

Is a Virtue

by Venus

The chase is over! Hermione and Severus have found true love, but what do their friends have to say about it? Sequel to *Deliver Us*.

LadyTuesday – Asteroid Beater, kittyperry – Comet Chaser

Chapter 1 of 3

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Acceptance

Harry sighed as he returned to the corner of Hermione's cramped living room where Ginny and Ron sat, heads together as they spoke. The pinch to Ginny's forehead and splotches of red across Ron's face could only mean that the bickering that had prompted Harry's trip to the buffet had not died in the last ten minutes. Fending off Ron's temper and Ginny's increasingly bad humor wasn't the way he'd wanted to spend the first half hour of Hermione's engagement party.

If he'd had a hand free, he'd have massaged his temples, but he just tightened his fingers around the butterbeer bottles dangling from one hand and the little plate of cocktail shrimp and cheese cubes in the other. Harry didn't relish rejoining this conversation, but his wife would skewer him if he legged it.

"...don't know what you expected, Ron," Ginny said as Harry approached and handed her a drink, "but you're just going to have to deal with it. Cheers, Harry," she finished, nodding to him as she accepted the bottle.

Ron grimaced as he looked from Ginny to Harry. "Well, excuse me for being concerned with Hermione's welfare," he said in a righteous tone.

"Oh, give over, Ron; you're not interested in Hermione's welfare; you're upset that she's picked Snape and not you."

Harry drew a breath to calm himself down, but it didn't work. The small tirade he'd been suppressing for three months tumbled out before he could stop himself.

"You've had your pants in a twist ever since that day she turned you down, and it's not anything to do with your concern over her welfare. It's that you don't want to see Hermione go to anyone but you."

Ron opened his mouth to speak, but Harry figured that as long as he finally had the courage and opportunity, he might as well let Ron have his whole opinion.

"All right," Harry said, dropping his voice to a stage whisper, "we all know that Snape's a sarcastic, condescending git to anyone he's decided isn't as smart as he is. And yeah, he's biased as hell. But the point is, he gives a damn about Hermione, and since you do, too, you should bloody well get around to showing it."

Ron goggled at Harry, who winced and waited for an explosion. One that, much to Harry's surprise, never came. Eventually, Ron nodded, staring at his lap and picking at a loose thread on his robes.

"You're right, I suppose. Bastard," Ron said without any real heat. He smiled up at Harry. "I really did love her, you know. Still do, I guess. Just want what's best for her."

"Of course you do," Ginny said, her face softening as she laid a gentle hand on Ron's arm. "But you need to let her choose what's best for her, even if you don't agree. And given what we know of Snape, you can be certain that once he allows himself to love someone, he'll love her forever."

Ron nodded again and swiped away a tear.

"Besides," Ginny added with a grin, "you don't really have to like Snape; you just have to shut your gob and pretend to be thrilled. Maybe when you get around to seeing how happy she is, you really will be."

"Yeah," Ron said. After a moment, he looked up and smiled. "Yeah, you're right. Suppose I'd better go congratulate our girl and her git, eh?"

"I wouldn't use those exact words, though," Harry added as Ron strode away, casting a mischievous grin over his shoulder.

Draco and Pansy stood uncomfortably next to the fireplace looking out at the sea of Gryffindors filling the tiny space they found themselves in. Lucius and Narcissa had refused the invitation, stating that they would be out of the country. That they had then used the opportunity to bugger off to Egypt for a romantic holiday had given their quickly thought up excuse legitimacy, but it also meant that Draco and Pansy were left with no recourse but to accept. Severus would have been extremely putout if the only four guests he'd invited had turned him down.

"Why does he have to marry her?" whined Pansy. "I mean, having a torrid affair, that I understand. He's a man, and she's fairly fetching I suppose, if you like that swotty sort of woman. But to marry her...I really don't know what he's thinking sometimes."

Draco sniggered then looked over at Severus, who was smirking evilly at Hermione while circling her waist possessively with his arm. "I think he really loves her, Pans. I mean, he's bending over backwards to speak to her weird friends. He even shook Potter's hand. And he's changed since being with her. He's so much more understanding with Scorpius; it's as though she's given him something to cherish about life again."

Pansy made a moue of distaste, but nodded her head in resignation. "Yes, I suppose you're right. And she definitely does love him. I saw how cold your mother was to her the other day, and she just pasted a smile on her face and put up with it because Severus was deep in conversation with your father. If she had been alone, Granger would have given your mother a piece of her mind. I could see the irritation radiating off her in waves."

Draco sighed. "Mother's behaviour taxes Father sometimes, too. I think he's accepted that Godfather has found what he's always wanted, love. Father was quite willing to attend today, actually, but told me he didn't want to ruin Severus's happy day by having Mother come and upset Granger. I never thought I'd see the day when my father put the feelings of a Mudblood over Mother's entertainment of cutting people down to size and giving them the freeze."

Pansy sighed. "We all care deeply for Severus. He's been a pillar of strength for us all in our times of trial. I suppose we should be happy he's found someone to love. Besides, Granger's not that bad. She's not after him for his money or his position now that he's been accepted into the inner council of the Order of Lao Tzu."

"True," said Draco with a smirk that made him look exactly like his father. "Clarissa Nott was all out to ensnare him when it became public knowledge that Godfather had made it to the inner circle. It gave me great pleasure to inform the gold-digging bitch that Severus was very much taken."

Pansy laughed. Her laughter changed her haughty, cold demeanor into that of the warm, vibrant woman she really was inside.

Draco smirked and pulled her closer to him. "Does that mean you're going to be nice to the Mudblood, Pans?"

Pansy smiled and kissed her childhood love and husband softly on his cheek. "Yes. And stop calling her Mudblood. We don't want her referring to you as Ferret. It's too

good a name not to stick."

"Cheeky minx," said Draco with another smirk.

Severus's heavy brow descended as he scowled down at his fiancée. This was most emphatically *not* the way to reassure him that he would enjoy a party, let alone one where people would bother him all night, simpering about the joys of love. He damn well knew what it was like to be in love with Hermione, and he didn't appreciate other people commenting on the fact. He'd love nothing more than to tell them all to just nose out, including the figure attempting to make his way over to the alcove where Severus currently hid.

"What is *he* doing here?" he spat.

Hermione gazed over her shoulder, eyebrows raised in puzzlement.

"Hagrid is my friend, and he's like family to me. Why *wouldn't* he be here to share in our happiness?"

Severus could feel the grimace settling into familiar lines on his face. "Because I don't want that brainless oaf spending the evening commenting on my private life and threatening to pummel me if I ever 'be hurtin' our Her-mion-ee'..." he affected a gross exaggeration of Hagrid's accent. "...each reaction depending on how drunk he is at the time! You know I'd rather eat a smoldering Ashwinder egg than spend an evening with Hagrid. What in the world would possess you to think that inviting him was a good idea? Minerva I can understand, but Hagrid? I still don't understand why we couldn't just skip all this nonsense, elope, and be done with it."

Throughout Severus's rant, Hermione's jaw stiffened as she kept from giving her fiancé the tongue lashing he deserved. Her voice, when it came, was surprisingly calm.

"You know, Severus, I am constantly astonished at how easily you choose to ignore what is right in front of you. If you had any brains at all, you'd realize that these people here care about you. They all want to wish you well, which has been noticeably lacking in your life to date. You might also notice that I've made lots of changes in my life since falling in love with you in order to accommodate our new relationship."

Severus started to retort, but Hermione held up a hand to stop him.

"Changes I was happy to make *because* I love you, but changes nonetheless. You need to get it into your head that we do not live in a vacuum, Severus. I have friends you don't like; you have friends who I believe need a good swift kick. But if we're going to make it as a couple...something I know we can do, otherwise I wouldn't have accepted you...then we both need to bend a little more. Starting with you extricating your head from your arse and making nice with my friends."

Before Severus had a chance to reply, Hermione turned and plastered a smile on her face, waving to Hagrid near the door. It didn't take the half-giant long to cross the room...he parted the crowd like a tug boat, leaving people bouncing off each other in his wake...and scoop Hermione into a bone-crushing hug. Severus did not care for the smirk on her face as she turned to include Severus.

"You know, Hagrid," Hermione said in a sickly sweet voice, "Severus was just telling me how good it is to see you. Perhaps you could extend your congratulations to him while I circle the room and greet the other guests?"

Long fingers encircled Hermione's wrist and yanked her towards the tall, broad frame of her fiancé.

"You will pay for this later, you know," Severus hissed, but the roguish grin on her lips had him smiling reluctantly. "You're lucky I love you."

"I know," she said, smiling, before moving away across the room.

AN: Thanks for reading! Please leave us a review...we get points for every review. And please vote in The Petulant Poetess LJ poll for Team Venus if you liked this chapter: <http://community.livejournal.com/petulantpoetess/5286.html>.

Word count: 1881

Prompt words used are bolded: 1. **Affair** 2. **Explosion** 3. Golem 4. Expurgate 5. Spectrespecs 6. **Shrimp** 7. **Taxes**

Clairvoyant - Meteoroid Beater & Livvy6 - Gravity Keeper

Chapter 2 of 3

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Loving-Kindness

It was a very pleasant late afternoon in Simla, but Narcissa Malfoy fanned herself obsessively, an antique silk and lace fan...charmed blue to match her eyes and robes...flitting to and fro beneath her chin. She squirmed upon the red and gold Chiavari chair as if her Slytherin bottom was having an allergic reaction to Gryffindor décor.

Lucius sat bedside her, motionless except for his expert eyes scanning every detail of Severus' lush garden, now resplendent in summer's full bloom. "For Merlin's sake, Narcissa, stop fidgeting," he admonished her in a low voice while gently rubbing her back.

"I can't help it," she hissed through gritted teeth. "I'm uncomfortable."

At that moment, Minerva McGonagall...main contributor to Narcissa's discomfort...turned around in her seat, shooting a reproachful glare at the couple. "Shush. Have you two no manners? This is a wedding, not a pub. I'd take House points from you if I could."

Lucius remained silent, but fixed the etiquette-obsessed witch with a look...nothing more than a slight arch of his elegant eyebrow and an amused sparkle in his eye...guaranteed to make lesser men beg for their mothers. Minerva peered down her nose at the rude, snooty duo and sniffed, clearly unimpressed; she swivelled forward, returning her attention to the happy couple at the altar.

A swish of his wand and a wordless *Silencio* allowed him to converse with his wife and still pay attention to Severus and Hermione as they recited their vows. That was Narcissa's cue to begin a hypercritical, gossipy conversation with her husband.

"That hair is nothing short of a miracle today," Narcissa commented with cool detachment. "But I wouldn't expect any less when one's fiancé is a Potions master and creator of a fabulous line of hair care products." She paused to search for anything else that failed to meet her high, pure-blood standards, more fodder for her critique.

She inhaled deeply, about to continue her sharp-tongued assessment, when Lucius interrupted. "Please, Narcissa. The bride is utterly beautiful tonight, as are you, darling." He pulled her hand to his lips, placing a lingering, worshipful kiss upon it.

She smiled warmly, but continued her tirade. "There's proof that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Severus isn't much to look at, either."

"You're being too harsh, Narcissa. He isn't classically handsome like me," Lucius noted, never missing an opportunity to preen his metaphorical plumage. "But his features are striking; he cuts quite a dashing figure. Besides, I think Miss Granger cares more for his other positive attributes rather than his appearance."

"Are you speaking about his wealth or his cock?" she asked dryly.

"Narcissa," he intoned, unimpressed with her humour. "I meant loyalty. If anyone could understand that virtue, it's you." Her eyes sparkled with curiosity that belied her controlled expression. Lucius held her hand and spoke, his honeyed voice radiating warmth strong enough to melt the layer of ice holding her heart captive on that day. "You've stood by me in good times and bad...when wizarding society scorned me and the Malfoy name for my poor choice of political affiliations, when I rotted in Azkaban for my heinous crimes, when that lunatic despot treated me like dirt in our own home. A lesser woman might have fled after I sullied the family name the first time. But you held strong, loyal to a fault. Perhaps there's a bit of Hufflepuff hiding beneath your sleek, Slytherin comportment." He flashed her a saucy wink and a seductive smile. If his words didn't thaw her heart, then that look would do it.

Her smile illuminated the gathering dusk; her glistening eyes reflected a love that endured through times of happiness and hardship. "I love you, Lucius. Always have. When we married, I promised to stand by you, no matter what fortunes the Fates had in store for us." She paused her speech for a dainty, yet inconvenient sniffle. Lucius conjured a blue linen handkerchief; with a tenderness that defied his cool exterior, he dabbed the corners of his wife's eyes before offering it to her. He loved Narcissa with every fibre of his being, but he wouldn't go so far as to hold the hanky to her nose and order her to blow when she was capable of doing it herself.

She blew her nose briefly and looked up at the bonding ceremony. "One only need look at Severus and his bride to see how much they love each other. I've been such a bigoted fool. Just because one Muggle-born Gryffindor witch abandoned our friend doesn't mean *she* will. If Miss Granger... no, Madame Snape can love Severus despite his shortcomings, if she can stand by him despite his misdeeds, if she can defend him despite his wretched past, then they have a love match like no other."

Lucius quirked a sexy eyebrow and asked, "Can you honestly think of no other great love that compares to theirs?"

Narcissa made a dramatic display of tilting her head, pursing her full lips and looking upward to ponder his question. "Hmm," she purred teasingly, then pinned Lucius with a lusty stare and a playful smirk. "Not a one."

Once the flirtation ended, they held hands and watched the sunset behind the bride and groom. It was the end of the day, but the beginning of a lifetime.

Arthur and Molly Weasley sat at their reception table savoring their apple crumble after Severus' and Hermione's wedding. Arthur reached over and took his wife's hand in his own. He looked at her as her gaze fluttered down to their entwined hands and then up to her husband's face.

"Molly, what is it about weddings? I look at you, and I can scarcely believe we have been married this long!"

"Oh, Arthur," Molly chided. "We've been married for over 35 years! I am hardly the girl I was when we married."

Arthur grinned and squeezed his wife's hand at the sight of her cheeks flushing. "You are still the most lovely girl in the world, Mollywobbles."

Molly glanced at him quickly and smiled demurely. Only Arthur saw this side of her. After raising seven children and losing one in war, she had quite the reputation of being the bossiest witch in all of wizarding England. No one really remembered the old Molly Prewett, who had married Arthur Weasley at such a tender age. She had been terribly and painfully shy. They had married right out of school in a lovely ceremony on the banks of Hogwarts Lake. It was the happiest day of her life.

It was something Molly never really spoke about...her intense love and gratitude for Arthur's continuing affection. She had gained so much weight during her pregnancy with Fred and George that she had cried for months in secret, thinking Arthur would throw her over for a thinner and lovelier witch. She had been so surprised when Arthur had whispered to her one evening in their bed how much he enjoyed her curvy body and fuller breasts. It had led to an intense and fulfilling night of passion that resulted in her pregnancy with Ronald.

"Arthur," she whispered as she leaned into his side, "I always wonder at weddings what the couple will face in their life together that will keep their love growing. I don't think I have ever pondered more about a couple's future, outside of our own, of course."

"There they are," she gestured with her free hand. "Severus is so much older, lived a lifetime before Hermione was born, and with his past with You-Know-Who...I think marriage will be terribly difficult."

Arthur looked at the bride and groom as they made their way around the tables, making small talk, Hermione laughing and Severus smiling a bit as he kept his hand on the small of his new wife's back.

"Molly, I see something so different. Look at how each compliments the other. Severus has always been a bit socially backward. Hermione is leading him gently, teaching him to open himself up to people. Poor bloke, he is nothing more than a wayfarer when it comes to love and friendship. She has an extraordinary capacity for kindness, forgiveness, and love. She sees Severus for who he is: no more, no less. What a blessing that is for a man to have in a wife!"

He looked at his wife. "I never made much money, nor did I become a great man in the Ministry...people like the Malfoys talking about me as if I was a lamebrain, Muggle-collecting eccentric! However, you loved me, stood by me, and never complained about the lack of money or how hard we had to work to make ends meet. That is the greatest gift you have given me, Molly. You have taken me just as I am. I know Hermione will give that same type of loving-kindness to Severus. Then, when he realizes it is real, he will be free to be the man and wizard he has always wanted to be."

Molly's eyes were overflowing with tears. "Oh, Arthur! That has to be the sweetest thing you have ever said to me. I think Hermione *is* a strong witch. She will challenge Severus...but it will be good for him. I worry though, not about her ability to love, but Severus'. Does he truly love her? Young women can easily be hurt by harsh words. A young bride like Hermione might be dashed to pieces if he gets his dander up."

Arthur turned to face Molly. "You can't judge Severus through your experience, Molly. You married a man who is very different from Severus. The way I love you is perfect for us, but it may not be their way. Severus is a man of few words, but it is his actions that show how deeply he loves."

Molly looked over at the newlyweds just in time to watch as Severus gently held his bride's train as they maneuvered through the crowd. He lovingly touched her elbow, careful to guide her safely. Molly continued to watch Severus as he attended to his new wife. It was subtle. However, when she took time to look closely, she could see how they loved each other.

Arthur wrapped his arm around his wife's shoulders. Molly leaned her head against her husband. Her Arthur, ever the patient man, had opened her eyes once more to how differently people lived and loved. What was right for them was not Severus and Hermione's way, but she could see that they had their very own silent language of love between them. She could see that their marriage was off to a wonderful beginning.

Hermione's toast was the last of the night, and she was nervous. She had a reputation for long-winded speeches and worried that Severus might be annoyed with her. But the smile he had worn all day never faltered, even as she flipped the final note card on the inch-thick stack. At the sound of thunderous applause and calls for yet another kiss, he held her close and unleashed his trademark smirk for the first time that day.

Hermione's eyes grew wide with alarm. She tried unsuccessfully to pull from his embrace. "What are you playing at, husband?"

"You'll have to kiss me to find out," he whispered, another smirk playing about his lips.

A Gryffindor never shies away from a challenge The day's most perfect kiss was long and sweet, tasting of champagne and wedding cake. Still wrapped in each other's arms as the clock chimed midnight, Severus and Hermione felt fluttering butterflies in their stomachs. Or perhaps it was the navel-tugging sensation as the Portkey...the crystal flute Severus held...activated, depositing them in the honeymoon suite of the Ritz Carlton in Paris.

Severus held Hermione tight as the wave of nausea passed. "I shared you long enough, Madame Snape. And now we attend to business." He silenced her with a searing kiss before she could protest.

AN: If you like our chapter, please review and please vote for us in the LJ poll.

astopperindeath - Black Hole Chaser, kittylefish - Supernova Seeker

Chapter 3 of 3

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Forgiveness

"What are you trying to tell me, Hermione?" Severus snapped impatiently. He was eager to get to the lab...he was experimenting with a new cream for dry skin relief, as Hermione had been complaining about itching on her back. "Just spit it out."

Her eyes first widened in shock, then narrowed with ire. "If you're going to be like that, never mind. Go on to your lab. We can talk later when you have more time." She turned her back to him, concentrating on the bouillabaisse she was planning to make for lunch, but he noticed a slight tremble of her shoulders.

Damn. He didn't know what had got into her these past few weeks. It was nearing their fifth wedding anniversary, and he'd thought they were happy, but lately he'd had cause to worry. Yesterday morning she'd dropped a cup, and when it shattered, she'd burst into tears, notwithstanding the fact it was easily mended. He stifled a sigh. He'd best discover what was going on before it got any worse. He clamped down hard on any trepidation he might feel and approached her back.

"Hermione. What is it?" He placed a hand on her shoulder. "Just tell me." He moved behind her, massaging her upper arms as he kissed the side of her neck. "Nothing you tell me can be as bad as all this uncertainty and wondering." He nuzzled the soft skin behind her ear.

She drew in a deep, shuddering breath...*Was she crying? Please not that...* then reached up, drew his arms around her, took his hands, and quite deliberately placed them on her stomach.

And said nothing. She seemed to expect him to understand ... *Oh ... Oh!* As realization dawned, he tried not to stiffen away from her in shock. She, meanwhile, burrowed her head back against his chest. And now he was supposed to say something. Something that sounded ... pleased. Well, he was pleased, wasn't he? Pleased and ... terrified. He, a traitor in the Dark Lord's court who'd dallied with Death Eaters, was terrified at the thought of a tiny, little, helpless baby. He drew in a deep breath and wrapped his arms tightly around Hermione. A baby such as he had once been. He thought of his parents, of his father's anger and his mother's ineffective efforts to protect him.

"Severus? You understand, right? We're going to have a baby." Her voice shook slightly, and he remembered he'd thought she might have been crying. "Are you pleased?"

He'd been silent too long. He couldn't remember ever hearing her sound so timid, not even when she'd been a student. He kissed the top of her head. He couldn't believe he had not ever seriously considered this possibility. He'd just assumed he'd never have children...never have that responsibility. That opportunity to ... ruin someone.

He shook his head and pulled himself together. Just because he might share some homologous chromosomes with his father, that didn't make him the same kind of man. He wasn't his parents, and after all, even with everything...their mistakes and inadequacies, his own missteps and horrible decisions...he hadn't turned out so badly in the end, had he? Surely, even with all his ... challenges, he could manage better than they had. Couldn't he? And...he had Hermione to show him how. Hermione...a baby such as Hermione had once been. A tiny smile curved his lips.

He released her and turned her in his arms, his smile melting the apprehension in her face. "Yes, my love, I'm pleased." He realized it was true.

Eileen Snape wiped a tear from the corner of her eye. Whenever she thought of her son, she felt so keenly her own failures. He'd known so much anger and pain at such a tender age, she'd feared for him. Feared for his soul, even. And now ...

She felt another presence and turned. "Headmaster," Eileen said, then, at his raised eyebrow, quickly corrected herself. "Albus."

"Hello, Eileen." He looked down at the scene playing out in the earthly realm and smiled. "I never expected to see such a day."

"Nor I." She sniffled a bit.

"Never?" Albus asked. "Not even when he was very young?"

"When he was very young ..." She pondered. "I'm afraid not." She hesitated before continuing, "It started so soon after he was born, you know. There wasn't very much time ..."

"I've often wondered why you stayed with him. Surely you had other options?" Dumbledore inquired.

"It didn't feel that way. My family had opposed the union. They disowned me when I married 'that Muggle' as they called him." Eileen laughed, but the sound lacked humor. "As it turned out, they were half-right."

"Half?" Dumbledore asked.

Eileen sighed. "I would never have wished Severus unborn. However imperfect a mother I was to him, I loved him with all my heart. I hope he knows that." Her voice was barely above a whisper as she finished.

Dumbledore patted her arm. "I'm sure he does. And look at him now, so happy."

"It's beautiful to see, isn't it?" She smiled.

"It is." Dumbledore's blue eyes twinkled in the familiar way.

"Do you think ... Do you think he'll be all right?" Eileen forced the words past a lump in her throat.

"I know he will," Dumbledore reassured her. "We've seen how great a love his heart is capable of holding. This child will only make that more true. And...perhaps a little harder to hide from the rest of the world." He chuckled.

Looking down at her son, now truly smiling into the face of the woman he loved, she knew he spoke the truth.

Lily watched Severus holding his daughter, pacing around his bedroom to try to lull her to sleep. She recalled the nights when she had watched James do the same thing with Harry, and she smiled.

She sensed a presence behind her, before feeling her husband's arms wrap around her waist.

"Remember when Harry was that small?" he whispered into her ear.

"Like it was yesterday." She rubbed his arm with her hand, leaning back even further into his embrace.

James grinned. "It's hard to believe the bastard could be the father of such a pretty little thing."

Lily smacked her husband's arms, then spun to face him. "James Potter! After all these years, after being *dead* all these years, and after being able to see all of the sacrifices Severus has made for our own son, you still can't forgive him for reacting badly to all the stupid stunts you used to pull?"

James smiled. He loved that after all this time, he could still get a rise out of her. Yes, he knew it was probably not in his best interests to annoy his wife too badly...an eternity of her irritation would be uncomfortable at best. His wife stood before him, forehead drawn and fists bunched at her sides. He raised his hands and placed them on her shoulders, looking into her eyes.

"Of course I've forgiven him, Lilypad. He's made choices to protect our son that I'm not sure I could ever have made for someone else's child, let alone the child of someone I disliked no matter how good my reasons for disliking him seemed at the time. Hermione is the only other person down there who has cared for our son as much as Snape, and I know they will be at least as fiercely loyal to their own child as they've been to ours." James pulled his wife into his arms and hugged her, tucking her head under his chin.

Lily sighed. "I just wish ... things could have been different."

"I know, darling." He wrapped his arms around her tighter in comfort before turning her to watch the scene below once again.

Snape continued walking circles around the room, staring down at his little daughter in awe. Lily looked up at James and smiled once again.

"I'm glad he's finally happy."

"Well, he better be happy! At least she didn't get his nose!" James said, bracing for impact.

Lily smacked him again, but playfully this time.

Hermione had not slept well the last few weeks leading up to her due date. She had taken to pacing at night, not just in the hope of inducing labor but also out of cabin fever. She was so uncomfortable she hadn't left their home much recently and had reached the point where she had just wanted it over and done with.

In the wee hours of the morning, she had woken him, clutching her stomach, her face drawn. In a less-than-logical move on his part, he had Floo'd for Molly Weasley instead of a healer, and Hermione had given birth in their home. The labor had been quicker than Severus had expected for her first child, and after five hours, he had welcomed his daughter into the world.

Hermione was fast asleep, but Severus couldn't even dream of sleeping. He had been pacing with their little baby daughter for hours, in part because it lulled her to sleep so quickly and in part because it kept him from falling asleep. He knew it was irrational, but if he slept, this beautiful creature in his arms might not be there when he awoke. So he spent his night cradling her in his arms, taking a few stolen moments to inhale the sweet baby smell from the top of her head. He had never been able to identify that third aroma he always smelled when brewing Amortentia until today, and he was amazed to finally discover the origin of the fragrance.

He heard Hermione begin to stir seconds before the baby awoke crying...almost as if she had some sixth sense already as to the needs of their child. He crossed to the bed and gave her to her mother.

Hermione unbuttoned her pajama top and began nursing their daughter. "How was she, Severus?"

"Absolutely fine. Though, I'm sure any number of my former students would be appalled by the fact that you trusted me not to eat such a small child."

Hermione smirked. "Or use her for potions ingredients." She looked down at their daughter, smiling. "Don't worry, Amanda. Daddy won't be using you for potions today."

Her husband sneered. "Amanda and I had a very nice walk while you were asleep. I'll not have you scaring her before I've even done something to deserve it." He attempted to keep the stern look on his face, but the corner of his mouth began to twitch.

Hermione smiled. "Severus, I was watching you with her for a lot of the time you thought I was asleep." Her husband's face blanched. "If you always look at her the way you did tonight, you're never going to be able to resume that persona you worked so hard on."

Severus leaned down and kissed each of his ladies on the forehead.

"Indeed," he whispered before sitting on the bed next to them, pulling his wife and daughter into an embrace.

AN: This is the last week of this competition. If you enjoyed our story, please review and vote for it in the LJ poll. Team Venus appreciates the support of everyone who has read and reviewed our stories, *Deliver Us* as well as this sequel. We thank you for sending us through to the finals and giving us the opportunity to write this story.

Prompt words used: Homologous, Bouillabaisse, and Amortentia

Word count: 1899