident last night that I wish to avoid, and I figured if I studied up on him some more I might be able to circumvent events like last night's."

"Hermione, that is a very serious request...especially when it involves the privacy of a man such as Professor Snape. First I would like you to tell me what happened last night," Minerva stated firmly.

Hermione told Minerva all about their walk in the woods: what was said, what was done, and how the evening had ended. Minerva, to her credit, refrained from commenting, but her facial expressions were not so well hidden as she heard the tale. "So Severus performed a Levicorpus on you? My, my, that is interesting. Tell me, did Harry ever share with you the memories that Severus gave him before he died last spring? After Nagini had bitten him?" she asked after a brief pause, with a tilt of her head.

"Yes, he shared some of it. He told me and Ron that Harry's mum was friends with Severus until he lost his temper and insulted her."

"So there you go," Minerva stated, like the answer was obvious to both of them, while she sat back and contemplated Hermione's expression.

"I don't understand, Headmistress. What does Severus's previous friendship with Lily have to do with what happened last night?" Hermione asked, confused.

"Severus and Lily were friends from the moment they set foot in this castle until his fifth year, when he put his foot in his mouth all because he was embarrassed that a girl came to his rescue. Don't you see? You remind Severus of Lily in many ways. You, like she, are a studious, hardworking, moral-minded individual. You are even smarter than Lily was, if I do say so myself," she remarked, a proud expression showing itself briefly upon her features. "Severus's life up until that point was looking up. He had a great friend who shared many things in common with him, yet he threw it all away and went down a path that literally killed him despite his reformation. Now here he is, with a clean slate, and he is faced with the unlikely situation of being around someone who reminds him of Lily," Minerva explained.

"Wow, I never thought of it like that," Hermione replied. After staring at nothing in particular for several moments, she inclined her head and looked at the Headmistress. "You think Severus is a bit scared of me, don't you?"

"It's not as simple as that, but being a tad scared may begin to help you understand a complex fellow such as Severus Snape, Hermione. In all my years, I have never known a witch or wizard who has experienced such horrible things as Severus. Not even Albus or Harry have known such sorrow, in my opinion," Minerva said, setting her teacup down and twining her fingers together. "I could not even begin to imagine how one would go about creating a whole new life for oneself after going through such things. To an extent, he will always be scarred by his past, but I do think that with help from people who actually care about him, Severus may truly be given a chance to live a good and happy life," Minerva exclaimed confidently.

"So do you think you would allow me to see any journals or memories? I'm sure if I'm given the chance to understand him better, I will be more prepared to handle his sudden mood swings and not be so intimidated by him in general," Hermione said.

Minerva smiled at Hermione and shook her head. "No, Hermione, I will not give you access to such things. I understand that trying to be Severus Snape's friend will be one of the most difficult things you have ever tackled, but it would not be to your benefit to 'study' him in such a way. True and lasting friendships need to be nurtured naturally,

not forced," she explained wisely.

Hermione smiled shyly. "Thank you, Headmistress. Though it won't be easy, I will try to befriend him without the advantages that journals and memories would give me."

Minerva smiled lightly as she stood and headed for the door. "I think in years to come, no matter what becomes of your hoped-for friendship with him, you will not regret it," she replied before exiting the large room and leaving Hermione to her thoughts.

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Severus's face was creased into a very mean scowl as he stared at the papers in front of him. For over two hours he had been sitting at his desk, trying to figure out what to do with them. The papers themselves were worn with use from over the years, with notes and possible formulas scrawled across the lines. Before him was the most promising of his potions research, scribbles and ideas he'd made sure to write down over the years when he had a few moments to spare, which wasn't much. Most Potions masters would have compiled a hundred times the amount of research papers he had by the time they were his age, but with his past duties to the Order and to Voldemort, he had never had the time to fully research the formulas before him.

Part of the problem, as he saw it, was that with Potions and research such as what he had written before him, more than two hands were needed to work out the problems. Potions could be a very dangerous subject in general, but when you entered into the realm of experimentation for the sake of the unknown, it was extremely dangerous and required more than one brilliant mind to ensure success without bodily harm.

With that thought, his scowl deepened. Most Potions masters had a handful of assistants, and some even worked beside other masters. Severus was not one to share his work equally with anyone, so he knew that having at least one go-fer to order around would be more preferable. But in his situation, he was unable to inquire about obtaining assistance from a recent graduate. With his responsibility to keep Hermione's true whereabouts unknown, he could not introduce a new person into the castle, especially one who could get suspicious when Severus disappeared often and would not elaborate on his whereabouts.

So that left him with one option, and he was loath to consider it at all! *Already have the unhappy pleasure of working with her on the first through fourth years' homework and going for walks to help her cope with her imprisonment; how am I suppose to voluntarily ask her to aid me in my own personal research?* he wondered grumpily.

Slouching a bit in his chair, he steepled his fingers and tried to work out the situation in his head. *Obviously I would have to invite her into my personal lab, since it would risk her exposure if she were seen in the student labs. She would need her own workspace and would be in need of constant verbal communication with me to ensure she didn't hurt either of us, depending on what she was assisting with. Bloody hell,* he thought as his debt to her nudged him once again.

*She did save my life, after all. And despite her over-eager attitude, she wasn't all that bad at the subject,* he admitted to himself with a mixture of irritation and reluctance. After much internal debate, he decided there was no way around it. As he finally resigned himself to what lay before him, he sat forward and started to write out a schedule for each of them, all the while wondering what the fates had gotten him into.

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Hermione sighed as she sat back on the couch and stretched her neck backward, looking at the ceiling while she tried to relax aching muscles that tended to bunch up when she worked so hard. The papers that had been delivered for grading that morning were finally done, but not without the crick in her neck threatening to cause a major headache. The first years had turned in five feet of parchment each on basic ingredients and their uses. The second years had been given twice as much about several ingredients and how they interacted. The third years had been given three feet of a detailed analysis of everyday cures. And the fourth years had been almost assaulted with twelve feet detailing the uses, precautions, and "don'ts" of all the fourth year level potions they had covered to date. With an average of twenty to thirty students per class, the papers were long and tedious and would be quite daunting to anyone trying to grade them who didn't have Hermione's drive to accomplish such feats.

Thinking of this put Hermione's mind back onto the very reason she had so much grading to accomplish. Part of her wanted to blame Snape and accuse him of giving the first through fourth years so much homework just to irritate her. But Hermione shook the thought from her head, remembering her own years in his classroom, knowing that Professor Snape would have assigned that amount of work even if he had had to grade them himself. The other part of her wondered what her hard work was allowing him to accomplish in his own research. Though she had had access to his personal work before she'd saved his life, she had never given herself the chance to look at it since she was too busy *saving* his life.

It was while thinking these very thoughts that a knock at the door interrupted her. Hermione's brow furrowed since the only people who knew she was here were able to walk in without knocking. "Who is it?" she asked, wishing the door had a peephole like her Muggle home from her childhood had.

"Open the door, Miss Granger," Snape's voice drawled in exasperation.

Hermione opened the door and stood there staring at the Professor in confusion. "Why didn't you just come in, sir?" she asked, stepping back and motioning him through.

Severus swept into the room with his scowl fixed firmly in place, took a seat across from the couch, and replied evenly, "After what happened last evening, I thought it might be prudent to keep things as civil as possible. Most people respond well to common courtesies, like knocking on a door instead of just entering, for instance."

Hermione sat down and faced him. "Thank you, sir, I appreciate you knocking," she replied sincerely. She smiled lightly and leaned forward, gathering the graded papers together. "I was about to call Snarky and have her pick these up. They are all done, sir," she said, pushing the stack across the coffee table towards Severus.

He leaned forward and picked up the first few reports and leafed through them. The muscle in his cheek twitched slightly when he remarked on her work. "The comments sound as if I'd truly graded them myself," he said stiffly. His body language clearly showed how difficult that compliment was to voice, much less think.

"Thank you, sir," she replied, shocked but not willing to say anything else. For several moments they sat in silence, then Hermione could take it no longer. "Was there anything else you needed of me, sir?" she asked quietly.

Severus pulled a piece of parchment out of his pocket and laid it on the table. "That is a schedule I have drawn up. I would like you to look it over and tell me if you think it would be too taxing for you. If not, I would like to implement a new routine for both of us in hopes of helping us acclimate to this situation over the next year. I'm hoping the work involved will keep us too busy to think of our..." he said, trailing off smoothly.

Hermione's zeroed in on the paper with interest as she picked it up and read the two lines.

**9:00 AM Previous day's HW delivered for grading**

**4:00 PM Potions Research/Assisting**

"So basically you're giving me seven hours each day to grade papers, after which you want me to assist you in the lab," she said, eyeing his handwriting on the paper. "Sir, there are two things you didn't address on this paper. How many hours do you want me to help you each evening, and how will I be able to get to the Potions classroom without being noticed? How would I even be able to be there for a set amount of hours without someone discovering I'm at Hogwarts?" she asked, setting down the paper.

Severus scowled, though he was happy with her response. The fact that she immediately addressed the most important issues proved she would be a worthwhile assistant. "I would welcome your opinion on how long you would be able to... assist me each evening. I tend to work late, but the majority of my work requires a steady set of extra hands, so I will defer to you depending on what we might be working on. As for where we work, you will have to work with me in the private lab so we do not get disturbed...or you get discovered. Minerva is the only person with access to my lab, so the secrecy of your stay at Hogwarts will be protected," he replied.

Hermione eyed the schedule for a moment before looking him squarely in the eye. "Sir, I have a request, if I might," she said. He nodded his head reluctantly so she went

on. "If we are going to work together for the next year, I would like us to be on more... familiar terms. May I have your permission to use your first name?" she asked, her voice quiet and nervous, her eyes watching his face carefully.

Severus nearly walked out of the room. The very thought of letting her call him by his first name galled him. But after taking several deep breaths and resisting the urge to conjure up a Draught of Living Death and force it down Hermione's throat, thereby keeping her asleep until she could be released, he calmed down. *What would be the true harm?* he wondered. Hermione fidgeted across from him as he tilted his head, refusing to stop scowling at her. Finally he replied, "Is that your only request?"

"Yes... sir," she replied carefully, unsure what he was thinking.

"Very well, Miss... Hermione. You may call me Severus on one condition of my own," he replied carefully.

"Name it," she replied, wondering what it would cost her in the long run.

"You may call me Severus while we are alone. But if Snarky or Minerva are around, you will continue addressing me as sir or Professor Snape," he said, clearly grudgingly.

"Very well, Severus," she replied with a smile, unable to help herself.

Severus picked up the graded papers and left in a rush, all the while wondering what he had done with his sense.

**A/N: Thank you guys for bearing with me. I know the wait was long, but I'm trying to get the plot bunnies back. They have been difficult lately. I hope you enjoyed this update and please remember to review.**

## First Day in The Lab

*Chapter 11 of 11*

Voldemort is dead. As others around her comb through the bodies and help the wounded, Hermione Granger thinks of only one wizard. A wizard who gave everything and died without anything to show for it, but the lives of those who survived because of him. A wizard who deserved a second chance; something Hermione would go to great lengths to make that happen.

The very next afternoon found a very excited Hermione as she fidgeted with her notebooks and checked to make sure she had the proper amount of parchment, quills, and other items that would help her be an aid to Professor Snape. She debated on asking Snarky to find her a set of dragon-hide gloves and apron, but she figured Severus would want to supply her with such things since different potions required different forms of protection.

Severus, she thought, smiling. Only hours after her talk with Professor McGonagall and she was already that much closer to becoming more than an acquaintance with Severus Snape. The mere fact that he had agreed to allow the use of his first name...albeit in private...would go a long way towards making their year together easier to bear. With a pop, Hermione was startled out of her thoughts by the arrival of Snarky.

"Snarky is being asked to show Miss the secret passage to Professor's lab. We is needing to leave now; the path is being quite long since it is so hidden," Snarky said, opening the door to the empty hallway.

"Just a moment, Snarky, I need to put my things in my bag," Hermione said, pulling the bag out and carefully putting the rolls of parchment and such into it. "I was so absorbed with making sure to get everything together that I might need, that I failed to pack them," she remarked a tad bit anxiously as she closed her bag and walked to the door.

"Professor is wanting Miss to take her time on the steeply stairs," Snarky said, motioning Hermione over to the right side of the long hallway towards a large window that, from the outside of the tower, would be invisible and part of the seamless stone wall. "He is wanting Miss not to fall again, he is saying," she remarked as she pointed to a sconce on the right side of the wall. "Miss is needing to pull the sconce down for the door to be opening," Snarky said.

"How many floors do these secret stairs bypass, Snarky?" Hermione asked, eyeing the dark descent with caution as they slowly started down the curved stairs.

"The stairs be going down over seven stories into the dungeons, Miss."

Hermione put her hand near the wall and started to regulate her breathing. "I know we are going to Professor Snape's personal lab, but where in the lab does these stairs lead, exactly?" she risked between breaths.

"There is a magic doorway that appears next to the Professor's fireplace. Only Miss and Headmistress and Snarky can make it appear," Snarky answered.

Hermione nearly fell in her brief moment of shock and had to balance herself before catching up with Snarky's fast little legs. *will be allowed back into his personal rooms? With his permission?* she wondered as her eyes caught a glimpse of light below. As they neared the bottom of the stairway and approached the door, the light from beyond it seemed to shimmer. Hermione stepped toward the shimmering barrier and felt goose bumps all over as she passed through. She turned around once she was in the room and watched the shimmer fade until the wall looked solid once more. "Interesting," she mumbled curiously. She was already itching to have a go at the school Library to research such protective doorways. But Snarky pulled on her hand and pointed to the door Hermione knew led to Snape's lab.

"Miss is to be waiting for Professor. Professor wants Snarky to tell Miss not to touch anything while she is waiting," Snarky said, clearly unhappy with having to be so rude on Snape's behalf.

"Thank you, Snarky. I promise I won't touch anything while I wait," Hermione said, her eyes already wandering and absorbing the differences as she entered the lab she was already familiar with.

The well-designed lab seemed to have been cleaned from top to bottom. The shelves opposite the main door that housed mortars and pestles, glass beakers and other instruments of potion-making gleamed with their immaculate contents and were well organized. The main difference she noticed was the six cauldrons on the right side of the room. They were made of a liquid-looking black metal; a material she knew was rare and very expensive. The purpose of the Black Metal Cauldrons was the spells woven into the metal while it was shaped. This helped produce potions that would last even a wizard's lifetime, much less a Muggle's. Muggles would call it "preservative", while it would also increase the potency of any potion brewed within them.

Hermione walked to the nearest one and looked at it closely, admiring the craftsmanship with awe and anticipation.

Severus walked in to see Hermione's head bent over as she inspected the detail of the Black Metal Cauldrons and paused. He watched as she admired them and wondered if she was truly that interested or if it was a simple case of being intrigued at seeing such an expensive piece of equipment for the first time.

Without warning her of his presence, he set the objects in his hands on the preparation table next to Hermione and the Black Metal Cauldron she was admiring. "Miss Gra...*HERMIONE!* If you are done ogling my equipment I would like to get this evening's task underway," he said tersely.

It wasn't the sudden noise of the ingredients being set down next to her that made her jump and stare at him so much as his words. It took every bit of her willpower to resist glancing downwards or give in to the laugh she felt bursting inside of her. And if Severus had realized exactly what he'd said, he hid his own reaction. Standing up straight and facing him, Hermione pushed the funny moment behind her and stood at attention.

Severus, seeing that she was ready to follow his lead, proceeded to point and direct her. "From that cupboard you will need the glass mortar and pestle. From the shelf below you will need a platinum blade for chopping. Tonight we will start by creating a large supply of infused gingerroot. The process I have developed to maximize its quality when infused will take us approximately five hours. If at any time you feel as if you are the slightest bit tired, you will inform me promptly and retire. When creating infusions on a large scale for potions that are very delicate, it is important not to fall asleep or get clumsy with the process, or you will cause serious problems, if not actual danger, with the later stages of brewing. Do you understand me?" he said, staring her down to bring his point home.

"Yes, Severus. I promise to inform you if I am unable to continue," she said, feeling a bit nervous. In all the years of brewing in his classes she had never felt so anxious. Brewing alongside thirty or so other beginners was one thing. Brewing complex potions with Severus Snape there to witness every aspect of your work was another. "May I ask what potion would need such amounts of infusion of ginger?" she asked, retrieving the materials as directed.

Feeling a surge of his teacher self come forth, Severus began to explain even as he picked up a gingerroot and started to show her the proper way he wanted each root sliced. Hermione listened intently and then she, too, started slicing.

"I have been formulating a potion to counteract and possibly even prevent the effects of the Cruciatus Curse," Severus began. "I have never had the opportunity to truly experiment with my formula, which is why we will be preparing such large batches of all the ingredients I will be using in the experimentation process."

"How do you plan to test the variations?" she asked, concerned about the possible side effects when toying with such dangerous anti-curses.

Severus raised one eyebrow in a questioning manner. "I intend to test them on myself, Mis...Hermione," he stated firmly.

"Is that . . . wise, Severus? You are the one who should be testing it on someone else. You are more equipped with fast reflexes. What exactly do you expect me to do if something goes wrong?" she asked, pulling out a notepad a bit nervously with the intention of copying down his instructions verbatim.

Severus looked at her as he replied. "I will test these on myself because I don't know for sure what the outcome will be. In the worst-case scenario, you will not tell the Headmistress about the situation unless you think I will actually die if I don't receive proper help. As for what you should do in such a case? I have a cupboard over my desk there that houses a variety of strong healing and pain-relieving potions. Treat me as best you can, and don't let Minerva find me in such a state. Tell Snarky to pass on the message that I'm sick. I'm notorious for my bad moods when I am ill, and Minerva won't come anywhere near me unless it is an emergency," he remarked.

Hermione walked over to the cupboard and looked at the potions, wanting to confirm that the remedies she would use would be on standby. She hated to admit how scary the idea was of having to lie for Severus while he was seriously injured but not dying. As she perused the bottles, she noticed a flask made of the same black metal as the cauldrons. She picked it up carefully and noticed that the label stated simply, "*If all else fails*". "What is this one?" she asked, holding it up and looking over her shoulder in question.

Severus almost smiled as he remembered its effects. "That is exactly what it says. If all those others fail and you become desperate, then you will make me drink it. It's an old Potions master secret, so you can't reveal its contents or its effects to a living soul. It's a backup that will do the job the others cannot, but I will warn you now that we'd better not have a need for it. The side effects will put me out of . . . commission . . . for several days. The only good thing about it is its ability to keep a person from dying," he answered.

Hermione put the flask back and closed the cupboard. "So besides ginger, what other ingredients are we going to infuse?" she asked, changing the subject.

Severus motioned for her to continue cutting the gingerroots. "We will need infusions of hellebore, pokeweed, and wormwood. The more precarious part of this process will be the use of betony, crampbark, asphodel, belladonna, and fluxweed. Not only will those have to be prepared to exact amounts, but the way in which we combine them with the base of the infusions will be dangerous. We will have to study with small amounts of everything first, just to make sure none of the steps we take will cause an explosion or melt the cauldrons. Once we perfect the orders in which the ingredients can be added without danger, then we will make those variations in amounts that can be tested. That is when we will enter the realm of the unknown. You will take notes as best you can, unless you are too busy treating any possible side effects that may incapacitate me. It is extremely important for you to keep your calm in those cases, and observe as best you can while reacting and treating, do you understand me?" he said, looking over at her.

Hermione looked at him, their glances catching as they looked hard at one another. Severus was intrigued to see seriousness laced with apprehension cross her features. Hermione was fascinated by the trust he was giving her. She was going to be responsible for his life in those situations. "I understand," she replied simply, her every word firm.

As they spent the rest of the evening preparing the gingerroot, they were silent except for the occasional question and answer between student and teacher. Yet their relationship was more than just that now. It was unspoken, but a sense of friendship and camaraderie seeped into them both that evening.

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Late that night, long after Hermione had left with Snarky, Severus sat in a chair in his sparsely decorated sitting room. The greenish glow from the lake cast an eerie light over the room, broken only by the faint glow of the candles. Despite his depressing surroundings, he was anything but depressed. If he were to give a name to his mood, it would be complacent. His mind turned over and over, recalling the evening with Hermione and the work they had begun. Never in his life had he enjoyed his job so much. It wasn't just the surprise he felt at finding companionable someone he had once loathed, but the work itself. He was finally taking steps into a project that meant so much to him. Work he did for anyone else was merely slave labor. He was acting as a true Potions master should, experimenting and making use of his hard training. The unknown for a Potions master was the whole reason for the job. Any wizard or witch could brew everyday potions, but to be the mind behind new creations and new possibilities was a thrill that only one such as himself could truly appreciate.

As he sipped his tea and fingered the black bone china between his hands, his thoughts went to his assistant. He pictured in his mind the moments spent in the lab. The thoughtful questions she asked, the way in which she watched him work. The way she caught on quickly when told to chop those roots a certain way, the way she noted down the littlest thing even though she obviously remembered each instruction she was given. The way she smiled slightly when he had reluctantly complimented her on a job well done before she left for the night. Severus scowled to himself, wondering why he'd thought of that moment. Thinking that he was letting his mind wander a bit too far, he set his cup down on the bare coffee table. He went to bed with hopes of forgetting such things.

**A/N: Thank you all for the long wait. The plot bunnies have returned and I await your many reviews! \*HUGS\***