

Leap of Faith

by Hanagasume

After the war, everything is different. The Gryffindor Trio is no longer, and Severus Snape is left ashamed and alone with the knowledge that the woman he loves just might know his secret.

Part One: Potions

Chapter 1 of 3

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Disclaimer: All publicly recognizable characters, settings, etc. are the property of their respective owners. The original characters and plot are the property of the author.

A/N This was written about three years ago and was originally posted as two parts. It is now in three parts, and after editing out the bits I didn't like and altering things to my current tastes, I am now reposting this here and at other archives. I hope you enjoy this and rest assured I am working on something new.

A big hug and the most indulgent and expensive chocolate truffles must go to WriterMerrin for rescuing this story and making the suggestion of posting it in three parts. Thank you so much my dear I'd be lost without you!

At the end of it all, it had been a beautiful, intelligent girl with a riot of brown curls who had made him pause. Voldemort, the foul manipulator, had read him like a book the moment his thoughts had lapsed towards her. She had been captured then, and used against him. Eventually, Potter delivered his final blow to the Dark Lord, and Snape had been cast into the background. This was despite the fact that every strategy, every bit of information and every little detail that helped Harry Potter reach the final battle had come from Severus Snape himself along with countless other hard-working Order members.

It was true that Snape hated publicity and would never have wanted all of the fame and medals, but he had given up so much of his life for some small acknowledgement that he was forgiven for his mistakes as a teenager. The dark side had exploited his greatest weakness had tortured him and left him on death's door, but not before they had told Hermione Granger that she had only been kidnapped because Snape was in love with her, already the most powerful young witch of her generation.

He was pathetic, and he knew it. He had purposely removed himself from the eyes of the public, just so that the media couldn't get their claws into him. He had no intention of running the risk of seeing Hermione Granger after her discovery of his long-harboured secret. He was lucky that it was only she who had discovered this. She would likely sneer at him and think him a filthy lecher for having feelings for her. It had been two long years since that fateful day, and he had managed thus far to avoid nearly everyone he knew.

The only problem in this entire situation was that he constantly received owls from said bright witch. He convinced himself that it was 'just business'. He had left Hogwarts

and had begun his own private brewing company for potions which, oddly enough, he supplied to the apothecary that Hermione happened to run. She was unaware of the fact that it was he who brewed her potions, and he intended to keep it that way.

After all, the only time he left the security of his own land or manor was when he attended the occasional Potions convention. He blinked out of his musings just as an owl swooped in through his office window and dropped a roll of sealed parchment in front of him before retreating to its stand.

'What have you brought me today, Archimedes? Some delightful poetry from my beautiful Gryffindor?' he asked his black hawk owl sarcastically, tossing him an owl treat.

The owl ate his treat and gave a soft hoot, making Snape proud of how well he had been trained. He cracked Hermione's dark blue seal and unfolded the letter, taking in the precise rounded cursive of Hermione's writing. Much like the woman herself, the text was flawless in his eyes.

--

Mr. Prince,

As I have been a client of your brewing company for the past year, I would be most gratified if you would consider allowing me to include a special order service in my Apothecary to be available for my customers. The reason for my request is the result of an increase in interest in special potions and medicinal ones that I have not the time to brew for myself.

I kindly ask that you consider this and reply as soon as you have come to a decision, and I will draw up an appropriate price drafting so that you receive extra for specialty potions. As always, I am extremely grateful for your support and partnership in both my Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade Branches.

I remain faithfully, your servant,

Hermione J. Granger

--

Severus read over it again and tapped thoughtfully on his chin as he began to think on a response to her request. She had been polite and fairly straightforward in her offer, not asking too much, but obviously trying to come across to him as a woman who was serious about her business. It was quite refreshing to receive such a letter, so he took out a fresh piece of parchment and a quill and decided to pen down a brief response.

--

Miss Granger,

I am aware of our current arrangement and am willing to allow such special orders to occur. I will post you a list of potions that I am not currently already sending you post haste and will be happy with any price list that you believe appropriate. I look forward to continued business with you.

Your most humble servant,

M.J. Prince

Persuasion Brewing Company Director

--

After reading through to make ensure that he had not misspelled anything, he folded it carefully, sealed it with a drop of silver wax, and pressed his seal into it. He walked over to Archimedes and attached the letter to the bird's leg, carrying him out to the window and sending him off.

'Take it to my Hermione,' he told the bird as it took off into the night.

Sighing as he watched his familiar fly off to his beloved, Snape contemplated finishing off his work for the day and indulging in a nice hot bath. He had every intention of falling asleep totally relaxed.

--

A hawk owl swooped through the open window of the Apothecary and landed on the stack of notes that sat precariously near the edge. Hermione walked in just in time to shift the pile before it toppled over and crashed to the floor. The poor owl would have been crushed by the weight of her unfiled paperwork. Detaching the note from the creature's leg, she gave it a treat before it took off again.

'Hmm... let's see what you have to say, Mr. Prince,' she murmured to herself.

Breaking the seal, she unfolded and scanned the contents of the letter, which was short and straight to the point. But that's what she liked about this company and the Director; he didn't bandy about with inane information and was reliable, always sending on time and offering his complete services. She also knew that he supplied for several other Apothecaries throughout Europe and that the Director himself had published three books: one on the uses of Dragon's blood and two others concerning potions and the properties of some ingredients and their uses.

She smiled and decided just to send him a write-up of the potions she would like to have on the request list in the morning. Securing the shop and office, she Apparated to her house in Aberdeen from the alleyway behind the shop. She got inside as soon as she could autumn was shaping up to be rather cold. Leaves were everywhere on the ground. She hung up her coat and scarf in the closet beside the front door and took off her long boots.

'Hello, Crookshanks,' she said to her ginger half-kneazle as it wound around her legs in greeting, mewing softly. 'Are you hungry?'

Crookshanks' response was a louder, more insistent mewl and a nudge in the direction of the kitchen. She laughed and picked him up, cradling him as she went to find his food, and deposited him on the floor with a full bowl before him.

'You're really getting fat, Crooks,' she muttered as she walked across to put on the jug to boil water for tea.

She made and drank her tea slowly, savouring the warmth, before going up for a hot shower and pulling on her comfortable flannelette pyjamas. With the addition of bed socks on her feet, she clambered under the covers and opened a book. It was a book she had read many times before, but just couldn't get enough of Jane Austen's *Sense & Sensibility*. It was a Muggle book, but she liked it and felt an affinity with the characters.

After a while, her eyes drifted shut, and she woke for just long enough to mark her page and set it aside before extinguishing the lights and falling into a peaceful slumber.

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Two months later...

Rubbing a hand over his tired eyes, Snape forced himself to concentrate on the task at hand. He had received a letter two days before from Aberdeen College, requesting that he deliver a weekly Potions lecture, essentially becoming one of their casual teaching staff. At first he had wondered if they had all gone mad, asking to hire him after all that had happened during the war.

Then after a while, he remembered that he had received the top N.E.W.T. score for Potions in the whole of Europe, and after all, he was a famous and highly recognized figure in the world of potion-making. Aberdeen was the best Wizarding and Witchcraft College in Scotland, and of course, they only ever hired the best. Apparently he was the best they could find.

'What do you think, Archimedes?' he asked the owl who was currently perched precariously on top of his paperwork. 'Should I accept? It would only be one day a week.'

The owl hooted softly, and he made up his mind. He took a fresh bit of parchment and his finest quill and began writing a response. Perhaps it wouldn't hurt to teach the next generation of potion-makers something of worth?

--

Dean Grey,

I will accept your offer to educate your current Potions students so that they received the finest training possible. I will be free to teach every Wednesday, and shall begin as soon as it is convenient to the current timetable. Please recognize that this is purely an informal teaching post and that I will accept no proposals in the future for a more permanent position.

Regards,

Professor S. Snape

Potions Master, Order of Merlin: First Class

--

Snape smiled at what he had just written. It had been a long while since he had signed a letter with his own name and title. He had been working as simply Mr. Prince for so long that he had almost forgotten what a pleasure it was to sign his own name. He folded the parchment into an envelope and sealed it with his regular dark-green wax and the Snape family seal as opposed to the Brewing company wax and seal, and attached it to the waiting Archimedes.

'Deliver this safely to the Dean, and don't wait for a response,' he said just before his familiar flew away. He would find out soon enough what the Dean thought of his reply to her letter.

He sat back in his chair and sighed, wondering just what it was that Hermione was doing at that very moment. He often wondered as he sat alone in his office, whether or not she was working, or teaching, or reading, or even going out on a date with some other dashing fellow. During those times, he had migraines and often felt regret and jealousy among other things. Shifting his mind to the stack of orders on his desk, he stood to retrieve them and walked towards his laboratory to begin. Now that he was teaching again, he couldn't afford to let things pile up.

--

Severus Snape strode into the lecture theatre confidently, robes whipping behind him and swirling dramatically as he walked in the very same way as he had always done at Hogwarts. He was singularly proud that he had not lost his presence and intimidating gestures. He would have everyone's attention before his class began, or he would not begin to teach at all until he did. He had planned it so that his class was never boring. It would neither carry on for too long, nor would it be so short that he did not impart the necessary information to his students. He was demanding and would weed out the stragglers. Not one of them would fail his Potions class that year.

'Get out your notebooks and open your texts to page 359,' he said smoothly as he walked to the front of the room, pointing his wand at the board so that the class notes for that lesson would appear.

Every student hurriedly obeyed and was scrambling to get all of their things so that they didn't anger their new, scary professor, who had been rumoured to have been not only the nastiest Potions Master in Europe, but a former Death Eater. As he surveyed the crowd, he took note that very few of those present had actually attended Hogwarts. From what he had been told, many were exchange participants from various Universities in Europe and America. They whispered a little, and Snape smirked inwardly. He had already frightened them with his entrance. This was going to be all too easy.

'You will not need to hold private discussions in this class. Any student that does... will find themselves punished,' he barked sternly. 'I am Professor Snape, and I am your new Potions instructor for your Wednesday class. Before we begin, I will tell you all that there will be no tomfoolery in this room. The moment you pass through the doors of my classroom each week, you will be silent and attentive. If not...' He paused and looked straight at a particularly arrogant blond chap. '...You will be asked to leave, or receive a punishment befitting your crime.'

By the end of this, Snape was positive that he had even the tough boy shaking in his boots, if the fear in his blue eyes was any indicator. Smugly, he tapped the projector with his wand, and slides began to appear on the board in accordance with the topic for that day.

'Now,' Snape began. 'Can any of you tell me what the difference is between Monkshood and Wolfsbane...?'

Not one hand rose up, and the dunderheads simply looked around at each other, trying to see if anyone actually knew the answer. He had only asked the question to gage the level within the classroom. Clearly, Snape thought to himself, he was going to need to start from scratch. And then he heard it. The classroom door opened at the back, and a sweet, familiar voice spoke.

'Professor, there is no difference. Monkshood and Wolfsbane are one and the same.'

He looked towards the back of the classroom, and what he saw was most alarming indeed. Hermione Granger, in all of her glory, was approaching the front seats with a bag over her shoulder and a book in her hand.

'You're late,' he stated curtly.

'Yes, and I apologize, Professor Snape, but I was speaking with the Dean,' she delivered flawlessly, making his heart skip a beat.

'Very well, take your seat and keep silent,' he said, trying not to look directly into her warm, coffee eyes. 'Raise your hand if you wish to ask or answer a question.'

He was no nicer to her than he had been to any of the others, and had even sneered a little as he spoke to her in an attempt to exaggerate his indifference. What on earth was *she* doing in *his* class? If he had known, he would have never accepted. Class went on, however, with Hermione asking and answering most of the questions just as he had expected he would from the moment she walked in. The only difference was that now, he was in love with her. Back then, she had just been a major annoyance. When he had finally finished covering all of the topics for that day, he turned off the projector.

'Class is dismissed. I shall see you all *here on time* next Wednesday,' he said, putting an emphasis on the attendance time.

All off the students practically fled from the room, scared out of their wits by their new Professor. One student, however, lingered behind a little an intelligent, witty and beautiful student.

'I see you have already created your intimidating persona, Professor,' Hermione said as she put her book in her bag and stood. 'They're like first-years.'

'I don't see how that is any of your business, Miss Granger,' he said curtly, clearing the notes from the board.

She laughed softly and went to the door to leave. 'Have a nice week, Professor, and I'll make sure that I get here on time next Wednesday,' she said before she slipped out.

Snape stood there, confused and dazed by what had just transpired. She had not taken offense to his belittling remarks *and* had ignored his indifference and acted as though he were just any other person, not a man that she despised. She had laughed at him and had bid him a pleasant week. What the hell was going on?

--

Hermione watched and listened intently as she learned from her former Hogwarts professor and current College professor at the front. Ever since that first Wednesday in his classroom, she had chosen a more discreet position in the classroom towards the back. She didn't raise her hand as much and always arrived early. She couldn't bear his coldness towards her, and the less she gave him to insult, the better off she would be.

For some reason she had wanted, from the second she had realized that Severus Snape was going to be her Professor again, to impress and please him. She knew that it would be hard, but she would do anything to gain his approval. It had been years since she had seen him, since her kidnapping and the discovery of his feelings for her. In his first class he had been so unfeeling and cold towards her that she would hardly have guessed he had ever had feelings for her at all.

In the end, the only conclusion she could come to was that he hated her again. After all, the way in which she had discovered him had been in the worst circumstances, and she didn't want it to be a bone of contention between them. He had saved her from death, had loved her, and she liked this man. She *wanted* to be liked by this man. And that was why she was trying to prove herself to him, to be more than just some silly girl that he once knew.

'Miss Granger, are you paying attention?'

Her eyes snapped to the face of the man in her thoughts, and she blinked in shock. She had totally zoned out and had no idea what he was talking about. 'Sorry, Professor, I lost track,' she apologized, blushing.

He had a smug look on his features at that, and he crossed his arms, forcing a frown to harden him. 'You will stay behind and see me after class, but for interest's sake we are currently studying the topic of water plants and ingredients,' he said sardonically, looking away from her and throwing a question at another unsuspecting target.

Hermione concentrated for the rest of the while, and when the day's work was done, she packed her bag and remained behind as requested. 'What did you want to see me about, Professor?' she asked, trying to sound more confident than she felt.

'You were daydreaming in my class, and I will not tolerate it,' he answered back immediately. 'You are the brightest student in this class, and although you might not understand, I need to make it seem as though I punish this sort of thing. I will not punish you however. I believe that you have already an extensive knowledge in this field. But I do have a reputation to uphold.'

Hermione nodded in understanding, seeing for the first time in ages the near-normal Snape that had once been revealed in the heat of a war. 'I understand Professor, and I do not mind being made an example of in class; however, I wish you wouldn't be quite so horrid.'

He smirked at that. 'But Miss Granger, is that not my reputation?' he queried.

She smiled. 'Of course, and I suppose you have your reasons,' she replied before pausing briefly to think. 'I suppose if I asked you to join me for lunch so that we could discuss Potions, you would say no, correct?'

He raised an eyebrow at the suggestion and decided to keep her unstable for the time being. 'On the contrary, Miss Granger, I will join you on the condition that this is to discuss Potions only,' he answered simply.

Hermione nearly fainted. He said yes. 'Where would be acceptable?'

'It is not my decision,' he answered seriously.

'How does the Three Broomsticks sound to you then, sir?' she offered, praying that it didn't seem too much like an outing with a friend. She didn't want him to be scared off by her so soon. 'It's not far away from here, and we could Apparate. I promised Madame Rosmerta a visit soon anyway.'

'Alright,' he conceded.

He had to admit, it had been quite a long while since he had entered the long-familiar establishment himself. They Apparated within seconds of each other and hurried from the winter chill into the warmth of the glowing, cheerful pub. They located a fairly private table and placed their lunch orders with the owner herself, before they relaxed slightly.

'What exactly did you have in mind to discuss with me?' Snape asked, breaking the silence first.

'Well, as you know, I did mention Potions, but it isn't just the subject in itself that I wanted to talk about,' she began casually. 'I have been attending your classes and other lectures in order to gain knowledge enough to qualify for testing to become a Potions Master.'

'You want a Master's in Potions? Why?'

'Well, I always wanted to have plenty of options for my career, and while being a qualified Apothecarist is all fine and good, I want so much more than just that,' she answered, taking a sip of her butterbeer. 'I fear I will be studying for the rest of my life, unable to decide just what I want to do with it.'

'Ever the ambitious one, Miss Granger. It often surprises me that you weren't sorted into Slytherin or Ravenclaw,' he said in a voice that was almost kind.

'Well I might have been if it weren't for my Muggle background, or reputation for being brash and forth-coming,' she quipped.

'Touché,' he said with a short bark of laughter. 'In any case, why is it that you wanted to discuss your plans with me?'

'Well, you are a famous Potions professional, and I was always told that if you want the best information, you have to go to the best,' she offered with a smile. 'I just wondered if you had any advice.'

'Perhaps,' he said, just as their lunch arrived in front of them.

They ate in companionable silence for a while, and when they were finished, they bundled into their coats and bid each other well until the next class.

--

Snape sealed the last of the boxes and attached the Portkey note to it, sending it off immediately to the client. He had completed his monthly replenishment of stocks in the various Apothecaries, including Hermione's, and had another two days until he had to teach on Wednesday. He hadn't expected to be finished so soon, but then again, it would give him more time to catch up on his recent research.

As he searched for his journals, his thoughts travelled back to Hermione and their most recent lunch conversation after class. Ever since that first lunch, they had somehow agreed to meet after every class he taught, and they discussed everything from Potions to Arithmancy, even dwelling occasionally on his current research.

He enjoyed every second of every minute that he was able to spend with this wonderful, bright witch, but still remained indifferent as her Potions professor, if only just a little nicer.

As he walked through his private labs, he collected his books and headed straight to his library. When he arrived, he saw Archimedes perched precariously on top of a pile of books, waiting, with a letter attached to his foot in a familiar rounded cursive. 'Thank you my friend,' he said to the bird as he removed it.

He was disappointed to find that it was addressed to *Mr. Prince*, but opened it, wanting to read what she had to say.

--

Mr. Prince,

Sorry if I may seem presumptuous, but it seems appropriate for me to suggest that perhaps the time has come when we might perhaps arrange a meeting. I make it a point to meet all of my business partners and so forth, and have up until now, decided to overlook the fact that we have never met.

I understand that you are a very busy man and run a large business that must call upon a large portion of your time, but I would appreciate if you would owl me a day that would be acceptable for us to meet in person. Please understand that should we continue business as we do now, I will, at the very least, need to meet you once.

Kindest regards,

Hermione J. Granger

--

Snape re-read the letter and felt the urge to kick something. She had always been content without meeting him in the past. Why the sudden interest after all that time? He looked back at it. He could always just say no. But he wasn't so stupid to risk losing her as a client that way. After all, her Apothecary chain was good for his business, not to mention that she was the woman he was in love with.

He couldn't bear to be rude to her, no matter whether she knew his name or not. He couldn't even do so while pretending to be someone else. Sighing, he knew that there was only one thing for it; he would have to arrange a lunch with her and show up as himself. Hopefully she would not be too upset with him for not revealing his identity. If she was, he would accept it. After all, it was his fault for being so secretive.

He pulled out a sheet of parchment and began.

--

Hermione paced her bedroom at her house. She had been waiting for a reply for the last week from the Director of the brewing company she did business with. She had been so distracted on Wednesday that she found it hard to concentrate in class. Even when she had lunch with Snape, she was mostly quiet. But she couldn't help it. She really didn't want to lose the supplier, but at the same time she also really wanted a meeting.

After all, she was running a business. And although she had never been given reason to mistrust them before, she still felt that she needed just this one meeting to make sure that everything was fine. Finally, she heard the sound of wings beating as the black hawk owl dropped to her windowsill. She hastily went to it and took the note attached.

But when she went to open it, she noticed something was different. It was the seal. It was green, and was of a family crest instead of the silver. What on earth? She quickly opened it and then realized the writing was slightly different. It was neat, but the letters were spidery and familiar.

Miss Granger,

I do believe that I have a lot of explaining to do, and would appreciate if you would be able to make time to see me at lunch tomorrow. Perhaps you will oblige to meet me in the Red Room at the Leaky Cauldron? I have booked this private dining room and sincerely hope that I will be able to explain everything to you.

Until then, I remain your faithful servant,

Professor S. Snape

Hermione stared at the note, bewildered. This letter was from Snape, but the owl had been the very same one that had been delivering her notes from *Persuasion Brewing Company*. What was this all supposed to mean? She dropped the letter on the bed and sank onto it soon after.

And then it dawned on her. Snape was the Director of *Persuasion*. And he had pulled the wool over her eyes.

Please leave a review and let me know what you think.

Part Two: Passion

Chapter 2 of 3

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Hermione Apparated to the courtyard just before the entrance to Diagon Alley, walking into the pub and straight to Tom the barman. 'The Red Room please, Tom. I'm meeting Severus Snape,' she said kindly.

'Right you are, Miss Granger,' he said with a broad grin, leading the way.

She followed until they were faced with finely polished mahogany doors, and he left without further comment. She knocked confidently on the door and waited for it to either open or for permission to open it herself. She heard footsteps coming towards the door, and soon after, it opened to reveal a pale Severus Snape, dressed only in black slacks, a white shirt and black waistcoat. His eyes were dark, face haggard and showing signs of not having enough sleep, eyes slightly bloodshot, and he looked as though he hadn't shaved for a few days.

'Come in, Miss Granger,' he said, stepping aside and letting her pass.

She nodded and walked inside to find the fire gently crackling, surprised when Snape took her coat and scarf from her and gently draped them over the back of a chair with his own robes and coat.

'Please, have a seat,' he said, gesturing at those before the fire. 'You must be cold.'

When Hermione heard the strain in his voice, she felt her argument and annoyance at him dissipate. He had really been killing himself over this for the last week, and it appeared that he felt really guilty for his deception. Forgiving him without words, she sat, and only afterwards did he take a seat across from her.

'Miss Granger, I know you understand exactly why it is me that you are meeting here today, and I am truly sorry,' he began.

Hermione cut him off with a wave of her hand. 'Never mind, Professor, it really didn't bother me. I was surprised, I'll admit, but no lasting damage. I will accept your apology and forgive you; however, none of this was necessary.'

Snape sighed with relief. 'Thank you, I appreciate that.'

'Well, is that all you wanted to discuss?' she asked, looking him in the eye.

'Yes, although seeing as you are here, you might join me for lunch,' he offered, smiling wearily at her.

Boy, she thought, *he really must be tired if he's smiling at you*. She nodded, and they moved to the dining table to where a Sunday roast lunch was waiting for them. It looked delicious, and their conversation was polite and courteous, despite the circumstances under which their meeting was derived.

After they had finished, Snape escorted Hermione to her coat and helped her put it on, handing her the ruby-red scarf before donning his own coats. He walked with her back to the courtyard that she had come from and prepared to bid her a pleasant week before Apparating away. But when she paused and rested a hand on his forearm to stop him, it caused him to pause also, looking at her with a stunned expression.

'Umm... Professor, I hope you do not find me too forward, but I was wondering if you would go with me as my date to the Ministry Christmas Ball. I have to go, and I'd rather not be fed to the sharks alone...' she asked, fumbling with her words.

He smirked at that and took her hand in one of his. 'It would be a pleasure, Miss Granger,' he said politely. 'When would you like me to collect you?'

'Well, it's on Saturday, so maybe seven? Is that alright?' she asked.

'Fine,' he said. 'Until then...' he added, kissing her knuckles smoothly before Apparating away.

Hermione was left in the courtyard alone, still in quite a daze at their exchange. She had asked Snape out on a date? He had accepted? Was the world going completely mental? She certainly hoped she had not just been dreaming it all up... for his sake.

--

The Granger house was in havoc. Hermione had been rushing around all day, looking for everything to make sure all was perfect for the ball. She had found the perfect dress and shoes and had decided to wear her hair simply, pinned back loosely in a few places and spilling in curls down her back. Her dress was a strapped, black number that clung to her trim figure and hugged her ample curves, falling loosely at all different lengths to her knees, with the back lacing down in a webbed pattern from shoulder blades to waist.

After taking a bath, applying all the necessary charms for her hair and dashing on some natural make-up, she had hardly finished dressing before she heard the doorbell ring at exactly seven o'clock. *Was that man ever late for anything?* Groaning, she slipped her wand into the black, lacy garter around her thigh and pulled her shoes on before hurrying down the stairs.

She composed herself quickly and opened the door, only to be nearly shocked out of her skin. Before her stood Severus Snape looking the handsomest she had ever seen him. His dress robes were simple and black, with a white dress shirt and silver waistcoat, but his hair secured at the nape of his neck.

'Hi,' she managed to squeak.

'You look lovely; may I come in?' he said.

She nodded and moved aside to let him in. Once the door was closed, she went to her cupboard and collected her white, winter dress coat, which went to her knees and secured with stylish buttons. Snape held it out for her to slip into it, and she picked up two simple silver masks that would only cover the top half of their faces.

'It's a Masque Ball this year,' she explained, although he probably already knew. 'I'm glad it matches your robes. You look nice.'

He admired the way her cheeks tinged pink as she said this. Obviously, she was not very experienced with delivering any sort of compliments, so he took pity on her and accepted the mask, putting it on. It was a perfect fit. She did the same with hers, and they were soon ready to leave.

'Are you ready?' he asked smoothly.

'Yes,' she answered.

He smiled and took her hand, bringing it to his lips and letting them caress her knuckles momentarily before he released it and held an arm out for her. She accepted it and held onto him tightly as he Apparated both of them to the Ministry Grand Ballroom reception hall. Hermione and Snape had their names marked off on the invite list and entered arm-in-arm.

The hall was spectacular. It was not overly Christmassy, and the large crystal chandelier in the centre above the dance floor was simply breathtaking. Hermione felt her mouth go slack when she saw the large, singular Christmas tree towards the stage, just off to the left. It was ornate, sparkling with its own light, and glistening with various ornaments. She had never seen anything quite so lovely.

'I never had a tree like that at home,' she murmured softly.

Snape chuckled dryly. 'I can't imagine anyone would. Where would they find the space to put it?' he asked with a smirk.

Hermione smiled back at his subtle teasing, left a little breathless from the smirk he had surprised her with. 'Did you ever have a tree when you were a child?' she asked carefully, knowing that he was sensitive about his past.

'Yes, and my parents still do,' he said quietly. 'I visit them every year.'

'That's lovely,' she said, her voice changing a little. She felt more than a little bit down that she would not be able to celebrate Christmas with her parents again.

'I think they would like you,' he offered simply, noticing her sudden change in mood. 'I'm sure my mother wouldn't mind the company of a woman on Christmas day. What do you say?'

Hermione smiled and felt tears well up in her eyes slightly. Taking his hand, she gave it a gentle yet firm squeeze. 'I would love to spend Christmas day with you and your family,' she answered. 'But only if it is not an imposition.'

He shook his head no, and that was the last that was said about her Christmas visit.

After a while, Snape finally found the fortitude to ask her for a dance, and they swept onto the dance floor like a pair that had been dancing with each other for years. One of his hands rested on the bare skin of her back, full contact prevented by the damnable lacings there, while his one hand held hers tightly as they waltzed amongst the other dancers. It felt so right to Hermione, and with his body pressed so firmly to hers, she could hardly complain about hating the ball.

'You dance well, Miss Granger,' he commented.

'If you can't presume to call me Hermione by now, when can you?' she asked, flushing slightly, despite her confident words.

'Very well, Hermione,' he said silkily. 'Though I still stand by my statement, you are an excellent dance partner.'

'Thank you, Severus, you dance rather well yourself,' she said, blushing as he twirled her out and brought her back sharply before dipping her over his arm at the end of the song.

He inclined his head and thanked her for the dance, wishing he could keep touching her for just a little longer. The next dance started, and by silent agreement, they took up their positions and joined in the box-step. But when that song had finished, Hermione was well and truly ready for a drink.

Severus, being the gentleman he was, told Hermione to go find herself a seat while he got her a drink. He returned with a glass of white wine and a Firewhiskey for himself, and by which time, the speeches for the night were ready to be made. They always arranged for the speeches to be early so that they were out of the way before anyone got too tired or too drunk to deliver them. Snape took a seat next to Hermione, handing her the drink as he did so. He noticed the scowl on Hermione's face as two people in dress robes and wearing red and gold masks sauntered onto the stage to deliver their speeches.

Hermione, after the war, had been in constant disagreement with both Harry Potter and Ronald Weasley. They didn't talk any more, but she did write occasionally to both Ginny Potter and Luna Weasley and sent birthday and Christmas presents to them and their kids. Snape noticed the sour look and decided that he'd rather see her smiling.

He leaned towards her and whispered. 'Imagine if they fell and smacked their little heads,' he said, sending warm breath down her neck.

She shivered. Gods, that voice could cure anything. She turned and smiled at him in appreciation, taking his hand boldly, which he allowed. She held it tightly, taking comfort from him as they sat and listened to all of the speeches. Snape, meanwhile, revelled in the fact that he was able to bring her such comfort, especially while her so-

called best friends were more foreign to Hermione than he.

When the speeches finally ended, they stood and did all of the mandatory mingling with various witches and wizards they knew of or were acquainted with. Eventually, that even meant having to greet and chat with the other two-thirds of the former Gryffindor Trio and their lovely wives.

'Hermione, it's so lovely to see you again!' Ginny Potter exclaimed. 'It really has been too long.'

Hermione gave her once-best-girlfriend a hug as well as Luna and received pats on the back from both of the boys. 'Harry, Ron, your speeches were very... interesting this year,' Hermione said politely.

Snape could tell she was lying because once she had finished speaking, her bottom lip pinched between her teeth for a moment. He noticed these little things about her, which just went to show how much attention those two boys had ever paid to Hermione. She was the one deserving of all of it, and she got the least of it.

'Who's your date, 'Mione?' asked Ron.

Snape hesitated for a moment before extending a hand to the boy, just because he was polite. 'Evening, Weasley, Potter,' he said as he shook the stunned redhead's hand firmly, and then shook Harry's also.

'Hermione, you came with him?' Ron demanded incredulously once he had snapped out of his daze.

'Yes, I did, Ronald, and I don't see how that is any of your concern,' Hermione snipped, resting a hand on Snape's arm gently.

'Too right it is!' Harry defended, loudly. 'You're our best friend...'

'I WAS your best friend, Harry, and you too, Ron. But we aren't anymore, and you both know it,' she snapped icily. 'Have a nice life, you lot.'

Hermione turned on her heel and walked off in an unknown direction. Snape watched her fleeing form for just a moment before he turned on the two dunderheads that had caused her hasty retreat.

'You two idiots owe her an apology,' he said darkly. 'You might not care all that much about her now, but you were once great friends. If not, then at least be gentlemen and think twice about treating a lady so abominably.'

Snape turned abruptly then also and headed in the direction that Hermione had walked only moments ago. After about ten minutes, he found her on the empty balcony with her back to the door. He gave her a couple more minutes before he finally slipped over quietly and rested his large, warm hands on her bare shoulders. She was freezing, so he took off his jacket and draped it around her. She turned to look around and up at him with a single tear sliding down her cheek. Slowly, he brushed it away with the pad of his thumb.

'I've had quite enough of this farce,' he admitted with a small smile. 'Let's leave. I'll take you home.'

Hermione nodded but then paused just before they could leave the balcony; she rested a hand on his chest, sliding it up the silky material and pausing to rub along his collarbone through his shirt. She wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling him down slowly and then pressing her lips flush against his. After recovering from his initial shock, he smiled into this kiss, tightening his hold around her. He pressed back against her lips hungrily, licking her bottom lip sensuously before snaking it past her perfect teeth when she opened her mouth to him.

It was the most perfect kiss she had ever experienced. She felt loved, cared for and desired all in that one kiss. He tasted like the Firewhiskey he had been sporting, and to her, she tasted like honey, sweet and pure and a little bit like the alcoholic beverage she had been drinking also. Eventually, he pulled away for air, both panting heavily and flushed, lips parted and glistening.

'You're so beautiful,' he murmured, pressing his forehead to hers.

She closed her eyes and knew in that moment that she loved him, more than she ever thought possible. 'Please, take me home,' she pleaded. 'I don't want to be here with these people. I want to be at home with you.'

'Hermione, I would love nothing more than to go home with you,' he said, taking her by the hand and leading her through the string of crowds towards the exit.

Once they had collected their coats, Snape Apparated them to her house, and they had hardly stepped inside before they were all over each other again. Their hands mapped out each other's bodies as they stole kisses in between the removal of items of their clothing on the way up the stairs. In her bedroom, she freed him from his shirt and pants, and he lifted her dress over her head, and then they were even.

It was in desperation that they ripped each other's undergarments off and tossed them across the room before falling onto the bed in a panting, naked mass. They teased each other to the point where they couldn't control themselves any longer, and he entered her quickly. After a while they established a rhythm before he pounded into her with everything he had, and they toppled over the edge together.

Later, they lay sated and exhausted amongst the covers on her bed. Her body wound around his tightly, and he cradled her to him. Resting his head just above her head which was on his chest, he smiled and closed his eyes. He was in love with Hermione Granger, and with her lying there in his arms, he thought that she just might be able to love him back.

--

Hermione Granger rolled over in her bed, feeling slightly sore, but at the same time, extremely satisfied. She came into contact with a long, firm body and opened her eyes lazily to see dark hair and pale skin on display before her. Images of the night before came racing back to her mind, and she smiled brightly, remembering not only how much pleasure he had brought to her, but how he had whimpered at her touch also. His eyes were still closed, and his body shifted then to curl around hers, one of his long arms coming over her possessively.

She couldn't, for the life of her, remember why she hadn't done something about this earlier. She had wanted to, of course, but she had needed that little bit longer to get to know the tall, dark Potions Master. And now that she had him, she was never going to let him get away.

'Good morning,' a husky voice said softly into her ear.

She looked up and saw deep black eyes gazing at her adoringly. 'Good morning,' she replied, leaning up languidly and kissing him on the lips gently, her breasts brushing his bare chest.

He groaned slightly and sighed. 'Keep doing that, and we'll never make it out of this bed today,' he warned with a growl against her neck as he kissed the tender flesh there.

'Ooh... that's kind of the ahhh... point,' she gaped out as his hands caressed her body while his lips suckled on her neck, making her squirm in need.

Her body demanded more, and he willingly complied until they both saw stars, and they remained in bed for quite some time afterwards. Eventually they managed to drag themselves out of bed and into her bathtub, only to repeat their lovemaking in there as well. Hermione paused to muse that her dark lover was certainly insatiable.

'God, we're good,' she murmured to him as they descended from their climaxes.

'Indeed we are,' he agreed, shifting and rising from the tub and Summoning towels to them with a crook of his long, talented fingers. 'Come, I want to dry you.'

She complied immediately and allowed him the liberty of drying every bit of skin he could, enjoying the way he worshipped every expanse of skin as he did so. After, she returned the favour, drying him from top to bottom slowly, and they wrapped the towels around themselves before heading into the other room to change. Hermione handed Snape a white bathrobe for starters, until she could find him something to wear, and she pulled on a green sweater and comfy jeans, donning her slippers.

'What would you like for breakfast? I'm starving, so I could make just about anything right now,' she said as they walked to the kitchen downstairs.

'Anything you have the heart to make, my dear,' he said, following but keeping a possessive hand on her back.

She wrapped her arms around his waist and hugged him tightly. 'Well then I think blueberry pancakes wouldn't go too amiss,' she said with a small smile, practically bouncing ahead of him into the other room.

Snape smirked and watched her, wondering just what he had done to deserve this. Surely he hadn't done anything so spectacular to have the woman he loved in his life. Not to mention the woman who was currently doing her best to please him and one that he wanted to please just as equally. Leaning against the doorframe, he watched her bustle about the kitchen looking for things.

'Would you like some help?'

She looked over him and flashed him an adoring smile. 'That would be wonderful, Severus,' she answered, holding out a hand to him.

He didn't need to have the offer repeated.

--

Snape walked through the snow with his arms wrapped around himself in an effort to keep warm. He sensed that the wards for the house were down for the time being and let himself inside the front door after scuffing the snow from his shoes. He'd Apparated from his house earlier into the town just so that he could enjoy the walk up to Hermione's house, but had instead caught a chill.

'Hermione, I'm here!' he called out up the stairs.

'Come on up!' she answered immediately.

He smiled, something he had been doing a lot more of lately, and followed the sound of her humming voice as it floated down the stairs. She actually had quite a sweet singing voice, he'd discovered, as he quite regularly woke to the sound of her singing in the shower. Something that he had not thought possible only a week and a half before.

'I need your help with something,' he heard her say once he had reached the top and was just beyond her bedroom door. 'You can help me choose what to wear.'

He stood in the doorway, leaning casually against the frame with his arms folded over his chest. 'I'm sure my parents won't be too bothered by what you wear as long as it covers most of your body,' he said, eyeing her in her black, lacy knickers and bra before him.

Hermione smiled when she saw that he was wearing nice cream pants, a white cotton shirt and a dark green sweater, his long black winter coat over the top. 'You look lovely like that, Severus,' she commented.

'And you look lovely in that,' he returned swiftly. 'Pity I can't just take you as you are.'

Hermione threw her brush at him as she pulled a white blouse on and did up the buttons and flicked her wand to summon her nice black pants and beige, v-neck sweater. Once she was dressed, she cast a drying spell on her hair and glanced in the mirror to make sure that it was falling in curls instead of puffing out like an untamed bush. Satisfied, she crossed to Snape and wound her arms around his neck.

'I missed you,' she offered before proceeding to snog him thoroughly.

When she pulled away, his eyes were darkened with desire, and she had the urge to pull him into the room and shag him for the rest of the day. But propriety and her desire to make a good impression on his parents made her decide against it and simply brush her lips across his again.

'Happy Christmas, dearest heart,' he murmured provocatively, closing his eyes and leaning his forehead against hers.

'Happy Christmas to you too,' she said, closing her eyes and enjoying the feeling of being in his arms.

'We should go now; my parents are quite eager to meet you,' he said, thinking about what their expressions might be when they saw him with such a beautiful young lady. 'And we wouldn't want to keep them waiting.'

'Of course not,' she replied, releasing him. 'So what am I being introduced as?'

'Hermione Granger, Apothecarist and Order of Merlin, First Class,' he answered simply, getting her white winter coat out of the closet downstairs for her and helping her put it on.

'Oh.'

'And of course as the young woman that I am...' He trailed off there, unable to continue because he didn't even know what they were. 'What are we, Hermione?'

'We are two of a kind,' she said. 'And I hope that we are exclusive.'

'You want to be you want to date me?' he asked, obviously shocked. 'I didn't think you wanted that type of relationship.'

'You don't?'

'I do, with you, but I can't understand exactly why you would choose me over so many of the young men that fancy you, and just in my class,' he murmured, looking at the floor.

'They are hardly men, Severus,' she sniffed. 'Besides, I like older men; they're more intellectually and physically mature more experienced.'

'I can agree with that,' he said smugly, wrapping an arm around her and resting it on her hip as they walked together to the front door to Apparate to his parents' home in Wales. 'And I would like for us to be exclusive also.'

'There now, we've both got the right idea,' she said with a smile.

They Apparated soon after and found they were standing in a foot of snow at the front gates of a reasonably large estate. Hermione looked up ahead of them at the end of the road and saw Snape Manor in its entire splendour, at least a three-storey high building, with the rest of it stretched out across the vast, snow-covered plains. She was sure that there would have been a visible road and gardens had it not been winter.

Severus gazed at the amazed look on her features and revelled inwardly that it was a part of him that had brought her that. He took her hand in his and led the way up the road to the main house, feeling good about the knowledge that his love was with him for this Christmas.

'Severus, you have to go back to teaching next Wednesday, don't you?' she asked softly from beside him.

Of course the College had been put on hold for a little while for the Christmas Season and New Years', but Snape would have to return to teaching when the College year resumed after vacation. Then he would have to go back to being the cranky git who taught Potions and was horrid to Hermione. 'Yes,' he answered simply.

'Will we still be... that is to say, do you want this,' she gestured between them, 'after we return back to our normal lives?' she asked hesitantly, afraid of what he was going to say to her.

'Do you want to continue seeing me?' he asked simply.

'I would love nothing more, Severus,' she answered immediately, giving his hand a reassuring squeeze.

'You understand that as a professor of the College, technically, you are my student, and therefore I am obligated to treat you indifferently on campus?' he asked, knowing that she would somehow understand.

'I... I know,' she said reluctantly. 'But I can't promise to like it.'

'I think I can handle that, dearest heart,' he said, pulling her to his side and resting his hand on her hip carelessly.

They walked that way all the way up to the main house. Once they were through the huge front doors, Snape helped Hermione out of her winter jacket and took off his own, handing them to one of the house-elves before taking her hand again and leading them up the first lot of stairs. They went left down a hallway and soon approached a set of doors that were made of mahogany and had a nice pattern stained into it.

'They are just inside this door, Hermione,' he warned her softly, leaning down to whisper in her ear. 'Are you sure this is what you want? Are you sure that you want this kind of relationship with me?'

'Severus, I want you! Not some stupid, immature boy. We are perfect for each other, so don't try to say that this isn't right,' she insisted, kissing his cheek gently and running her fingers through his hair. 'I don't want to argue about this ever again, alright?'

'I wasn't aware that we were having an argument.'

Hermione smiled. 'Well, technically we were having a disagreement, but it all constitutes as an argument when two people have a difference of opinion,' she answered in a know-it-all tone.

He chuckled. 'Let's go in then.'

Please leave a review and let me know what you think.

Part Three: Perfection

Chapter 3 of 3

After the war, everything is different. The Gryffindor Trio is no longer, and Severus Snape is left ashamed and alone with the knowledge that the woman he loves just might know his secret.

Disclaimer: All publicly recognizable characters, settings, etc. are the property of their respective owners. The original characters and plot are the property of the author.

A/N This was written about three years ago and was originally posted as two parts. It is now in three parts and after editing out the bits I didn't like and altering things to my current tastes, I am now reposting this here and at other archives. I hope you enjoy this and rest assured I am working on something new.

A big hug and the most indulgent and expensive chocolate truffles must go to WriterMerrin for rescuing this story and making the suggestion of posting it in three parts. Thank you so much, my dear I'd be lost without you!

The two of them walked in together, and Hermione wasn't at all surprised when she saw an older man with Severus' nose and silver hair sitting in a chair and reading the newspaper, with an older woman with more of Severus' sharp features just across from him, reading a book. They both looked up at Hermione and Severus and smiled, quite unlike the snarky Potions Master himself, but it was nice all the same.

Severus, however, was the first to speak. 'Mother, Father, Happy Christmas,' he said in one of his friendlier tones.

'Happy Christmas, dear,' his mother said in a higher, tired voice. 'Who is your young lady friend?'

'This is Hermione Granger,' he said hesitantly, pulling her forward slightly with a tug of his hand. 'She is...'

'I'm Severus' date, ma'am,' Hermione spoke up, sensing that he was obviously nervous, as he had probably never introduced anyone to his parents before, let alone a woman. 'I hope that it was alright that he brought me.'

The older man chuckled then, standing from his seat and going over to her. He took her hands in both of his and shook them. 'My dear girl, you have no idea how long we have been waiting to meet you,' he said enthusiastically. 'You may call me Theodore, or Theo if you prefer. Come and sit; we have heard so much about you!'

'Oh, is that so?' Hermione asked, throwing a glance over her shoulder at Severus, who was beginning to turn pink in the cheeks, as she was led towards the lounges.

Severus sat down next to his mother and smiled when he saw what she was reading. Hermione was reading the exact same book. He then saw the smile that was lighting his mother's face and saw the mischief that twinkled in her eyes in an annoyingly familiar way.

'Mother, you're not scheming are you?' he asked in a warning tone.

'Never, my dear,' she answered. 'It's nice to see Hermione as a woman. She really has grown up since the war.'

'I know.'

'I'll bet you do, Severus,' she said before she looked over at her husband who was talking animatedly with a smiling Hermione.

Severus watched as his father entertained his love. She looked so beautiful, especially when a laugh lit up her face, making her eyes seem so much brighter and her cheeks flush. He loved it when they did. His mother eventually convinced him to go and join them, but he only agreed on the terms that she go with them too.

'It is wonderful to meet you, young lady,' his mother said as she shook her hand. 'You may call me Eileen.'

'It's lovely to meet you, Eileen,' Hermione responded politely. 'I am glad to be here. Your house is amazing.'

'It is a bit spectacular, isn't it?'

At noon they all had lunch in the dining room, and afterwards they opened presents. Snape decided to withhold his present for the time being and whispered to her that she would get it when they got back to her house. He mused momentarily about the ring in his pocket that he had wanted to give to her for years. Although he knew his chances were slim, he wasn't going to give her up, and he fully intended to make sure that he did this soon before he lost his nerve.

It was late in the afternoon when the sun was beginning to set before they were ready to leave, and Severus made to bid his parents goodbye. After making promises to come and visit again soon, they began walking away from the house, with all of their coats donned once more. He Apparated home with her with the intention of giving her some space that night, but found he was easily swayed into staying.

--

On New Year's night, he Apparated the two of them to the edge of the Snape family estate, and he led Hermione off to a smaller path that led to the cabin near the forest where he used to find solitude as a teenager. He opened the door and soon had a fire crackling away merrily. He drew her towards the couch there and sat her down before sitting next to her and taking her cold hand in his.

'I used to come here when I was younger to do some thinking,' he began.

'It seems like a great place to think,' Hermione said with a smile. 'It's very cosy once it's warm.'

'I thought so too,' he agreed with a grin. 'I came here the other day to do some thinking too, and I found something here that I am very glad to have found.'

'What was that?'

'A letter from a friend, who I lost at a very young age,' he answered. 'She lived on the next estate with her family, and I went to the Muggle primary school with her until we were eight. She died the day before her eighth birthday from pneumonia.'

'That's so sad,' Hermione said, blinking back tears and sniffing a little, curling further into his side comfortingly.

'It was very sad, and I remember it being the first time that I had ever cried, and the very last time I cried,' he admitted. 'I have always remembered and regretted not being able to do anything for her. I regret not being able to keep such a good friend in my life.'

Snape turned and put his arms around his Hermione. 'She was the only girl that I had ever loved before I met you,' he said, tilting her face up so that he could look into her eyes to gauge her reaction. Tears were spilling down her cheeks, and she gave him a watery smile. 'Hermione, you knew that I loved you all those years ago during the war,' he continued. 'I have never stopped loving you, even when I thought you could never love me back.'

Hermione heaved a sob and buried her face in his neck. 'But I do love you, Severus,' she cried. 'I love you so much!'

'Hermione...' he sighed out, stroking her hair lovingly. 'Hermione... I the girl I knew, her name was Ivy, and after I thought about it a bit, I realized that you look quite a bit like her,' he said, nudging her to look up at him. 'I thought at the time I was simply trying to find a replacement for Ivy, but I know now that I was never looking for that in you.'

'Severus, you don't need to explain yourself...'

'No, Hermione. I must say this,' he insisted, kissing her on the end of the nose. 'Hermione, I loved Ivy as the dearest and closest friend I've ever had, but when I look at you, I don't see the eight-year-old girl that I once knew. I see the face of the woman I love dearly and would go to the ends of the earth for.'

Taking her hands, he looked her in the eye and smiled. 'I see a woman who is beautiful, brave, cunning and intelligent. You are proud, kind, and everything that I could ever want in a woman. And most importantly, you are everything that I have failed to be,' he said, eyes flashing fiercely. 'I see in you the woman I would love to spend the rest of my life with.'

'Severus, are you asking me to...?' she began, stammering slightly.

He stilled her rosy lips with his fingers and leaned in to press a delicate kiss to them. 'I love you, Hermione Granger, and I would like to ask you if you would consent to being my wife?' he asked, voice thick with emotion.

Hermione cried and threw her arms around him. 'Yes,' she squeaked before she broke down in heaving sobs against him, clinging to him like a limpet.

Severus felt his heart swell. That had gone a lot better than he had even dared to dream, and he was holding her in his arms. She had said yes. His own dear Hermione loved him and was going to be his wife! He tightened his hold and buried his face in her hair where the first tears he'd cried since he was eight years old dripped off the end of his nose into her tangle of curls. He had found his home.

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'Hermione, it's good to see you!' exclaimed the raven-haired wizard across the office, making her duck her head and blush.

She went across the office to Harry's desk in the Auror's office and hugged him when he held out his arms to her. She had been on speaking terms with Harry again, as after the ball, he had seen fit to apologize for his rudeness and they had started to patch things up. Ron had not been so agreeable, and he was still refusing to talk to her, despite the fact that he had absolutely no claim over her, seeing as he was married and all.

'How are Ginny and little Lily going?' she asked politely, looking at her watch a little impatiently.

She had to go to class that morning and had just stopped by the office to deliver the invitation for their engagement party. The senior Weasleys as well as Charlie, Bill and Fleur, and the twins had already accepted, as well as the rest of the Order and people that either she or Severus knew or worked with. All that was left were her two supposed best friends and a few unimpressed family members.

Surely Harry wouldn't deny her this?

'Yeah, the girls are going along just fine, and the next one is well on the way,' he replied with a proud grin.

'Uh, well, I have my last class before I take my Potion Master's exams in two weeks, and I just came to drop off an invitation,' she said with a forced smile, handing it to him and waiting for all hell to break loose.

Harry opened it and frowned almost immediately and looked up at her with an almost hurt expression. Hermione was annoyed at that, but decided to give him some leeway, simply because the two men had never gotten along. 'Hermione, are you sure about all of this? I mean, you're really going to marry Snape, aren't you?' he asked quietly.

'I don't see how that suddenly became your immediate business, but yes, I do intend to marry Severus,' she said irritably. 'We've been engaged for almost five months now, and I don't intend to break it off just because you only just found out and don't like it, Harry Potter.'

'I understand that, 'Mione. But are you sure he's the ONE?'

Hermione sighed and nodded. 'I love him, Harry. You can accept it or not, but we were good friends once, and that means something to me. I want you to be a part of my life still, and I want it to start with this,' she said softly.

'Alright, that sounds okay,' Harry agreed giving her a hug. 'I can't promise that Snape and I will be best mates, but I will try to be nice.'

'Thank you, Harry,' she said with a grin. 'Oh, I have to go!'

As she rushed off, Harry smiled and shook his head. Who would have ever thought that Snape would be the platform from which he would patch up his friendship with Hermione? How could he make her so happy? Watching as one of his best friends left the office, he smiled and looked down at the picture of his wife and daughter. Hermione deserved to be just as happy as he was, he thought.

--

Snape watched as his students left the final-year Potions lecture theatre for the last time before the summer. He had finished teaching for the year and had a whole summer to finally get his other life back on track. He had seen so little of Hermione in the past two frantic weeks and had been preparing the exams for the students with the other professors for them to take in the next few weeks.

He looked up and along the rows. All of the desks were empty, except for one, which had a bright, attractive witch perched at it, shoving books back into a bag hurriedly. She looked up and smiled at him. He returned the smile and let his gaze travel along her arm as she put her quills and parchment in too. The ring on the third finger of her left hand sparkled where there was a white gold band and the lovely Snape diamonds and serpents carved into it.

'Well, Miss Granger, it appears you have completed your training,' he commented with a smirk. 'Whatever will you do with yourself now?'

She smiled at him and stood. 'Well, there is this wizard that I am highly attracted to, and I intend to take him home and shag him into the mattress,' she said in all but a purr. 'But only if he is interested, of course.'

'Why, Miss Granger, are you coming onto me?' he asked as she looped her arms around his waist.

'I would never, especially when I have my fiancé to go home to,' she whispered seductively into his ear, nipping and teasing his neck with her teeth and tongue for a moment.

'Why ever not? He'll never know,' he said suggestively.

'As I said, only if said wizard is interested, and up to it,' she said, dragging her hands down to his bum and squeezing gently. 'Or perhaps he's lacking a bit in stamina today, hmmm?'

'Never,' he said, wrapping his arms around her and Apparating them home.

--

'Hermione, this wine is wonderful! Wherever did you find it?' asked a drunken George Weasley from beside his just as intoxicated twin as they slurred and sung horrid Quidditch songs loudly.

She simply smiled and shook her head from where she was sitting, turning back to the conversation between her, Fleur, Ginny and Luna. Ron had eventually accepted the invitation after Luna had threatened to leave him if he didn't, and it had pleased Hermione that he was there, but they still had issues to resolve one day.

'So, the baby will be along very soon?' Luna asked Ginny as the Weasley women all cooed over her pregnant belly.

'Three months, but it seems so much longer than that,' Ginny exclaimed, beaming around at the women.

They all turned and watched as Severus and Harry approached them, chuckling at something one of them had said, and each dropped down to sit beside their women. Hermione stood and allowed him to sit before she snuggled firmly and comfortably into his lap and smiled in contentment. All of the men had been in the other room drinking, save for the twins, who had relocated with a lot of the booze and had gotten completely wasted in front of the fire.

They had decided to have the party at Severus' house in London because it was larger and more convenient for everyone else. Tonks was across the room, talking with many of the professors from Hogwarts like Minerva, Sinistra, Vector, Madame Pince and Pomfrey, Sprout and even little Flitwick, who had decided to gossip instead of drink. *Smart man, that Filius*, Snape thought.

Molly and Arthur were sitting and talking with Albus Dumbledore, and Severus' parents were near the coffee table sipping tea and playing cards. Meanwhile in the next room, the likes of Remus Lupin, Mundungus Fletcher, Moody, and Kingsley Shacklebolt were playing drinking games. Severus had been in there too, but as more of a spectator than an actual participant.

He wrapped his arms around Hermione and rested one on her hip and the other on the flat plane of her belly. She rested a hand over his and gave it a gentle squeeze, turning just that little bit to kiss him on the cheek while the conversations around them were drowned out by their love for each other.

'I think you're getting a little tired, my love,' he whispered when she yawned softly, covering her mouth as she did to muffle it.

'I might be, at that,' she said sleepily.

'Let's go to bed then. This lot knows how to find the door,' he suggested, shifting to get her off his lap to stand. 'Trust me, they will find it.'

She nodded in agreement and followed him as he led them up to his room. She kicked off her shoes and socks and took off her jeans, leaving her in knickers and a skin-tight tank top, as she climbed in between the silk sheets. She fell asleep almost instantly, and Snape went back downstairs to find that most of the Weasleys had gone, and the professors had dispersed to their own homes, and he told the men to take their drinking elsewhere. Only Albus, Molly and Arthur were left sitting by the fire.

'Thank you all for coming,' he said politely in a guarded voice. 'It really meant a great deal to both Hermione and me that you came.'

'Well, you both mean a great deal to us, so it's only right,' Molly said with a beaming smile. 'It's good to see you so happy, young man.'

'She's right you know, and thanks for the invite,' Arthur agreed, just before they Apparated away on the doorstep outside.

Albus smiled and patted him on the shoulder, giving him a fatherly clap on the shoulder. 'You've done well, my boy. I never thought I'd see the day where you were so content and happy with your life, but it seems even I can be proven wrong,' he said warmly with a chuckle. 'She is a wise choice, and she loves you very much.'

'I love her too,' Snape said with a smile.

'Well, don't keep her waiting for too long. She'll tire of you and then where will you be?' Albus joked. 'Thank you for the wonderful evening, Severus, and I look forward to seeing you and your wife at the wedding.'

'Thank you, Albus,' he said with a small smile.

'Take care of her, my boy,' Albus said just as he Apparated away.

Snape smiled and closed the door, turning to see his house in slight disarray. He waved his hand at the mess, and it all began to tidy itself up as he walked up the stairs. He stopped at his bedroom door and took a peek inside, only to see his Hermione asleep and curled up peacefully. He slipped in quietly and stripped off his shirt and pants, leaving him in only his boxers before he slipped in beside her and wound his arms around her. He closed his eyes and fell asleep.

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Hermione rushed blindly past the food waiting for her on the table, grabbing an apple as she ran through the door, only to be called back by an insistent male voice within the house.

'Now, just where do you think you were going, Hermione?' Snape asked in a low, reverberating voice.

She scowled at him. 'You know I have my last exams today,' she snipped huffily. 'And I have to get there soon, so I'd rather you hurried this along.'

He simply grinned and shrugged, moving forward quickly and kissing her on the cheek. 'Good luck with your tests, my love,' he said with a hint of disappointment in his voice before he turned and walked out of the kitchen.

Hermione mentally kicked herself for not realizing earlier that he had just wanted to wish her well. He only ever tried to do everything for her. He had made her breakfast and had waited in the kitchen for her to make sure that he would be the first to say good morning and kiss her gently and encourage her to do her best. And all she had wanted to do was selfishly run off without considering his feelings.

She followed him out of the kitchen and stopped him on the stairs of his house, just before he could reach the top. 'I'm sorry, Severus. My nerves are just a bit frazzled, and I didn't mean to snap at you,' she apologized.

'I understand,' he answered simply.

Hermione sighed inwardly, knowing that she had blown it. 'I love you,' she said simply, giving him a tender kiss on the lips before hurrying down the stairs and out of the room for her exams.

Snape watched her retreat with mild interest, smiling and shaking his head. He really didn't mean to make her feel guilty like that, but he truly hated being neglected by her, just as she did whenever he became too focused on his research. Just as he was thinking about going to his study, he heard the beating of wings on air by the window and was there just in time to see an owl float inside and drop a letter on his head before hastily retreating.

Snape picked it up from the ground and broke the Aberdeen College seal, unfolding the enclosed letter.

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Professor Snape,

We, at Aberdeen College, firmly believe that, although you have requested that we do not offer you further classes, your technique with the students this College year has been most effective. The Board of Governors has requested that I inform you of the current empty position as Head of the Potions Department at the College, and hinted that they would be most honoured if you would accept that role.

You would not be required to teach any further classes with this position, but will need to take on a slightly larger administrative role and shall then be required to write the Potions course and set the exams. Please respond to me if this holds any appeal to you at all. If not, please let me know so that I might inquire elsewhere.

Yours Sincerely,

Janet Grey

Dean of Admissions, Aberdeen College

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Snape read the page once more and decided that instead of writing back, he would go to the College that day and see this Janet Grey in person to discuss this job. He didn't think it sounded too bad, but he didn't want to press anything. Being the Head of a department was a huge job, but a well-paying one. He had no need for money. He was already one of the wealthiest wizards in Europe aside from his own father and the Malfoys. The only reason why he resumed teaching was because he didn't want the next generation to be complete dunderheads.

'Archimedes!' he called out to his owl from the study.

The bird hooted and flew into the room, accepting the notification of Snape's visit so that he didn't just rudely drop in. Besides, if he went there, he would be able to collect Hermione after her final exam and take her to the loveliest place in the whole of Europe when he found out that she had passed with flying colours. And he knew she would do it too. Hermione was capable of practically anything.

'Take this to the Dean,' he said as he attached the note to his foot and watched as it took off out the window.

Severus walked out of the study and into the kitchen to clean up. He waved his hand, and the dishes began washing on their own before drying and putting themselves away. He left that room and went upstairs to dress appropriately for a meeting with the Dean. He threw on his waistcoat and robes and left the house promptly, not wanting to be late for the meeting he had organized.

He Apparated to the administration blocks of the College and somehow managed to find his way to the right office, taking a seat to wait. He was summoned almost instantly.

'Professor?' said the skinny blonde assistant. 'The Dean will see you now.'

He stood and looked menacingly down his nose at her, revelling in that fact that he could still make people cower that way. 'Thank you,' he offered coolly before striding past her towards the door.

He opened the door and walked in to see a tall, voluptuous witch with straight honey-brown hair and bright green eyes sitting behind the desk. 'Dean Grey?' he asked with a furrowed brow.

'Professor Snape, you have no idea how glad I am to finally meet you,' she said with a lilt in her voice that sounded just like a seduction. 'Please call me Janet; we are colleagues after all.'

'Dean Grey,' he said, continuing to use her formal name. 'I came here to discuss with you the position you have offered me.'

'Alright, then have a seat,' she offered.

Snape took a seat warily, making sure that he did not give this so-called Dean of Aberdeen College the wrong idea. 'Please, I must insist that this meeting is short. I must go and collect my fiancée shortly,' he said with his mouth twitched into a grin.

'Oh... well, congratulations, Professor, I had no idea,' Janet offered with a pleasant smile, but flushed cheeks all the same. 'In any case, what were the issues you saw with taking on the Head of Department role?'

'I was wondering if the curriculum could be changed entirely, were I to take over the department?'

'Well of course you can, I daresay that curriculum hasn't been changed at all since the 1700s,' she answered immediately, beginning to fidget uncomfortably.

Sensing that the woman was sufficiently embarrassed for her opening lines, he decided to take pity on her and go to find his Hermione. 'Well, that is all I had to discuss with you. I will gladly accept the Head of Department role that has been offered.'

'Thank you, Professor Snape. We have been searching for a competent professor for years now. None of them have ever lasted for that long,' Janet said with a grateful sigh.

'If that is all...?' he said, letting the sentence trail off.

She stood up, looking all kinds of embarrassed and flustered, and offered him her hand. 'Right, well, I'm glad we have come to an arrangement,' she said, shaking his hand a little nervously and tucking her hair behind her ear self-consciously.

Snape swept out of the room quietly and passed through the rest of the administration block quickly, intent on arriving at Hermione's exam room before she finished. He looked at the sun as he walked outside and guessed that it was about midday from its position in the sky and remembered that she would finish at around ten minutes past the middle of the day and hastened himself. He reached the exam room shortly afterward and peered in through the window of the door to see said brunette writing intently.

Her pace was astounding to say the very least, and he had always wondered how she did it so neatly at such a speed. Checking the clock out in the hall, he saw that there were only two minutes left and counted down the time in anticipation, waiting for the doors to throw themselves open and for his newly graduated Potions Master to come out.

None of the rest of the class could have possibly hoped to pass after their shabby performance during the year. It would only be Hermione passing the exam, and he would have to re-write the curriculum to make it so that the dunderheads would learn something.

At 12:10 pm sharp the doors opened themselves and the scraping of chairs on the stone floor could be heard before the dribble of exhausted students filed out. Some of them were aware enough to be astounded to find their Potions professor standing just outside of the door when they usually only saw him on Wednesdays. But most of them passed without noticing.

All except for his Hermione, who, as soon as the rest of the class had passed on, threw herself into his arms in a tight yet exhausted embrace. He wrapped his arms around her and Apparated them home, holding her to him and guiding them into one of the chairs in the study. He sat on the couch with Hermione across his lap, hugging around his neck, face buried into his shoulder.

'How did it go?' he asked warily.

He heard her mumble something incoherently and patted her head lightly. 'You're going to have to speak up, love. I don't understand what you're trying to say,' he said gently.

She lifted her head just a bit and sighed. 'I said, I think it was good, but I may have gotten a few questions wrong in the written exam. I sort of blew it, but I suppose we'll know next week, won't we?' she said, straining to answer through her exhaustion, slumping against him.

'Indeed, my love. That we will,' he reassured her softly.

They sat there in blissful silence for much of the afternoon, and after dinner, they retired to their rooms for a passionate bout of love-making before they lay on their backs beside each other, spent and exhausted. Hermione rolled over and draped her arm across his chest gently and toyed with the sparse hairs of his chest.

'Severus?'

'Yes?' he asked back sleepily, capturing her hand and kissing her palm lightly.

'What are we going to do now?' she asked, looking up a little to gauge his reaction to her casual question. 'I mean, I've finished my Potion Master's degree, but I don't know what to do.'

'I...' He paused, unsure of what to say. 'Perhaps it would be prudent for us to get married sometime soon?'

Hermione smiled brightly at the suggestion. 'Perhaps... you will allow me to work, won't you?' she asked, almost afraid to know the answer. 'I still have the Apothecary and the two degrees now, after all.'

'I wouldn't dream of trying to stop you from working,' he answered automatically. 'You are allowed to do whatever pleases you, and even as my wife, I would not make you do anything you do not wish to.'

She hugged him tighter. 'Thank you, Severus,' she murmured. 'I really do love you.'

'And I you, pet, and I you,' he said before sleep claimed them both.

But as they slept and while they were dreaming, Snape found that he had never been quite so happy in his entire life. He had the woman of his dreams, and she loved him too, and he knew that he would never be able to deny her anything. He watched her as she slept through squinting eyes and loved how her curly hair fell wildly around her shoulders and back.

He loved the flush of her skin from their amazing, mind-blowing sex earlier and the rise and fall of her chest as she slept, breathing with such seductive movements. Eventually, sleep found him, and he closed his eyes, tightening his arms around the woman he loved. She would be there in the morning, and for the first time in his life, he felt good about himself and what he was going to do.

He had taken a flying leap of faith, and it had paid off.

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Fin.

Please leave a review and let me know what you think.