

# The Long Wait

*by ancientgirl*

Hermione gets a letter of invitation to return to Hogwarts. Will she say yes?

## Chapter 1

*Chapter 1 of 29*

Hermione gets a letter of invitation to return to Hogwarts. Will she say yes?

I had been toying with this idea for a while. I had written a response to the 100 word mirror of Erised challenge and wanted to write a full story. I hope you like this.

These characters are owned by JKR, I'm just toying with them.

The Long Wait

by: ancientgirl

Chapter 1

Hermione Granger had been working at the Dover University of Witchcraft, cataloging many of its old books and scrolls, for the last 6 months. She had graduated with honors the year before and took six months off to travel and rest. When she was offered a job at the university after her return from France, Hermione immediately accepted. Living at home would have been nice for a while, but she wanted to move out and go on with her life as a young adult.

Hermione had majored in Transfiguration and in Potions, and managed to get her degree in both. As she began her job she thought she would love being surrounded by so much education and history. However, much to her dismay, she found out quite quickly that it was insanely boring. For now though it was steady money and it was better than nothing. On Friday evening, after a long week of cataloging, she arrived at her flat and found an owl waiting for her outside her bedroom window.

She opened the window to allow the owl inside and immediately put out a small cup with water and a plate with a few pieces of bacon, which she always had handy. She then untied the small scroll from his leg and sat on her bed to read it:

*Dear Miss. Granger:*

*I am writing you this letter hoping you are well rested after your long vacation. I had heard of your graduation from the University of Witchcraft at Dover and recent employment by said university. I was beyond thrilled to hear that you obtained not one but two full degrees. As you may or may not have heard yourself, Professor McGonagall will be in need of a teachers assistant for her Transfiguration class this year. It is my pleasure to offer to you this position.*

*I know that you will a great asset to Hogwarts, as you are one of the few students to have graduated with such high marks in close to twenty years.*

*I have instructed the owl to wait for your response.*

*I look forward to hearing from you soon.*

"Hello!" she said as she drew nearer.

Once the door closed behind them, Minerva turned to him.



obviously expected an assistant, but not her. No, she figured she was getting off quite easy since he was being somewhat civil to her.

"I already have plans for this evening. Come to my office in the morning after breakfast. I will expect you at eight a.m. sharp. We need to begin the schedule for this coming year's newest crop of dimwits. I am sure the Headmaster has informed you, that the odious task of teaching the first through third years classes is now yours?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good. Then I shall see you in the morning." He walked past her and began to walk out the door.

"Oh, congratulations, Professor," she called out after him. He stopped and slightly turned to look at her. "You finally got the DADA position, just like you have always wanted."

"Thank you...Miss Granger," he said hesitantly before he continued on his way. He walked down the hall thinking that at last he had finally gotten one thing he wanted. Severus Snape had allowed himself only a few dreams in his life; obtaining the DADA position had been the one dream to come true. For now that had to be enough.

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

## Chapter 5

*Chapter 5 of 29*

Severus and Hermione begin to work together and start to notice each other in interesting ways.

All canon characters are the property of JKR.

Thank you to June who is the best beta ever.

### Chapter 5

The next morning, Hermione arrived at Severus' office door a few minutes before eight. She had been so nervous, that she barely ate anything for breakfast. Not only was she going to work with a man she had secretly desired since her seventh year, but said man also happened to be the most dreaded and feared professor in all of Hogwarts' history. He was a hard taskmaster and not the most tolerant person when it came to making mistakes. Perfect ... that was what she needed to be. Unfortunately, she was far from that. Hermione Granger, the brightest witch of her generation, made mistakes just like everyone else did; and like everyone else she wasn't keen on getting her head chopped off for making them. She stood and looked at her watch, then at exactly eight o'clock she knocked and waited to enter the proverbial snake pit.

"Enter," said a stern voice from the other side.

She walked in and closed the door behind her. While she had served detention only twice for him during her entire time as a student, she had never been inside his office or private lab.

"Good morning, sir," she said, hoping to start their conversation on a friendly note. "I didn't see you at breakfast this morning." She tried to keep from looking at the little bit of skin peeking through the opening of his shirt. He had forgone his formal teaching attire in favor of a white shirt. Since he was sitting, she assumed he was wearing black trousers.

"During the summer, I rarely eat breakfast in the Great Hall. I spend my time working out the schedule for the upcoming school year, as well as doing some private research. I also make surplus supplies of potions for Madam Pomfrey to keep in the hospital wing. Now, if that satisfies your curiosity as to how I spend my private time," he said, emphasizing the word private, "may we get on to the work at hand?" He stood and motioned for her to follow him.

*'Yes, he's wearing black trousers, and they fit quite nicely,'* she thought. They walked down a dark corridor and emerged in a room half the size of her former Potions classroom. It looked like his private lab, a place where he conducted research for who knows what. She looked around and wondered if his private stores were close by.

"Now, as you may have guessed, this is my private lab. You are welcome to use it, provided you inform me of your intention to do so beforehand, and I expect you to keep it clean." He walked to the other side of the room and pointed to a door. "This door leads to my private stores." He turned to her and raised his eyebrow. "Although I am quite certain you remember them being in a different location." He walked towards her slowly. "I have since moved them, and these stores you have permission to use." She felt the blood drain from her face at that moment, and a cold shiver ran down her spine.

"H... how did you know?" She swallowed hard and looked at him wide-eyed, only to be given that famous smirk in return.

"I did not know," he said as he took another step and leaned towards her. "You have just confirmed it," he purred. "Pity I can no longer take points from you." Then he did the unthinkable: he smiled, then walked past her and headed back to his office.

As she followed him, she cursed herself for letting him trick her so easily. Of course, he had spent many years spying, so it should not have come as such a surprise. Not to mention he could have just used Legilimency on her anyway, as well as...wait a minute. She stopped for a brief moment, then wondered if she had seen correctly. *'Was that a smile?'* He had actually smiled at her; he was actually being....playful! She shook her head and resumed walking before he noticed her lagging behind.

She arrived after he had just sat down behind his office desk. He pointed to the chair across from him, silently telling her that was to be her place for the next several hours. And so there they sat, planning the first years' class schedule for the school year. At one o'clock they stopped, and Severus decided to call it a day as far as the Potions scheduling went. He still had to begin his own schedule for the curriculum for all seven years DADA classes, as well as the fourth through seventh years Potions classes. Wanting to get something started on that, he told Hermione she could have the rest of the day off.

She quickly agreed, not wanting to spend much more time alone with him. She knew her hands had trembled several times while taking papers from him, but she hoped he hadn't noticed her nervousness or the blush she felt burning all over her face when she accidentally touched his fingers while passing him back his notes. She rushed out of his office, just barely hearing him remind her to be back at the same time the next day. They had gone through quite a bit today. At this rate she would have her lessons planned before the end of the week, and have what was left of the summer to explore the castle, as she had wanted to do during her seventh year.

Hermione's speedy exit did not go unnoticed. Severus sat back for a moment, intently looking at the spot she had just vacated. She had been nervous while she had been



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Hermione arrived at her rooms, wondering how he would react if she asked him out to dinner. *'No, that wouldn't be a good idea,'* she thought; *'at least not until we've been working together for a while longer.'* She had arrived at Hogwarts less than two weeks ago, and she was only now getting used to seeing him as a colleague. She was sure he would be feeling the same way.

The big problem was that she had only seen and known him as a man, an adult; in contrast, he had first seen her at Hogwarts when she was a child, and even though she was eighteen when she graduated he would still have seen her as a child, and recent ex-student. Now, at twenty-two years of age, how was she going to get that image of a little girl out of his head, and make him see her as a woman?

She looked out of the small window that had the same mountain view she had from the bathtub. By now most of her peers were either getting married, already married and starting families, or at the very least in some long-term relationship. Harry had been seeing Luna for ages, and even Ron had been seeing Susan for a while. Just recently she had gone to Ginny's wedding. Oddly enough, Ginny had married Draco Malfoy of all people. Hermione laughed to herself; if anyone could take on Draco, it would be Ginny.

Hermione turned away from the window, and walked to the fireplace. She picked up a small figurine her mother had given her upon graduation from Hogwarts. It depicted a little girl, wearing a very large graduation cap and holding a diploma. She looked at it and smiled; perhaps she would give it just a bit more time with Severus. After a while, maybe he would see how mature she was. She and Severus had many of the same likes and dislikes. They also both loved their privacy, as well as books and potions ... let's not forget potions.

They also hated crowds, parties, and being the center of attention. She recalled one particular night after the fall of Voldemort. The Ministry held a celebratory ball in the school's Great Hall, which had been decorated with twinkling stars and floating swirls of glittering clouds. There was also a ceremony to decorate the war's heroes, who were all called to the stage one by one. First up was Harry, then Severus, Ron, Hermione, Remus, Minerva, and ... of course ... Albus. They all received the Order of Merlin, First Class. She thought she would faint as she stood on that stage with all those hundreds of people looking at her. It wasn't until she felt two strong hands on her shoulders, that she realized how close she really was to landing face-first on that stage.

Severus had already received his medal, and noticed her swaying slightly. He steadied her, then whispered in her ear, "Take a deep breath, Miss Granger. Try to steady yourself; it is almost over."

She was not comfortable in those kinds of situations, and she thought it odd for him to even notice how unsteady she was at that moment. Now, four years after that Ministry ball, she wondered if he realized how alike they were.

Hermione decided to leave it alone for now. She was a patient woman, and her rewards would be so grand. "Severus Snape, evil git and greasy Potions Professor ... that's my reward," she laughed at herself. If Ron could hear her now he would drop dead right on the spot. She laughed again, "Yeah, and Ron would land right on top of Harry's dead body."

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Several weeks had gone by, and it was now two weeks to the start of the school year. Hermione had grown to be quite a fixture in Severus' private lab. He had allowed her to take over the production of the minor healing potions supplied to Madam Pomfrey.

Severus had been too busy to make potions, as he was devising his new curriculum for his first of what he expected to be many years of teaching DADA. He knew that Hermione was a competent young woman, and she would need no supervision, so he left her to take care of the potions for the hospital wing herself. He figured she would be taking over that task at some point anyway, so why not let her get used to doing some of it now. She had graduated at the top of her class, and by next year she would most likely be his full-time replacement in the Potions Department.

He had also decided that he would soon teach her how to brew the Wolfsbane Potion. He was only one of two Masters in the world who could brew the potion to perfection, and if he had anything to say about it she would be the third. She may not have reached full Potions Mistress accreditation, but he had decided that if all went well he would submit a petition to the University of Dover and count her year of teaching as an apprenticeship. This, along with her degree and brewing a complex potion like the Wolfsbane Potion, would be enough to earn her the title. It was hard for women to get ahead in Wizarding society, and even harder for someone who was Muggle-born. Hermione was an intelligent woman, and Severus was determined that she deserved to be given every opportunity.

*'I must be going soft,'* he thought. No, he was just doing for her what Albus had done for him so many years ago. He was giving her an opportunity to make something of herself; surely there was nothing wrong with that?

He had a hard time admitting it to himself, but he had grown accustomed to her presence. She had always been a serious and quiet student, that is when she was away from Potter and Weasley, but now she seemed to be, well.... grown-up. She was no girl, which was another thing he had a hard time admitting to himself. Since she had begun working in his private lab, there were times when several cauldrons were going at once, thus making the room quite warm. On several occasions, he had passed the open lab door on his way to retrieve things he had left in his quarters, only to see she had shed her robe. From the shadows, he would observe her working intently, wearing nothing more than a pair of hip-hugging shorts and a barely-there tank top. She kept quite a bit hidden under those robes of hers, he mused.

Severus enjoyed their conversations as well. They spent hours sometimes in discussing a wide variety of topics, from the possible uses of aconite in healing potions, to why anyone would prefer Roger Moore as James Bond over Sean Connery. He laughed as he recalled the look on her face when he mentioned how he thought that even the new man could not hold a candle to the original. Contrary to popular belief, Severus did not hate all things Muggle, nor was he completely in the dark as to many Muggle things. He was not the elitist some thought he was. He was an intensely curious man. Ever since he was a child, he craved learning new things.

After becoming a servant of Voldemort, Severus decided to see what the cause of so much hatred was. What was it about the Muggle world that Voldemort hated so much? One night after a raid on a Muggle home, Severus took the opportunity to stay behind in London and do some of his own investigation.

He had cloaked himself in an invisibility spell and wandered into a large building called a cinema. They were showing something called a movie, in which a story was acted out; it was like a play except it was projected onto a screen, with no live actors. When he was a student at Hogwarts he had overheard a Muggle-born boy describing a movie to another student, so Severus knew the basics of what movies were. On this particular night, he watched a group of men with very odd names causing havoc in a university. The movie was called Animal House, but frankly the only animal he saw was a horse, which met a most untimely and hysterical demise.

Severus prided himself on always being dignified and serious, yet for the first time in his life he laughed so hard his ribs were aching. He made it a point from then on that, whenever time permitted him to do so, he would come and watch movies. His favorites were the older Bond films, and of course all the classic Hammer Studios films. If he wasn't in the mood for a movie, he would wander into a Muggle bookshop. There he found treasures. Authors he had never before heard of ... Dumas, Brontes, Austen, King, Barker ... were all so different, yet they all wove tales which mesmerized him for hours.

And then there were the Muggle art museums. He lost himself in those museums at times. He remembered sitting in front of a painting called Flaming June for almost three hours. It depicted a woman sleeping on a chair of some sort. She wore a bright orange dress, and the fabric looked like the sheerest finest silk ever made. He felt as though he could just reach out to the painting and touch the fabric, and at times he thought he could almost see it move. There were many artists he loved, and it seemed he had a new favorite each time he visited a museum. The last time he ventured out, his favorite was Vermeer. He tried to remember when the last time was that he had been able to get away. It had been at least three months, maybe four.

He had always been a very private man, and so he certainly surprised Hermione and himself the day he told her of his knowledge and fondness of the Muggle world. Tonight, as he allowed himself to savor the first sip of his brandy while sitting in front of the fireplace, he thought perhaps he would surprise her once again. He would ask her to accompany him to dinner this coming weekend; after all, she was a colleague now.

Hope you liked the chapter. I'll have more up soon.

## Chapter 7 of 29

I know this chapter is a bit short, but it sort of just belonged on its own.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thanks to June for being my beta.

## Chapter 7

It was now Saturday morning. Severus rose early, as was his usual custom, and dressed in casual attire — black trousers and a white raw silk shirt. With his sleeves rolled up, he sat at his desk and penned a short note to Hermione. ‘No,’ he thought; *she is Miss Granger.*

*Miss Granger:*

*I realized this morning that we are in need of several ingredients for the coming year. It will be necessary to venture to Hogsmeade to order the proper amounts for all the classes.*

*Be ready to leave the grounds at two this afternoon. We will Apparate to Hogsmeade, and then proceed to the Apothecary. I will need to show you how to choose the freshest ingredients for your upcoming classes. Since you will be acquiring these on your own in the future, it is best you learn the correct way to do so now.*

Once we have finished, we can have the Apothecary deliver the order to the castle. I imagine this will take us the entire afternoon, and therefore we will most likely miss dinner at the Great Hall. It would be best for us to have dinner at the Three Broomsticks, or better yet, Muggle London.

*I will meet you outside your rooms at two.*

*Severus Snape*

He made sure not to sound as though he was asking her to dinner, instead telling her she was having dinner with him — no ifs, ands or buts. He looked the letter over several times, then rolled it up and sealed it with wax and his personal crest. He opened the small narrow window next to his desk and whistled. After a few moments, a large black Raven appeared and bowed his head.

"Osiris, take this to Miss Granger. She is next door, but wait for a response."

The bird bowed once more and flew in the direction of Hermione's rooms. He only had to fly about thirty or forty feet, so it did not take long for him to start tapping at her window.

Hermione had just woken up and gone into the bathroom when she heard the familiar tapping sound, letting her know she had received correspondence. She had to run out in her towel. She saw the large black bird and wondered briefly who could have sent it. Hermione knew no one with such a bird. She opened her window and the bird hopped in. He was the biggest Raven she had ever seen. His feathers were shiny and so black he shone blue, not unlike Severus' hair, she thought. She smiled; if she could not call him Severus to his face, she would at least give herself the pleasure of doing so when thinking about him.

She took the small scroll from the bird's leg and looked at the sender's name. She gasped; it was from him, from Severus.

"Oh no, I must have forgotten an appointment with him or something," she said aloud to herself. She looked at the Raven. "Was he angry when he wrote this?" To her great surprise, he shook his head and actually looked agitated. 'Yes,' she thought, *this was certainly his bird.* She sat down breathing a sigh of relief and read the note.

"Dinner?" She had to read it twice. He had practically ordered her to have dinner with him. It seemed as though he timed the trip to the Apothecary just right. Of course it would take several hours to pick out the freshest and best ingredients, as well as choose the correct amounts for the potions planned for the first quarter of the year. She had no idea how to do so herself, so he clearly needed to teach her the process. By the time they finished shopping, it would be dinnertime, and certainly too late to have dinner in the Great Hall. Why not have dinner out? She went to her office and wrote a quick note to let him know she would be ready, and sent it off. Tonight she would have dinner with Severus.

I'll have another chapter up on Sunday. I hope you like this one.

## Chapter 8



Hermione makes a little visit to the Malfoy's. No, not those Malfoys.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thank you to June for doing the beta work for this.

## Chapter 8

Hermione was beside herself. She was going to spend the afternoon and most of the evening with Severus. She had to look her best, but she also had to look like she wasn't trying to look her best. After all, this was just an afternoon of buying potions supplies, followed by dinner with a colleague. Well, a colleague for now, that is.

She went to the bathroom and took a quick shower, then came back to the bedroom to begin her planning. As she looked through her wardrobe, she realized she really had nothing appropriate to wear. Everything she owned that wasn't Muggle clothing made her look frumpy. Hermione quickly took some floo powder and tossed it into the fireplace. There was only one person who could help her, and it happened to be the only person who would ever understand her situation. She called out for Ginny, hoping it wasn't too early for her.

After a few moments, Ginny's head popped in through the flames. "Hermione, how are you?"

"Ginny, I'm fabulous! I need your help, though."

Ginny was surprised. She had never before seen Hermione this giddy or frantic, and wondered if working with Professor Severus Snape had finally gotten to her. "Well, come on over, then." She took a step back and waited for her friend to come through the fireplace.

When Hermione stepped through, she and Ginny gave each other a tight hug, and then sat down on the couch in front of the fireplace.

"So spill. I'm dying to know what has you so excited," said Ginny, smiling and waving her hands about in a flurry of movement.

Hermione looked around the room to make sure they were alone. "Is Draco here?"

"No, he went to go visit his mother. Hermione, what on earth is going on? Look at you, you look like that cat that ate the canary!"

"Okay." Hermione took a deep breath. "Do you remember my telling you once, that I had a crush on a Slytherin during my seventh year?"

"Yes," Ginny said as she crossed her arms and scowled at her. "And don't think I've forgiven you for not telling me who it was."

"Well, you can forgive me now, because it happens that the Slytherin was none other than Professor Snape." Now Hermione crossed her arms and gave Ginny a satisfied grin.

"No! Hermione, are you serious? I can't believe it!" They both started giggling. "Does he know?"

"Good heavens, I hope not!" yelled Hermione.

"I suppose you still have a crush on him, then?" Ginny got closer to her now.

"Yes, a wicked crush, Gin. I can't tell you how difficult it is sometimes, being in the same room with the man. Just trying to keep my hands to myself is becoming quite a bothersome chore."

"Wow, you have got it bad. How has he been then? I mean...has he been nice to you? Draco and I went to see Professor Snape just before you went back to Hogwarts. I have to admit, he's quite a different person when you get to know him, especially outside of the teacher/student relationship."

"You're right. Don't get me wrong, he's still the same Snape we knew in school, but, I don't know, he seems much more.... approachable. Well, approachable for him, that is. For the most part, he has been quite friendly, too."

"Well, I have to say, there is just something about those nasty Slytherin men that makes them irresistible to us poor innocent Gryffindor women."

"Ginny, *you* have never been innocent, which is why I need your help. I'm going to Hogsmeade with Severus this afternoon for some potions supplies. After that, we will be having dinner out. Now, it's not a date, but I want to at least show him I'm not just a colleague ... I'm someone he should see as a woman."

"Severus now, is it?" Ginny smiled.

"Well, not quite. We still address each other formally, but I can call him anything I want when he's not around, can't I?" Hermione leaned back against the couch and tucked her leg underneath her, to get more comfortable.

"True. So, let's see, we need to find you something casual enough to go shopping for supplies, yet sexy enough to have dinner with a man you are trying to get to notice you, while looking like you aren't trying to get him to notice you." Ginny stood and paced in front of Hermione several times until she smiled. "I have just the outfit, come and see." She took Hermione by the hand and ran up the stairs to her room.

Ginny and Draco had been married for less than three months, but they had been living together at the Malfoy estate for almost a year. Lucius had run off with Rosmerta after the war, and they were living in his estate in France. He gave Draco half the family fortune, and completely cut Narcissa out. She, after all, had been having an affair with an equally wealthy wizard from Spain, so he felt she had plenty of money to keep her happy.

Ginny and Hermione stood inside a large closet filled with dozens upon dozens of dresses, robes, skirts, and everything else you could imagine that was worn. After pushing aside several garments Ginny finally found what she had been looking for.

"Here it is," she pulled out a sage-colored silk robe along with a matching skirt and off-the-shoulder top. "Now the skirt and the top will fit you perfectly. And the robe is made to look like flowing liquid when it moves, see." Ginny waved the robe in front of Hermione. The fabric truly looked like liquid; it was gorgeous.

"Oh, Ginny, it's beautiful, but way too dressy. Remember, I'm not supposed to look like I'm trying to look good for him."

"Oh right, you're right. Okay, that's no problem, as we have plenty of choices here. Something simple, let's see." Ginny and Hermione spent the next hour looking for something simple and casual, yet sexy enough to get the Potions Master's attention. They finally found several outfits that would be perfect for Hermione's expedition with Severus, and were walking out of the closet when they came face to face with Draco.

"I smell trouble. You two have been in there forever, giggling and whispering. What are you up to, and whom should I warn?" he raised a suspicious eyebrow as he crossed his arms and tapped his foot impatiently on the floor.

"Draco, how long have you been here?" Ginny came and gave him a peck on the cheek.

He grabbed his wife by the waist and nipped at her neck playfully, then turned to look at Hermione.

"Well now, Hermione, who are you going out with tonight?" Draco knew enough about women to know that two women holed up in a closet full of clothes laughing and whispering meant one of them had a date. Since Ginny was his wife, of course the guilty party was Hermione.

"Honestly, Draco, must you always be so suspicious? I just haven't had time to buy any new clothes, so I thought I'd borrow some from Ginny until I could go shopping; that's all." Hermione smiled and placed the clothes she held on her arm across the bed.

Draco narrowed his eyes and walked to her. "I'm a Slytherin; we are always suspicious, and nine times out of ten with good reason. Now spill: who is he?" He now threw himself on the bed and smiled.

Ginny slapped him on the arm. "Draco, stop it. If Hermione doesn't want to tell you, then she doesn't have to."

"What's the big deal?" He shrugged his shoulders. "I mean, what's so secret about her going out on a date with someone?"

"Well, you see, it isn't really a date." said Hermione as she sat down on the bed.

"Not a date. Right, that's why you've got enough clothes here to open up your own boutique. If it's not a date, then what is it, exactly?"

"I'm just going to get some supplies for the new school year with a colleague. Since we'll be finished too late to get back to the Great Hall for dinner, we'll be having dinner in London," she mumbled the last few words. Hermione then stood and began to shrink the clothes on the bed, placing them in a small case Ginny had given her. "It's nothing, really, Draco."

"Wait a minute." Draco sat up. "Colleague, school supplies. Aren't you covering some of Severus' classes this year?" Draco now noticed a blush creeping up Hermione's neck and settling onto her cheeks. "It's Severus! You're going on a date with Severus! I knew it, I knew it! You've had a crush on him since we were in school, haven't you?" Draco fell back onto the bed and began laughing.

Ginny immediately began punching him on his arm. "Draco Malfoy, don't you make fun of her!"

"I'm sorry, Hermione, I swear, I'm not laughing at you," Draco shook his head and began to wipe the tears that had fallen from his eyes from laughing so hard. "I think it's fabulous!"

Ginny and Hermione both looked at him as though he had an extra eye growing in the middle of his forehead.

"You aren't going to tell me I'm crazy or disgusting, or try to talk me out of wanting to pursue something with him?" Hermione warily sat down on the bed again.

"Look, I love Severus," explained Draco. "He was more a father to me while I was at Hogwarts than Lucius ever was, and I can't think of anything better than for him to find someone who might make him happy. He made a mistake when he was young, and it cost him the happiness we sometimes take for granted. He has spent over twenty years making amends for that mistake. No, Hermione, I'm not going to reproach you. If you like him, then go for it. Just don't play games with him, that's the one thing that will drive him away."

It touched Hermione that Draco would speak of Severus in such a way. He was very much the Slytherin and rarely spoke with such emotion, but there was such conviction in every word he had spoken, that she could not help but grab him and hug him so hard he could barely breathe.

"Thank you, Draco. Thank you for being so supportive."

"Hey now, Hermione, that's my husband you're rubbing your body against," protested Ginny.

"Ladies, please, there's plenty of Draco to go around." Draco grabbed Ginny and then all three fell onto the bed. After several more playful punches from Ginny, this time because he asked Hermione to join them in a ménage à trois, he excused himself and left the room.

"Ginny, you really are lucky. He turned out to be quite the catch, didn't he?" said Hermione.

"Yes, he did. Remember when he was such an ass to us in school? He says now that it was his way of flirting." Ginny helped Hermione finish putting the clothes in the case and walked her back to the fireplace. "Now you have to floo me tomorrow to tell me everything that happened, you hear?"

"Loud and clear, Mrs. Malfoy." Hermione hugged and thanked Ginny, then stepped into the fireplace. "Hogwarts Hermione Granger's rooms."

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I hope you liked this chapter. Tomorrow I'll be posting part one of the date.

## Chapter 9

*Chapter 9 of 29*

The date - part one. Severus and Hermione embark on their outing.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thank you to June for being my beta.

### Chapter 9

The morning had practically flown by for Hermione. She tried on every single outfit Ginny loaned her. After outfit number nine, she finally had the right one. It was a two-piece dark blue ensemble. The skirt was long, and had a slit on both sides up to her mid-thigh; and the blouse was sleeveless with a cowl neckline, showing just the barest hint of cleavage. Simple and casual, but it hugged her body in the right places. She looked at herself in the mirror and gave a spin. All she needed to do now was to fix her hair. She had conditioned it for several minutes to make sure it was soft and touchable, just in case, then pinned the sides back to keep it out of her face, but left the rest of it loose. With the hair done, the only thing left was a dash of make-up and she was finished. She looked at her watch; it was one fifty-five, which meant Severus would be

knocking at any moment. She walked out to the living room, gave herself one more quick look, and then dabbed a small bit of vanilla musk oil behind her ears.

"Well, Hermione," she said to herself. "This is about as good as you're going to look tonight."

She took a deep breath, looked over at the door, and saw his shadow. He knocked, and she immediately felt that tickle in her stomach, the sure sign this evening was going to be hell on her nerves. She opened the door to find him dressed in Muggle clothing. Taken aback, she could do nothing more than just stare at him. He was wearing a suit, a double-breasted suit to be exact. It was dark gray, and the shirt he wore underneath was also gray, as was his tie; he had the monochrome look down to a science, and he made it look quite fetching. His hair was tied back, which made it easier to see his whole face. Not that he didn't look sexy as hell, with his hair hanging loosely, but now she could see him better. She had decided long ago that, although he was not conventionally handsome to other people, to her he was just what she thought a man should look like. He stood in front of her with his cape draped on his arm, much like the ones she remembered Lucius Malfoy wearing.

"Ready, Miss Granger?" he asked. He noticed her slightly studying him. She had never seen him in Muggle clothing, so he allowed her to gawk for a bit.

"Yes, I just need to get my cape and shoes, I'll just be two seconds," she said as she turned. *'Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god,'* she thought as she walked quickly to her bedroom. Never had she imagined he would wear Muggle clothes, and never could she have guess he would look so devilishly handsome in them. She grabbed her cape from the wardrobe, and then slipped on a pair of strappy sandals.

While she was gone, Severus reached up and loosened his collar a bit. He was used to high collars, but not neckties. He only wore Muggle clothing when he was visiting Muggle London, so it always took a bit of getting used to. Of course, add to that the fact that Hermione had answered the door wearing the most delicious outfit he had ever seen. There was nothing really fancy about it, yet the moment he saw her, he felt as though he had fallen from the top of the Astronomy Tower head-first. He thanked the Lord in the heaven she had to go retrieve her shoes, for he needed those few moments to regain his composure.

When she came back, he stepped away from the door, allowing her to exit. After she warding the door, they walked silently out through the hidden tunnels of Hogwarts. Severus had shown her the tunnels only days earlier. During his years as a spy, they enabled him to go in and out of the castle without being seen. After a short walk, they reached the outside of the gates to the Apparation spot.

"I trust you have acquired your Apparating license, Miss Granger?" he asked as he turned to her.

"Yes, but I'm afraid I'm still a bit new to it. I got my license a couple of years ago, and haven't really done much Apparating." It was true: she rarely Apparated, and only did so when she visited her parents on holiday.

He took a step towards her. "Then we shall do so in tandem. May I?" He bowed his head slightly, and put his arm around her waist.

She was a bit surprised that he would willingly touch her in such a fashion, but there was no other way for both of them to Apparate in tandem. When he approached her, she nodded and allowed him to take the small liberty of holding her in such an intimate fashion. He was a head taller than her, and she easily rested her head against his shoulder. She took a deep breath; he smelled divine.

It took only seconds for them to appear next to the Apothecary. They both hesitated slightly in letting go. Severus let her go after a moment and stepped back.

"You look quite pale, Miss Granger. You really don't Apparate often, do you?" He looked at her as she placed her hands on her stomach, as though to keep it from running off.

She laughed a bit at herself, and then opened her eyes, not realizing she had them closed all this time. "Not as often as I should. I imagine the dizziness passes as one grows accustomed to this form of travel?"

"Of course," he said with amusement in his voice. "If you are well enough, we should get started. Come." He placed his hand on her back, between her shoulder blades, and guided her along.

As they walked into the Apothecary, the bell over the door rang, letting the owner know someone had entered. Severus and Hermione were standing at the counter, when a small elderly man came out from behind a dark red curtain.

"Ah, Professor, good afternoon. What can I do for you today?" The old man smiled at Severus, then looked at Hermione and nodded.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Wicket." Severus bowed his head slightly, then gestured his hand towards Hermione. "This is Miss Granger. She will be assisting me with some of my classes this year."

"Hello, sir." She smiled at the old man, who seemed to blush.

"We need to order some ingredients, and I will also be showing Miss Granger how the purchasing process works. Have you received the slippery elm I ordered last week?" asked Severus.

"Yes, just this morning, Professor. Shall I set it aside for you while you shop?" asked Mr. Wicket, as he handed each of them a wicker basket.

"Yes, that will be fine." Severus and Hermione then turned and walked to the far end of the store. "It's best to begin at one end, then work your way down the rows to the other side. Do you have the list we prepared?" he asked. Hermione nodded and took out her list, and thus they commenced shopping.

Along the way, Severus pointed out which plants were better than others for certain potions, as well as how to determine a fresh ingredient from one that has been sitting around for anywhere from several hours to several days. By the time they reached the other side of the store, it was six o'clock. Hermione couldn't believe they had been in there as long as they had. She had become so engrossed in her observations of Severus, as well as what he was showing her, that she had lost all track of time.

When they walked back to the counter, she noticed there were five full baskets, as well as the two they were holding. Apparently, whenever they filled a basket, Severus would go back to get a new one without her even noticing. Severus reached into his pocket, then handed Mr. Wicket a slip of paper.

"Hermione, I will show you how to fill the voucher next time you have to venture out for more ingredients. This has the account Mr. Wicket needs to draw the payment from. It also turns into a Portkey. When he is finished wrapping everything and putting the order all together, he will attach the slip to the box, then with a short incantation the box will appear in the classroom storage closet."

"I don't suppose you can have him charm the box so that the ingredients store themselves, can you?" she asked with a smile.

He quirked his lip slightly and looked at her. "Come now, Miss Granger, do not tell me that the highlight of your day tomorrow will not be pressing leech intestines into tiny bottles?"

Hermione crinkled her nose and shuddered. He sure knew how to spoil the fun, she thought. They thanked the store owner, then walked outside. The sun had gone down, and the skies were beginning to darken. Severus took her by the arm, and they began walking to a different Apparation point. They stopped just a few feet short of the Three Broomsticks.

"Is there any type of food you are in the mood for?" he asked as he began to take off his cape. "We can have dinner here if you do not wish to travel to London."

"No, I think London sounds wonderful. It's been a while since I had dinner there." She approached him, also removing her cape.

He shrank his cape to a small enough size and placed it in his pocket, then did the same to hers. He then stepped forward and held his arm to her.

"Shall we then?" He took her by the waist as he did before, and they popped out of sight. They reappeared in a semi-lit alley. Severus gave Hermione a moment to gather her bearings, then stepped back. "Are you all right?" He hoped she would not notice the fact that he had been uncharacteristically kind to her. It wasn't like him to inquire how someone was feeling, but he felt oddly protective of her in the state she was in.

Hermione took a deep breath and nodded, letting him know she was fine. They walked side-by-side out of the alleyway. As they walked up the street, Hermione wondered where her uncaring, ill-tempered Potions Master was. He had been nothing but kind to her all day. True, he had been courteous to her since they had begun their work together, but this evening he had been different.

While they were at the Apothecary, he had been patient in his explanations of the process she needed to learn when picking out ingredients. He had been courteous while they walked alongside each other, and was the ultimate gentleman. Whatever anybody thought of Severus Snape, one thing was clear: the man knew how to treat a lady on a date, and she had long since decided that was exactly what this was.

The night was clear and cool, and she wondered where he was taking her. She hadn't answered his question as to what she was in the mood for, and she hoped his taste in food was as good as his taste in clothes. They stopped in front of a small white building, with blue awnings.

"Al Casbah! Oh, I've been wanting to come here for ages." She looked at him and smiled when she saw he was once again smiling. "Do you come here often, Professor?"

"Yes, I do. I find the food at Hogwarts a bit bland sometimes, so I come here once in a while to resuscitate my taste buds." He opened the door for her, and she walked inside. The lighting inside was very low, and the air smelled like spices. Hermione was in heaven. A tall man approached them and instantly held out his hand upon recognizing Severus.

"Mr. Snape, how wonderful to see you!"

"Hello, Coman," Severus greeted him warmly.

Coman smiled and looked at Hermione. "Two for dinner, I see."

"I'm sorry, but this was a bit of a last-minute outing. I'm afraid we do not have reservations," said Severus.

The man shook his head and held up his hands. "Please. You, sir, need no reservations here. Give me a moment; I will check and make sure we have a table suitable for you."

Coman turned and walked down the aisles of tables, clapping his hands and shouting at several waiters. After only a few short minutes, Coman came back and escorted Hermione and Severus to a table located near a dark corner; he knew Severus liked his privacy, although he didn't know the reason. After so many years as a spy, Severus was accustomed to having a full view of his surroundings. Best to see the danger coming, than to get caught by surprise; that was the spy's philosophy.

They sat down and Severus ordered his favorite Shiraz. Soon the wine arrived along with several appetizers. Severus poured a glass of wine, then handed it to Hermione; she took a sip and found she rather liked red wine. They ordered their food and waited in silence. She leaned back and wondered how to begin a conversation with him that had nothing to do with school, or potions, or anything even remotely business sounding. Then she thought of the perfect topic. After their food came, she began her quest.

"Professor, you have a very beautiful raven."

"Thank you, Miss Granger." He smiled. He thought it amusing that she was trying to start a conversation and Osiris was the only thing she could think of.

"I've never seen a raven that large. Is he a family bird?"

"Yes, you could say that," he said, then looked at her curiously when she laughed. "What, may I ask, is so amusing?" he asked, one eyebrow now rising to its limit.

"Well, when he showed up this morning with your note, I was afraid I had missed an appointment with you. Not expecting him to understand, I offhandedly asked him if you were angry when you wrote the note. And I think he actually understood me. He shook his head and gave me this look that reminded me of you when I was in school."

Severus almost choked on his curried beef. He thought quickly. She lived in the dungeons now, and of course would be spending quite a bit of time there. She would soon notice the ever-constant presence of Osiris. It wasn't unusual for other professors to keep familiars with them, but other birds, not including Fawkes, were usually kept outside in the Aviary. Hermione was curious; she had already noticed Osiris to be rather intelligent for a bird; give her enough time and she would soon figure it out. Severus debated on whether to trust her with the true nature of Osiris' existence. He studied her as she cut her kibbe into small pieces. She had always been a trustworthy person; she would never have been part of the Order if not. That was actually one of her many good qualities; Hermione Granger knew how to keep a secret.

"Miss Granger, since we will be working together, I would like to feel that I am able to place a certain amount of trust in you. Am I correct in making that assumption?" He reached for his wine glass and took a small sip.

"Of course, Professor," she said as she put down her fork and knife, and then placed her hands on her lap. "You know I would never break your confidence. But, I think if either of us are to feel we can trust one another, don't you think we should at least be able to address each other on a first-name basis?"

There it was. She knew the only way to ever have any type of a non-business relationship with him was for them to be comfortable enough to call each other by their first names. She had been Miss Granger for her seven years at Hogwarts as a student ... a student and a child.

"You have a point, Miss.... Hermione." She flashed him with a smile, which temporarily left him wondering what he had been about to say. He quickly recovered and went on to tell her the true nature of Osiris. "Now, you see, the thing is, Osiris is not so much a family bird, as he is a family member. He is Osiris Dominicus Snape, my cousin ... and as you may have already guessed, an Animagus." He waited for her eyes to get back to their normal size. He knew the wheels in her head were churning with untold questions, so he held his hand up to stop her from asking the obvious. "He cannot turn himself back to human form."

"Why? What happened to him?"

"When Osiris was twenty-three years old, he met a woman from the Orient. We never really knew much about Kito, just that she came from that part of the world. He was madly in love with her for about two weeks. In those days, my cousin fell in love on a regular basis and rarely had a relationship that lasted more than a month; that was an oddity for him. When he broke things off with Kito, she was devastated. To say she took it badly would be a gross understatement. She began following him and showing up at his home at odd times. He was cruel to her, though. He ignored her for the most part, but sometimes he would find her following him and he would publicly humiliate her." Hermione was on the edge of her seat. Severus took a sip of wine and continued his tale.

"After almost two months of stalking Osiris, she realized that he would never love her again. One day she followed him to his home. He had let his guard down after not seeing her for several days. As he walked to the door of his home, she came out from behind some bushes and held a knife to her own throat. Before Kito slit her own throat, she cursed him to live the reminder of his life in his Animagus form. I'm sure she had hoped his form to be something easily killed, or some lowly creature crawling about or who knows what."

Hermione gasped. "That's horrible; I've never heard of such a thing." She leaned back against her chair and took a sip of her wine. "And there is no way to turn him back?"

"I'm afraid not," Severus said. "Curses uttered by the dying are extremely difficult to break, but those wielded by a dying scorned lover can never be broken. Osiris came to me that same night. I tried for years to restore him, but found it to be irreversible. Albus tried as well." Severus shook his head. "There is no cure for my cousin. About seven years ago, he simply asked me to stop trying. He has resigned himself to his fate, and I think he has learned to make the best of it. At his request, I have never told anyone of his true nature, of course other than Albus."

"You would have figured it out anyway, as you are going to be spending much of your time in the dungeons. And since I did not notice you arriving with an owl, I thought at some point you may ask me if you could use Osiris for messages. I did not want you to think I would not allow you to use him to carry your post, since it would be his choice to carry your post, not mine. You would need to ask him yourself."

"Yes. At first, it was the only way, but eventually he gained the ability to write with his beak. His writing looks a bit odd, and it's a bit difficult to read, but it works. He writes, however, only in rare instances. His normal means of communication is Legilimency, and since only Albus and I knew of his true nature, he rarely needs to communicate by any other way. If you ever need to communicate with Osiris, he would most probably have to use his somewhat limited writing skills."

They ate the rest of their meal in conversation. Severus had asked her if she still had that crazy cat, and she laughed and nodded. Crookshanks was living with her parents at the moment, and she planned to bring him to the castle once school began. She thought Crooks would love living in his new rooms, not to mention stalking those dark corners in the dungeons. She only hoped Osiris and he would get along.

I'll have the second part of the date posted tomorrow.

Part two of the date: Hermione finds out about a secret passion Severus has. Poetry.

Thanks to June for doing the beta work for me in this story.

After Severus and Hermione finished their meal, they thanked Coman and then left with the promise of returning again soon. It was nine o'clock, and Severus wondered if he would be pushing his luck by asking Hermione if she wanted to take a walk to his favorite bookstore, which was located a few streets away. He didn't want to go back to Hogwarts just yet. Much as he hated to admit it, he was having a good time with her.

If Severus had decided to use his skills of Legilimency at that moment, he would have known Hermione was thinking along the same lines. At first, being around him felt awkward and uncomfortable; yet in the last couple of weeks she had grown quite comfortable around him. He was a highly intellectual person, which she found to be incredibly stimulating and sexy. She also knew that they would never be bored around each other as far as conversation topics went, since they had a lot in common. But, regardless of all these things, she felt apprehensive. He had never been in a serious relationship before, at least not any that she knew of. Hermione realized that his life as a spy had made it difficult for him to have the time for romance. There was no doubt though, in her mind, that he had lovers in the past. He was a man, after all. She looked at him out of the corner of her eye and sighed. *'Yes, he is most certainly a man,'* she thought. Then she began to wonder a whole slew of things. What would he be like as a lover, or a boyfriend, or even a husband? So many questions, yet so few answers. At that moment she wished that Sybil Trelawney wasn't such a quack, then maybe she would have some clue as to how to proceed.

"No, I don't believe I have. It's rather out of the way," she said as she walked through the front door.

Just as he had said, Hermione found the Occult section interesting, to say the least. There were many books on spells and incantations, as well as mythical beasts. She always thought it funny that many of the Muggle books written on magical spells read like fiction, but were meant to be real; and the books on mythical beasts, which were meant to be fictional, were real!

"It's my fault. Did you find anything interesting?" His eyes now became less intense and more amused. He could feel her trembling slightly against him, but having just

scared the living crap out of her, he attributed her shaking to being surprised.

"Umm...yes...I..." She stepped back slightly, but not enough to free herself from his grasp. She began to open the book and flip the pages. "I found this. I have always wanted to read it."

Severus released her and took the book from her hands. He looked at the title. "Pride & Prejudice. A very good choice; you will enjoy this." He handed it back to her, letting their fingers slightly brush against one another.

Hermione felt the telltale sign of a blush coming on and quickly spoke, hoping to distract him from noticing.

"What about you? What did you get?" she asked, almost too quickly.

"Nothing. It's getting late; we should be getting back to Hogwarts." He took her by the arm, and they walked to the counter.

"But you have something there. What is it? Did you find a potions book hidden in here?" She wondered why his mood had changed so suddenly. She also thought it odd he would not let her see his book.

"No, it is not a potions book. It's just some old book I saw the last time I was here, and I thought it might be interesting to read. It's not important." He took her book and quickly paid the old woman, then they both walked out.

Her curiosity was getting the best of her. She saw no reason why he should not tell her what he had chosen, when she so willingly told him what she had found; it was silly, really. Still, she let him hold her arm as they now walked briskly to the same point they had Apparated from. When they reached the site, she shook her arm out of his grasp.

"I know it's getting late, but I don't see why we had to practically sprint back to here."

"I need to get up early in the morning, as I am sure you do as well. I just wanted to hurry back."

"You just want to get back so you don't have to worry about me seeing what you got back there. Honestly, Severus, you tell me this incredible secret about Osiris, yet you get all secretive now over a book."

Severus looked at her, knowing she was right. It wasn't such a big deal anyway. It was after all just a book. He sighed deeply, then opened the bag and handed her the book. He may as well get it over with.

When she looked at the inside cover, her face lit up. "I love Coleridge! His poetry is beautiful. Why didn't you want me to see this?"

"So you can laugh at my expense? I think not." He snorted and backed away from her.

"Why would I laugh?" She stepped closer to him and tilted her head slightly.

"Come now, Miss Granger. The evil Potions Master of Hogwarts, the greasy git, a poetry lover?" He turned away from her, not wanting to witness her laughing at him. He had always loved poetry, yet could never enjoy it while living at home. His father caught him reading it once and beat him severely for it, after saying that only weak-minded sissy boys read poetry. During Severus' student years at Hogwarts, living amongst his Slytherin housemates, he would have been ridiculed for reading something so pure and inspiring. As a teacher, he was loathed and feared. He was seen as some evil bat roaming the dungeons, with no feelings or knowledge of what it was to love or be loved. Perhaps that last bit was true to a certain extent, but Severus Snape did know how to appreciate beauty in all its forms. That was something no one had ever taken the time to find out. He had kept his love of poetry a secret for these many years, and now she knew.

"I think it's lovely, Severus," she said softly, as she approached him. "I think you're lovely." She reached out and touched his shoulder, wanting to quell his fear of her mocking him. He turned slightly, and took hold of her hand.

"I'm sorry... I," she began to apologize, thinking he was going to push her away, but before she could finish her sentence, he took a step towards her and took her face in his other hand. He caressed her cheek with his thumb, then leaned down and kissed her gently. He lifted his head and looked into her eyes, which were fluttering open.

"Sorry for what, Hermione?" he whispered.

"For...for over....s...stepping my bounds," she answered, as she felt his arm wrap around her waist once again.

"I'm not," he answered, just before they Apparated back home.

They arrived back at Hogwarts within seconds. This time Hermione felt none of the sickness she had suffered with the last several Apparations. Severus wanted to pull her closer still, yet he thought better of it for the moment, and began releasing her slowly.

"I'm afraid it is I who must now apologize, Miss Granger, for I believe I may have overstepped my bounds."

"I do not accept your apology," she said as she smiled and bowed her head down shyly. "I rather liked what you did."

Severus was flabbergasted. What should he do now? He had been in conflict with his emotions ever since she had arrived. He had not wanted to surrender to the possibility that he might be falling for her in any way. She had barely been back at Hogwarts for two weeks, and he was acting like a hormonal teenager. Yes, there had been times during her seventh year when he would think about her, but he would not let himself go beyond thinking she was intelligent and quite beautiful. And now she was here on staff, she was a grown woman, and she was clearly willing to let him be close to her with no complaint. Could it be that he was letting that one blasted vision, from so many years ago, turn into some self-indulgent, self-fulfilling prophecy? Was he trying to make something happen with Hermione that should have happened with someone else? Was what he saw even real or even supposed to happen? Since the night he was in that room, he had not returned. It was so many years ago; could it have been her? How could he have known then, what he would want so desperately today?

Hermione wondered what was going through his mind. Would he revert to his former self? Would he refuse to let her address him as anything other than Professor Snape? She'd had a wonderful time that evening, and found herself not wanting it to end. She had wanted him for so long, and now he was here, releasing her slowly from their embrace. She remembered what Draco had said to her earlier: "*Go for it.*" But the apprehension was still there. He was obviously still getting used to the grown-up Hermione, and it had been such a short time since they had begun to work together. She could feel he was in conflict with himself. One thing she knew for a fact was that she wanted this to be something lasting, and real. She was willing to give it a bit more time ... time to let things take their natural course, as it had this evening. She did, however, want him to know she was open to more.

"Perhaps we can do this again soon?" she asked hopefully.

Severus reached into his pocket and took out her cloak. He waved his wand, and it slowly expanded to its normal size. He took it and placed it around her shoulders, letting his hands linger and caress her slightly.

"I believe that can be arranged," he whispered. He felt her shiver beneath his hands, much like she had done earlier in the evening, only this time he knew he was the cause of it. With that, he waved his hand gesturing to her that they should begin walking. They walked towards the castle in silence, yet he gave himself the pleasure of placing his hand at the small of her back. He wanted to keep touching her, if only to make sure she was real and this night had not been a dream. Their evening had begun in silence, and now it was ending the same way. The only difference was, they now walked with the knowledge that there was something they both wanted, and were just a hair's breadth closer to getting it than they were before.

~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*

And so we conclude this date. So, now the real fun begins.

# Chapter 11

Chapter 11 of 29

Hermione meets Osiris and she and Severus settle into a comfortable friendship

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thank you to June for betaing this for me.

## Chapter 11

It was Sunday morning. Severus woke up early, although he had barely slept after last night's outing with Hermione. When they got back to the dungeons, he had walked her to her quarters. They had stood outside her door for several minutes making small talk, mainly because neither one knew what to do. Should they shake hands? Should they kiss? Should he just slap her a few times on the back and say, "*See you at the office, mate?*" So he had decided to take the neutral route: he kissed her on the cheek, thanked her for the lovely evening, and went back to his quarters. She in turn had detained him from returning to his quarters by placing her small hand on his chest, letting it rest there for several seconds, before saying she had never before had such a wonderful evening. As it was, it had taken him forever to get to sleep, since he kept thinking about how soft her lips had been.

He had decided to take his breakfast in his office. School would be starting a week from Monday, and he wanted to take this day to look at his and Hermione's schedule. He wanted to leave next week open, so he could just sit back and relax before the new wave of dimwits arrived to make his life a living hell. He sat quietly at his desk, taking a sip of his coffee every so often, as Osiris stood perched at the windowsill looking out into the forest.

"Severus."

"Hmm?"

"Who's the tasty bird next door?"

Severus set down the scroll he had been studying and looked up. "Her name is Hermione," he said with a slight growl to his voice. "Please refrain from using any such terminology, vulgar or otherwise, when speaking of her in the future." Severus crossed his arms and gave Osiris a scalding look.

"Ah, it's like that, is it?" Osiris flew onto Severus' desk.

"It is like nothing. She is a very bright young witch, who deserves to be respected and not likened to some overheated trollop." Severus lowered himself so he was now eye-to-eye with Osiris. "I mean it, Osiris. You will treat her with respect, or I will be eating raven instead of duck tonight for dinner."

Osiris backed away and spread his wings. "*All right, all right, no need to get violent.*"

"I won't have you speaking of her in that manner." Severus sat back up in his chair, and picked up his scroll once more. Osiris approached him and tapped the corner of the scroll with his beak. Severus let out an exasperated sigh and put down his scroll once more. "What?"

"Did you tell her about me?"

"I had to. She is going to be living down here, and as I said before, she is quite brilliant. She would have figured you out sooner or later, so I thought it best to just tell her about you outright."

"Do you think she would mind if I visited her?"

Severus narrowed his eyes and leaned forward once more. "And just what do you want to go over there for? Osiris, I swear..."

Before Severus threatened him again, Osiris started to shake his head.

"*I just want a change of scenery. Good Lord, Severus, you don't think I get bored being stuck in this castle day in and day out, with only you and that crazy old man to talk to? I swear the man must shit yellow lemon drops. And there's only so much fucking flying I can do, you know. You see all those birds out there?*" Osiris pointed one of his wings towards the window. "*They're stupid! I can't talk to any of them! Have you ever tried to have an intellectual conversation, with something that just regurgitated their breakfast into some little chirping twerp's mouth? You won't be enjoying much of your lunch that day, I can guarantee you that. Look at me. I'm a bird, Severus. What the hell can I possibly do to her?*"

Severus hadn't seen his cousin this upset in years. He often forgot that, for Osiris, being trapped in a bird's body was probably worse than being sent to Azkaban. As a man, Osiris had never hurt a soul ... not physically, at least ... and the burden of the curse all these years had given him a certain amount of empathy towards those around him. Over the years, Osiris had served Severus as family, friend, confidant, and a great source of comfort. There had been so many times when Osiris was a sympathetic ear, especially after Severus came back from meetings with Voldemort or raids with other Death Eaters. Whether it be for his work as a spy, or his work as a teacher, Osiris was always there for him. Truth be told, Osiris was a better man now that he was a bird than he had been as an actual man!

"I tend to forget sometimes how difficult it must be for you," Severus said as he looked at the clock on the wall. It was eight o'clock. He knew Hermione was an early riser, and he also knew she would be up early putting away the ingredients they had purchased yesterday. "She may be in the classroom supply closet. I don't think she knows Legilimency, and if she does I'm not sure how skilled she may be. You'll most likely have to do some writing if you want to communicate with her."

"Thanks!" Before Severus changed his mind, Osiris Apparated away in search of a new friend.

\* \* \* \* \*

Even though he was a bird, Osiris was still a wizard. He could no longer do magic with a wand, and he was quite limited as to what he could do wandlessly, but he could still Apparate, and every now and then he could conjure up one thing or another. Before he was cursed he had been training himself in the use of wandless magic, and had been getting quite skilled at it. He thanked all the deities he could think of for giving him that much.

And Osiris did have one advantage when Apparating. Since he was smaller than a human, and quite light, he could Apparate silently. No pops for him, which often got him in trouble with Severus when they first began living together. For some time Osiris had taken to popping in on the man while he was showering, or trying to sleep. He finally stopped doing so when Severus threatened to configure his feathers into pink bunny fur, along with a bunny tail and ears.

He popped into the Potions classroom, but didn't see her. As he flew to the desk at the front of the classroom, he heard shuffling noises coming from inside the walk-in supply closet.

Hermione had hardly slept the night before. She couldn't get the kiss Severus had given her out of her mind. She had always dreamed of kissing him, and often wondered what it would be like. It was better than she had imagined. His lips were soft, and his kiss warm and sweet. She was so caught up in her musings that she didn't notice the large black bird now perched on the shelf above her. She reached up to grab some empty jars, and felt feathers instead. Looking up, she saw Osiris.

"Well, hello again," she said, walking from the supply closet into the classroom. Osiris bowed his head slightly and hopped down onto the table. "I hope you didn't think me rude yesterday, but I had no idea who you were," she added. Osiris tilted his head and looked very much as if he had shrugged his shoulders. *'Do birds have shoulders?'* she wondered. She realized he still seemed to have many of the mannerisms of a human, even after so many years. It looked a bit odd coming from a bird, but strangely normal at the same time.

"My name is Hermione, but I'm guessing Severus probably told you who I was." Osiris nodded, and Hermione laughed. She turned and put a blank scroll in front of him, then a bottle of ink. Osiris dipped his beak just slightly, then hopped onto the scroll and began writing. When he finished, she looked at the scroll.

"Learn Legilimency," she read aloud. She looked down at him and smiled. "That would make things easier for us, wouldn't it? Do you think Severus would be willing to teach me?"

Osiris nodded, then stepped off the scroll and stood next to the gillyweed.

"Would you like to help me put some things away?" she asked him, and again he nodded. "Let's see, I don't want you to get intoxicated or poisoned by anything. Since you're next to the gillyweed I think I'll have you separate it into small batches." She took from a shelf several small bottles and uncorked them. "Can you fill each of these?"

He nodded once again and started to separate the gillyweed into little bunches, then stuffed the bunches into the bottles and capped each of them.

They worked silently all morning. It turned out that Osiris was a wonderful helper. He was willing to do anything she asked of him. When they were finished, she cleaned up their work area and held out her arm so that Osiris could perch himself on it. She walked out of the potions closet and closed the door behind her. Since school hadn't begun yet, there was no need to lock it or set up wards.

"Does Severus ever let you help him put the ingredients away?" Osiris shook his head. She knew from being his student that Severus could be quite meticulous about his things, and even more so with potion ingredients. "Well, you are welcome to help me anytime." Osiris ruffled his feathers, which she took as a *"whoopee!"*

Hermione sat at the front desk and let Osiris hop down. She looked out into the rows of tables and chairs in front of her. To think, just a few years ago she was sitting behind one of those tables, and now she was going to be teaching in this very classroom. She could scarcely believe it herself. She looked into Osiris' eyes as he stared intently at her.

"Do you know what I'm thinking?"

He nodded. He should not have, but had been able to get into her head. He was too curious, and she lacked the Occlumency skills to keep him out. Severus rarely kept his mind closed to him, knowing this would be the only way they could freely and easily communicate. They had agreed from the beginning never to invade each other's head, other than to speak to one another. Osiris knew that if he were to go rummaging through his cousin's head, there would be hell to pay. Besides, there were things in Severus' head he did not want to know of. His cousin had been a Death Eater, and there were things Severus had seen and done that were best left unknown.

Osiris did not however have the same agreement with Hermione, at least not yet. He was sure Severus would make him promise not to go snooping inside her head, and if he did, he would have to promise not to. Since he was so small, his intrusion into her thoughts had gone unnoticed by her.

She leaned forward, "Can you do magic?" Osiris disappeared, and then within several seconds appeared again, but this time on the other side of the desk. "That's pretty impressive. I would imagine you are limited; is that right?" He nodded again. She noticed the clock on the wall and saw that it was almost twelve-thirty. Before she got up, she heard the classroom door open.

Severus came in and walked towards them. "Did you finish just now?" he asked her, and then looked at Osiris. "Have you been good?"

*"Of course. I was helping her."*

Severus arched his brow and looked at Hermione. "You let him... assist you?" asked Severus.

"Yes. He did a wonderful job with the gillyweed, and clover leaves."

*"Why don't you teach her Legilimency? Then I can talk to her like a normal person."*

Severus looked at him. "Normal person?" asked Severus as he looked back at Osiris.

"Who's a normal person?" asked Hermione.

Severus turned to her and smiled; he'd been doing that quite a bit lately. "Osiris wants me to teach you Legilimency, so you can talk to him like a normal person."

"I'd like that." Hermione walked to the other side of the desk and stood in front of him.

"Perhaps then, we can begin lessons tomorrow?" Severus asked. "My week is free, and we have finished our lesson plans, so we have no academic obligation to worry about. I am confident you will be quite proficient by the time classes begin. Then you and Osiris can have conversations galore." He looked at Osiris and smirked. "But don't say I didn't warn you, Hermione. He'll talk you to death if you let him. I'll make sure to leave some time on my schedule to give you Occlumency lessons as well."

*"Ha, ha, ha. Keep that up and you'll have to start walking around here with an umbrella."* Osiris then flew off, leaving Hermione and Severus alone in the classroom.

"Severus, that wasn't very nice. He can't be as bad as you say," Hermione said, as she lightly swatted him on the arm.

"He knows I'm teasing. But I do suggest you forbid him to enter your thoughts, unless it is to converse. It is easy for him to get inside unnoticed, and quite easy for him to find out things you would otherwise prefer left unknown," he said, as he looked down at her.

Not wanting to get poor Osiris in trouble, she decided not to tell Severus that he had already done so. "I'll make sure to ask him not to do that, then."

"Good. Have you had lunch yet?"



"No more apologies, Severus. Kiss me, or I'll die from wanting you to." She pushed him back against the couch and sat on his lap.

He ran one hand up her back, and wrapped the other around her waist to draw her closer to him. There they sat, kissing each other for what seemed like ages. Severus stopped and rested his head against her chest as he held her close. He could feel the softness of her breasts, and could hear her heart beating furiously ... or perhaps it was his own, as he didn't really know at that point.

"We seem to be getting into this habit quite a bit lately," he said.

"Yes, but you haven't heard me complain, have you?" she said as she stroked his silky hair. Funny how everyone had always thought it was greasy. They stayed on the couch holding each other for almost an hour, and only released each other when there was a knock on Hermione's door. She looked at herself in the mirror to make sure she didn't look too disheveled, then looked at the door and back at Severus.

"It's Albus," she said.

Severus rolled his eyes, as she opened the door. *'Of course it is Albus,'* he thought, *'I'm on a couch, with a beautiful woman in my arms, so why wouldn't Albus be knocking on the door.'*

"Good afternoon, Hermione," said the old wizard as she opened the door.

"Good afternoon, Albus. Won't you come in?" Hermione stepped back and ushered him inside.

The Headmaster walked in, then noticed Severus standing next to the fireplace. "Ah, Severus, you're here." Albus walked towards Severus.

"Albus," Severus nodded in acknowledgment. "Was there something you needed from me?" he asked, hoping Albus didn't have some crazy assignment up his sleeve.

"No, nothing, really. I just wanted to see how you two were progressing with the planning of the classes for the upcoming year. After all, there is but one week left before we begin."

"Yes, everything has been planned out," said Severus, now sitting back on the couch.

Hermione had decided to bring in some tea, and set it down on the coffee table. "Albus, would you like some tea?" she offered.

"No, thank you. I am meeting Minerva shortly. I was merely making the rounds with everyone. Do either of you have anything planned for your last free week?" Albus said, much to Severus' dismay, with that ever present twinkle.

"Actually, yes. Hermione has asked that I teach her Legilimency. It seems that Osiris has found a new ear to bend."

Albus laughed and turned to Hermione. "Ah, so you have met Osiris?" said Albus with amusement.

"Yes, he's quite charming." Hermione took her tea and sat down. She heard Severus mumble something, and then turned to him. "What did you say, Severus?"

"I said, he's charming now, give it time," Severus answered.

During the couple's exchange, Albus noticed how relaxed they both seemed, and that they had called each other by their first names, something that until most recently had not been done in his presence. He would have to inform Minerva of the latest findings. Minerva had scolded him when she had found out he had tricked poor Hermione into thinking she would be her assistant. However, she had refrained from hexing him, after he told her his reason for it. Not to mention she made him promise to tell her anything he saw out of the ordinary, thus he would be reporting to her this very afternoon. He only hoped Severus would never find out he had been meddling. He decided to leave them alone, and excused himself.

Once they were alone again, the pair looked at each other and laughed.

"He's meddling, isn't he?" asked Hermione.

"Did you expect anything less?" Severus sighed and leaned back. "I find it amusing how he seems to think he is being clandestine about it." He stood up and walked to where she was standing. "I'd best get back to my quarters. I need to finish up some notes for my research project."

"What is it you're working on?" she asked.

"I'm working on a Wolfsbane Potion that needs to only be taken once a year instead of on a monthly basis. Unfortunately, it will most probably take longer to brew than the original potion, and cost more due to the ingredients. However, it may be more useful to those who are not able to acquire the potion on a monthly basis." He smiled, knowing what her next question would be.

"Oh yes, that would be very useful for someone like Remus. Tonks and he are often away for months at a time, looking for the few remaining Death Eaters."

"I came up with the idea for that very reason. The last time Remus left, I was only able to give him a two-month supply. Wolfsbane Potion does not hold up well over time. It loses its potency," he said

"Would you be needing any help?" She turned to the table, and then started toying with the flowers in the vase.

He approached her from behind and placed his hands on her shoulders, then kissed her neck.

"I would not mind an extra hand from you," he replied, "especially on such a complicated potion. I will let you look over the notes. If you have any suggestions, we can try those as well. I will let you know when I am ready to begin the brewing process."

She turned around and wrapped her arms around his neck, then kissed him. "Thank you," she whispered in his ear.

He squeezed her tightly, then let her go. "I shall see you at dinner?"

She nodded, and then walked him to the door. As Severus closed the door behind him, the floo came alive.

"Hermione! Hermione, are you there?" Ginny's head popped through the flames.

"Ginny! Oh, no, I completely forgot to call you this morning," said Hermione as she fell to her knees in front of the fireplace.

"You most certainly did. Now spill, you horrible friend. Draco and I were starting to think Severus had kidnapped you."

"That would have been interesting," said Hermione as she pondered such a delightful predicament.

"So, tell me. How was it?"

"Ginny, it was the most wonderful, fabulous, marvelous night of my life. I'm going to get myself a Pensieve, and put the memory in there so that I can look at it over and over again."

"Oh, Hermione, I'm so happy you had such a good time! How was Severus?" asked Ginny, as she moved a bit closer.

"He was a perfect gentleman, even when he kissed me." Hermione giggled and Ginny screamed.

"NO! Hermione, he did not kiss you!"

"He most certainly did, and it was better than I had ever imagined." Just then Hermione heard a muffled voice behind Ginny.

"Draco, for Merlin's sake get back. They did not sleep together, he just kissed her. Honestly, do you think Severus is so ill-mannered?"

"What's that all about?" asked Hermione as she tried to make out what Ginny and Draco were both saying.

"Ignore him, Hermione. He's thinking with his penis! He wants to know if you and Severus slept together."

"No! I think Severus is too proper to do that, at least not on the first date."

"AHA!" yelled Draco, as he shoved Ginny away, and his face came into view. "I knew it was a date!"

~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*

I hope you liked this chapter. I'll have more tomorrow.

## Chapter 13

*Chapter 13 of 29*

Hermione begins her Legilimency lessons and Severus finds out some interesting things.

All canon characters belong to JKR

Thanks to June for doing the beta work for me.

### Chapter 13

Severus walked to his quarters quickly. He didn't want to spend too much time alone with Hermione, since it had taken all of his self-control not to grab her and haul her off to the bedroom. She had awakened something inside of him that had lain dormant for many years. During his time as a spy, he had kept himself in check. It was not that he had been celibate all those years, but sex with a prostitute was not the same as sex with someone you cared about. And he did care about her, and also realized he could very easily love her. She was young, though; and he wasn't sure if she had ever been in a serious relationship. While he knew she had dated Victor Krum for a short while, he did not know of any other boys she may have been involved with. To her, Potter was just a friend ... actually, more like a brother. As far as Weasley went, Severus hoped she would have had better taste.

So far things were progressing nicely, he thought. As it was, their relationship was developing quickly, which was quite all right with him. They had already become good friends, something he never thought would happen. Obviously, it would be easy for them to turn their friendship into something more. The true test for them would be the start of classes. There would be little time this year for outings much like the one they had on Saturday. Of course, if things worked out the way he hoped, they would not need to go out to have a good time. He could make things quite enjoyable for her indoors.

On Monday morning Severus and Hermione walked to the Great Hall together. With one week left before the onslaught of new students, Severus thought he should get used to eating with the rest of the staff once again. It did not go unnoticed, however, that he entered the Hall with Hermione at his side. And more than one set of eyebrows were raised when he pulled Hermione's chair out for her. Although he seemed to be himself in every other aspect, the rest of the staff noticed Severus paying particular attention to Hermione, and several times noticed the girl smiling at him.

"Are you ready to begin your lessons after breakfast?" asked Severus, as he poured their coffee.

"Yes, I'm looking forward to it." She beamed at him.

"I hope you don't mind, but I took the liberty of having a word with Osiris last night. I made him promise not to go rummaging in your head unnecessarily, and he assured me he would not."

"Thank you. I was thinking about that last night as well. I mean, it would be a little embarrassing if he were to see everything in there." She blushed as she said the words, realizing once they came out of her mouth how it might have sounded. This earned her a curious look from Severus.

"Really, Miss Granger? Do tell." He slightly bumped her elbow with his, prodding her to spill her secrets.

"There is nothing to tell, Professor." She laughed softly, yet refused to look at him. "That is, nothing you would consider scandalous." She knew she had opened herself for questions after what she had said. She dared not tell him she spent many nights dreaming of him lying next to her. Hermione couldn't tell him how she secretly desired his hands in places no man had seen in years ... and in all honesty, places no man had ever been. She really only ever had one real boyfriend, and that was Victor Krum. They never got further than kissing, though.

After she graduated Hogwarts, she had met a boy at the university and dated him for a few weeks until he moved back to Spain. The night he left she slept with him, only to be greatly disappointed. She vowed that night never to go out with boys her own age. While she had little experience, she found they had less. They had no idea how to touch a woman the way she wanted, nor did they have the confidence to ask a woman what she wanted. No, Hermione wanted a MAN. She looked at Severus as he buttered his toast, and then looked back down at her plate. She had found just the man she wanted, and he was sitting right next to her.

After breakfast they left the Great Hall to begin her Legilimency lessons. They walked back to Severus' office, where he had placed two chairs across from each other. He motioned for Hermione to sit down, and then he sat himself down across from her.

"It is not always necessary to have eye contact with the person, or bird." He added that last word hoping to ease the tension he had felt coming from her. "You will feel something when I am coming in. You must relax; if you are tense, then my intrusion will be a bit uncomfortable for you."

She nodded and closed her eyes. Hermione let herself breathe in and out deeply, then opened her eyes again. She noted how relaxed Severus looked, and wondered what things she would find in his head if she dared to look. When he was certain she was relaxed, he began.

"I'm going to start now. Are you ready?" he asked. It sounded to her as though he were speaking to her in a dream. The air around her seemed to have changed, and she felt her body quickly growing warm. Within seconds, Hermione felt as though something was pushing through her skull. It wasn't a completely unpleasant feeling, just different. "Can you feel me?" he asked. She nodded slightly, not trusting her voice. Not only could she feel him breaking into her head, but she also felt as though the room temperature had just gone up about twenty degrees. "Can you feel me inside of you now?" he asked.

She was breathing faster now. It felt as though his entire soul had wrapped itself around her. She felt him so close to her now; he seemed to be everywhere. Her nipples were tingling, and a heat was building inside of her, traveling slowly down to her heated core. She had never felt anything like this, not even when she had the encounter with the young Spaniard. Severus was doing this, and he hadn't even touched her. She heard a faint voice inside her head now, and realized he was trying to communicate with her.

*"Speak to me,"* he asked.

*"What should I say?"* she answered. She heard him chuckle across from her.

*"Anything you want."*

Hermione decided to take this opportunity to show him just exactly how she felt about him. *"I think I would rather show you something?"* she said, and then noticed him arch his left brow.

*"Show me whatever you wish."*

She thought back to her last day as a student at Hogwarts. It was as though they were both walking down a corridor, towards an open door where she ushered him inside. She let him see her sitting at her desk, inside her Head Girl's room. She had finished writing inside the last page of her journal. She set down her pen, and closed the journal. She stood and looked around her room as she bent down to pick up her cat. He looked at the sad image she was showing him, and then heard her speak.

*"My last day here, Crooks, and I will most probably never see him again. I'm afraid I don't have the courage to tell him how I feel."* She lifted Crookshanks and stared into his eyes. *"I wonder if he will ever think of me."*

Next they walked through another door, and into yet another room. This time she was in her university dorm room. She had been studying and decided to take a break. She opened her desk drawer and took out a picture. Severus noticed she was smiling. He walked closer to her image and looked at the picture in her hand. It was him. He was standing near the Quidditch pitch, watching the Slytherins practice. The wind was blowing his hair and his robes around wildly.

*"How did you get that?"* he asked in wonder.

*"I begged Colin Creevey to send it to me. He said you almost caught him, but he managed to run away before you turned around."*

*"Why?"* He leaned forward now, letting himself drift out of her head. *"Why would you want a picture of me?"*>

Hermione bowed her head, and began playing with the bottom edge of her blouse.

"I knew if I wrote to you, you would probably not answer me," she said. "I wanted so badly to look at you, to see your face. I.... I thought of you every day when I was at the university. I knew you would never want me, but I thought, if I could have a picture of you, then you would be mine, even if it were just your image that belonged to me, and not your heart."

He knelt down in front of her and lifted her chin with his hand. Her eyes were sparkling with unshed tears.

"You are correct, Hermione; I would not have answered your letters. It would not have been the right time for me, and I am afraid I would not have been open to a relationship with you in any form. You were still a student in my eyes." He wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her slightly towards him. "You are no longer my student, and if you wish it, then I am yours, Hermione. If that is what you truly want, then I am yours." He kissed her, and she wrapped her arms around his neck. She opened her mouth, allowing his tongue to brush against hers. He held her tightly and ran his fingers through her hair. Hermione lifted her head and stared into his eyes. For a moment, he thought he saw fear.

"Severus," she said as she closed her eyes, making him think she was going to change her mind about wanting him. He prepared himself for her rejection. "I've wanted you for so long. But at the risk of having you bolt out the door and never coming back, I have to tell you I want more than just.... than just sex."

To her surprise, he threw his head back and laughed. "I thought you were going to tell me you didn't want me after all."

She laughed shyly, then laid her head on his shoulder. "Never! I would never say that to you," she said softly as he stroked her hair. "I haven't scared you off with what I said, have I?"

"Silly girl, do you see me going anywhere?" he said playfully, as he sat back on his chair, taking her with him to sit on his lap. "Right now, there is no other place I would rather be."

The rest of the week was spent much the same way. They would have breakfast and lunch at the Great Hall. In the afternoon, Severus would give her lessons in Legilimency, and they would snog for a while. Then in the evenings, they took walks around the lake. Dinner was in her rooms.

Hermione proved to be an excellent Legilimens. She picked up the skill easily. Within the first two days, albeit with a bit of difficulty at first, she was able to communicate with Osiris. At the end of the week, she was beginning to have short conversations with Severus as well. She was quite pleased to have picked up such a difficult skill, and couldn't wait to tell Harry and Ron what she had learned.

Before he left her quarters on Sunday evening, Severus wanted to speak with her about the first day of classes.

"Are you ready for tomorrow?" he asked as he walked to the door.

"As ready as I'll ever be, I suppose. I'm a bit nervous," she said as she followed him.

"It will be very easy to want to be their friend, Hermione, but just remember: they are students, not friends. Do not allow yourself to become personal with them; I guarantee it will be something they take advantage of. Be firm, and do not hesitate to hand out punishment if need be."

"I want them to respect me, not fear me." She had hoped he would not take what she had just said personally.

He stepped towards her and loomed over her, his face cold and eyes glittering. Then he leaned down until she felt his breath in her hair.

"I find that fear is, more often than not, a greater form of motivation than respect when it comes to some of these children," he whispered in her ear. He kissed her cheek, and then moved down to her neck, leaving tiny kisses along the way. The dungeons were cold, yet she always seemed so warm beneath his touch.

She grabbed his wrist, then slid her hand up and entwined her fingers with his. She turned her head and met his lips with her own. They had spent the entire week ending their evenings the same way. After dinner in her rooms, she would walk him to the door, he would reach out and kiss her, and they would kiss at her doorway for several minutes before they said goodnight. This evening would not end the same way. This evening, she would not let him go to his room. She released his lips, and pulled her

"Please, stay with me tonight." She could hardly believe that the deep breathless whisper had come from her own mouth. He pulled her closer, and for the first time she felt just what he had hidden so well, all these years, beneath those teaching robes. His body felt firm and warm, and she also felt the telltale sign that he didn't want to leave either.

~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*

I see Hermione as being an incredibly intelligent woman. In my opinion there is no reason not to believe she has during her time after Hogwarts probably has delved into the world of Legilimency because of her thirst for knowledge.

## Chapter 14 of 29

Thank you to June for doing the beta work.

In her bedroom, he gently set her on her feet, then took her face in his hands and kissed her with the passion that had been building for days. Hermione wrapped her arms around his neck, as she raised her left leg and lightly rubbed it against his thigh. Severus began to trail his hands down her body. He first caressed her neck lightly with his fingertips, earning a shiver from her. He then continued down her shoulders and lightly down the sides of her breasts, then stopped at the base of her spine. He lifted his head and kissed her jaw line, making his way to her ear.

"You have me now, Hermione," he kissed her lightly, nibbling at her bottom lip, as he rocked himself against her. He increased his rhythm as he felt Hermione tighten her legs around his waist. "You're so warm. love. so warm." He increased his thrusts more, and he could feel her inner walls begin to twitch slightly.

She held him close to her and nipped his earlobe, as she began to gyrate her hips against his pubic bone. This had an instant effect on him as he felt himself reaching his peak. He held back until he felt her body stiffen, as her walls took hold of his cock, milking him as he spilled his seed inside of her. He could feel her relaxing beneath him, as he slowed his movements. Their breathing finally slowing, as he rolled onto his back, bringing her small body to lie partly on top of him. He kissed her forehead, and stroked her hair. Hermione laid her head down against his chest, and stroked his stomach lightly.

"Did you mean it?" she asked, a bit unsure.

"Mean what?" He looked down at her, then lifted her up slightly.

"You called me 'love.' Am I your 'love'?" she asked hesitantly.

He smiled as he remembered his words, and then stroked her now flushed cheek. "Yes."

With nothing more needing to be said, they fell asleep in each other's arms.

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In the morning, Hermione woke up with the feeling of something warm and hard behind her. She breathed in deeply and smelled the scent of sandalwood mingled with sex. She tried to stretch, and then felt a strong arm tightening around her waist, pulling her back.

"Good morning," said a voice behind her.

"Yes, it is," she replied as she smiled and turned around to find Severus smiling at her. She kissed him, as he rolled her onto her back, and quickly entered her.

"Oh....it's....Gods....a very good morning." She gasped.

"Are you ready for school, little girl?" he asked before he began nipping at her neck. They had spent most of the night in a pattern of sleep and sex. Now, they did not have the luxury of falling asleep in each other's arms. There was no time for explorations, or sweet words to be spoken. This morning it was hard and fast. He needed to feel her warmth surrounding him; he needed to feel the tightness of her passage gripping him even tighter.

"Yes...Professor...harder, oh...please, faster!" She felt him deep inside of her as he took hold of her legs and placed them on his shoulders. She came within seconds, leading him into his own climax. "I've never had such a wonderful wake-up call," she said as she tried to catch her breath. Severus threw off their covers and slapped her hard on the ass. "Ouch!"

"Time to get ready. Shower, breakfast; then, my dear, your entrance into the wonderful world of teaching or hell, depending on how your day goes."

They missed breakfast and of course lunch, but at the risk of having Albus send a search party for them they decided they should get out of bed. After they managed to finally getting out of the shower, they barely made it in time to see the first years being led into the Great Hall. The two of them sat in their usual seats. For the first time in his entire teaching career, Severus was actually looking forward to the start of the new school year. It was not because he would have new students to torment, but because he would have someone to share his day with at the end of it.

~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*

The poem Severus read to Hermione is called "Love" and it is by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, one of my favorite poets. If you have an opportunity to read it please do so. And just so you know, you will bear a bit more of it before this story is over.

## Chapter 15

*Chapter 15 of 29*

Hermione gets a letter from Harry and Severus decided to do some spying.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thanks to June for the beta work.

### Chapter 15

Hermione's first week of teaching had been both exhilarating and chaotic. Her relationship with Severus was becoming stronger and stronger. She started helping him with the new Wolfsbane Potion he was developing, as well as spending most of her nights in his bed. However, she found that teaching the first years was akin to being hung by your toes and being dipped in hot oil; it was excruciating. At the end of her first week, she found herself apologizing to Severus for everything she had ever done during her first year as a student. She now understood why he was always on edge with them, seeing as she had several students who resembled Neville Longbottom in the same room.

She decided to visit her parents that first weekend, and returned to her quarters with Crookshanks in tow. When Severus came to her room that evening, he was greeted by a large orange cat that needed a severe attitude adjustment.

"I see the cat has arrived," he said as he walked into her quarters. Crooks stood in the middle of the living room staring him down, as if by staring at him the man would disappear. "Don't look at me like that. I'm not going anywhere," he said as he stared back at the cat.

Hermione laughed and immediately wrapped her arms around his waist for a tight hug.

"He loves his new home. Don't you, Crooks?" she said as she turned to look at him. Crookshanks gave a bored meow and walked away.

"I can see he is bursting with excitement," Severus said as he looked down at Hermione.

"I wonder if I should introduce him to Osiris," she wondered aloud.

"I'm sure they will meet each other eventually," said Severus as he walked to the small bar she had set up in the corner of the living room.

"I just don't want Crooks attacking him," said Hermione in a worried tone.

Severus poured himself a brandy and chuckled. "Don't worry about Osiris. I'm sure he will have no trouble with your cat. Remember, Hermione, he is still a wizard after all."

Hermione knew Crookshanks could be very territorial. The fact that he was trying to get rid of Severus just moments ago, with his own form of intimidation, proved that her familiar had already staked his claims on her quarters, and he had barely even been there an hour. However, knowing Osiris was still a wizard, and had probably dealt with far worse than a cat, she felt perhaps she was worrying for nothing.

Two months had passed quickly, and Hermione finally received a letter from Harry and Ron. They had finished their training assignment and were now home for several weeks. She wrote them a quick note, asking them to meet her for lunch at the Three Broomsticks that coming Saturday. It had been so long since she had seen her friends, and she wanted to tell them how happy she was. She knew Harry would take the news of her new relationship with Severus well; it was Ron she was worried about.

She sent the letter back with Hedwig, knowing Harry would send her a reply before the end of the day. At dinner that evening, Hedwig flew into the Great Hall and dropped a letter next to her plate. She quickly picked it up, as Severus looked at her, wondering who it was from, before he remembered that the owl that dropped the letter belonged to Harry.

"It's from Harry. I asked him and Ron to meet me for lunch this weekend." Severus rolled his eyes as she began to read silently:

*Hermione:*

*Lunch sounds great, but Molly already cornered us. We have to go to the Burrow on Saturday. Sunday would be better, if that's okay with you. Ron and I can't wait to see you. It's been ages since we saw you last!*

*You know we can't really talk about our assignment, but it went well.*

*I'm happy to hear things are going well for you back at Hogwarts. By the way, how is Snape treating you? I hope he's not making your life miserable.*

*Take care, and we will see you soon.*

*Love,*

*Harry*

"So what does Potter have to say?" asked Severus, not really caring, but knowing he should at least act like he did. They were her friends after all, and now that he and Hermione were together he knew he would have to put up with the two dolts.

"I have a date with two men this Sunday. What do you think about that?" she asked, looking at him out of the corner of her eye.

"I say, how will you have time to do that and also see Potter and Weasley?" He continued to eat his dinner unaffected. He had formed a sort of truce with Harry during the years, but could not, for all the wands in Ollivander's, stomach Ron. However, Severus did not like the idea of her going out without them. He knew it was silly to be jealous, but he didn't want other men thinking she was available. They had not had an opportunity to get away from Hogwarts since the school year began; therefore he had not been able to parade her on his arm in public. It was not that he wanted her to look like a trophy, but he merely wanted to let other men know that she was taken, and she was his.

As he finished his dinner, he devised a plan to follow her into Hogsmeade. During his years as a Death Eater, he often used different spells to disguise his appearance or become invisible. He could do either of those two things, to watch her and her friends. If anyone got the bright idea of approaching her, he would make sure they walked away with a little less spring in their step, and a few less teeth in their mouth.

They finished dinner, and then went to his private lab. The base for the Wolfsbane Potion had been made, and this evening he needed to add the new components that would hopefully make the improvement he theorized would give it the potency needed to improve its shelf life, as well as shorten the dosage frequency. It would take several weeks before it was finished, and would need a few more ingredients added in certain intervals, but he was confident it would work.

Sunday morning Hermione woke up early to get ready for her lunch date with Harry and Ron. She had slept in her own room the prior evening. Severus slept in on Sundays, so she slept in her own bed in order to not disturb him in the morning. To her surprise he hadn't complained about the arrangement. Of course he had shagged her senseless before she left his rooms, so she thought he was probably too tired to argue. What she didn't know was Severus wanted to make sure she was unaware of his plans to follow her into Hogsmeade.

As noon drew near, Severus began to get ready.

"Are you going out? I thought you were working on that potion today?" asked Osiris from his spot atop the fireplace mantle.

"I need to get some things at the Apothecary," said Severus as he put on his traveling cloak.

"How convenient. Isn't Hermione going out to meet those friends of hers near there?"

"I don't know where she is meeting them," Severus said in a clipped tone.

"You're going to follow her, aren't you?" asked Osiris.

Severus sighed and turned to him. "I am not going to follow her. I couldn't care less if she wants to waste her afternoon with those two dimwits. Well, one dimwit at least. Potter is no longer as irritating as Weasley. I'll see you later." He turned and walked out the door.

Osiris flew to the window and waited. First he saw Hermione leaving the castle and walk to the gates, then Apparate out of sight. No sooner had she disappeared than he saw Severus coming out as well, and taking the same path. He shook his head.

"What are you up to, cousin?" He had a bad feeling about this.

~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*

Yes, I know, Seveurs should trust her more. But, he doesn't have too much relationship experience. Besides, Slytherins aren't know for their trust in others.

# Chapter 16

*Chapter 16 of 29*

Hermione meets Harry and Ron and Severus overhears only part of a conversation.

Things begin to get bad for our couple from here.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thanks to June for the beta work.

## Chapter 16

Hermione Apparated just behind the Apothecary. She remembered the last time she was here. That was the night Severus had taken her to London, to Al Casbah. As she walked to the Three Boomsticks she felt an odd feeling, like she was being watched. She looked around but noticed no one looking at her. She stopped and was about to turn around, when she heard Harry's voice.

"Hermione! Hermione, over here."

She looked to her right and saw Harry waving wildly to her. She smiled and rushed to him and hugged him.

Severus took the opportunity to slip into the alley next to them. He had placed an Invisibility spell on himself, but now decided to get a bit closer. He altered his appearance, then came out of the alley looking like an old man. He now appeared short and slightly hunched, with white hair down to his shoulders. He wrapped his cloak tightly around him and resumed his spying. He noticed Hermione and Harry entering the restaurant, and followed them.

Ron had been waiting inside, having already secured a table for them. As soon as they sat down, they wasted no time in telling each other what had been going on since they had last seen each other.

"I can't believe Dumbledore tricked you like that, Hermione," said Ron, as he reached for his butterbeer. "I guess that's the only way he could have gotten you there. I mean, who'd want to work with that slimy git willingly anyway?"

Harry rolled his eyes and took a sip of his own drink.

Hermione had planned on telling them of her relationship with Severus, but felt the need to work up to it gradually. Her legendary Gryffindor courage was waning fast. She decided to take a much needed break; she excused herself and made her way to the ladies' room.

Severus, who had been looking through the window, walked inside as she left the table. As he walked past the table where Harry and Ron sat, he lightly brushed a Knut along the top and situated himself in a corner table. He whispered an Audito charm as he bought the small coin to his ear. As he settled himself back in his chair, he heard Ron's voice.

"Can you imagine, Harry? I wish I could be there to see the look on that greasy bat's face when Hermione tells him it's all been a joke." Severus heard Ron laughing. "I mean, all the while he's been thinking she's madly in love with him, and it's a joke?"

Severus froze. He dropped the Knut and rose from his seat so fast he nearly knocked over the table he had been sitting at. He felt as though his heart stopped beating at that very moment. He walked to the back exit, never seeing Hermione come back to the table. He stood outside, trying to catch his breath. He could feel the bile rising in his throat, and knew he needed to get out of there fast. In his haste to leave, he never realized that what he had heard was but a small part of a cruel fantasy in the mind of a very stupid and immature young man.

Hermione came back to the table to find Ron laughing and Harry shaking his head.

"You're acting as though she's already agreed to it, Ron," said Harry, thoroughly disgusted.

"Agreed to what?" asked Hermione as she sat back down.

"Go on, Ron. Tell Hermione what you spend your free time doing."

"I don't spend all my time thinking about that git, Harry. Don't tell me you haven't thought about getting back at him for being such a bastard to us all those years," said Ron defensively.

"No, I haven't," Harry said. "I've moved on, and in case you hadn't noticed, he may have been a bastard to us, but there were reasons he acted the way he did. He was a spy. And he did save our lives in the final battle, something which you have very conveniently forgotten. He risked his life to distract Voldemort that day, Ron. I would never have been able to get to him if Snape hadn't done that. If for no other reason, you should be grateful to him for that." Harry was fuming. He had grown up quite a bit in the last few years. He had even come to terms with how Severus had treated him during his years in school. While there was no love lost between them, he had to admit that he had a great deal of respect for the man.

"Ron," Hermione looked at him, her face burning with anger. "What have you been saying?" She knew Ron's hatred of Severus knew no bounds, yet she now had a sick feeling he had been plotting something, and it was something she most assuredly would not be happy with.

Ron rolled his eyes and leaned his upper body against the table. "Look, all I said was, wouldn't it be great if we got old Snape back for tormenting us all those years?"

"And how would we be doing that?" she asked as she folded her arms and sat back against the chair.

"Easy. All you have to do is pretend to fall in love with him. You lead him on for a while, then just when he's head over heels, you tell him it's all been a joke." Ron started laughing. "I mean, can you imagine anybody being desperate enough to fall in love with that wanker? Blimey, I'd love to see the look on his face when you told him he would be the last person in this world you would let touch you."

Hermione closed her eyes. She began to count; her father had always told her to count when she felt angry enough to burst. Then, as calmly as she could bear, she uncrossed her arms and leaned forward.



"Ronald Weasley," she said, her voice just above a whisper, "you are the most disgusting, immature, idiotic little boy I have ever had the misfortune to know. Not only would I never be part of such a cruel and malicious joke, but, if I ever find out you have had any part, in any plan, to hurt Severus, I will hex your balls so far up your ass they will come out of your ears, and you'll be wearing them as earrings. Have I made myself clear?" She pushed her chair back so fast that the noise made all the patrons turn to look at what the commotion was all about.

"Hermione, wait. I know you work with him, but you don't have to get so upset," Ron said as he tried to go after her. Ron's complexion grew so pale that his freckles had disappeared.

Harry put his hand on his friend's shoulder and pushed him back down.

"Don't," Harry said as Ron looked at him. "Just leave her be, Ron. That was a bloody stupid thing to say, and you know it."

"Okay, maybe it was, but why is she so defensive of him anyway?" Ron took another sip of his butterbeer and shook his head.

Harry knew why she had been so upset. He had suspected her of having a crush on Severus during their seventh year. Today, seeing her so upset confirmed that not only did she have feelings for him back then, she may still feel the same way.

\* \* \* \* \*

As soon as Severus reached the castle he immediately retreated to his rooms. He rushed to the sideboard next to his desk and poured himself a shot of firewhisky. He downed it in one gulp, and then poured himself another. Osiris had heard him come in, and flew down from his niche near the ceiling and stood on the fireplace mantle.

"*What's happened?*" he asked. Severus looked pale as a ghost.

"Leave me alone!" Severus drank down the shot in his hand and poured another. "I am in no mood for questions or company."

"*That's too bad because you have it regardless. You followed her, didn't you?*" Osiris looked at his cousin drink his third shot in less than five minutes. "*For Merlin's sake, stop doing that and tell me what the hell happened.*"

Severus was about to take another drink, then realized getting himself drunk would accomplish nothing. He threw the glass into the fireplace and sank heavily into his favorite chair. Head in hand, he sighed heavily.

"It was a joke," he said sadly.

"*What was?*" Osiris flew down and sat on the chair's armrest. He looked up into Severus' eyes and was shocked to see what looked like tears forming. "*Severus, what was a joke? Please, tell me what happened. Is it Hermione? Is she all right?*"

Severus leaned his head back and closed his eyes, then laughed slightly.

"Don't you understand? It was a joke. All this time, her words, her actions, her feelings, it has all been a lie!" he said now at the top of his lungs.

Osiris bowed his head, trying to let what Severus had just said sink in.

"*You mean.... she was pretending? This whole time she was pretending to have feelings for you? Why?*" Osiris was fairly laid back, and rarely let things upset him, but this was something inexcusable. Severus was his family, his friend. He had taken care of him all these years, and the fact that someone had so willingly tried to hurt Severus made him angry. Still, Osiris had spent time with Hermione, and he was a pretty good judge of character. It seemed, though, she had fooled him too.

"I was not kind to her or her friends when they were students here. I suppose they were trying to exact some sort of revenge," Severus' voice sounded hollow and mechanical.

"*Are you sure? You said she showed you things. She had a picture of you, and on her last day as a student here she was thinking about you. What did she say when you confronted her?*"

"Perhaps she may have had an infatuation with me at some point in the past, but not anymore. Besides, she is a powerful and talented witch; even when she was a novice at Legilimency, you know that she could have easily projected false images. And as far as confronting her, I want nothing to do with her," he spat out.

"*You mean you aren't even going to give yourself the satisfaction of finding out why?*" asked Osiris as he threw his wings in the air, as though they were arms.

"I have told you why! They wanted to play their stupid little childish game of retribution. I don't care to hear her explanations or excuses!" Severus rose and took off his cloak. Then he began to undo the buttons on his shirt; as cold as it usually was in the dungeons, his anger was making his body temperature rise.

"*Fine, I'll go ask her then.*" Osiris was getting ready to fly out the window, when Severus' hand came down and picked him up.

"Don't you understand? They were laughing at me, Osiris! They can hate me all they want, but I won't stand for anyone laughing at me! That I can never forgive! I forbid you to go over there. You are not to speak with her about any of this, do you understand?"

"*Maybe you don't want to know what the hell happened, but I do.*"

"No, Osiris," his voice was softer now. "It's over. Just...just let it end, all right? Please, just let it end." He put Osiris down gently on his desk and retreated to his bedroom, where he stayed for the rest of the afternoon.

Osiris flew to the window and looked out. He saw that Hermione was making her way back to the castle, looking as angry as his cousin had just been.

He wanted to fly down and ask her what had transpired that afternoon. He wanted to know how Severus found out about her deception; he wanted to know why she had done it. Why had she hurt him? Severus was not a man to give his love freely, and Osiris had never known his cousin to have ever before truly loved any woman. Now that Hermione had deceived Severus, there would be no hope of him ever letting anyone touch him like that again. Osiris turned and sat quietly on the windowsill. He knew he would never get the look on Severus' face out of his head. Never had he seen his cousin look so defeated.

~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*

So let me know what you think so far.

## Chapter 17

Chapter 17 of 29

Hermione goes back to the castle after her lunch with Harry and Ron. Severus gives her the cold shoulder.

All canon characters belong to JKR

Thanks to June for her help with the beta work.

## Chapter 17

Hermione was fuming. She couldn't believe Ron could still be so immature. He was almost twenty-three years old, yet acted like he was thirteen. She felt bad having to leave Harry the way she did. After all, he seemed to be just as angry as she was at Ron's behavior, but she just could not stand to be in the same room with Ron.

She looked at the clock and noticed it was not quite one o'clock. Deciding to take some time to calm herself down, she shrugged off her clothes and walked into the bathroom. An afternoon soak in a warm tub would relax her. Afterwards, she would go and see if Severus wanted to take her to dinner.

After spending some time getting herself together, she walked to Severus' quarters. She knocked on his door, but there was no answer. She then tried to open it, but found he had changed his wards. After several minutes of trying to get them down, she tried knocking again. *'Why did he change his wards?'* she wondered. She walked away, not knowing he had been standing on the other side of the door waiting for her to leave.

Severus walked back to his desk, wondering how long she would have carried on. When had she planned on telling him the truth? As he sat, staring into the bottle of ink sitting at the corner of his desk, he hit upon an idea. *'Perhaps,'* he thought, *'I will give her a taste of her own medicine.'* He would let her see how it felt to be played with in such a malicious way. Deciding it best to stay in the rest of the evening to finish grading essays, he would deal with her in the morning.

It angered him that he felt cold and empty. He looked around his rooms and found he missed her presence desperately. He missed looking up from his parchments and seeing her sitting in the corner of the couch. He missed sitting next to her as they read books. Most of all he missed the feel of her body. Severus had barely been away from her for an entire afternoon and he missed her already. He needed to get her out of his mind. He kept telling himself it had all been joke. She never felt anything for him. She had played him brilliantly. She knew just how to get to him. God, he had been such a fool to have fallen so easily for her deceit.

He looked behind him to the window. Osiris had not moved from his spot for several hours. Severus kept trying to talk to him, but his cousin refused to answer. He was taking it as badly as Severus. Osiris had grown very attached to Hermione. Severus would often find him in the potions classroom helping Hermione with odd tasks.

"Come away from the window. It's getting cold, and you'll catch a draft," said Severus.

Osiris turned and flew onto the desk. *"I guess it's just you and me again, then."*

"So it would seem, cousin, so it would seem," Severus said as he pushed his sifter of brandy towards Osiris. "You still have Albus to talk with as well."

Osiris dipped his beak into the brandy, then looked at Severus. *"Oh, the joy of being me."* Then he hiccupped and sat on the edge of the desk.

They both sat there for the rest of the evening, every so often taking a drink. By the time Severus had finished with the essays, it was time for bed. He got up and felt the room was beginning to swirl around him. He looked down at Osiris, who had passed out. Gently, he picked up his cousin and placed him on one of the pillows on the couch. Before he went to his room, he measured out a small amount of Hangover Potion and left it on the coffee table with a note, telling Osiris to drink the potion the second he got up. Then he went to bed, wishing he had never met Hermione Granger.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

In the morning Hermione knocked on Severus' door again. Once again there was no answer. After several minutes, she walked to the Great Hall by herself. As she entered, she noticed immediately Severus was at the High Table. His head was down, but she noticed he was scowling. She had not seen him the entire previous day. She approached her seat smiling.

"Why didn't you wait for me?" she asked.

"I was not aware that I needed your permission to come to breakfast, Miss Granger," he said tersely.

She had been reaching for a scone, but drew her arm back quickly when she heard him address her formally. She turned to him, and wondered if he was playing with her.

"Of course you don't need my permission," she said. "It's just that I didn't see you all day yesterday, and I thought we could walk together this morning."

"I was busy yesterday," he said. She noted his voice sounded irritated, like it often did when he did not want to be bothered.

"Severus, are you all right?" She put her hand on his forearm, only to have him move it away from her.

"Professor Snape, to you, Miss Granger. And I can assure you I am quite fine." He refused to look at her, deciding instead to keep his eyes on his plate.

Hermione felt like a piece of lead had settled in the pit of her stomach. She swallowed hard. Something was wrong. He was acting like a complete bastard.

"What's wrong? Why are you acting like this?" Her voice was shaky.

"Nothing is wrong. I am merely tired of playing this game. You know about games, don't you, Miss Granger?" He now looked at her with a disgusted look on his face, and noticed her face pale at his sudden use of the word "*games*." *"I've caught you, and you know it,"* he thought.

"What game?" she asked, now even more confused.

"You did not honestly think there was really anything between us, did you?" Her eyes grew wide. "Oh, I suppose you did." He turned back to his plate, and began stabbing the potatoes and filling his fork. "Perhaps it was more than just sex for you, Miss Granger, but I am afraid that is all it has been for me."

~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*

Okay, Severus is going to be pretty hateful for the next several chapters, but that's because he thinks he's been played.

# Chapter 18

*Chapter 18 of 29*

Hermione has to deal with her feelings of betrayal.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thank you to June for being my beta.

## Chapter 18

Hermione felt as though she had just been pushed off a cliff. She couldn't believe what he had just said to her. In that brief moment, when he finally looked at her, she could see only contempt in his eyes. She moved away from him slightly and sat back in her chair. She wasn't sure what to do at this point. She doubted she should ask him to explain further, as what he had just said did not need much clarification. But what the hell had happened? He was fine when they last saw each other. She tried to think of what may have happened Saturday evening, but could not think with all the noise around her, not to mention his now cold demeanor had her out of sorts.

She needed to get out of there, and away from him. She could feel the sting of tears forming in her eyes, and didn't want him to see her crying. She pushed her seat back and started to get up.

"Leaving so soon?" he asked, as he took a sip of his coffee.

"Yes, I find the air in here to be a bit rancid!" she spat out, as she threw her napkin on her plate. She practically flew out of the Great Hall.

Albus and Minerva had observed the entire exchange with confusion. Something had happened, and it was not good; that much they could surmise. Minerva looked at Albus with an extremely worried expression. He patted her hand and leaned towards her.

"Most probably a disagreement, nothing more," Albus said.

"She looked quite upset." Minerva looked toward the door Hermione had just exited through. "I hope you are right, Albus."

\* \* \* \* \*

Hermione walked briskly towards the dungeons. Once she was out of view, she broke down. Her body slid down the wall she had been leaning against, and she buried her head in her hands. All this time he had been using her, and no doubt laughing at her behind her back. She felt like a perfect fool. She needed to pull herself together and fast. She had classes in less than half an hour and couldn't afford to have anything go wrong. If he had reverted to being a bastard, the last thing she needed was to give him a reason to have her fired. She wiped her tears and walked back to her rooms.

She just wanted to crawl into bed and wake up from this nightmare. Hermione loved him; she loved him desperately. Even though he often called her "love," he never actually had said the words, and really, neither had she. Looking back she supposed she made it easy for him to do what he did. Severus hadn't been a spy all those years for nothing. He fooled Voldemort for years, so why was it so hard to believe he had fooled her. It didn't matter though, because she still loved him. Deep within the recesses of her mind, she thought perhaps he had just been playing with her, that he didn't mean what he had said to her. Deciding it would be best to just leave him alone until later, she went to the classroom to await her students.

\* \* \* \* \*

Severus sat staring at his plate. He hated himself for saying those things to her. Unfortunately, his words were true; however, it was the other way around. For Severus had found his soul mate, or at least he thought he had. He loved her; he loved her with a desperation he could not explain. He had rarely felt love during his life. He loved his mother, and he knew she loved him as well, but this kind of love was different. He wanted to hold Hermione, to kiss her, to stroke her hair. But she did not want those things, at least not from him. He knew from the look on her face that she knew she had been caught. She most probably was back in her rooms trying to figure out a way to get out of it, perhaps try to get him to think she really did care for him.

He threw his fork down in disgust, and looked up. Students were beginning to leave their tables and going to their first classes of the day. He sighed heavily, and stood. He would see her again at lunch, then at dinner. Much as he wanted to avoid having any contact with her, he could not have all his meals in his quarters. As he walked towards the DADA classroom, he shook his head. Why had she come back? Why did he let himself fall under her spell? He should have kept his distance; he should not have let the image of so long ago influence him as much as it did. God, he hated himself right now. He hated himself because he wanted to hate her, but he couldn't. He needed to be strong. In his mind, Hermione had played a game with the wrong man. Severus Snape knew how to please women, but he also knew how to hurt them.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hermione was halfway through with her second class of the day when she began to feel ill. She had been feeling this way for a little over a week. She excused herself, and then ran to her room. She barely made it to the toilet before she threw up all over her robes. When she was done, she muttered a Cleansing spell and walked to the vanity. As she splashed cold water on her face, she thought back. She had no time to look at her calendar, but she didn't really need to look at it. As she gazed at her reflection, she thought back on the past two months.

"No," she whispered. "Not now, not like this. Please, not like this." She bowed her head and began to cry once more. During their first month together, she and Severus were both careful about performing contraceptive spells. However, looking back, she knew she had forgotten to cast the spell more than once or twice. There were times when they could not wait to have each other, and then after hours of pleasuring each other, they would wind up falling asleep in each other's arms. She was not ill, nor had she eaten anything disagreeable; therefore she knew of no other reason than the obvious.

She was pregnant.

~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*

Okay before anyone points it out, I know that Hermione winds up pregnant in every story. That may be true, but for my purposes this works.

# Chapter 19

*Chapter 19 of 29*

Hermione visits Ginny and Draco

All canon characters belong to JKR

Thank you to June for doing the beta work for me on this.

## Chapter 19

Hermione had no time to think about what to do, since she needed to get back to her class. When she was back at her desk, she quickly scribbled a note to Ginny, then asked one of the students to run to the Owlery and send it off. She was sure she was pregnant, but wanted proof, and there was no way she was going to go to Poppy. It was not that she thought the school's Medi-witch would say anything, but, until things between her and Severus were worked out, she did not want anyone at the school to know.

Ginny would keep her secret. It would be difficult to keep it from Draco, though. He would of course find out, but right now Hermione couldn't think that far. Telling Harry was another dilemma; she also needed to tell him. As far as Ron knowing, she didn't even want to think about him right now, since he was still on her shit list for what he had said on Sunday afternoon. She would deal with him later.

As lunchtime drew near, Hermione dreaded having to sit next to Severus. She wasn't sure which was worse, to have him ignore her, or have him say hurtful things to her. Perhaps, he would be different this afternoon. Maybe he just woke up on the wrong side of the bed, and decided to take it out on her. Although it would not have been fair, she would welcome that as a reason. She walked into the Great Hall and saw him sitting in his usual spot. She approached her seat and sat down quietly.

"Good afternoon, Severus," she said, as she placed her napkin onto her lap.

"Did I not make myself clear this morning, Miss Granger?" he said coldly.

She closed her eyes and tried to steady herself. "Why are you doing this? Please, talk to me," she pleaded.

He put his fork down and slowly stood, then took hold of her arm, and pulled her up. They walked to the side door and he opened it, and then he motioned for her to go inside the room. He closed the door and faced her.

"I will say this one time only, Miss Granger. I am ending this little game. Is that simple enough for you to comprehend? I am in no way interested in pursuing a relationship with you, nor have I ever been." He noticed her lips trembling, and her eyes growing wet with tears. "Please keep the theatrics to a minimum; they are no longer of any use. I will treat you as a colleague, no more, no less. I have to put up with your presence for at least the remainder of this teaching year, and am willing to be civil to you."

"Civil? Why, you utter bastard. How dare you treat me like some whore that you can play games with and just toss to one side after services rendered!" She felt herself close to losing control, but knew there was a room full of people on the other side of the door.

"How dare I?" He laughed. "What did you expect to happen at the end of all of this? Did you think we would be friends? That we would just have a laugh and be done with it? No, Miss Granger." He grabbed her forearms, and bent down to whisper in her ear, "You play adult games, and you must deal with adult consequences. A whore does not only sell herself out for money." He shoved her away, and then walked out the door.

Hermione was trembling. There was now no doubt in her mind he had played a game with her. What else could it have been?

She dared not walk back out into the Great Hall. She could not face him, not after what he had just said to her. He obviously thought she was a whore, but what had she done? Why did he hate her so much? Only a day or so ago he had professed his love for her. 'No,' she thought; he never really said he loved her, he never actually said "I love you Hermione," and besides it wouldn't have mattered if he did. This had all just been a sick game he had been playing with her. God, she felt like such a fool. How could she have been so gullible, so stupid, and so completely pathetic? How he must have been laughing at her when he was alone. She didn't even want to think about it.

And what of Osiris? Hermione had not seen him since Saturday evening. She supposed he had been part of the whole game as well. It was his suggestion, after all, for Severus to teach her Legilimency, which prompted her to open herself to him further. '*Stupid, stupid, stupid, Hermione*,' she thought as she thumped herself on the head with her fist.

She took a deep breath, and turned towards the staircase behind her. It lead down out into the school hall but had a small doorway, which led both down to the dungeons, and up to the third floor of the school. She took the path towards the dungeons. Her classes were finished for the day, so she decided to go and lie down. Since Hermione didn't get to eat anything at lunch, she sent to the kitchens for some soup and crackers. She reached her quarters, and then let down her wards. She had thought about changing them as Severus had changed his, but knew that he would not be trying to get into her rooms at any point, so she left them as they were. As she walked to her bedroom, she heard a tapping at the window. A large hawk stood outside. She knew it was Ginny and Draco's hawk, and opened the window.

"Hello, Ovid," she said as she pet the hawk and allowed him inside. She kept nuts and small pieces of bacon in a small cupboard near her bed, and supplied it with what she liked to call "bird goodies." As Ovid helped himself to the bacon, she took the small scroll from his leg, and read Ginny's note:

*Hermione:*

*Your note has me more than worried. You seem distressed, and I'm hoping I am just jumping to conclusions.*

*I will be home this evening, so please come by whenever you wish.*

*Love, Ginny*

Hermione went to her desk and wrote a short reply:

*Ginny:*

*Thank you. I will be stopping by after two o'clock.*

*You are correct in your assumption that I am distressed. But I will speak with you about it later.*

*Hermione*

Hermione placed the note back on Ovid's leg, and he flew away. She sat on the bed and took off her shoes. It was one o'clock; she would rest for an hour, then go and see Ginny. There in her room, with only Crookshanks to comfort her, she cried until she fell asleep.

At a quarter to two o'clock, Hermione decided to Apparate to the Malfoy manor. She approached the door, but before she could knock it swung open. Ginny had seen her through the window, and rushed to open the door before the house elf could beat her to it.

"Hermione, you look terrible!" she said as she walked outside. Hermione immediately broke down in tears. "Oh, no, I didn't mean it to sound like that."

"It's not that," sniffed Hermione. "Ginny, I want to die, I just want to die!" She threw herself into Ginny's arms and cried. As Ginny guided her inside the manor, Draco was coming down the stairs.

"Hi, Hermione," he said cheerfully, then noticed Hermione's tear-stained face. "What's wrong? Ginny, why is she crying?" he asked as he followed both women into the sitting room.

"Draco, I don't quite know yet. She's horribly upset." Ginny sat down on the couch with Hermione, while Draco sat on her other side rubbing comforting circles on her back.

Hermione wiped her eyes, then looked at both of them. "It's over. Severus and I are over," she said as she accepted a handkerchief from Ginny.

"What? But, I thought things were going so well for you?" asked Ginny.

"I thought so too, but it seems it was all..." Hermione sobbed. "It was all a game. Severus said he was just using me."

Ginny looked at Draco, who had gone pale.

"Hermione, are you sure? I just can't believe..." Before Draco could finish his sentence, Hermione shot up and pushed him against the couch.

"Can't believe what? That he deceived me into believing he loved me? That he could be so cruel as to use me just for his own pleasure and then cast me to one side once he got what he wanted from me? Is it so hard to believe an ex-Death Eater could be so deceptive towards a Mudblood?" She pulled back, horrified at her own words. She covered her face and dropped to her knees, in front of Draco.

Draco slid off the couch and embraced her. "Hermione, you know I don't think that," he said calmly.

"I'm sorry. I don't know what I'm saying. I'm just angry. I'm angry at him, I'm angry at myself, I'm angry at the world!"

"What happened?" asked Ginny, as she helped Hermione back up to the couch.

"I don't know, I honestly don't know. Everything was fine on Saturday. We spent all day together, and then in the evening I went to my room. I went to lunch with Harry and Ron on Sunday. After meeting them I went straight back to Hogwarts. That evening I knocked several times on Severus' door, but he didn't answer. We always walk to the Great Hall together for breakfast, so this morning I walked to his room and knocked on his door again. When he didn't answer, I just went on my own. He was already there, and when I went to ask him why he didn't wait for me, it was like his whole demeanor had changed. He was a different person."

"You don't suppose someone did something to him?" asked Ginny.

Draco looked at her and shook his head. "Like what, Ginny? He's a powerful wizard; it's not like someone can just put some spell on him. It's not that easy, not with him." He looked at Hermione. "Hermione, have you tried to talk to him about this?"

"I tried to talk to him at lunch again, but he just reinforced what he had told me this morning, that he had been using me." Hermione wiped her tears away. She had calmed down and sat back against the couch.

"I'm going to talk to him," said Draco.

"No! Draco, please don't," begged Hermione.

"Hermione, don't you want to know why he did this?" asked Draco.

"I know why. He hates me; he's always hated me. It's no secret he really didn't want an assistant, and I know he couldn't have been too pleased when he found out I had been hired," said Hermione as she stood and walked to the window. "Right now, I've got bigger problems, though."

"Bigger problems?" asked Ginny.

"I think I'm... pregnant," said Hermione.

"You think? Haven't you seen Poppy?" asked Ginny as she and Draco looked at each other in horror.

"No. I don't want anyone to know," said Hermione.

"Is Severus included in that *'anyone'*?" asked Draco.

"Draco, he most of all can't know. It's clear he never cared about me. Do you think my having his baby will change that?" said Hermione.

"Just how the hell are you going to keep something like that from him? I mean, in a few short months it's going to be pretty hard to hide it from anybody," said Draco.

"I probably won't be showing until January or February. And my teaching robes will be able to hide me until the end of the school year," said Hermione.

Draco shook his head and walked to her. "Wait, you can't just not tell him. Hermione, I'm sorry for what he's done to you, but he deserves to know he is going to be a father."

"If I tell him, he'll want me to have an abortion, and I won't do that!" she yelled.

"Hermione," Ginny spoke softly as she now approached her. "Severus is a pureblood, and he is last of his line. Whatever has happened between you, he would never ask you to abort what may be his only heir. Besides that, Draco is right; Severus deserves to know," said Ginny as she took Hermione's hand.

Hermione bowed her head and turned to look out the window. "I suppose you're right. I'll tell him, but not right now. Please, don't say anything," she said as she looked at Draco, and he nodded reluctantly. "Just... give me some time." She leaned her head against the cold windowpane and felt the tears coming down her face. *'Time to get over him,'* she thought.

~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*

I know Severus is being a real bastard right now but you have to realize he thinks a very cruel joke has been played on him.

# Chapter 20

Chapter 20 of 29

Hermione and Ginny find out more about the baby and the first meeting of the dynamic duo.

All canon characters belong to JKR

Thanks to June for the beta work.

## Chapter 20

Ginny and Hermione decided to go to Muggle London and purchase a home pregnancy kit. They returned to Malfoy Manor and began to read the instructions, only to be interrupted by Draco.

"What are you supposed to do with that, exactly?" he asked.

"This stick is what tells you if you're pregnant. You urinate on it..." Before Ginny could finish, Draco raised both her hands begging her to stop.

"Hold it! You mean you have to piss on that stick?" he asked horrified.

"Yes. What do you think I'm supposed to do with it?" asked Hermione.

Draco shook his head in disbelief. "I don't rightly know, but I sure as hell didn't think you'd be pissing on the thing. That's positively archaic!" he bellowed.

"Apart from going to St. Mungo's or Poppy, how else am I supposed to find out for sure if I'm pregnant, much less how far along I am?" asked Hermione.

"Isn't there a spell or something?" he asked.

"Well, of course there's a spell, but neither Hermione or I are Medi-witches," said Ginny, as Draco plopped himself down on the large chair next to the fireplace.

"Honestly, sometimes I wonder about you two," he grumbled. "It must be a Gryffindor thing. Hermione, you are the most intelligent witch I know; and Ginny, you are the craftiest. You mean to tell me, that between the two of you, you can't find a spell in a library full of hundreds of books to determine if you are pregnant, and how far along?" He looked at them, as they looked at each other in surprise.

"Good Lord, he's right. Hermione, there are hundreds of books in our library, and at least a dozen I can pick out that are dedicated to Medi-wizardry." Ginny walked over to Draco and kissed him. "You, my dear, are a genius."

He rolled his eyes and shoed them away.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ginny and Hermione sat in the library with several old books opened to different pages. Between the both of them, they managed to find several spells; then by combining two of those spells, they found the final working and directions. Hermione lay down on the couch as Ginny waved her wand over her belly.

"I think it's working," said Ginny as she smiled. As the tip of her wand began to glow with a faint purple light, she counted the seconds before the light disappeared. She then looked down at the book behind her. As soon as she got her confirmation she looked at Hermione. "According to the book, you are seven weeks pregnant."

Hermione sat up, and placed her hands on her stomach. Now having had her suspicions confirmed, she felt a myriad of emotions. She was happy, sad, angry, afraid, and most of all confused. One thing she knew for certain was she needed to be strong.

Ginny sat next to her and assured her that everything would work out, and to not hesitate to count on both Draco and herself for support.

Knowing she at least had two people she could count on gave Hermione much needed hope. After making Draco promise not to go to Severus, she left. It had been a tiring day, and she wanted to go back to Hogwarts for some much needed rest.

Ginny stood at the open door and watched her walk sadly to the Apparation point. Draco came up behind her, and put his arm around her waist.

"I know him, Ginny. Something must have happened. He wouldn't do something like this just for kicks," proclaimed Draco.

Ginny leaned her head back onto his shoulder. "I know, Draco, but please, you promised her you wouldn't go to him. From what she said, he was very angry. If you start asking questions, it will make things worse for her."

"Something isn't right here," Draco said. Ginny turned and gave him a stern look. "Oh please, how stupid do you think I am? I'm not going to just walk up to him and say, 'Hey Sev, what's this I hear about you using Hermione for sex?'"

"Draco," warned Ginny.

"All right, I'll stay out of it... for now." He kissed Ginny, and they closed the door. Draco suspected something; he just wasn't sure what.

\* \* \* \* \*

For the next two months things between Severus and Hermione remained cold. They rarely spoke to one another, and what few words they had were short and to the point. Severus spent his free time in his rooms sulking, while Hermione became withdrawn and somewhat detached.

Severus had hoped that the time away from her would help him get over his feelings, yet it only made him miss her more. His dreams were filled with her images. During Quidditch games, he would spend his time looking at her across the field instead of paying attention to the game. He also took to following her it when it was her turn to do the rounds in the evenings. He kept himself hidden in the shadows, not wanting to give her yet another reason to laugh at him. She had put up a good front in the beginning, making it look like she was innocent of any wrongdoing, but during the last two months, she had backed away from him quite a bit, and no longer made any attempt to speak with him.

Severus had at first suspected she would still want to assist him with the Wolfsbane Potion, but she never said a word. She was distracted at times, and he noticed she looked tired all the time. He knew there was something going on with her, yet he could not and would not ask her what it was. He still sat next to her at meals, and one day he realized she was just pushing her food around her plate. *'No wonder she looks ill, she's not eating enough.'* He shook the thought from his head; she was no longer his concern. Still, he felt something emanating from her and often felt a sort of pull from her, a sort of need to be near her that was stronger than he had ever felt.

This time had not been any easier for Hermione. She had spent the Christmas holidays with her parents, and had visited Harry briefly, only to leave when he began alluding to her having a relationship with Severus. Harry was always very astute when it came to her feelings; he noticed she didn't seem as happy as she did a few months before. He also noticed that when he tried to bring up the subject of Severus, she would steer the conversation in a different direction. Ron had been on assignment, which was fine with her, since she was still angry with him.

As January turned into February, Hermione began to notice a slight roundness to her belly. She had never been extremely thin, but she had always been fit. Her once flat stomach now showed there was a life inside of her. She knew that soon she would need to wear her teaching robes full-time. It had been fairly easy to hide her form up to that point, since there was nothing to hide, but her body was beginning to swell. In the last month, she had noticed Albus was asking her odd questions about her health and wanted to know if she had been eating properly. It was obvious to her he suspected something, yet he did not want to ask straight away. It was no secret that she and Severus were not on speaking terms. The staff had known very little about their relationship, but just as they noticed when they were together, they now noticed they were not.

One particular breezy February morning, Hermione sat in her room, grading papers. Having been inside all day, Crookshanks decided to take a walk outside, and noticed a large raven perched on one of the iron railings next to the stairs. He had seen the bird before, and thought he knew whom it belonged to. He usually left it alone, but today he had a purpose.

Osiris stood on his usual perch outside the steps near the dungeon entrance. As he took in the sunshine, he heard something.

"Hey!"

Osiris looked around but didn't see anyone.

"You, up there!" yelled Crookshanks, in a rather straggly sounding meow.

Osiris looked down and saw a large orange cat approaching. "Are you speaking to me?" he asked.

"I'm looking at you, aren't I?" said the cat in an exasperated huff.

"Watch it, furball! How would you like a nub instead of a tail?" said Osiris as he lowered his head menacingly.

"Oh, now I know I have the right bird." Crookshanks stopped at the bottom step and lifted himself on his hind paws. "What did that rat bastard of a master of yours do to my girl?"

"Hold it right there, fish breath. Let's get one thing clear about Severus." Osiris hopped down and met the cat eye-to-eye. "He is NOT my master! I happen to be an Animagus, and he is my cousin."

"If you're an Animagus, then why is it every time I've seen you around here you're a bird? Can't you change back?" asked Crookshanks as he tilted his head.

"It's a long story; maybe if you're a nice kitty I'll tell you about it sometime. Now, what is this about Hermione?" Osiris had not visited Hermione since the day Severus forbade him to see her. He had often thought about going to see her, and had for some time felt confusion regarding what Severus had said to him. He felt that there was more to the story, but couldn't quite figure out what it could have been.

"He did something to her. She's crying all the time, and she's not eating properly, and it's entirely his fault. She was actually happy with him. Then poof, he upped and left her," said Crooks.

Osiris didn't take kindly to people talking bad about Severus, and was immediately on the defensive. "Well, maybe if she hadn't tried to make him look like a fool, she wouldn't be in this situation," countered Osiris.

"What? How the hell would she make him look like a fool? He seems to have done a very good job doing that on his own." Crookshanks was furious.

"Listen here, chunky paws, all he did was get wise to her little game. If anyone has a right to feel like shit, it's him, and believe me he does. He really liked her, you know, probably even loved her. Then one day she goes off to meet those two pea-brained friends of hers, and everything goes to hell in a handbasket."

"Hold on. Pea-brained friends? You'll have to be more specific; she has quite a few of those," stated Crookshanks as he sat on his hind legs.

"She showed me some pictures of them once. One is rather geeky looking and has red hair and freckles. The other wears glasses, and his hair is in dire need of a combing through. I can't remember their names right now, although I should since Severus has been complaining enough about them." Osiris sat down next to Crookshanks. "Come to think of it, he doesn't so much complain, as plot rather creative ways to torture and maim them."

"Oh, no!" Crookshanks shook his head in disbelief, now realizing which friends Osiris was talking about. Over the years, Hermione had still kept in touch with the two in question, and they had even lived together for a short while. Lately, however, with her studies, she had not had much time for them. Even he had been hauled off to live with her parents for a short while. "Not those two. I should have known they would have something to do with this." Crookshanks looked at Osiris. "I knew something smelled fishy," said the cat.

"You mean something other than your breath?" Osiris stood up and hopped on a step so he could be at eye level.

"Cute, floppy, real cute. Look, something happened, and I'll bet a month's supply of catnip that those two had a hand in all of this." Crookshanks shook his head and looked at Osiris. "I'm Crookshanks, by the way. My friends call me Crooks."

"I'm Osiris. My friends call me Osiris."

"Pleased to meet you," said Crookshanks. "Do you talk to many cats?"

"No. I can talk to very few animals. It depends on the animal, and sometimes the breed. I'm not really sure how it works; I've never really been that interested. It's basically hit or miss."

"Well, we've established that we can obviously communicate, and right now you are the only chance I have to finding out what happened. Will you help me?" Crookshanks now stood.

"I shouldn't. Severus told me not to get involved, but there has been something bothering me about this whole situation from day one. Talking to you now makes me think there was definitely more to it than even Severus realized. He keeps talking about some scheme; I'm thinking Hermione may have just been at the wrong place at the wrong time." Osiris nodded. "All right, I'll help."

"Good. Hop on," Crooks said.

Osiris hopped onto Crookshanks' back, and they were off. If anyone had seen them at that moment, they would have shaken their heads in disbelief, and thought they had probably gotten too much sun. It was certainly a strange thing to see ... a large black bird riding on the back of a large orange cat. But they were now the oddest of partners; together they hoped to find out what happened, and help the two people they loved the most.

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And so it begins. If anybody can get to the bottom of this its thest two.

## Chapter 21

*Chapter 21 of 29*

Draco visits Severus and plants the seeds of doubt.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thanks to June for doing the beta work for me.

### Chapter 21

As Osiris and Crookshanks were sprinting away, Draco was walking up to the entrance of the dungeons. He stopped briefly, thinking he had just seen something odd flash by him, and then thought, *'Did I just see a huge black bird, riding an even bigger orange cat?'* He shook his head and continued on his path. *'Next time I'll cut myself off after two martinis.'* He had promised Ginny he would not interfere with the Severus-Hermione situation. And he wasn't going to, but that didn't mean he could not visit his godfather. It's not like Severus would have suspected anything; after all, he had not said anything about his relationship with Hermione, and as far as Severus knew Hermione had not said anything either. Draco reached Severus' door and knocked several times, before Severus came and opened it.

"Draco, what are you doing here?" asked Severus as he let in the young man.

"Can't I come and visit?" asked Draco, as he walked in and took off his cloak.

Severus turned and offered him a drink, which he refused, as he sat on Severus' couch. Severus sat across from him on his favorite chair, next to the fireplace.

"You know that you can visit me any time you wish," stated Severus.

"I was meeting with some of father's investors in Hogsmeade, and thought I'd stop by and say hello."

"How is your father, by the way? I heard that he and Rosmerta were expecting; is that correct?" asked Severus.

Draco laughed. "Yes. Can you believe it? He told me about a month ago. He said he wanted to do it right this time." Draco looked down at his shoes, trying to focus on something so that his tears would not fall. "He said he realized a few years ago that he had not been a good father to me, and asked me to forgive him."

"And have you?" asked Severus.

"Yes. I'm old enough to look at it from his point of view at the time. He was a Death Eater then, and he believed in different things. He was busy with his beliefs and his Dark Lord. When he turned sides, he began to realize what a shit of a father he had been, when he realized he barely knew his own son. I'm glad he's happy now, and I'm glad he's decided to be a father to me." Draco smiled. Wanting to change the subject, he stood and walked to Severus' desk, where he picked up some papers. "Any prospective geniuses in your classes?"

Severus snorted. "Half-wits and dunderheads, the entire lot. I swear it's as though they are getting stupider and stupider with each passing school year. As much as she drove me insane with her endless questions, I would give anything to have at least one know..." Severus realized what he was about to say and stopped.

"One what, one know-it-all like Hermione?" Draco noticed how uncomfortable Severus was and decided to throw caution to the wind. Ginny would forgive him for meddling. "What happened, Severus?" Severus looked surprised. "I know you were seeing each other." Draco noticed Severus shift slightly in his chair.

"Nothing happened, and I'll thank you to stay out of my affairs," said Severus, in an annoyed tone.

"I'm not trying to meddle in your business, but it's just that..." Draco hesitated, not quite knowing what he wanted to say.

"Well, spit it out, for Merlin's sake."

"You're both miserable. You two were seeing each other for a couple of months, and you were...happy. At least, happy for you. And Hermione was positively glowing all the time. Then suddenly, something happens and you two aren't even speaking to each other." Draco had begun pacing.

"I take it she has been speaking with Ginny? And no doubt making me out to be the bastard in this whole situation," said Severus, now growing fully agitated.

Draco stopped pacing and looked at him. "Severus, I'm not quite sure how to ask this, but..." Draco approached him. "You weren't just using her for sex, were you? I mean, you did care for her, didn't you?"

Severus looked up at him. *'What the hell?'* he thought.

"So, it's like that, is it?" Severus demanded. "Now the blame is mine, and she is innocent of all wrongdoing?" Severus stood and walked past Draco. He poured himself a brandy, and began to drink it down. "So typical of a woman!"

"I've only heard her side of what happened. If she had something to do with all this then please, enlighten me." Draco was now confused. He had listened to Hermione the day she told him and Ginny about her breakup with Severus, as well as the cruel things he had said to her, but now Severus was turning it all around. Severus made it seem as though Hermione had done something to merit being treated like an unwanted dirty rag.

"Draco, I neither have the time nor the inclination to go into this with you. I'm asking you to stay out of this."



“Severus, I love you like a father, but Hermione is my friend and...”

“Well, maybe your friend hasn’t been as honest with you as you think!” Severus was quickly losing his patience. Hermione had obviously painted the picture of her being the woman scorned, the one who had been mistreated and abused. He laughed to himself; of course she would not tell anyone of her plot to humiliate him. No! That would make her look like a cruel unfeeling bitch. “You need to leave, Draco.”

Draco picked up his cloak from the armrest of the couch and headed for the door. Before he walked out he looked at Severus, who was now sitting at his desk, head bowed and scribbling like mad.

“If you two could see how alike you both are, then maybe you could just sit down and talk this out. Something isn’t right, Severus, and if I were you, I’d find out what’s really going on before you both lose out.” Then Draco walked out.

Severus set down his quill and ran his hands through his hair as he sighed deeply. He thought about what Draco had said to him, then thought back on how Hermione had been acting. He began to wonder, if perhaps there was something more to what he had heard that day at the Three Broomsticks. Draco had planted the seed of doubt in his head. Severus shook it off, as he remembered the conversation he heard. No, there was no doubting what he had heard, and there was no doubting her part in the scheme. Still, something nagged at him now. *‘Damn that Draco,’* he thought.

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Draco managed to put some doubt in Severus' head. Now its up to our two little friends to help out.

## Chapter 22

*Chapter 22 of 29*

Osiris and Crooks are getting closer to finding out what's happening and Severus begins to feel guilty.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thanks to June for doing the beta work on this story.

### Chapter 22

Osiris and Crookshanks arrived in Hermione's rooms. She had decided to take a nap and was lying on the couch, with a blanket over her. Osiris flew across the room and landed on the armrest she was using as a pillow. He looked at her face. She was pale, and had dark circles under her eyes. He rubbed his head against her temple, wanting to somehow give her some comfort, even if she was asleep.

Osiris let himself drift into her mind, hoping to see something that could explain what had happened. He saw very little, and realized she must have taken a potion to help her sleep, since the images he saw were jumbled. However, he was able to see her sitting at a table with the two boys. He noticed how angry she was at the red-haired one ... Ron, he thought. Then Osiris faintly heard her saying something about hexing balls, and earrings. *'What the hell do balls have to do with earrings?'* he thought for a moment, then noticed the other boy, Harry, looking rather angry. Osiris surmised that they had obviously fought about something, then drifted out of her head and looked at Crookshanks.

*"You may have been right about her friends. I was looking in her mind, and it looks like they had some sort of disagreement. I couldn't get much, though; her mind is all garbled,"* Osiris said.

*"How do you know what you just saw was recent?"* asked Crookshanks.

*"I don't, but she was wearing the same outfit I saw her in the day she went to meet them. Has she been to see them in Hogsmeade lately?"*

*"No. She's gone to see Harry once or twice, but she's gone to visit him at his house."* Crookshanks came up next to Osiris.

*"Well, that's a start, then. She looked quite angry with Ron. I know Severus followed her that day, and I have a feeling that this is all some huge misunderstanding. It's the only thing I can think of that might have happened,"* Osiris hopped onto Crookshanks' back.

*"Claws!"* hissed Crookshanks.

*"Sorry, I keep forgetting."* Osiris hopped down to the floor. *"I told you he thinks they were plotting something against him, some sort of revenge scheme, and how they were laughing at him. But I didn't see anyone laughing, and Hermione looked positively rabid."*

Crookshanks shook his head. *"I'll bet that little red-headed son-of-a-bitch had something to do with this. I never liked that little fucker, and I happen to know he can't stand Severus."*

*"Believe me, the feeling is greatly reciprocated. Severus can't stand him either."*

*"Okay, so now what?"* asked Crookshanks.

*"Do you know where Harry lives exactly?"* asked Osiris.

*"I've been to his house a few times. His godfather left it to him, but how do we get there? I can't exactly handle a broom, and I seriously doubt you can carry me and fly at the same time."* Crookshanks' tail began twitching wildly.

*"Hello, wizard here. I can still do some magic. I'll just Apparate us there. But we'll have to wait until tomorrow. I've been gone for a while, and Severus might start to wonder where I am."*

"Right, same here. If I go missing for too long, she thinks I'm up to something. Can you believe that?"

"As Muggles say, you are preaching to the choir, my friend. I get the same thing, believe me," stated Osiris matter-of-factly.

"Tomorrow is Saturday, so it should be easier for us to disappear for a while, don't you think?" Crookshanks put his paw on Osiris' wing; it was as close to a handshake as they could both get.

"Definitely. All right, meet me at the steps then. See you, Crooks." Osiris disappeared just as Hermione woke up.

She stretched and took a sip of her now cold tea. She sat back and wondered what to do next. If she stayed in her room much longer, she would go positively insane. Turning around, she looked at the clock on the wall, and decided to take a walk around the castle until dinner. Hermione silently berated herself; she hadn't been eating well, and during her last visit to her Muggle doctor, he told her that she needed to gain a few more pounds. But that had been weeks ago, and even though she began her pregnancy with the best of intentions regarding her health, as of late it had gone downhill. She often forgot to take her vitamins, and she missed too many meals. She knew she needed to start taking care of herself better, if not for her own well-being, then for the well-being of her child.

Deciding it would be a good idea to get her health back on track, she went to Severus' lab to get some ingredients to make herself a potion. She had read of a special vitamin potion for pregnant witches, and thought it would be a good idea to make. When she entered the lab, she saw that Severus was there. It was after all his private lab, but she had hoped to avoid him.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know you would be here." She turned to leave, when he stopped her.

"I'm just adding a final ingredient to this potion. If there is something you need, you may get it." He turned to look at her. She looked so frail and weak, he couldn't stop himself from asking, "Are you ill, Miss Granger?"

"I'm just a bit tired, that's all. I'll get what I need, then I'll be off." She walked past him and into the supply closet. Quickly getting what she needed, she hurried past him, but not before he looked at what she had taken.

It was obvious now to him that she was not well, since she had taken ingredients to make a very powerful vitamin potion. As he recalled, it was taken by many women who are either anemic, or with child. Severus had noticed her pale complexion and her frail appearance, and shook his head. She had obviously made herself ill. 'No,' he thought guiltily, 'I have made her ill.' He sighed heavily; knowing that her poor state of health had all been his doing.

As she left the lab, Hermione hoped he had not seen what she took. Either way he would most likely think she was sick, since she admittedly looked like ten miles of bad road. She put the ingredients in her robe pocket and went for a walk. She had been to places in the castle she had never seen. Hermione looked at her small watch and realized she needed to start heading back to her rooms and prepare to go to dinner. Before she reached the stairs, she noticed a large door with huge metal knockers. She turned the knob and was surprised that it opened quite easily.

As she walked inside she noticed the many columns in the room. The room was completely void of furniture, save for a very large object covered by a velvet curtain. She walked towards it, and felt a flutter in her belly; she wondered if it was her baby letting her know it was there with her, or apprehension at what she was about to see. Hermione knew exactly what she was walking towards. As she reached the object, she gently moved away the curtain and saw her image. She looked at herself, and knew this was not the image she had seen of herself earlier that day. In the mirror, she was wearing a dark purple dress, and her hair was swept up in a loose bun, with curls cascading down her neckline.

Hermione reached out and touched the image, but stopped when she saw Severus appear behind her mirror self. She quickly turned around, only to find the room empty. When she looked back into the mirror, she saw her mirror self in the arms of Severus. She inhaled sharply, and began to reach to the mirror. She tried to touch him, but felt only the hard surface of the mirror. They were happy and laughing as they held each other. The mirror-Severus took her face in his hands and kissed her tenderly.

The Mirror of Erised was cruel, because it showed her what she desired the most, but it was something she could never have. She bowed her head and wiped her tears. When she looked back up into the mirror, she saw the image of Severus holding a black-haired baby, wrapped in a tiny bundle with blankets of green and silver. The mirror-Severus looked up and smiled at her, and mouthed the words he had never really said to her, "I love you." Hermione sank down onto her knees and wept harder than she had wept in the months since their relationship had ended.

There she stayed for hours, until she fell asleep, not realizing she had missed dinner.

Severus sat in the Great Hall at his usual place, and wondered if Hermione had just decided to have dinner in her rooms. Perhaps she had been too tired to deal with him this evening. He threw his fork down and pushed his seat back. As he passed Albus, the old man stopped him.

"Severus, would you come by my office in about an hour. I have some things I need to discuss with you," he said. Severus nodded and walked away.

As it turned out, Albus had been called to the Ministry for a few days. It seemed that several renegade Death Eaters had been caught just outside of St. Petersburg, and Albus was needed to preside over the Wizengamot during the trials. He asked Severus to assist Minerva with running the school, and assured them both he would be gone no more than two or three days.

As Severus walked back to his quarters, he thought about going to see Hermione. He could not help but wonder if she may have been too ill to come to dinner, but stopped himself just before he knocked on her door. Perhaps she had gone to see Ginny and Draco. He turned and continued walking to his room. As he got ready for bed, he decided to just put his pride to one side. In the morning, he would ask her how she was feeling, and perhaps even offer to make her the potion she had most probably taken the ingredients for.

~\*~\*~\*~\*~

Morning came and Severus didn't see Hermione at breakfast. He was now beginning to worry. He had not seen her since she came by his lab the day before. Minerva also noticed her absence and walked over to him after breakfast.

"Severus, do you know where Hermione is? I haven't seen her since yesterday," she asked.

"No, Minerva. I myself have not seen her since she went to my lab yesterday. I thought perhaps she might have gone to see Ginny and Draco."

Minerva noticed he seemed worried.

"Severus, I know I have no right to ask but, am I right to assume you were both involved?" she asked, only to receive a nod from him in affirmation. "You both seemed to have drifted apart. You seemed quite inseparable during the first two months of classes, but something happened between you two, and I can't help but notice you have both been quite detached," Minerva said.

Severus bowed his head and pinched the bridge of his nose with his hand.

"You have every right to ask, Minerva. You and Albus are like family to me; if I cannot trust you, then whom can I trust. Hermione and I were close, but things happened, and, well...things happened; let's just leave it at that. We have barely spoken since the end of October," he said as he shook his head.

Minerva put her hand on his shoulder. "Perhaps you two should have a talk." He just looked at her. "Whatever happened, Severus, is it not worth it to try and work things out?"

"I will do my part; that is all I can promise," Severus said, and then walked away.

~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*

Severus is at least willing to extend the olive branch to Hermione. Will she accept?

## Chapter 23

Chapter 23 of 29

Osiris and Crooks visit Harry and Hermione is lost in the image of her love.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thanks to June for doing the beta work for me.

### Chapter 23

Back in Hermione's rooms, Crookshanks was pacing. She had not come back since yesterday afternoon. He knew her well, and it wasn't like her to disappear like this. Osiris popped in next to him, and tapped him on the back. Crookshanks jumped and quickly turned around.

"Jumpy, aren't we?" said Osiris.

"She didn't come home last night, Osiris," said Crookshanks.

"Maybe she went to her friend Ginny's house," noted Osiris.

"No, she would have said something, or taken me with her."

"Do you think we should go look for her?" asked Osiris.

"I don't know. I suppose she could have gone to see her friend. If she's not back later, we'll look for her. Come on, let's get to Harry's place and see if we can get anything out of him."

Osiris hopped on Crookshanks' back, and they Apparated.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hermione was sitting on the floor, next to the Mirror of Erised. She could not bear to separate herself from the images she was seeing. She didn't know what time it was, nor did she care. She closed her eyes, and leaned her head against the mirror. Hermione remembered the first night Severus and she had spent together. They had never proclaimed their love for one another, not in the usual way, but that night she had felt an understanding between them. She wrapped her arms around herself, tightly. How could she have been so wrong about his feelings?

\* \* \* \* \*

Severus, in turn, sat in his room wondering about that same night. He closed his eyes, and remembered how soft her skin was, and how the two of them whispered sweet words of devotion into each other's ears. Could he have been wrong? He played that night over and over again in his mind. Her eyes had looked so full of love. He shook his head; how could he have been so wrong? She had not seen her friends for weeks before she came to Hogwarts; he knew that. She had told him they were on some sort of assignment for their Auror training; and she had spent months studying for her final exams. Could he have misunderstood what he heard that day? While she was young, he had always felt that she had a great sense of what was right. For the first time since he had broken off their relationship, he truly wondered if he might have accused her of something she had no knowledge of.

\* \* \* \* \*

Harry sat in the living room at Grimmauld Place. He was studying for his next assignment. Tonks had written to him from Romania, where for three weeks she had been on the trail of Peter Pettigrew. The Animagus rat had escaped the final showdown, and it was thought he had faked his death yet again, several weeks before the war broke out. Tonks had followed a lead, which apparently had proven to be worth the time she had spent traveling the Carpathian Mountains. Harry had requested special permission from the Ministry, and just that afternoon he finally got word that he would be able to join the hunt. As he looked over his papers, he thought he saw something out of the corner of his eye. When he turned his head he saw Crookshanks sitting next to the fireplace, and next to him was a very large black raven. Harry set his papers down and looked at both animals.

"Hello, Crooks. What are you doing here?" Harry made a motion to pet the cat, but retracted his hand when Crookshanks hissed at him. He then looked at the raven next to him, who was now fluttering his wings.

Osiris flew onto the table where Harry had been sitting.

"Okay, four-eyes, spill!" Osiris said as he narrowed his small black eyes. He waited for Harry to say something, but was met with a blank expression. "Well, what do you have to say for yourself?" he asked Harry. Osiris looked down at Crookshanks. "I thought you said this numbskull would be able to talk to me. He does know Legilimency, doesn't he?"

"I think so. I remember him telling my girl that Severus was teaching him that. At least, I think that's what it's called. I remember the mency part. Isn't that what Severus was teaching my girl?" Crookshanks approached the desk, as he looked up at Osiris.

"Severus taught her Legilimency, but are you sure it's the same thing Harry knows?" asked Osiris.

The scene playing out in front of him enthralled Harry. There was some type of an exchange going on between the two animals. Crookshanks was now shaking his head

as though saying "no" to something.

*"Shit, now I'm not so sure. That word isn't sounding so familiar."* As Crookshanks tried to remember back, Osiris had a sudden realization.

*"Please, don't tell me it's Occlumency."* Osiris looked down and saw Crookshanks nodding.

*"That's it! That's what he knows,"* said Crookshanks, nodding.

*"Great, just great. We'll never get anything out of him. He's got his mind blocked. No wonder I can't get inside. His mind is as tight as a sparrow's asshole."*

Crookshanks tilted his head as his tail shot up. *"Excuse me?"* he exclaimed.

*"A moment of weakness. Please, just don't ask."* Osiris began to pace Harry's desk, as Harry watched the scene in amazement.

"Umm, can you two understand me?" asked Harry.

Osiris walked quickly to Harry and spread his wings.

"Are you trying to tell me something?" Harry asked.

*"Yes, I am! Open your mind, you twit, and maybe I can get you to understand me!"* Osiris began to jump around wildly, as though his actions might catch Harry off guard and he could get into his head. Nothing! He looked around the desk and noticed a small drawer. He tapped on it, and Harry opened it. Luckily there was a bottle of ink inside, which Osiris tapped with his beak.

"You want this?" asked Harry. Osiris nodded, and backed away. Harry uncorked the bottle and set it in front of the bird, and was flabbergasted when he noticed it dipped its beak inside the bottle.

Osiris knew he would not be able to speak to Harry in any form. He could but only hope to write a few words, and get him to Hogwarts. If Osiris could get Harry to Hermione's room, then he could talk to Hermione, and talk about the day they were at Hogsmead. Then, with any luck, he might be able to get Severus to Hermione's rooms. Osiris wasn't sure how he was going to pull it off; right now, he could only concentrate on getting Harry to Hogwarts. Severus' incessant harping on the game of revenge, had been nagging at Osiris. The only thing that made sense to Osiris was that his cousin overheard something, and misunderstood it.

Osiris wrote out Hermione's name, and then scrawled a few more words. Harry looked at the paper in front of him, as the black bird stepped back.

"Her mini?" Harry looked at the note, puzzled.

Osiris shook his head and looked down at Crookshanks. *"I can't believe this is the same guy who defeated Voldemort,"* said Osiris.

*"Well, he did have help,"* said Crookshanks.

*"Thank the gods, or we would all be knee-deep in snake shit."* Osiris turned and continued scribbling, hoping Harry would understand what he was writing.

Harry then lit up. "Oh! Hermione!" exclaimed Harry.

*"Finally! Sweet Nimue's knickers, if I had a canary creme I'd shove it in his mouth,"* said Osiris as he looked down at Crookshanks.

"What's wrong with her? Has something happened?" Harry looked at the paper again. "Sad, help," he read aloud. He looked down at the bird, then at Crookshanks. He sat back in his chair, and thought back. Hermione had been out of sorts the last few times she had come to see him. He recalled her being quite happy that day the three of them were at the Three Broomsticks, just before the argument with Ron. But after that day, it seemed every time he spoke with her, she was distracted and melancholy. She had also looked incredibly pale and tired as of late. Harry surmised that something had been going on between her and Severus, and now she was upset about something, most probably involving him as well. Whatever was wrong with her was big enough for her cat to show up at his home, with a large black bird he had never seen.

Harry got up and grabbed his traveling cloak. As he turned to say something to the two animals, he noticed they had gone. He looked around the living room but couldn't find them. He shook his head, wondering if he had just imagined the whole thing. No matter, he thought; imagined or real, Hermione needed him. That much he was sure of. He grabbed his wand and Apparated to Hogwarts. Today he would get to the bottom of what was going on with his best friend.

~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~

Harry to the rescue! From here on things will start to unravel.

## Chapter 24

*Chapter 24 of 29*

Harry tells Severus the truth about what he heard and Osiris makes a sacrifice.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thank you to June for doing the beta work for me in this story.

Chapter 24

Osiris and Crookshanks appeared back in Hermione's room. Crookshanks looked around and noticed that Hermione had not returned. Now he was really beginning to worry. Crookshanks knew that this wasn't like her; she would not have gone without him knowing, and even if she had, surely she would have been back by now.

*"Is she here?"* asked Osiris.

"No. I'm scared, Osiris. Where can she be?" Crookshanks walked to the front of the fireplace and hung his head.

Osiris flew to the coffee table and looked down at Crookshanks. He was about to say something when he heard knocking, and then Severus' voice.

"Miss Granger? Open the door!" Severus said, from the other side of the door.

Osiris looked at the door, then back at Crookshanks. *"He can't see me here. He'll know I've been meddling,"* he said, as he waved his wings about.

*"Go, then. See if you can find her. She's got to be somewhere around here."* Crookshanks jumped on the couch and curled himself up as though he had been sleeping.

As soon as Osiris disappeared, Severus opened the door. He walked inside warily, and looked around.

"Miss Granger?" Severus called out, as he walked further inside. "Hermione, are you here?" He walked to the bedroom, and noticed the bed did not appear to have been slept in. Then he walked to the bathroom, which was empty, as well as her small office. *"Where could she be?"* he wondered. He looked down at the coffee table and noticed what looked like a photograph sticking out of a book. As he bent down to inspect it, Harry walked in.

"Professor!" said Harry, a bit shocked. "I came by to see Hermione. Is she here?"

"She is not. I am looking for her myself," said Severus. "I don't suppose she will mind if you wait for her." As Severus turned to leave, Harry stepped in front of him. "Do you mind?" Severus said through gritted teeth. Harry was the last person he wanted to see right now.

"Since you're here, I'd like to talk to you," Harry said. He noticed the angry look in the older man's eyes, and hoped Severus wouldn't hex him into oblivion.

"All right, Potter. What is it? I don't have time to just stand here idly chatting with you, so out with it," Severus stepped back and stood next to the coffee table, a good distance away from Harry.

"I've been wanting to talk to you for a while, about Hermione," said Harry.

"Save it. I know all about your little scheme, as well as Miss Granger's part in it." Severus stared at Harry, wondering if he would crack.

"Scheme? What are you talking about?" asked Harry.

"Acting stupid may have gotten you out of trouble as a child; however, as an adult it doesn't suit you, Potter." Severus approached Harry slowly, only to have Harry back up slightly. He needed to get to the bottom of this whole situation, and if he had to hex Harry Potter to do so, then so be it. He was to the point where he wasn't sure about anything anymore.

"Sir, honestly, I don't have a clue what you're talking about." Harry shook his head.

"I heard your little conversation with Weasley the day the three of you had lunch at the Three Broomsticks. I was there, and I heard it all. So I say again, I know how Miss Granger was to lure me into believing she had an interest in me."

Harry struggled to remember the conversation he had that day with Ron and Hermione. Suddenly, it all came back to him like a tidal wave. He realized why Hermione had been so sad. There must have been something between her and Severus. The key word seemed to be had, since their relationship appeared to have changed so drastically as to make his friend almost ill.

"Oh, no." Harry turned and shook his head in disbelief. "Professor, please hear me out," he said, as he faced Severus again. "What you heard that day was only part of a conversation. I'll admit that Ron wanted to do that to you, but the minute Hermione came back to the table and found out about it, she was furious. She threatened to hex Ron within an inch of his life."

Severus looked at Harry as though trying to look through into his head.

"Don't ask me to tell you what she threatened to do to Ron. My balls have finally come out of hiding, and I don't want to think about it. Anyway, she hasn't spoken to him since that day." Harry was practically pleading now.

"You have to believe me, sir. I'll take Veritaserum, you can use Legilimency on me, anything. Please, what Hermione feels for you is real, and what's more I'm pretty sure she has felt this way since our seventh year. She's never told me, but I've always suspected it. I'm sure that day at lunch she was going to say something about it, but then Ron was being an ass and...well, she just stormed out of there."

Severus felt like he had just been knocked upside the head with a bludger. Not only had he just found out what he had suspected that morning was true, and that Hermione had been honest with her feelings towards him, but she had felt this way since she was his student. He looked down at the coffee table and reached for the picture he was going to look at before Harry came in. It was the picture he saw in her mind the first day of their Legilimency lessons ... the picture Colin Creevey had taken of him for Hermione.

"I've been a fool," Severus said as he shook his head.

Much as Harry wanted to agree with him, he knew it wasn't completely his fault. "Don't be too hard on yourself. If I had heard the same thing you did, I may have jumped to the same conclusion. Now that you know the truth, what are you going to do about it?"

Severus turned around and looked at Harry with bewilderment. "Are you encouraging me to go to her?" Severus was astounded.

"I suppose I am," Harry said with a smile.

"Why?" asked Severus warily.

"I love her. She's my best friend, and she has been there for me through good and bad times. But I can't love her the way I'm sure you do. You do love her, don't you?" Severus could only nod. Harry turned to leave, but as he did Severus put his hand on his shoulder.

"Potter... Harry, thank you."

Harry smiled and nodded. "Just don't hurt her again," said Harry.

Severus crossed his arms. "I suppose you will hex me if I do?" asked Severus.

Harry laughed and shook his head. "I may have defeated Voldemort, but it was only because of your help. I don't profess to be powerful enough to hex you, but if you hurt her again, you'll have quite a few people after you. I'm sure between all of us we could do some damage." Harry turned to walk out. "Oh, and don't worry, I won't tell anyone you thanked me. It wouldn't be good for either of our images." Then he left.

Severus put the picture of himself back down on the table and walked back to his rooms, with Crookshanks on his heels. As he walked through the door into his living room, he noticed Osiris perched on the windowsill.

*"There you are. I've been waiting for you!"* said Osiris.

"Not now, Osiris. I have to find Hermione." Severus walked to the fireplace, thinking he would contact Ginny to ask her if she had seen Hermione, when Osiris flew to the mantle.

*"I know where she is,"* Osiris said as Severus looked at him, *"Severus, I think she's sick. She isn't moving, and I tried to talk to her, but she wouldn't respond."*

"Where is she?" asked Severus desperately.

*"She's sitting next to the Mirror of Erised."*

Severus turned and ran. He knew that she had most probably been there all night. It was not good to spend too much time in front of the mirror, especially for someone whose mind and body was already weak. She was frail; he had seen her health deteriorate in the past week, and he blamed himself fully for that now. No doubt the ingredients she had taken from his stores was for a potion for anemia.

When he reached the third floor, he immediately ran to the room she was in and threw the door open. Severus saw her sitting on the floor, leaning against the mirror, with the velvet curtain partly covering her. He approached her slowly, then as he reached her he knelt down and moved the curtain away from her.

"Hermione," he whispered.

She stirred slightly, then raised a shaky hand and touched the mirror. She sobbed quietly and turned her face into the cold surface.

"You're not real, you're not him. Please, please, leave me alone." Her voice sounded as fragile as she looked.

Severus took hold of her shoulder and turned her to face him. When she looked up at him she gasped, and then fainted. He lifted her in his arms and rushed her to the hospital wing. Her head rested in the crook of his neck, and he could feel that her forehead was much too warm.

"Poppy!" Severus shouted for Poppy as he gently placed Hermione's limp body in the last bed of the hospital wing.

Poppy came running out of her office.

"Severus, what are you shouting about?" The Medi-witch looked at Hermione. "Hermione! Oh my, Severus, what's happened to her?" She immediately drew her wand and began her examination.

"I found her moments ago. She has not looked well for days. I don't think she's had much sleep either." He stood beside the bed, just behind Poppy, his eyes never leaving Hermione's sleeping form.

"She's has a fever, but it's not too high, thank the gods. She could certainly do with a bit of rest and food as well." As Poppy's wand neared Hermione's belly, the tip began to glow with a blue light. Poppy looked at Severus in shock. "She's with child!" she exclaimed.

Severus took a step back, then looked to Hermione.

Poppy continued her examination, and then shook her head. "He is weak, very weak. I can barely register his heartbeat." She looked at Severus. "I don't have any Fortis Cor Serum, and if we don't get some to her soon... the child will die."

Severus all but flew out of the hospital wing.

His mind was reeling. She was not anemic at all. She was carrying his child, his son. He threw open the doors of his lab and immediately began to prepare the potion. As he began to add the ingredients to the cauldron, he realized he had run out of the one key ingredient. Undeterred, he continued to make the potion, as he recited every possible replacement ingredient he could think of that would not take away from the potion's potency. As he reached the final stage, his actions slowed. There was no acceptable substitute.

*"Was she all right?"*asked Osiris, as he appeared with Crookshanks in tow.

"Hermione is weak, but she will be fine. It...it is our child that is in danger."

*"What?"* Osiris approached the cauldron. *"She's pregnant?"*

"Yes, and the child is weak. My son..." He stopped, then cleared his throat. "He needs a heart-strengthening potion, but I am missing the key ingredient," said Severus hesitantly.

*"What is it?"* asked Osiris.

"Raven's blood," answered Severus wearily.

*"Well, have some of mine then,"* offered Osiris.

Severus took a ragged breath. "It is more than you can safely give," he said sadly.

Osiris backed away slightly, and looked at the simmering cauldron. He bowed his head, then looked up at Severus. He took a deep breath, then flew up and landed on Severus' shoulders. He placed his small head against Severus' temple as he closed his eyes.

*"I know that I have lived as long as I have because of you. Those first days after Kito placed this curse on me, I wished she had killed me instead. But you have made me happy. You have taken care of me and never asked for anything in return, nor did you throw your kindness in my face. You have never made me feel like a burden to you, and have always treated me as an equal. I will always love you for that. For all that you have done for me, for all that you mean to me, please, let me do this for you. Take what you need, cousin... take what you need."*

~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*

Okay, I'm a softy, I wrote this and even I'm crying.

## Chapter 25

Severus gives Hermione the potion to save their baby.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thanks to June for doing the beta work for me.

## Chapter 25

With his head bowed, Severus sighed heavily, and took his cousin from his shoulder. He stared into the fathomless eyes that would soon be closed forever, as he felt the tears running down his face. Severus began to softly sob, and he felt his body shaking. This was the only family he had left. Osiris had truly been more a brother to him in the past twenty years, than just a mere bird. With trembling hands, Severus took a small knife from the table and placed it just below Osiris' throat. He hesitated. He had never hesitated to kill anything before in his life, not even a human being.

In those early days as a young Death Eater, when he was called upon to kill he did so readily, and without question. Then, as part of the Order, to keep up appearances Severus still needed to kill. During those times he knew the sins he committed would be for the greater good. But now, this life in his hands was so precious to him, that he felt himself faltering.

Osiris nodded, then closed his eyes and turned his head. He was giving himself unselfishly, so that the unborn child Hermione now had in her womb would live.

Severus made a small incision, and held his cousin in his shaking hands. The blood came pouring out of Osiris' body, and into the cauldron. Severus felt the life leaving his cousin's body, as he whispered words of comfort and gratitude for his sacrifice. As the tears flowed from his eyes, he hit upon an idea. Crookshanks had been huddled in the corner of the room for several minutes. Severus whispered a spell to start the wooden ladle to stir itself, and then called Crookshanks.

Severus had kept himself from the Dark Arts for many years, knowing it to be too much of a temptation for his borderline dark soul. Now he remembered something he had researched just before Voldemort's demise. Voldemort had asked him to create a potion, which would take part of one person's life force and merge it with another's. Voldemort wanted a guarantee, that if he were mortally wounded, he would be able to take the life force from another and join it with his. Doing this would allow him to continue living.

Severus had succeeded in creating the potion, only to keep it hidden for the Order. He knew it would be easy to alter and use it with Osiris and Crookshanks. The only side effect was that the two people sharing the life force would be bound to each other for life. Osiris was technically still a wizard; therefore Crookshanks would live the life span of a wizard once they were bound. He knew that this was Osiris' only hope, and if his cousin lived and hated him for doing it, then so be it; at least he would be alive.

"By the fact that you came in here together with my cousin, I know you two must be friends. He needs your help now."

Crookshanks scuttled over to Severus and allowed himself to be picked up and placed on the table. Severus transfigured a piece of parchment into a small blanket and placed Osiris' body on top of it. He then whispered a few words and closed the wound.

"Osiris is dying. I have taken his blood to make this potion for Hermione's and my child. I can only give Osiris a blood-replenishing potion, but that alone will not help. His life force is weak; he needs what you can give him. I have to take this potion up to Hermione." He looked into the cat's eyes and asked, "Do you understand me?" To his surprise, Crookshanks nodded. Severus ran to the supply closet and brought out two small vials. One held the red Sanguis Restituo Serum, the other the green Vita Partitio Potion.

He placed a small straw into the red bottle, and then placed the other end inside Osiris' beak. He positioned Crookshanks' paw so that he held the straw firmly in Osiris' beak. Severus then took a second straw, and did the same thing; only this time with the green potion. He made sure Crookshanks held both bottles in place with one paw, and Osiris' head with the other, then recited an incantation. The Vita Partitio Potion began to sparkle with green and red light. After making sure both Osiris and Crookshanks were comfortable, Severus then poured the still warm Fortis Cor Serum into a medium-sized bottle. Before he left, he lowered his head and whispered into his cousin's ear.

"I will come back to you soon, dear one." He kissed his small head and left the lab.

Crookshanks moved closer and placed his hind leg over Osiris, then lowered himself carefully to lie down next to his friend.

\* \* \* \* \*

Severus entered the hospital wing, and immediately went to Hermione's bedside. Poppy looked at him, then at the bottle he was holding.

"Make sure she drinks all of it," she said as she placed her hand on his shoulder. "We'll need to let it take effect for a few minutes. Let me know when you are finished, as I'll need to check the child once more."

He nodded and Poppy walked away. Severus sat down on the bed and gently lifted Hermione's head.

"Hermione, you need to drink this potion." He tipped the bottle to her lips and began to slowly pour the potion into her mouth. Hermione tried to move his hand away. "I know, darling. I'm sorry it tastes dreadful, but it's a heart strengthening potion. Please, love, you have to drink it or our child will die."

She immediately opened her eyes, and looked up at him. There was a tear falling down the corner of her right eye, which he brushed away with his thumb. She took the bottle in her weak hand and drank all of it down. She closed her eyes as Severus let her head gently fall back down onto the pillow.

Severus set the empty bottle on the table next to the bed, and looked back to Hermione, who was now staring at him. He lifted his hand to touch her, only to have her turn over on her side, leaving her back to him.

He sighed and looked out the window. He knew she had every reason to despise him. He wanted to stay near her, but thought it would be best if he left her alone for the moment. He stood and walked to Poppy's office.

"She has taken the potion, Poppy," he said quietly.

"I'll check on her then," Poppy walked past him, and he waited inside her office. She came back five minutes later.

"It worked; the heartbeat is stronger. I'll begin giving her some proper vitamins in the morning. They will both be fine." She smiled and gave him a reassuring pat on the arm, then sat at her desk.

Severus moved to leave, then looked back to Hermione once more.

"I will come by in the morning to check on her," he said to Poppy. He appreciated the fact that Poppy asked no questions, as he walked out with his head hung low. He had ruined everything; he knew that now. The fact that she would not even look at him proved that.

He walked back down to the dungeons to check on Osiris. He hoped his cousin was all right. Osiris had unselfishly given himself without question, knowing full well it would cost him his life. Severus only hoped Crookshanks could pull him through.





"Yeah. I have no idea where that bird came from, but he's obviously very smart," said Harry as he laughed.

"That's Severus' co...family bird." Hermione caught herself before telling Harry the true nature of what Osiris was.

"Well, this bird kept hopping around and waving his wings at me. Finally he managed to write your name on a piece of paper. He wrote your name and the word 'sad.' I thought I better come see you, but when I got to your room I found Snape there."

"Why was he in my room?" she asked.

"I'm guessing he was looking for you. Everyone's been worried. No one had seen you since yesterday afternoon," said Harry. "Hermione, I know you were seeing each other, and I know why you stopped."

"He ended it. I told you he was just using me," she said angrily.

"No, he wasn't. Remember that day at the Three Broomsticks?" She nodded. "Remember what Ron said, about playing a joke on Snape?" Again she nodded. "Somehow Snape heard Ron talking about it. I guess he was too upset to stick around for the rest of the conversation, so you can imagine what he thought."

"He followed me." The realization stunned her. She laid her head on the pillow and closed her eyes, throwing her arm over her face. "That stupid jealous git. Doesn't he know he's the only one?" She now realized the meaning behind his constant usage of the word "game." She thought of his cruelty towards her, and the emotional pain he had put her through. Then it suddenly dawned on her. She thought back to the day Harry had told her what his father and the rest of the Marauders had done to Severus in school. She finally understood. Severus could never forgive being laughed at like that.

"He thought we were laughing at him," she stated.

Harry nodded. He sat with her until she fell asleep once again, and then left. He passed Severus on his way down the hall.

"She's just fallen asleep," Harry said. "Could you let her know I'll come by next week?"

Severus nodded, and then they both walked past each other. Severus walked into the hospital wing and stood next to her bed for a while. He quietly crept closer and carefully sat next to her. He watched her in her serene slumber. He looked down towards her belly and lightly placed his hand on it. He felt a slight curve. This was his child, their child, and he knew it was a son. He felt her stir, then drew his hand back as he looked at her now open eyes.

"How you must hate me," he said. She stared into his eyes, but did not speak. "I should have trusted you more. I'm sorry. I will understand if you do not wish to give me another chance, but please, Hermione, I would like to be a part of our child's life."

Hermione took his hand and placed it back on her belly. "No, Severus, I do not hate you. Yes, you should have trusted me; and no, you cannot be part of our child's life."

He looked at her in shock, and began to pull his hand away from her belly, but she held it firm.

"I expect you to be part of my life and our child's life, you stupid jealous git."

Severus dropped his head, then leaned down and laid his head on her chest. He held her as though she would fly away at any moment.

She held him close as she ran her fingers through his silky hair.

"I do love you. I have always loved you, Hermione. I'm sorry for being so cruel to you; there is no excuse for my actions," he said as he kissed her cheek.

"Harry told me what happened. Why didn't you just ask me about what you heard?" she asked.

"I should have, but I couldn't see beyond Weasley's laughter and what I had heard. I'm sorry."

She looked at him and sighed. "I suppose I would have thought the same thing, had I heard what you did. Promise me from now on, if you ever feel something is amiss, to please ask me. We have to be honest with each other, Severus. If we aren't, then this will never work. I love you; please, believe me." She took his face in her hands, and kissed him.

"I do." He smiled, and looked into her eyes. "Will you tell me something?"

"Anything."

"What did you see in the mirror?"

"The mirror?" Hermione caressed his cheek, not really listening to his words.

"When I found you, you were sitting next to the Mirror of Erised. I called to you, but then you told me to leave you alone, that I wasn't real," he said.

"I saw you, of course," she smiled. "But it was just an image of you. I wanted to touch you so badly. You were always within my grasp, yet all I could ever feel was that hard cold mirror."

He pulled away from her and studied her. He noted the shape of her eyes, the contours of her cheeks, the hair that framed her face.

"What is it, Severus?"

"When I first arrived here, as a professor, one of the first things Albus asked me to do was move the Mirror of Erised from its hiding place. A student had found it, and he needed to make sure it was kept from innocent eyes. The move went smoothly, until I placed it in its new spot. I had levitated it into the room, and as it came down to the floor, the curtain that had been placed around it came down. Before I could cover it up again, I looked into it." He took hold of a stray curl and wrapped his finger around it.

"What did you see?" whispered Hermione. His eyes entranced her, and she caressed the back of his neck as she listened to him.

"I saw a woman, the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. She had deep brown eyes," he said as he lightly traced the shape of her eyes with the tips of his fingers, "skin like the palest bisque," he then caressed her cheek with his hand, "her lips, full and red," his thumb brushed her lips, "and her hair was a mass of brown," he pulled her to him, "curly," her lips were close to his now, "silk." Then he kissed her softly and laid his forehead against hers, as they both closed their eyes. "I have waited for you, Hermione. I have waited so long for you."

~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*

So now you know Severus' secret. If you recall in the beginning of the story he was shocked to have seen her and several times remembers the vision he had seen. Hermione was the vision he saw all those years ago.

# Chapter 27

Chapter 27 of 29

Hermione and Severus talk a bit more and he asks her a very important question.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thanks to June for all of her help and for being my beta.

## Chapter 27

Hermione wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him close to her. She inhaled the spicy amber scent in his hair. It had been so long since she had held him this close to her, and now, she never wanted to let go.

He rubbed her back gently and stroked her hair, as he pulled back to look into her eyes.

"When I saw you that first day you arrived to be my assistant, I thought my eyes were playing tricks with me. I had never truly looked at you before that day. I did not allow myself to believe it could have been you, but now I know it was. I know now that it was you, as you are now, that I most desired." He ran his fingers through her hair, noticing the different shades of brown in each strand.

"I'm sorry for not telling you about the baby," she said, as she pulled away from him slightly.

"I gave you no cause to want to come near me," he stated.

"I'm such a fool, Severus. I haven't been taking care of myself; I could have killed our child," she said, rubbing her belly lightly.

"From now on, I will make sure you are both taken care of. The potion gave him the nutrients he needed, his heart is strong again, and Poppy told me he would be fine." Severus smiled and kissed her forehead.

"We're going to have a boy. I can hardly believe it," she said, as she tried to get out of bed.

"What do you think you are doing?" asked Severus, in his most stern Potions Master voice.

"Severus, I feel fine. I can't stand being in this bed any longer. Besides, poor Crookshanks must be wondering where I am." She took the arm he offered her and stood up.

"Crookshanks is in my rooms."

"Oh no, what has he been up to?" she wondered aloud.

"Not he, they. He is watching over Osiris," Severus said.

"What? He didn't hurt Osiris, did he?" asked Hermione frantically.

"Hermione, it was Osiris' blood that enabled me to finish the potion for our child," he said.

She looked at him and fell back onto the bed. She knew the potion he was speaking of, and knew just how much blood was needed.

"But, oh Severus, is Osiris all right? Please, tell me he's not going to..." her voice gave away, and she grabbed his forearm, pulling him towards her.

"He is fine, Hermione. Please, calm down, Osiris is fine. Crookshanks was there, and I...I used his life force to help Osiris recover. They are both fine, I assure you. I don't know what matter of havoc those two have been up to, but they seem to be friends." Severus chuckled, and sat down on the edge of the bed, next to her. "I... we owe Osiris a great debt. Had he not offered himself, our child would not have lived." Severus placed a hand on Hermione's belly and smiled.

"You used Voldemort's potion, didn't you?" she asked. Severus nodded, "I'd like to see Osiris. Do you think Poppy will let me leave? I really do feel much better, please," she begged.

"Wait here, let me speak with her." He stood and walked into Poppy's office. After he promised the Medi-witch that he would make sure the patient got plenty of rest and ate her three meals a day, Poppy sent Hermione to her rooms. Instead, however, Severus took Hermione to his rooms. As they walked slowly to the dungeons, Hermione looked up at Severus.

"Have you told Osiris and Crookshanks about the bond?" she asked.

"Yes, just before I came to see you. They took it quite well. I don't know if I should be happy or worried about that."

"Why worried?" she asked as she looked up at him.

"Hermione, Osiris was sorted into Slytherin when he attended Hogwarts. He is a notorious practical joker, and we both know cats are forever causing mischief. Can you imagine those two together for the next hundred or so years?" They both shuddered as they approached the dungeons. When they arrived in Severus' quarters, they found Crookshanks and Osiris curled up with each other in the corner of the couch.

Severus sat down next to them and shook Osiris gently. "Osiris. Osiris, wake up. Hermione is here to see you," he said.

Osiris lifted his head and peered at him. "*Hermione is here? Does that mean you two made up?*" he asked as he spat away at Crookshanks' tail, which had been wound up around his neck and partly in his beak.

"Yes, we have cleared up the misunderstanding," Severus answered.

"*What the bloody hell happened anyway? It was something that red-headed little shit did, wasn't it?*" said Osiris, as he tried to stand.

Hermione came and sat down next to Severus, leaning over to caress Osiris' head.

"It doesn't matter anymore," she said. "What's important is, it's all cleared up. Thank you; I can never repay you for what you have done." She smiled, then looked at Crookshanks. "Now, tell me, just what have you two been up to anyway?"

As the celebration moved on, Severus noticed Hermione smiling at Harry and giving him knowing glances. He suspected it had something to do with the fact Ron had not

A short epilogue and then on to sequels.

# Chapter 29

*Chapter 29 of 29*

And so we come to the end of this story.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thank you to June for helping me with the beta work.

## Epilogue

In the months since they had married and had their child, everyone noticed how much Severus had changed. He was still the same snarky bastard he had always been, and trying to get a nice comment from him was like trying to get water from a rock. What changed in him was his outlook on life. He was a husband and a father. No one would have ever thought that Severus would take on those two roles with such passion. But it did not surprise anyone he did so, since Severus Snape did everything with passion. He often took on the duties of bathing and feeding little Raven, and every once in a while changed nappies with no complaint.

After the end of the school year, they summered at one of the many Snape estates. This year it was outside of Madrid, on the Spanish countryside. They invited her parents, as well as Minerva and Albus, to stop by and visit. Draco and Ginny spent two weeks at the home, and arrived with the news that they were also expecting their first child. Harry and Pansy made an appearance and announced their engagement. Pansy had not wanted Harry to go on with being an auror, so when Albus offered him Professor Flitwick's position Harry jumped at it. The older wizard wanted to retire, and Harry wanted to finally lead a somewhat tranquil and safe life.

Hermione never quite forgave Ron for what happened that day at the Three Broomsticks, and their friendship would always remain strained. Because of him, she almost lost the only man she had ever loved. She never understood why Ron just couldn't be happy for her, even though she chose to live her life with a man he thought was the biggest bastard alive. Severus may have been a bastard, but he was her bastard.

Osiris and Crookshanks became self-appointed nannies for little Raven. They could often be seen near the baby's crib, or sharing naps with him. In those early weeks, Severus had come to suspect that his son already had the ability to communicate with both Osiris and Crookshanks, and made a mental note to watch the three very carefully. He tried asking Osiris, but his cousin remained tight-lipped about it all, or rather tight-beaked. Severus also began to notice other odd goings-on, not just with Raven, but also with Crookshanks. He suspected that the cat's now extended life wasn't the only thing he got in exchange for part of his life force being given to Osiris. There were occasions when Severus thought he could read the cat's thoughts. While still not very clear in his mind, there was something there. He decided to make some time to investigate further once they got back to Hogwarts.

On the day they returned to Hogwarts, Hermione noticed a letter on her desk. She opened it, and found it to be not a letter, but a degree from the University of Dover, signed by Professor Anteus Montclair, awarding her the title of Potions Mistress. As she studied the document in her hands, Severus came up behind her and wrapped his arms around her waist.

"I see your title has arrived," he stated.

Hermione turned around and looked at him in wonder. "What's this all about? I'm supposed to apprentice for a year with a Potions Master, to get my accreditation," she said as she held the paper to him.

"I know. I took the liberty of writing to Montclair, just before we returned to Hogwarts. You were a teaching assistant last year after all, and we did work together for a good part of the year. You also helped me when I began the new Wolfsbane Potion, and I did use several of your ideas for the improvements." He noticed her furrowed brows and knew immediately what she was thinking. "You deserve this title, Hermione. You worked hard at the university, and with all the distractions you suffered during this past year, you managed to teach the first through third years Potions classes on your own. Please, love, you earned this." He noticed her smile finally and kissed her forehead.

"Well, I know better than to argue with you, especially when you are right, dear husband." She kissed his lips, and jumped when she heard a crashing noise outside in the halls, along with what sounded like Filch screaming at someone.

Hermione and Severus both looked to the door as it swung open, allowing Osiris to fly in and Crookshanks to come almost sliding into the living room, leaving the door to shut loudly behind him.

"What the?" Severus watched as the two headed straight towards the study.

"*We're not here!*" Osiris said, as he and Crookshanks went past him and Hermione, just as Filch began pounding at the door.

The newlyweds looked at each other.

"I can only imagine what they have done this time," stated Severus as he rolled his eyes and opened the door. There stood Filch, as angry as the devil on Christmas, clutching a very bald Mrs. Norris.

"Where are they? I know they had to have come in here!" the caretaker yelled. Severus immediately crossed his arms and scowled down at him. Filch lowered his voice and took a cautious step back, and held out his bald cat. "Professor, look what those two animals did to Mrs. Norris."

"And what, may I ask, gives you the idea that either Osiris or Crookshanks had anything to do with this? They are animals, Mr. Filch, no more intelligent than..." Severus looked at the door next to him, "than perhaps this wooden door," he said as he knocked on the door. "No doubt the perpetrators are using their human legs to run from you as we speak." He then turned to Hermione. "Hermione, didn't you just tell me you thought you heard laughter and someone running past our rooms?"

"Why, yes." Hermione approached the door. "Mr. Filch, I believe I heard them going that way," she said as she pointed down the hall.

Filch immediately turned in the direction she had indicated and began to run. "I'll get you, you little bastards. I'll hang you by your thumbs when I do!"

Hermione stepped back and Severus closed the door. They looked at each other trying to hold back their laughter, and then Severus turned and called out to both the perpetrators.

"Osiris, Crookshanks! Out here now!"

Within seconds Crookshanks walked out with Osiris on his back.

"*Whatever you do, don't tell them it was my idea,*" begged Crookshanks.

*"All right, Severus, I can explain. You see, Crookshanks here bet me that I couldn't make Mrs. Norris' fur pink with blue polka dots, and I told him that of course I could. I am a wizard, after all,"* Osiris chuckled. Severus heard Raven crying, and went to the bedroom, leaving Hermione to deal with the two troublemakers. *"Uh, yes, well, anyway ... you see, Hermione, this is the funny part. Uh, instead of using a spell to change the color of her fur, I accidentally used a spell that left her completely bald. Isn't that funny?"* Osiris chuckled again, and was then swatted on the head by Crookshanks' tail.

"Osiris, you and Crooks have been playing these games with Mrs. Norris for several months now. Why do you insist on torturing her?" asked Hermione.

Hermione shook her head, and then sat on the couch. Severus emerged from the back room with Raven in his arms. The baby had filled out a bit, and now, at four months old, he was laughing wildly at his father's tickling. Hermione looked at her husband as he held their child. Crookshanks scooted next to him, and he and Osiris were now swatting each other with wings and paws. Severus held Raven as the baby watched the interplay between his two animal friends.

Severus handed Raven to Hermione. He watched her as she held their baby against her breasts, and caressed his chubby cheeks with her soft hands. He knew now that he was truly blessed. He thought back to the day when she had arrived as a teaching assistant. How he had fought with himself in those early days, and how he had refused to believe she had been the vision he had seen all those years ago in the Mirror of Erised. Never could he have believed he would be this happy. He smiled and moved closer to his wife and son, and held them close to him. What he held in his arms now, had certainly been well worth the long wait.

~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*

Thank you for reading and getting this far.