

Heaven or Hell

by MsTree

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 38

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A/N: This was my completed 2009 NaNoWriMo entry that I originally posted, unbeta'd, to my LiveJournal account. Including the epilogue, there will be thirty eight chapters in total all written between November 1st and November 30th.

I will not apologize to those who expect *evil* Malfoys. I don't do evil that well and this actually worked out better than my original outline. Besides, Lucius hijacked my plot bunny when I finally started to write this story. ^_^

Thanks to my beta, Lydia, for this chapter and Britpicker extraordinaire, SlytherinsHeirx.

Chapter One

War Hero Seen in Diagon Alley

By Rita Skeeter

Correspondent, Daily Prophet

Miss Hermione Granger, reclusive war hero and friend to Harry Potter, The-Boy-Who-Lived-Twice, was seen today leaving the Apothecary in Diagon Alley.

Miss Granger declined to answer when asked where she had been for the last six months, if she had returned to the Wizarding World, and if a wedding was being planned with Mr Ronald Weasley, best friend to The-Boy-Who-Lived-Twice.

This reporter cannot help but wonder where Miss Granger has been hiding since the end of the second war against He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. While her appearances in Diagon Alley are rare, she has been seen in Hogsmeade and Ottery St Catchpole at infrequent intervals. As Mr Weasley lives near Ottery St Catchpole, it is inferred that an announcement of marriage may be forthcoming.

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"Oh bloody hell!" Lucius Malfoy finished reading the article by the aptly named Miss Skeeter and threw the paper across the room.

"What's wrong?" Draco asked curiously, looking up from his own reading.

"Miss Granger!" Malfoy called, hearing the *pop* of Apparition that heralded someone's entry into the main hall, the designated Apparition point for the Manor.

"What?" came the response from further down the hall as Hermione turned back from the entrance to the basement potions lab.

"What is the meaning of this?" Lucius summoned the *Daily Prophet* and handed it to her with the pertinent article facing out.

"What's this?" Hermione asked, perplexed.

"This article in the *Daily Prophet* by that irritating woman?" Lucius pointed out with a smirk.

"Reclusive war hero?" Hermione shrieked. "What does she think she's playing at?"

"Well, we haven't actually been around any of our friends for the last six months or more, Granger," Draco said carelessly, studying his fingernails for any imperfections.

"Shut it, Malfoy. I've gone to Sunday dinner with the Weasleys several times in the last few months, and I'm expected for Christmas Day as well," Hermione said heatedly. "Skeeter just wants to sell papers."

"And why did you even talk to her?" Draco asked scornfully.

"I didn't."

"What...?" "Huh?" Both men spoke together, obviously perplexed.

"She saw me coming out of the Apothecary with our latest order and dove right in. I Apparated as soon as I saw her," Hermione explained.

"So the *'declined to answer'*?" Lucius seemed determined to get an answer to his questions.

"I couldn't answer questions if I wasn't there, now, could I?" Hermione smirked.

"How Slytherin of you," Lucius said, shivering. Her smirk reminded him of a friend and Potions master who currently resided upstairs, paralysed and dead to the world due to the bite of Nagini.

He, Narcissa and Draco had rescued Severus Snape from the Shrieking Shack after Hermione had told them exactly what had occurred. It hadn't seemed feasible that Snape could have survived, yet they found him still alive. Alive and unconscious due to precautions taken when he realised that the Dark Lord would probably kill him.

Narcissa and Lucius had taken Severus back to Malfoy Manor and installed him in a guest bedroom, while Draco had informed Hermione of the circumstances in which they had found the professor. She'd had the presence of mind to bottle a portion of Nagini's venom before Horace Slughorn thought of the money to be made out of it and, with Draco's help, was trying to determine an antidote. The main problem was trying to determine what Snape had used to develop his antivenin.

Having no access to his notes at Hogwarts, Hermione and Draco were forced to experiment using Snape's tainted blood. So far, even with the resources of the Malfoy library, they were drawing a blank as to what formulae Professor Snape had used in his potions.

"I have an idea about what to do next," Hermione said thoughtfully. "You may not like it, though."

"If it will help Severus, we will do whatever is necessary, Miss Granger," Narcissa said from the bottom of the stairs. "He's getting weaker it seems." She truly looked distraught over the thought of losing their old family friend.

"It's a method that Muggle Healers use..." Hermione began.

"Absolutely not!" Lucius protested. "Wizard medical techniques have always been good enough before. I won't have anything Muggle in this house."

"I'm here," Hermione said coldly.

"Of course, there are exceptions," Lucius sputtered as he corrected himself.

"What did you have in mind, Miss Granger?" Narcissa asked, her eyes warning her husband that under no circumstances would he object to anything that might save Severus.

"Muggles make antivenom by injecting a small bit of the snake's poison into the bloodstream of an animal such as a horse or a cow and then using the antibodies the animal's blood produces to make the antidote," Hermione explained. "If we do the same and then add the renovation potion that we found in your library, maybe that would help."

"It could also make it worse!" Draco exclaimed. "I'm not so sure that this is a good idea."

Hermione huffed. "It would be tested on a few drops of his blood first, Ferret. Just as we've been doing all along. I've no intentions of killing Professor Snape."

Narcissa looked at her husband and son. "If Miss Granger... Hermione... thinks that it might have a chance, then I have to agree with her. Lucius, he's getting worse. If we don't do something soon, he's going to die anyway."

Lucius studied his wife. She had been the epitome of calm during Voldemort's occupation of their home, but now she seemed close to tears at the thought of losing Severus.

"All right," he finally said with a sigh. "We'll try Miss Granger's idea. Merlin knows, I've run out of ideas myself."

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"Are you sure this is right, Granger?" Draco asked, watching with concern as Hermione cautiously removed from their storage vial some of the antibodies they had cultivated using the Abraxans stabled at the Manor.

"I'm using the instructions from the medical textbook we bought in London last month," she said petulantly. "Now, be quiet so I can concentrate."

Using a few drops of Snape's blood from their supply, which they kept in stasis to keep it fresh, she added some of the potion they had derived from the antivenom/renovation potion combination. At first, nothing happened. Then the poisoned blood began to change colour from the almost black of the venom to a bright red.

"Yes!" Hermione shouted. "It worked! Draco, it worked!" She swung around, grabbed him into a hug and began dancing around the lab.

"Easy, Granger. Take it easy," Draco panted, although he too was grinning. "You'll break something." Under his breath, he muttered, "Probably something of mine."

Hermione laughed. "I promise right now not to break anything you might need to use later," she said. "Come on. Let's go tell your parents."

* * *

"Since he can't swallow, how do you propose to get the potion into him?" Lucius asked, looking from Severus to the vial of potion Hermione held in her hand. "Spell it into his stomach?"

"Well, no," she said. "Since it's derived from a Muggle method, I'll use a Muggle method to get it into his bloodstream where it needs to be." Pulling a syringe and needle out of her potions kit, she drew up a dose of antivenom and made sure there were no air bubbles in the syringe's tube.

"Wait a minute," Lucius said in horror. "What is that? A needle?"

"It's used for inoculations all the time in the Muggle world," Hermione explained patiently. "Since the poison is in his blood, this will put the antidote directly into his bloodstream without having to swallow a potion and wait for it to work."

"Won't it hurt?" Draco asked fearfully. He eyed the syringe, shuddering at the thought of a needle going into his skin.

"Probably," she answered with a small shrug. "A little bit, but the sting doesn't last long."

With that, she tied a tourniquet around Snape's upper arm before pressing the needle into the vein on the inside of his elbow, releasing the antivenom into his bloodstream as she did so. She then released the tourniquet and removed the needle, using a cotton ball to staunch the slight bleeding that the needle left behind. "Now all we can do is wait."

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Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: See chapter One for standard disclaimer because it's not mine.

A/N: Mucho thanks to GrammarPolice for her beta and SlytherinsHeirx for the Britpicking. Also, thank you to quaffswinegaily for pointing out vein and artery ~~arrot~~ synonymous. This non-medico type is very grateful for the assist.

Chapter Two

It felt like he was as weightless like a feather. *So this is what dying feels like,* Severus Snape thought. He opened his eyes to an ethereal apparition bathed in a halo of light. *'What a gloriously angelic creature.'*

"How strange. Heaven looks a lot like a guest room in Malfoy Manor," he said, half to himself.

A low chuckle came from another figure standing in the corner. "Heaven, Severus? Guess again," said Lucius.

Snape groaned. "Okay, so Hell looks a lot like a guest room in Malfoy Manor. I'm guessing that the battle is over?" He started to sit up only to have the angel (or maybe a demon) push him back into the bed.

"Please, Professor. You don't want to try and sit up yet," Hermione said, holding him down. "Let me check you over first." She cast a series of diagnostic spells over him and looked pleased at the results.

"Granger," Snape snapped irritably. "Now I *know* I'm in Hell."

Lucius laughed, tossing his head back and braying. "I knew there was a reason I liked you, Miss Granger. Anyone who can provoke that reaction from the great stone-faced Snape is my kind of person."

"Lucius, what is going on?" Snape asked. "Why is the Gryffindor Know-It-All here? Shouldn't she have gone in the other direction?"

"You're not dead, my friend," Lucius explained. "Miss Granger and Draco have spent the last six months trying to find a cure for Nagini's bite. And damn me if they didn't do it, too. And with a Muggle method at that."

"Muggle method? What Muggle method?" Snape was getting more confused by the moment.

"I took a small portion of Nagini's venom that we rescued before Professor Slughorn could get to it and injected it into one of Mr Malfoy's Abraxans. Then we took the antibodies that were produced by the Abraxan's blood and made antivenom with them..." Hermione began.

"Yes... yes," Severus said petulantly. "That's standard procedure for making antivenom in either world. How is that a Muggle method?"

"We used a syringe and needle and injected it directly into your bloodstream rather than using magic to get it into your body." Hermione chewed her lower lip anxiously while she waited for the explosion she was certain would be coming from the wizard in the bed.

"Logical," Snape said placidly, startling her with his calm demeanour. "After all, the venom was injected into my bloodstream when the damn snake bit me."

"You mean you're not upset?" Hermione asked. "Mr Malfoy didn't want me to even try at first."

"My dear girl," Lucius purred smoothly. "You have lived in this house for six months at the very least and have been using *my* library and potions lab. By now we should be on a first name basis. After all, I did allow you to use my prize Abraxans for your Muggle potion."

"Why the Abraxans?" Snape asked peevishly.

"Well," Hermione explained nervously, eyeing Lucius with trepidation, "since Nagini was a magical snake, I figured we needed a magical creature to make the antibodies. Abraxans are the closest to the Muggle animals listed, so we thought..."

"Miss Granger," Snape snapped suddenly, "where did you get your information on producing antivenin? That is not a subject taught in Potions at Hogwarts, and I am certain you would not have had time last year to learn while you were doing whatever you and Potter were doing to annoy the Dark Lord."

"We went to Muggle London and found some medical texts in a bookstore, Uncle Severus," Draco answered from his chair in the corner. "Fascinating place, Muggle London. I wouldn't mind going back and exploring some more."

"Who's *we*?"

"Granger and I. Like I said, it's a fascinating place. Some good food, too." He grinned and licked his lips in remembrance of the Chinese restaurant Hermione had taken him to for lunch.

"We found an renovating potion in one of the books in the library here at the Manor," Hermione took up the explanation once more. "Since we didn't know what potions and spells you had used to circumvent the poison, we had to try something else."

"We took some of your blood," Draco continued, "and put it into stasis so we could use it as needed. Then we began experimenting with Nagini's venom to see what would work to neutralize it."

"It took them six months of almost constant experimentation before Miss Granger thought to try this particular idea," Narcissa chimed in, her ice blue eyes sparkling with unshed tears. "I like to think it was the fact I told them you were getting weaker that spurred them on."

"I didn't want to see you die," Hermione admitted. "After the battle, all the students who were at Hogwarts last year said it was as if you had tried to protect them without giving yourself away to the Carrows and Voldemort..." Snape and the three Malfoys flinched at her speaking the name of the Dark Lord, but Hermione didn't seem to notice.

"Harry then said that your memories showed you to be on the good side with us and that you were a true hero. He also told us about how Dumbledore made you swear you'd kill him when the time came," she said angrily. "I lost all respect for that man when I heard. The nerve of him!" She stamped her foot petulantly.

"Albus Dumbledore did what he thought he had to in order to preserve the Wizarding world," Snape responded with a sigh. "Yes, *he* was a manipulative bastard. Yes, he could have told Potter the truth about his scar, but Albus felt everything had to be done his way. After all, *he* was the one to defeat Grindelwald and *he* knew Riddle best."

"I think we need to let you rest," Narcissa said in an attempt to defuse the tenseness in the room. "I'll have a house-elf bring you some broth and then you should sleep."

"Miss Granger..." Snape was hesitant. "Does anyone else know I've survived?"

"Harry does," she replied and hurried to explain. "He took a wand oath that he wouldn't tell anyone, not even Kingsley, until he was able to get a full pardon for you."

"What would Kingsley Shacklebolt have to do with a pardon?"

"He's the new Minister of Magic," Draco smirked, "and Potter is their fair-haired boy. We've saved all the *Daily Prophets* since last May so you could see what's been happening while you were unconscious."

"Good. I'll read them now."

"You'll read them when / say you're able," Narcissa scolded, helping him to sit up while a house-elf brought a tray to the bedside. "Right now, you haven't the strength of a newborn wizard. We need to get you well again. Then we can discuss what comes next."

"Don't argue with me, Severus Tobias Snape," she snapped at him when he started to speak. "Right now, Miss Granger and I are your nurses, and *we* will make sure you get on your feet as soon as possible. You just have to do what you're told and relax."

"I won't tell Harry that you're awake until you're ready, sir," Hermione assured him. "He only knows that Draco and I are trying to find answers, not what we've done so far."

"What day is it, anyway?" Snape asked. "I feel like I should be doing something."

"It's the 10th of November, 1998" Narcissa said. "You've been unconscious for almost six and a half months. Now, drink your broth."

"Yes, ma'am," he said, somewhat in awe of this unknown facet of Narcissa's personality.

...Two days later...

"I know my own strength, Miss Granger, and I am strong enough to get out of this bed without your help," he snapped at his not-quite-so-bushy-haired nemesis who hovered over him constantly, or so it seemed.

Hermione sighed in frustration. "All right. If you want to end up on your arse on the floor, be my guest." She stepped away and left him to rise on his own.

Severus sat up on the edge of the bed and took a deep breath. He hated to admit that the Know-It-All was right, but it was all he could manage just to sit there. Placing both hands on the mattress next to his hips, he shoved off and managed to stand for all of two seconds before he felt himself falling forward.

"*Levicorpus*," Hermione said, waving her wand, and he found himself floating upright a few inches from the floor. "If you want, I can help you this way until you get some more strength in your legs. I found a book in London..."

"Of course you did."

"I found a book in London," she huffed, ignoring his sarcasm, "that tells how to do physical therapy for injured people who have spent a lot of time in bed like yourself and need to regain their strength and stamina. Draco was quite interested in the theories, and he's willing to work with you if Mrs Malfoy and I don't meet with your approval as therapists. Besides, he's got the upper body strength to help you with some of the exercises that neither of us can."

"Draco will be quite acceptable," Severus sighed in embarrassment as he bobbed like a balloon. "Now, if you would be so good as to guide me to the loo and back..."

Hermione blushed, but helped him to the toilet and stood behind the door while he did his business. She then guided him back to the bed and, ending the spell, set him down just as the house-elf came in with his lunch.

"Ah," he said, rubbing his hands in pleasure when he saw a bowl of chocolate mousse on the tray along with the ubiquitous bowl of broth and cup of tea. "I see I'm allowed some slightly more solid food today."

"Yes, Master Snape," the house-elf said, placing the tray across Severus' knees. "Mistress said you are doing well and could have some more soft foods. Netty is to take good care of you."

"Thank you, Netty. This looks most enjoyable." He picked up his spoon and turned to Hermione, who was leaving the room. "Oh, by the way, Miss Granger."

"Yes, sir?" She turned at the door.

"When you get a chance, would you ask Draco to bring the texts and notes the two of you have been using? I should like to see what you have done with your research."

"Yes, Professor." She grinned. "I'll help him bring everything upstairs after you finish your lunch."

He looked at the tray sitting on his lap. "That shouldn't take long," he sighed.

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Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 38

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Chapter Three

That afternoon Severus dissected the books and notes used to make the antivenom and potions that had saved his life and asked Draco and Hermione myriad of questions. Having Professor Snape questioning them in a strict and no-nonsense manner while expecting them to answer to the best of their ability reminded Hermione of Potions class again. She smirked at Draco when Severus pronounced himself satisfied with their answers.

"If the war has been over for seven months now," he asked, "why have you not returned to Hogwarts for your seventh year? In fact, I'm surprised that the two of you worked together so smoothly given your history for the last seven years."

"The Ministry has offered honorary N.E.W.T.s to everyone from seventh year as a reward for fighting in the battle," Hermione said. "I've already spoken to the Headmistress..."

"I hope the Board gave the position to Minerva," Severus interrupted. "She deserves it after putting up with me for the whole of last year."

"Yes, they did," Draco said. "She's agreed to let Granger and I return after the New Year to finish out our seventh year. Of course," he smirked, "I have a slight advantage, seeing as how I already went through seventh year."

Hermione grimaced. "I'm sure I'll catch up quickly. After all, I had all my seventh year textbooks with me and studied whenever I could."

"Leave me now," Severus said petulantly while inwardly smirking at their rivalry. "I'm getting rather tired."

"Of course, Professor," Hermione agreed. "Can I get you anything before I go?"

"Just send Netty in," he said. "He can help me bathe."

"Oh, but I can..."

"Miss Granger, do you really want to watch me in the tub?"

She blushed. "No, Professor."

Draco laughed. "I'll have Netty come in and help. After all, Mother gave him orders to take care of you to the best of his ability."

"Thank you, Draco."

* * *

"Master wants Netty to help with his bath?"

"Yes, Netty," Severus answered absently. He was looking through the Physical Therapy textbook and reading Draco's annotations on what might work for wizards as well as Muggles.

He looked up. "Right now, I need a quill and some parchment. Can you send an owl without anyone here in the Manor finding out?"

"Netty can do that, yes." The house-elf beamed and snapped his fingers. A quill, inkwell and several sheets of parchment appeared on the bedside table.

"Netty will go and prepare his bath for the Professor," he said.

"Thank you, Netty. I'll need your help to get into the bathroom and back as well." The elf nodded and turned towards the bath.

Taking a sheet of parchment and using the textbook as a writing desk, Severus set himself to write his letter.

Minerva McGonagall

Headmistress

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Minerva,

I hope this does not come as a complete shock to you that I managed to survive Nagini and the Dark Lord. You might even have held some suspicion when my portrait did not appear on the wall of the Headmaster's office.

I wish to convey my heartfelt apologies to you for the way you and the rest of the staff were treated last year during my sojourn as Headmaster. I did my best to follow Albus' orders of protecting the students from the Carrows while maintaining my position within the Death Eaters, and I know that many of the staff and students suffered from it.

As I understand it, the War has been over for approximately seven months. I am not sure, as I was revived only two days ago and am still trying to catch up. Two of Hogwarts' finest students had a hand in my revival. Lucius tells me if it weren't for the fact that Miss Granger told him and Narcissa of her suspicions that I might have taken some potions to help circumvent any danger from Nagini's bite, I might still have perished. In fact, I rather expected to receive an Avada Kedavra from the Dark Lord himself.

Miss Granger and Mr Malfoy have laboured these past months on an antidote for Nagini's bite and actually succeeded. They inform me that they will return to Hogwarts to continue their interrupted seventh year after the New Year holidays. I hope you won't think that I am presumptuous to suggest that perhaps the work they have done up to now might be considered as part of their final grades and work as their Honours Project for Potions. Of course, I realize the final decision will rest with Horace Slughorn, but I hope you can convince him of the rightness of this exception.

Miss Granger tells me that Potter is trying to convince the Wizengamot and the Minister—is it really Shackbolt?—of my innocence. Something about following orders in a time of war, I believe, is his defence. In any case, outside of the Malfoys and Miss Granger, Potter was the only one to know I still live. And of course, now you do as well. I do not need to remind you of the secrecy involved just now, do I?

If Potter succeeds, I plan to offer both Mr Malfoy and Miss Granger positions as my apprentices if they wish to further pursue this course after leaving Hogwarts. I shall ascertain their desires as soon as possible so as to begin making my own plans.

Once again, please accept my heartfelt apologies for the last two years. I do hope you can forgive me.

Your friend,

Severus Snape

"The Professor's bath is ready."

"Thank you, Netty." Severus sealed the letter. "Once I am in the bath, would you make sure this gets sent? I don't want anyone else in the house to see it."

"Netty can do that, Professor." The house-elf helped him to sit up on the edge of the bed. "Does the Professor want Netty to move him by magic?"

"I think so," he said. "My legs still don't want to support me properly. I need to see what Draco intends to do about that with his physical therapy," he muttered to himself.

A few moments later, he lay back in a tub of hot water and sighed. "This feels wonderful. If you'd get that letter on its way, you can come back and help me wash my back."

"Netty will be back soon. Professor must remember not to fall asleep."

"Indeed." Severus smirked. "Don't want to survive that damned snake and her master just to die by drowning."

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Chapter 04

Chapter 4 of 38

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Disclaimer: I don't own them (except the ones I do) and make no money from this (darn!). Much thanks to GrammarPolice for her beta help and to Britpicker Extraordinaire SlytherinsHeirx.

Chapter Four

Lucius and Narcissa were astonished by the whirlwind that swept into the Manor the next morning after breakfast. Minerva McGonagall had never stepped foot onto the Malfoys' land in all the time she'd known them. Yet here she was, demanding to see Severus and Hermione.

"How did you know..." Lucius began.

"...That they were here?" she finished with a sniff. "That's easy. Severus wrote me a letter yesterday. I came as soon as I received it."

"Professor McGonagall?" Hermione was hesitant to enter the room. The Gryffindor Head of House seemed to be upset.

"Miss Granger... Hermione... how could you keep such a secret from me? Really, did you think I couldn't be trusted?"

"It's not that, Professor," Hermione said quietly. "We just didn't know who else we could trust. Harry and I trusted the Malfoys because Professor Snape was their friend and we," she indicated Lucius, Narcissa, and Draco as well as herself, "trusted Harry, because he knew Professor Snape was innocent of almost everything."

"He murdered Albus Dumbledore!" Minerva shouted.

"By Headmaster Dumbledore's express orders, Professor," Draco broke in. "The Headmaster was dying anyway."

"Yes, yes, Mr Malfoy. I understand all that. What I don't understand is how he didn't trust me to help him last year." Minerva was visibly upset, but if it was because of Severus' being alive or their mistrust in her, no one could tell.

"Draco and I were on our way upstairs with Professor Snape's breakfast," Hermione offered. "Would you like to come with us?"

"I most certainly would," Minerva huffed. "I have some things to say to that silly little boy."

Draco and Hermione grinned at each other. "*Silly little boy?*" Draco mouthed. Hermione barely stifled her giggle with a cough.

* * *

"Ah, Minerva," Severus purred when she practically stormed into his room. "It certainly does me good to know that you survived in such fine health."

Minerva glared at him. "How could you not trust me with your secret last year? I would have done something to help you."

"Do you know what the biggest problem is with Gryffindors, Draco?" Severus smirked at his godson.

"Their leaping before looking, sir?" Hermione backhanded Draco on the shoulder. He grinned at her.

"No," Severus said. "It's that they can't act."

Minerva stared daggers at him. Then she relaxed and started to smile. "All right," she said. "I'll give you that. But I still think you might have let someone else know besides that daft old bugger of a Headmaster."

"Now, Minerva, is that anyway to speak of Phineas Black?" Severus teased.

"I was speaking of the late Albus bugging Dumbledore," she laughed. "Oh, Severus, how I have missed you." She bent down and hugged him despite the fact that two of her students were still in the room.

"Miss Granger, if you would leave that tray on the table, please," Severus said, visibly uncomfortable with Minerva's uncharacteristic emotions.

"Oh! Of course, Professor." Hermione levitated the tray to the bedside table and set it down with a gentle touch. "Do you need anything else, sir?"

Severus looked over the tray. "I see I'm allowed a poached egg this morning. If you would have Netty bring another cup and some more tea, Professor McGonagall and I shall have a long overdue talk."

"I'll see to that, sir," said Draco. "Come on, Granger. We can get back to studying for our N.E.W.T.s while the professors talk."

"I guess we can quiz each other," Hermione said. "But no cheating."

"I don't cheat!"

"You did so. There's no such creature as a Crumple-Horned Snorkack and you know it."

"According to Looney Lovegood, there is."

Minerva smiled as she watched them leave the room. With a 'pop', Netty appeared with another cup and a larger pot of tea.

"Mistress says the Professor is to eat all his breakfast and not to talk so much that he loses his voice. Good morning, Headmistress."

"And good morning to you, too," Minerva observed as she acted as mother and poured tea for the two of them. "Don't worry. If he starts to get hoarse, we'll stop. I can always come again."

"Netty thanks you for that, Headmistress." The house-elf looked pointedly at the breakfast tray and Severus sighed.

Minerva reached over and placed the tray across his knees with a pat. "Here you go, Severus. Netty's mistress is obviously concerned about you eating right."

"Narcissa is a hard lady to ignore when she feels something strongly," Lucius said from the door. "You're excused for now, Netty."

"Yes, Master." The house-elf bowed and vanished.

"So what made you grace our house with your presence, Headmistress?" Lucius asked smarmily.

"I received a letter from an old friend," Minerva said, sniffing her cup of tea.

"Really?" Severus sounded disbelieving. "You still consider me a friend?"

"Of course, you silly boy," Minerva answered. "I was so angry at you last year, but I couldn't help but remember that we used to be friends. Now that I know what happened and why, I understand why you did what you did. I just wish I could tell the rest of the staff."

"Not until Mr Potter completes his latest quest, my dear Headmistress," Lucius said. "Otherwise, we might find the house full of Aurors looking to arrest Severus." He shuddered. "Dreadful creatures, Aurors. Almost as dreadful as Dementors."

"Lucius?" Severus looked pained.

"Hmm?"

"Would you mind leaving us alone? We do have quite a bit to discuss." He tried to look stern.

Lucius smirked at him. "Of course, dear boy. Wouldn't dream of intruding." As he walked out the door, he turned around. "Narcissa does expect you to eat your entire breakfast. Don't get to talking so much you forget."

Minerva waved her wand and shut the door in his face.

"How rude," Lucius commented through the wooden panel just before she placed locking and silencing spells on it.

Severus laughed. For the first time in almost twenty years, he felt as if he could be free.

* * *

"Minerva..."

"Eat your breakfast," she interrupted. "I'll do the talking for now."

Severus nodded and dutifully turned his attention to the poached egg and tea, still hot and steaming due to Netty's magic.

"Last year, when the Death Eaters took over the school, the entire staff was still in shock over Albus' death." She looked at Severus who nodded his understanding. "Then, when you assigned my Gryffindors detention with Hagrid rather than the Carrows, I began to suspect that maybe you were trying to protect the students more than those *people*...and I use the word lightly...would have preferred.

"There were several times that you might have allowed them to really injure someone, maybe even kill, but you always stopped it before it could go too far with a well-placed dismissive remark. That confused me. Whose side were you really on?"

"When Mr Potter, Mr Weasley and Miss Granger returned to the castle, I knew you had to know they were there. Why didn't you try harder to find them? No, don't answer," she said, as he opened his mouth to speak. "I'm not finished.

"When Mr Potter came to us after the battle and explained the memories you gave him, I wasn't inclined to believe anything. Then I spoke with Albus' portrait and he confirmed that he ordered you...under an Unbreakable Oath, no less...to kill him if it came down to saving Mr Malfoy's soul. No, don't interrupt..."

Severus sipped his tea while she poured out more into her cup and took a drink.

"You were right when you asked about my suspicions. When it was pointed out that there was no portrait...which there should have been considering *you* were a Headmaster, if only for three terms...I began to wonder. Mr Potter had told us what happened in the Shrieking Shack, but Poppy and I couldn't find a body. We didn't know what had happened to you. Now I find that you've been here all this time." She sighed and took a drink of her now cold tea. With a grimace, she cast a Warming Charm on the cup and took another sip.

"Are you finished?" Severus asked.

"Not quite," she answered, "but I'm sure you probably didn't write to me just so I could come ring a peal over your head."

"Quite," he said with a small smirk, "although it does feel like old times again."

Minerva laughed. "I really have missed our various conversations over the years," she said.

"Is that what you called them?"

She smiled. "Well, I will admit they got rather acrimonious at times."

"I actually wrote to ask you about the Potions Honours project for Miss Granger and Mr Malfoy. Of course, they used a Muggle method in the end, but it did involve the use of magical beasts..."

"Perhaps Care of Magical Creatures could be involved," Minerva said thoughtfully, staring into space. "Hagrid would be thrilled with that idea."

"Be that as it may, do you think it would be approved by Slughorn?"

"If we approach him the right way, I think we can get it by him." Minerva pursed her lips. "Of course, since both Miss Granger and Mr Malfoy are involved, he might consider it an advantage for himself, in terms of influence."

"Horace Slughorn is the consummate Slytherin," Severus pointed out. "If there is any advantage in it for him, he will use it. Of course, you can't say anything until Potter convinces Shacklebolt and the Wizengamot that I should be pardoned."

"Severus..." she began.

"Yes?"

"If you don't receive a pardon, what will you do?"

"Are you worried about me, Minerva?"

"Of course I am," she snapped. "You've been my friend for years, Albus' machinations notwithstanding." She paused, considering. "If you do receive a full pardon, would you want to return to Hogwarts? I can offer you the DADA position..."

"I would rather teach Potions," he interrupted. "Slughorn is far too lenient on his students. I expected to learn that one of the dunderheads had managed to destroy the dungeons. Give Lupin the DADA position. He was the best of all the idiots Albus hired."

Minerva looked at him, tears brimming in her eyes.

"What? What did I say?" Severus was uncomfortable with the fact that he had made her cry.

"Remus Lupin died in the final battle," she said, wiping her eyes. "As did Nymphadora Tonks-Lupin, young Colin Creevey and Fred Weasley from Gryffindor. Mr Crabbe from Slytherin was also among the casualties, but he did it to himself when he cast Fiendfyre to try and kill Harry Potter. We lost at least fifty people on our side during the battle."

"The Slytherins?"

"While some of them fought on our side, the vast majority of them left the castle. Miss Parkinson actually suggested that we accept the concessions Voldemort was offering," Minerva said coldly as she remembered the battle. "As I understand it, Mr Goyle and Mr Malfoy owe Mr Potter, Mr Weasley and Miss Granger a life-debt for rescuing them from the Fiendfyre."

"So many lives," Severus said quietly. "I can understand why some of the members of my House would suggest such a thing, but I would have thought that they would have tried to defend their home."

"As you pointed out earlier, it wouldn't have been to their advantage," Minerva said. "They were taught the tenets of their House too well, I believe.

"However," she continued, "if you receive a pardon, I, for one, would welcome you back to Hogwarts and the Potions position. I have to agree with you about Horace Slughorn. Whatever was Albus thinking?"

"I won't excuse his actions," Severus said, "but I feel he was thinking about my vow to him and how he could best utilize it." He frowned. "I don't like thinking that Mr Potter might fail to present a good case to the Wizengamot, but if he does, I suppose I can immigrate to Canada or Australia," he mused. "After all, nobody else knows I'm alive, and anywhere in Europe would be too close to England for my comfort."

"We won't think about that," Minerva said. "I'd rather think you'll be coming back to teach. Are you really going to offer Miss Granger and Mr Malfoy apprenticeships when they leave school?"

"I am sure Draco would be receptive to the idea," Severus said. "You know Miss Granger's mind better than I. What do you think?"

"I think I would prefer she apprentice with me," Minerva said with a laugh. "Filius would no doubt want her to study Charms and Septima would argue that she would do best with Arithmancy. If her N.E.W.T. scores are as high as her O.W.L.s, I believe she could set her own price in the Wizarding world."

"You may be right," Severus said. "But I will deny I ever said that if anyone asks."

"Just like a Slytherin." Minerva removed the tray from the bed and set it on the bedside table. With a barely audible "pop", it vanished, presumably because Netty sensed it was empty.

"When are you going to ask those two to be your apprentices?" Minerva asked.

"When do you expect Potter to convince Shacklebolt?" Severus countered sneeringly. "I can't move ahead with any plans until I know what my future holds. Since he has always taken the entire school year for his endeavours, I expect this will take longer. After all, he doesn't have his Brain with him to help."

"Now, Severus," Minerva protested, "that was completely uncalled for. Harry Potter is quite an intelligent young man..."

"...who depended on Hermione Granger to do his thinking for him," Severus finished. "Admit it, Minerva. The fact that Potter managed to survive six years at Hogwarts and the last year on the run was due to the fact that Miss Granger was there to think logically for him. If he was to have tried it on his own, Potter would have perished in his first year. He's far too emotional."

"I have to agree that Harry is an emotional thinker, but did you know that the Sorting Hat wanted to put him in Slytherin?"

"*What?*"

"Albus told me during their first year. Didn't you know that the Hat always spoke with Albus when a student could be in two or more Houses? The only reason Mr Potter ended up in Gryffindor was because he asked the Hat not to put him in Slytherin." Minerva almost laughed at the look of horror on his face. "Just think, Severus. You almost had a Potter in your House."

"Your sense of humour is sorely lacking, Minerva." Severus growled. He was about to say more when footsteps came running down the hall outside the room and someone started pounding on the door.

"Professor! Professor McGonagall?" Hermione called, her voice punching through the wards. "Harry's here. He's got news."

Minerva removed the silencing spell and unlocked the door. "Good heavens, child. What *are* you on about?"

"Harry's here," Hermione gulped, panting for breath. "He's..."

"You said that already, Miss Granger," Severus sneered. "What news would Potter have that could possibly concern Professor McGonagall and myself?"

"He's brought the Minister of Magic with him," Draco said from the hallway. "They're asking to talk to you, sir."

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: Don't own it. Wish I did. Much thanks to GrammarPolice for her beta and to SlytherinsHeirx for Britpicking. Also, I would thank the admins for their due diligence in catching my commas. They would make great Quidditch Seekers. ^_^

Chapter Five

"Kingsley," Minerva said in a formal voice, greeting the Minister and Harry as they walked through the door. Hermione and Draco crowded in behind them while Lucius and Narcissa looked on from the hallway.

"Severus," Kingsley said in his deep voice. "You're looking rather good for a dead man."

Severus sneered. "I take it this isn't a social call."

"In a way, it is," Harry said.

"Yet it isn't," Kingsley continued. "I am here to offer you a conditional pardon from the Wizengamot."

"Conditional!" Hermione interrupted. "They should be on their knees thanking..."

"Miss Granger," Kingsley said, raising his hand. "Please hear me out before you berate the witness." He smiled apologetically at Severus. "The members of the Wizengamot feel that although you were a double agent and actually worked for the Light in accordance with Harry's testimony, the killing of Albus Dumbledore was a mitigating factor in their decision.

"If you accept the pardon, the conditions entail you returning to Hogwarts as a Professor at half your salary from the last year you actually were a teacher..."

"Half?" Minerva exclaimed. "Kingsley, he can't live on half-pay."

"They feel that since his room and board are considered part of his pay package, he can get by. If I might continue?"

Severus waved him on.

"You are to remain at Hogwarts for a total of five years. Your pay will increase ten percent per year until you have reached one hundred percent of your former salary. If you desire to travel to potions conventions and the sort, you will have to get special dispensation from the Wizengamot..."

"And they'd probably reject it from what I saw," Harry interjected.

"Ahem. Yes... well... the animosity was rather..." Kingsley hesitated. "You have to understand the way they're thinking right now. Trying to deal with the corruption of Ministry employees; having Harry there almost every day trying to talk to people; being told that the most hated teacher at Hogwarts is in reality a war hero."

Severus raised his eyebrow and Harry squirmed. "It wasn't just me, Professor," he said. "The Weasleys helped... and so did Neville."

"They know I'm alive?" Severus groaned. "I was told you had sworn a Wand Oath."

"No, sir, they don't," Harry answered. "I just told them I thought somebody should clear your name so that you wouldn't be remembered as the greasy bat of the dungeons and the man who killed Albus Dumbledore."

"Mr Potter, I *did* kill the Headmaster."

"Yes, sir. I was there."

"Of course... that wretched cloak of yours..." Severus mused. "Where were you?"

"Standing behind Dumbledore. He stunned me so I would be quiet," Harry said. "I told the Wizengamot that if *you* were guilty of killing Dumbledore, then so was I. After all, he made me keep feeding him the poison from the cave of the Inferi so we could retrieve the locket." He shook his head sorrowfully. "Kreacher told me that's how Regulus Black died as well."

Kingsley cleared his throat. "If I might continue? You would not be allowed to make potions for the infirmary at the school or to sell for yourself during the entire five years. Nor would you be able to order any books or subscribe to any journals or papers, although you would be free to receive letters. After the five years, you would, of course, be allowed to resume your own life."

"When does this imprisonment start and just who would be my warden?" Severus asked testily. "I assume that if I agree to this travesty, an announcement is already made up for the *Daily Prophet*."

"You would be expected to return to Hogwarts on the New Year, and Minerva, if she is willing, would have to guarantee your behaviour," Kingsley explained. "And no, there is no announcement. I am the only person Harry told of your survival, and that was only this morning when the Wizengamot gave you the conditional pardon." He rolled his eyes and sighed. "Just how they expected you to accept when you were thought to be dead, I'll never know."

"The idiots probably thought they were showing benevolence towards a generally disliked wizard who gave his life in order to bring down a madman," Minerva snapped. "Since he wasn't there to protest, they don't lose face and can point out that they could just as easily have denied him everything if he does show up and protest."

"I must concur, Minerva," said Kingsley. "My apologies, Severus. Harry and I both argued that you deserved a full pardon as well as an Order of Merlin, First Class, even awarded posthumously. The fools wouldn't even consider it."

"If this is the only way I could live my own life, then I suppose I must accept it," Severus sighed. "I guess you will have to suffer Horace Slughorn for a few more years, Minerva. I can teach Defence Against the Dark Arts..."

"Nonsense!" Minerva chuffed at him. "This agreement only says you can't make potions for Poppy or to sell. It says nothing about not teaching. Does it, Kingsley?" She looked at him for confirmation.

Kingsley grinned, his teeth glaringly white against his dark skin. "No, Minerva, there is nothing in the wording of the agreement about Severus not being allowed to ~~teach~~ Potions." Then he laughed. "I truly believe that the entire Wizengamot thinks Severus Snape is dead, even though a body was never found."

"I'm right here, you know," Severus muttered in irritation.

"That settles it then." Minerva clapped her hands together. "You'll come back and teach Potions; I'll let Horace retire again and guarantee your good behaviour. Look on the bright side, Severus. According to this agreement, you can't go anywhere but Hogwarts, so I *could* take that to mean you wouldn't be allowed to supervise Hogsmeade weekends."

Severus smirked. "So you're saying it's a win-win situation for *me*? During the summer break, am I to stay in Scotland or would I be allowed to return to Spinner's End?"

"I think by the time school ends, the Wizengamot will have gotten over its shock and perhaps we can renegotiate where you spend the summer months." Kingsley rubbed his hands together in anticipation. "I am certainly looking forward to bringing this news to them if only to see their reactions."

Harry laughed. "Can I be there to see it?"

"I expect you to be right there by my side when I make the announcement." Kingsley smiled broadly.

"If that is the case, I can do nothing less than accept your terms," Severus said with a sneer. "If we are finished..."

"Not quite," Lucius broke in. He carried a bottle of champagne and Narcissa followed, levitating eight flutes. "We have to toast to your miraculous resurrection." He skilfully popped the cork from the bottle without spilling a drop of the wine. While Narcissa passed out the crystal flutes, he filled each one to the brim.

Once everyone had a glass of champagne, Lucius raised his and said, "To Severus. The friend I thought I had lost forever. May he live long and healthily."

"Live Long and Healthily!" the witches and wizards chorused as they raised their glasses to Severus and then drank deeply.

"Thank you," Severus said with a smirk. "I will endeavour to stay healthy and avoid joining any other madmen who might try to take over the world." With that, he raised his glass to the others in the room and drained it.

* * *

Chapter 06

Chapter 6 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: Not mine. JKR owns everything except the plot. I think Lucius owns title to that. ^_^ Virtual chocolates to GrammarPolice for her beta and SlytherinsHeirx for Britpicking. Also, chocolates to the admins who keep my commas corralled.

Chapter Six

Once congratulations were given, Kingsley and Harry left in order to return to the Ministry and present Severus' agreement to the Wizengamot. Harry was chortling to himself at the expressions he could imagine on some of their faces. Few of the members had endeared themselves to him, having been more of a hindrance than a help.

Lucius and Narcissa excused themselves as well, citing various responsibilities as to why they needed to leave. Minerva also started to excuse herself when Severus spoke up.

"Please stay, Minerva. This will concern you as well as Draco and Miss Granger."

"Professor?" Hermione was puzzled. She glanced at Draco, only to see confusion on his face as well.

"What concerns us, sir?" he asked.

"I have spoken with the Headmistress about your work this autumn to revive me and we agree that it could stand as your Potions Honours project if you so desire. The Headmistress suggested that Care of Magical Creatures might also be covered..." Severus paused. Draco and Hermione looked at each other, then back at the bed and their professorial patient.

"I realise this is a bit rushed, but there are only a few weeks until the end of the year when, under the terms of my probation, I will have to return to Hogwarts. What I wish to know is...would the two of you consent to serving as Potions apprentices when you leave school..." He paused expectantly.

"There's no need to answer today," he said warmly when they didn't answer. "Give it some time to settle in." Then he changed the subject. "Draco, I have looked over this physical therapy regimen you wish to use. Do you think I can be brought up to a hundred percent by the New Year?"

"Not a hundred percent, no," Draco said musingly. "But I can probably get you to where you would be strong enough to face a classroom by the time term starts. After that, we would have to work therapy in as time permits. As the book states, it can't be done all at once."

"Then I suggest we get started this afternoon," Severus said. "I should at least like to walk into Hogwarts on my own, not as baggage for a house-elf to carry." He glared at Hermione, who had the temerity to giggle. "Or as hand luggage for a witch."

* * *

Minerva, after joining the Malfoys and Hermione for luncheon, and astonished to find herself enjoying the experience, excused herself to return to Hogwarts. Looking in to say good-bye to Severus, she found him immersed in a medical textbook.

"Is that the book Mr Malfoy and Miss Granger used to find your cure?" she asked.

"Yes, it is," Severus answered. "I am finding it most fascinating. Some of the procedures described seem almost barbaric. You should thank your lucky star the Dark Lord considered this beneath him. Otherwise, we might have had some real trouble."

"As if we didn't have trouble enough," Minerva countered. "I will see *you* at Hogwarts on New Years Day, preferably walking on your own. Mr Malfoy was describing what sounded like the worst torture in order to build up your strength and stamina. I will wish you good luck. I have the feeling you'll need it." She chuckled to herself as she walked out the door to return to Scotland.

"Oh," she said, sticking her head back in the room, "be sure to continue our correspondence if you can. *have* missed you, you know." With that, she left the manor and Apparated back to Hogwarts to share the news with the other teachers and begin preparation for the new year.

* * *

Draco entered Severus' room with trepidation. A curt summons to enter was the response to his knock and he wondered what had gone wrong.

"Mr Malfoy," Severus purred. "I am given to understand that you wish to torture me into gaining strength and stamina."

"No, Professor," Draco said. "It's a regimen of exercise and massage to retrain your muscles. After lying in bed for seven months, they have forgotten how to work properly, that's all."

"Exercise *and* massage?" Severus questioned. "The exercise I can understand, but why the massage?"

"Your muscles have kinked up from the inaction. According to the book..."

"Mr Malfoy, never did I expect to see the day you would sound like the Know-It-All Gryffindor," Severus interrupted, smirking. "I have read your book, and I fully understand what you are saying. Now, let us begin."

* * *

Minerva McGonagall

Headmistress

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Minerva,

As much as it pains me, I am writing to thank you for your visit the other day.

Draco has given me exercises to help strengthen my leg and arm muscles. He says once I can sit up on my own, then we will start some harder exercises. Not to complain, but any harder and I am not sure I would survive. Of course, the massage afterwards is most excellent.

I can see you smirking at the thought of Severus Snape receiving a massage. This is not what you think. Draco is manipulating the muscles in my extremities and stretching out the kinks, as he calls them, in other parts of my body. I call them painful.

Tell Slughorn that all the papers he has assigned this term are to be completely marked before I return. I do not wish to start out the new term correcting his inane assignments. I am sure I will have enough to do without doing his work as well.

Severus

Severus Snape

Malfoy Manor

Wiltshire, England

Severus,

The Muggles have a saying: "No pain, no gain". I'm not exactly sure what it means, but it does sound good. Tell Draco to keep up the excellent work.

Horace has agreed that all his assignments will be marked before you return. He has stated that it would feel good to return to his little house again. Of course, Albus told me that Horace was living in a Muggle's home in Budleigh Babberton when Albus and Mr Potter discovered him. A Muggle who was out of the country at that! The man probably didn't even know Horace was there.

I informed the other teachers of your return to Hogwarts at the last staff meeting. I'm sure you realise that not all of them are pleased that you're returning. However, I hope to talk them into some semblance of civilised behaviour before you arrive.

Minerva

Minerva McGonagall

Headmistress

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Headmistress,

May I ask you for some advice? After you left the other day, Malfoy and I spoke about Professor Snape's offer of apprenticeships. It sounds lovely, but my parents made me promise that I would consider University after leaving Hogwarts as a condition of being allowed to enrol.

I understand there is a Wizarding University attached to Cambridge, and that I could also enrol in the Muggle University to study Chemistry and Advanced Mathematics. Does this sound like a good idea to you? I am honoured that Professor Snape thinks my work good enough for an apprenticeship, but I do want to honour my parents' request as well.

Could you please advise me as to what I might tell him? I don't want him to think I don't appreciate his offer, because I really do.

Sincerely,

Hermione Granger

Hermione Granger

Malfoy Manor

Wiltshire, England

Miss Granger,

I am sure if you explain your promise to your parents and your plans for tertiary education after leaving Hogwarts, Professor Snape will understand. After all, it is your education which is important here.

Cambridge does indeed have a Wizarding University. I have some acquaintance with the Dean of Transfiguration. I will speak with him and get you some information about what you can and cannot enrol in on the Muggle side, as well as what kind of records you will need to do so. I understand that Muggles are very keen on having the proper records for their students.

Please keep in mind that there are other careers out there besides Potions. Professors Flitwick and Vector have both expressed an interest in your possible apprenticeship after Hogwarts. I would also be pleased if you would consider becoming my apprentice. Even if you were to attend Cambridge, I am certain there would be a place for you here at Hogwarts when you are finished.

Sincerely,

Minerva McGonagall

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: Don't own them. Just taking them for walkies. I'll return them to JKR when finished. Much thanks to GrammarPolice for her beta and SlytherinsHeirx for his Britpicking. Any glaring errors are mine. ^_^

Chapter Seven

"Professor?"

"Hmmm? Yes, Miss Granger." Severus looked up from the book he was reading and indicated that Hermione could enter the room.

"It's about your offer of an apprenticeship, sir," Hermione said quietly. "I need to discuss it with you, if you don't mind."

"Not at all, Miss Granger," Severus said, setting his book aside. "When I made the offer, I was fully aware that a decision would take some time to reach."

"I really appreciate the offer, sir..."

"But?" Severus urged as she hesitated over her words.

"I promised my parents that I would attend university when I left Hogwarts. It was their one condition for allowing me to go to an unknown school in Scotland," Hermione explained hurriedly.

"Your parents put conditions on your education?" Severus said indignantly.

"Oh, no, sir." Hermione attempted a soothing manner, something she didn't have much practice with. "Just on attending Hogwarts. Because it wasn't what they wanted for me, but they did understand about the magic."

"So you're turning down my offer," Severus stated with a frown.

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Don't be sorry, Miss Granger," he said with a sneer. "It was merely an offer, nothing more."

"Professor McGonagall knows the Dean of Transfiguration at Cambridge Wizarding University," Hermione continued in a rush. "She said she would see about getting some more information for me. I want to attend the Muggle University, as well as the Wizarding University, and study chemistry and biology."

"A good idea if you plan to pursue Potions," he said, "but what else could you do with such an area of study?"

"Those particular classes are required for studying Muggle medicine," she explained, "so I had hoped they would be good for Wizarding medicine, as well."

"Yes... I see," he said, looking past her at the wall as if in deep thought. "Of course, you *do* realise that Healers also have an apprenticeship period after the completion of their studies."

"Yes, sir. I did know that, sir."

"Very well, Miss Granger. I will accept your dismissal of my offer with the intent in which it was meant."

"Thank you, sir."

"However..."

"Yes, sir?"

"I reserve the right to make such an offer at a later date, if I ever decide to be that idiotic again." He smirked at the look of shock on her face.

"Idiotic, sir?" Hermione gasped. "I don't think you're idiotic."

"Of course not, Miss Granger," he said. "But the two of you *were* the first students I have ever offered apprenticeships to in all my years as a Potions master."

"And we are suitably grateful, aren't we, Granger?" Draco chimed in from the door. "But I had also intended to pursue a university education after Hogwarts, sir. Does that mean the offer's been withdrawn for me as well?"

"With the same reservations, Mr Malfoy," Severus reiterated. "Perhaps either or both of you will change your mind before the Leaving Feast. I will hold the offer open until then."

"Thank you, sir," the two students chorused, then looked at the other and grinned.

Later, as Draco finished the daily therapy, he looked up and found himself regarded by the heavily hooded eyes of his godfather.

"Is something wrong?" the young wizard asked while cleaning the warming lotion from his hands.

"When did you and Miss Granger become such good friends?" Severus asked.

Draco blushed. "Pretty much just after Father and Mother invited her to come live here so she could use the Manor's library to look for a cure."

"I see," Severus commented while he continued to watch his godson, knowing that silence was a void most people sought to fill.

"She had thought to stay at Hogwarts and research there," Draco said as he nervously shifted his feet, "but Father convinced her that we owned pretty much every book Hogwarts had in the Restricted Section and others besides. He also pointed out that there were undoubtedly heavy protection spells on your quarters and personal lab so she was probably better off here.

"I didn't think she would want to come back here after the torture Aunt Bella put her through," Draco continued, "but she was really worried about you and wanted to do something to help."

Severus winced. "No doubt her idea of Gryffindor heroism..."

"Actually, sir, Hermione said something about 'getting back on the horse'?" Draco wrinkled his nose in confusion.

"A Muggle saying," Severus explained with a sigh. "It basically means, if you fall off the broom, you need to get back on so as to get over the fear of falling."

"Oh," Draco said, still confused. "So she decided she needed to come back here to get over what Aunt Bella did to her?"

"Probably," Severus said in an absent-minded manner, then changed the subject. "Do you know if anyone has tried to enter my quarters or personal lab since the end of the war?"

"I think the Aurors tried," Draco said with a smirk, "but I heard a rumour that the spells replicated themselves as fast as they were taken down. The Aurors gave up after a while, I think, because I haven't heard about anything else."

"All right," Severus said. "I'll ask the Headmistress about it. Since she said she had her suspicions about my so-called death, it's possible that she left the spells as they were, hoping I would come back to teach."

"I'm really glad you're coming back, sir," Draco said. "Professor Slughorn's okay as a teacher, but he's not you."

"Of course not," Snape said cheekily.

Minerva,

Have the protection spells surrounding my old quarters and personal lab been breached? Draco Malfoy was telling me that he heard a rumour about Aurors trying and failing. If this is correct, then I appear to have been vindicated in my use of the spells. Tell Albus I said so.

Severus

Severus,

No, your spells haven't been breached. In fact, when I was down there the other day, they seem to have grown stronger. It amused me no end to watch the Aurors take them down, only to be repelled immediately by stronger spells. You have to teach me those spells. I can see where they might come in useful around here.

Albus says that he always knew your spells would hold against anyone except him...the bugger...so I would imagine as Headmistress, I could get past them in case of an emergency?

Minerva

Minerva,

Do you have an emergency?

Severus

"So, I hear you're improving," Lucius said, sticking his head around the doorjamb as he waited to be invited in.

Severus waved him through and, sighing dramatically, once again put his book away in order to see to his visitor. "So I am told," he said. "Draco has very good hands."

Lucius smirked and examined his own. "Gets that from me," he gloated. Then, suddenly serious, he continued, "He told us about the apprenticeship and his decision to attend university instead."

"Yes. He and Miss Granger both made that decision," Severus said. "Apparently they received advice from their elders?" He quirked an eyebrow in unspoken question.

"I'm not sure about Miss Granger," Lucius said, "although the house-elves tell me she's been corresponding with the Headmistress."

"Draco, on the other hand, did discuss the situation with his mother and me. While we agreed that it was a munificent offer, a Wizarding University education would take him further, especially with the Wizarding world changing more every day. Although, I would ask that you keep him in mind for the same opportunities after university, if he's still interested."

"Draco has a fine future ahead of him," Severus said. "Of course, his Charm work is better than his Potions work, but there is little to differentiate between the two scores. Only a point or two. The same is true in Miss Granger's case, but with several of her classes, not just Charms and Potions."

"Yes, so I was given to understand from Draco over the years." Lucius rubbed his hands together. "Perhaps we could match the two of them together. There does seem to be less animosity between them since she came here."

"Draco and a Muggle-born Gryffindor?" Severus gasped in mock outrage. "Whatever are you thinking, Lucius?"

"I'm thinking I'd like some intelligent grandchildren," Lucius said with a grin. "Miss Granger, while Muggle-born, is not exactly what I expected when I asked her to come here."

"No?"

"No." Lucius paused in thought. "I had expected someone who didn't know the first thing about polite Wizarding society, and had no manners whatsoever. What I found was a young woman who is polite, intelligent, well read, and not afraid to state her opinions. In fact, I find myself liking her more all the time despite her unfortunate birth, and her friendship with Potter and the Weasleys."

"And, of course, she champions the house-elves," Severus pointed out.

"The girl champions all that she considers underdogs," Lucius said with a sniff. "Yourself, for instance. She told us you were probably still alive as there was no portrait on the Headmaster's office wall, and practically drove us out to the Shrieking Shack to make sure."

"And I, for one, am glad she did," Narcissa said, looking in. "It's getting late, Lucius. Leave Severus be and come to bed."

"Of course, my love," Lucius purred.

"Good night, Severus," Narcissa said.

"Night, Severus," Lucius echoed as he followed his wife out the door and down the hall.

Severus smirked and turned to pick up his book once again, only to have the candles go out. "Netty," he called.

"Yes, Professor, sir." Netty popped into view at the bottom of the bed.

"Get some more candles. These seem defective," Severus ordered.

"Not defective, Professor, sir," Netty said. "Mistress says it is time for the Professor to sleep so she puts out the candles herself."

"Merlin save me from managing witches," Severus muttered. "All right, Netty, you're excused."

* * *

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: I own the plot. JKR owns the characters and places. GrammarPolice and SlytherinsHeirx should own *thepain au chocolat* for their help in beta- and Britpicking this melee. Much thanks and virtual chocolates also to the admins who keep my commas in line. ^_^

Chapter Eight

...Two weeks later...

"Sir, are you sure?" Draco was perplexed. "I know you've made grand progress, but I'm not so sure about this."

"I refuse to continue simply pacing the upper hallway for the rest of my stay," Severus snarked. "I want to sit at a table and eat like a civilized person, not eat dinner in my room again."

"Draco," Narcissa interrupted, "if Severus thinks he can manage the stairs, then perhaps we should let him."

"But, Mother, he's..." Draco protested.

"But, nothing," Severus interrupted. "If I fall, it's entirely on my head. Let's go."

* * *

Hermione and Lucius stood at the bottom of the wide staircase and watched Severus slowly make his way downstairs followed by Narcissa and a frowning Draco. Once he reached the bottom, Severus took the walking stick Lucius held out to him with a grunted "Thank you."

"You're welcome," Lucius said with a smirk. "Keep it and consider it an early holiday gift."

Severus glared at him, then turned and walked into the dining room followed by a smiling Narcissa, who felt she had a rather lovely, if unconventional, family all of a sudden. Severus stopped next to a chair and waited while Lucius and Draco helped Narcissa and Hermione to their chairs. When the ladies were seated, the men took their seats, and Narcissa rang the silver bell sitting on the table at her right hand. With a "pop", bowls of soup appeared on the table in front of each of them and dinner began.

* * *

Minerva,

I appear to be progressing in my recuperation much faster than Draco believes I should be. I see no problem in teaching again come the winter term, but I'd prefer to remain in the old Potions classroom rather than move to the ground floor as suggested. I see no reason to coddle the students and have them expect never to have to brave the dungeons again.

I assure you I will have no problems in climbing staircases and patrolling the halls for miscreants. In fact, I believe I will enjoy the exercise.

Severus

Severus,

I know the terms of your probation say you are not to leave the grounds, but I expect you not to take out your frustrations on the students.

Of course, I'll keep the Potions class in the dungeons. That's the safest place for it. Whoever told you I was moving it to the ground floor?

I look forward to seeing you next month as do the rest of the staff. Filius says that he can't teach me the spells you used because he doesn't recognize them. I will definitely be coming to you to learn them.

Minerva

Minerva,

Why? Do you think I would give away my secrets that easily?

Severus

Severus,

You old fraud! Of course you'll teach me. Otherwise, I'll make your life under Voldemort and Dumbledore seem like a tropical holiday. So, what's it going to be?

Minerva

Minerva,

I suppose I will have to teach you then. Merlin spare me from managing witches.

Severus

"Well, you seem to be in a good mood," Narcissa said from the door of the library where Severus had taken up residence once he was able to move about. She walked in, levitating a tray of tea and a second tray of cakes and other pastries. "Is the news from Hogwarts that good?"

"The Headmistress and I are just having one of our *civil* conversations, albeit by owl rather than face to face," Severus answered with a smirk. "I believe your son has gone behind my back and suggested that the Potions classroom be moved to the ground floor, rather than the dungeons."

"Actually, I did that," Narcissa confessed. At Severus' scowl, she quickly explained. "I remember those stairs to the dungeons. They are steep and can be slippery at times, and I was afraid that you might lose your balance and fall. I truly didn't mean to infer that you were an invalid to be coddled."

"I should hope not." He sniffed and then took a deeper breath. "Do I smell *pain au chocolat*?"

Narcissa smiled. "Yes. I asked the house-elves to make some for our tea. Hermione is quite fond of the pastries."

"I take it Miss Granger will be joining us then," Severus growled.

"Why, Severus, I do believe you don't want our company." Lucius' snide remarks as he entered the library made Narcissa laugh, and Severus scowled at both of them. He started to say something, but was interrupted by Draco and Hermione's bickering voices.

"I still say he's trying to do too much too soon," Draco said.

"Nonsense, Ferret," Hermione shot back. "If he feels he can do something, then he should at least try. That's the whole idea behind physical therapy. The patient *usually* knows what he can and can't do."

They walked into the library to find Lucius and Narcissa beaming at them while Severus scowled.

"What?" Draco said, coming to a halt. "What'd I do now?"

"Nothing, dear." Narcissa smiled. "Come and have your tea."

Draco and Hermione exchanged puzzled looks on Narcissa's inexplicable affability and obeyed, seating themselves in the chairs on the other side of the tea table.

Severus waited until Draco took a sip of his tea. "I understand you don't believe I should be out of bed yet," he said.

Draco sputtered and started coughing. Hermione started up out her chair and he waved her away. "I didn't say that, sir," he said. "I just said I thought you were pushing too hard. The book..."

"The book is just guidelines," Hermione interrupted. "It's not the bible of physical therapy."

"The what?" Lucius asked. "I don't believe I've heard that expression before."

Severus smirked. "I do believe the Gryffindor Know-It-All has discovered that not every answer can be found in a book."

"Actually, sir, they can," Hermione said. "You just need to know how to interpret the information you're reading."

"Five points to Gryffindor, Miss Granger," Severus said. "I have been trying to teach you that since your first year. At least you no longer regurgitate the information word for word."

Hermione looked stunned. "D-did you just give points to Gryffindor, sir?" she asked.

"Did you lose part of your hearing in the final battle, Miss Granger?" he countered. "I find that I no longer have to coddle the members of my House in order to play a role. Therefore, when I return to Hogwarts, I will be giving and taking points appropriately.

"Even from Slytherin," he warned as Draco started to smirk, causing him to frown instead. "As to the expression Miss Granger used, Lucius, it means that there are other resources that may not agree with that particular volume and not to rely on it entirely."

"I see," Lucius said, reaching for the last scone. "So, Draco, do you still want to go to university after Hogwarts?"

"Yes, Father," Draco said. "I would like to learn more about how Charms can be combined with Potions. Professor Flitwick said that a university curriculum was better than an apprenticeship for learning to combine the two subjects, and he offered me an apprenticeship to complete my studies after I graduate."

"*He did what?*" Severus sputtered. "Why, that bandy-legged, little excuse for a teacher. If he thinks he can steal *my* apprentices..."

"Severus!" Narcissa said, shocked. "And you were doing so well, too."

"If you will excuse me," he growled as he reached for his cane and stood up. "I find I have a letter to write."

Author's Note: *Pain au chocolat* (translation: *chocolate bread*), for those who don't know, is a wonderfully flaky croissant crust wrapped around a stick of dark bittersweet chocolate and baked. Some bakeries roll hazelnuts or almonds up with the chocolate before the pastry is baked. They are delicious and very rich, which makes them perfect for chocolate lovers, in my opinion. I've even had them with an icing glaze drizzled over the top. Yummy!

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: Not mine. I will only take responsibility for their actions within the confines of this story. JKR will have to discipline them otherwise. Kudos to GrammarPolice and SlytherinsHeirx for their betas and Britpicking. Any glaring mistakes were made by me after they were finished.

Chapter Nine

Filius Flitwick

Professor of Charms

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Filius,

How dare you try to purloin one of my students? Mr Malfoy has told me of your offer to take him as an apprentice when he leaves university. I have already offered both he and Miss Granger apprenticeships, with the reservation that I have first refusal after their schooling. Wait your turn, you old wand waver.

Severus

Severus Snape

Malfoy Manor

Wiltshire, England

Severus,

I believe Mr Malfoy mentioned to me that he intended to study the effects of Charms on Potions while at university with an eye to becoming a Healer. If that is the case, my apprenticeship would make more sense than yours in Potions.

I understand from Minerva that Miss Granger used a Muggle method to neutralize the snake venom. Do you know if there were charms used as well? Perhaps I should offer her an apprenticeship as well. Minerva has already said she gets the first choice if either student refuses your offer, and Septima and I can duel for second choice.

Filius

"Over my dead body," Severus muttered, reading his latest correspondence by the library fire.

"Sir?"

"Miss Granger." He looked up and waved her into the library from where she stood, frowning, just outside the door. "What exactly do you plan to do once you complete your university education and satisfy your parents' expectations?"

"I'm not sure, sir," she said, plainly thinking of her options. "I had thought to teach at one of the Wizarding schools, but I would like to have a Mastery before I did that."

"Just one Mastery?" he asked smoothly.

"Maybe to start with," she said, a dreamy look on her face. "The Headmistress offered me an apprenticeship as well—" Her voice trailed off as Severus nodded his head in acknowledgment. "Then I also received letters from Professor Flitwick and Professor Vector—" He nodded again.

Severus growled in frustration. "Thank you, Miss Granger. I already knew that Flitwick had considered offering an apprenticeship to you, and he insinuated that Vector would offer one as well. You have just confirmed my suspicions."

Hermione backed out of the library without picking up the books she had come for while Severus muttered, "Damn poachers. Let them find their own apprentices. Leave mine alone."

* * *

"Oi, Granger, wait up!" Draco called as she hurried down the hallway. "What's the matter with you?"

"Malfoy," Hermione sighed in relief. "Just the person I needed to talk to."

"Wait. You *want* to talk to me? Without us working on a project together?" Draco asked, his hand on his chest in simulation of shock.

"Yeah," Hermione said with a small laugh. "Freaky, isn't it? But you know Professor Snape better than anyone except your parents. Did you know he's talking to himself about poachers and apprentices?"

"Oh, that," Draco said with a laugh.

"You did know!" accused Hermione.

"Well, not that he was talking to himself," Draco admitted, "but I did know about the 'duelling Masters', as it were. Professor Flitwick offered me a Charms apprenticeship after university if I wanted some advanced study."

"Me too," Hermione said. "I also received offers from Professor McGonagall and Professor Vector. That makes four, if you count Professor Snape's."

"Well, don't *you* rate," Draco sneered.

"Jealous much, are we, Malfoy?"

"In your dreams, Granger," he countered, and then he grinned at her. "I'll make a bet with you."

"What kind of bet?" Hermione demanded, her eyes narrowing.

"I'll bet I can get better N.E.W.T. scores than you," he said, "and I'm willing to swear on my wand that I won't cheat or try to hinder you in any way."

"What's the prize?" she asked. "I refuse to bet if it's something kinky."

"If I get better scores than you—" Draco paused, obviously thinking, "then you have to kiss me in front of the entire student body and staff at the Leaving Feast." He wiggled his eyebrows in a lascivious manner. "And with tongue."

"And if you lose?"

"Then I'll stand up in front of everyone at the Leaving Feast and sing the song of your choice to you."

"Draco, I've heard you sing." Hermione giggled, remembering. "You've an awful singing voice. Everyone will laugh at you."

"All the more reason for me to win then, isn't it." He pulled his wand out of his arm holster. "Do we have a deal?"

Hermione drew her wand. "Deal," she said, and touched the tip of her wand to his with a shower of sparks.

They separated and went on about their business, unaware of the two sets of eyes watching from an alcove under the stairs.

"Well, dear," Lucius purred, "shall we make our own side bet?"

"Are you asking me to bet against my son," Narcissa said with a smile, "because I agree with Hermione. Her *oes* have the most awful singing voice." She laughed.

"I am willing to wager new dress robes against their cost in galleons that Draco will win this bet of theirs."

"New dress robes, hmm?" Narcissa mused. "Who would get the robes, me or you?"

"Well, I was thinking of you," Lucius said smoothly, "but if you want to buy me new robes, I won't demur."

Narcissa laughed again. "All right, I'll wager that Hermione gets better scores than Draco. In fact, I'll do you one better."

"Oh?" Lucius asked, raising his eyebrows.

"I'll wager you that Hermione will match or surpass Severus' N.E.W.T. scores. After all, his record hasn't been broken since he left Hogwarts. And if I win, you will take me to Italy this summer and buy me a new wardrobe, shoes and all."

"Done!" They also touched wands to seal their wager.

Severus smirked as he watched their machinations from the door of the library. Then he returned to his seat by the fire and began to make his own plans for the coming year.

* * *

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: The characters in this little play belong to JKR. I can claim only the plot (and the wager). I'll take Hermione by ten points. ^_^

A/N: Thanks to GrammarPolice and SlytherinsHeirx for their beta and Britpicking skills. This chapter would have been very illegible without them.

Chapter Ten

Minerva,

Mr Malfoy and Miss Granger have entered into a wager as to which one will receive the highest N.E.W.T scores without cheating or trying to hinder the other in any way. In addition, Lucius and Narcissa have entered a wager of new dress robes to the backer of the winning student.

Lucius, of course, is backing Mr Malfoy. Narcissa then upped the ante by wagering that if Miss Granger could either equal or surpass my N.E.W.T. scores, Lucius would take her to Italy for a new wardrobe including shoes.

I thought that perhaps the staff might like to participate in this wager. As you know, my financial situation at this moment is rather bleak. I can only afford to wager a galleon that Mr Malfoy will have the higher scores at the end of the year. If you would place my wager for me, I can repay you when I return to the school on New Year's Day.

Severus

"Minerva?" Poppy Pomfrey looked at the Headmistress with trepidation. After all, it did not seem proper for the Head of Hogwarts to be giggling like a little girl while at breakfast in the Great Hall. Even the students were staring.

"I'll tell you at today's staff meeting," Minerva whispered to the Mediwitch. "It's rather intriguing, really. And sounds like too much fun to miss."

"Fun?" Poppy asked.

"Hmmm," Minerva hummed in reply while rereading the letter she had received from Severus that morning. "Oh, yes. This promises to be great fun, indeed. It should liven up the winter and spring terms no end." With that, she rose from the table and out the staff door, carrying her correspondence with her.

By afternoon, word had spread through the staff that something interesting was afoot, and it promised to make the end of term staff meeting rather more interesting than usual. Albus looked on benignly from the landscape over the fireplace mantel as the various teachers entered the staff room and greeted him. He nodded as he returned their greetings, his eyes twinkling. When all members of the staff were present, Minerva opened the letter she received that morning.

"I think in light of this development..." she began.

"What development?" Filius interrupted. "What's going on, Minerva?"

"I'll explain if you quit interrupting." Minerva gave him her best quelling look, and he settled in his seat. "I received a letter from Severus this morning concerning a certain wager between Miss Granger and Mr Malfoy, as well as a wager between the elder Malfoys concerning the same subject.

"It seems that Mr Malfoy has wagered he would receive higher N.E.W.T. scores than Miss Granger without cheating or hindering her in her studies. Mr Lucius Malfoy then wagered Mrs Malfoy that Draco would succeed. Mrs Malfoy accepted the wager, and then suggested that if Miss Granger won and also managed to equal or exceed Severus' N.E.W.T. scores, Mr Lucius Malfoy would take her to Italy for an entire new wardrobe."

"Must be nice to be so rich," Pomona Sprout sighed. "What has this to do with us?"

"Severus suggested we might like to participate in this wager ourselves. He has already placed a galleon on Mr Malfoy, as this is all he can afford at the moment."

Filius snorted. "Mr Malfoy may be an intelligent wizard, but he is nowhere near as intelligent as Miss Granger. I'd wager a galleon on her scores against Malfoy's."

"As would I," several of the other teachers said.

"How would we compare their scores?" Septima Vector asked. "I don't believe they're taking the same number of subjects. Miss Granger has always taken more classes each year than even Filius' Ravenclaws."

"Hmmm, yes," Minerva mused, glancing at the class timetable in front of her. "I believe she is taking ten N.E.W.T.s: Transfiguration, Charms, Potions, Astronomy, Care of Magical Creatures, Arithmancy, Defence Against the Dark Arts, Ancient Runes, History of Magic, and Herbology.

"Mr. Malfoy is taking N.E.W.T.s in Transfiguration, Charms, Potions, Defence Against the Dark Arts, Ancient Runes, Divination, and Herbology. That is three less N.E.W.T.s than Miss Granger and only six classes that coincide. I would suggest that we use the scores from the classes they have together rather than their total scores. Is everyone in agreement?"

Nods and "yeses" signified agreement among the staff, and they discussed wagers and placed their bets. Of all the teachers, only Severus, Sybill Trelawney and Horace Slughorn had placed any galleons on Draco's chances of bettering Hermione's N.E.W.T. scores.

Severus,

I hope you have great faith in Mr Malfoy's ability to outscore Miss Granger. Only yourself, Sybill and Horace have placed wagers backing him. The rest of us have more confidence in Miss Granger. By the way, I am curious. What did they wager?

Since Miss Granger is taking ten subjects and Mr Malfoy only seven, we decided that the six classes they will have together are to be the basis of the winning scores. This seems only fair. Otherwise, Miss Granger would win by default with her three extra class scores.

Now, you old faker, how much do you want to wager on Miss Granger's chances? You see, do know you quite well, and I am certain that your wager on Mr Malfoy was only a blind.

Albus would also have liked to make a wager, but...fortunately for us...portraits don't have vaults in Gringotts.

Minerva

Minerva,

Mr Malfoy has wagered that if Miss Granger had higher scores than himself, he would sing the song of her choice in front of the entire school at the Leaving Feast. If he had the highest scores, Miss Granger would have to kiss him in front of the entire school at the Leaving Feast. I felt justified in wagering so little on Mr Malfoy, as I believe Miss Granger will be highly motivated to win.

Of course, Miss Granger would be taking ten classes. You do realise that is one more than I took my seventh year. However, I would imagine she ~~is~~ taking Divination. The girl is far too intelligent to fall for that claptrap.

Sybill wagers against Miss Granger because she resents the fact Miss Granger not only spoke her mind, but did not adore and worship Sybill during Miss Granger's one attempt at the class (and I don't blame Miss Granger one bit).

Horace, I would imagine, is trying to gain the Malfoys' good graces as part of his lifelong pursuit of patronage and self-aggrandisement. I can see no other reason, as Miss Granger is clearly the better student in Potions. Even last year, when Miss Granger was noticeably absent, Mr Malfoy did not apply himself in any of his classes, as he is quite capable of doing. I am speaking here as the then serving Headmaster, not the Potions professor. If he applies himself for the rest of this year, I would expect to see a significant improvement.

Place five galleons on Miss Granger, if you please, and keep the information strictly to yourself. I have a side wager going with Lucius on the same subject. He, of course, thinks his son is the superior student, despite the evidence in front of his nose during the last few months. My winnings from this wager should make up the shortfall the Wizengamot has forced on me by cutting my salary by half.

Severus

Severus,

As Pomona said at the staff meeting, it must be nice to be rich.

I will add five galleons to my name in the book. That should keep your name out of it, and you can pay me back out of your winnings.

As I have heard Mr Malfoy sing, I am not sure I want to hear him again, much less in front of the entire school body. However, the thought of Miss Granger kissing him at the Leaving Feast leaves a much less palatable taste in my mouth. All I can say is let the best student (and teacher) win. By the way, how many points do you want for your spread?

Minerva

Minerva,

By at least fifty points on the N.E.W.T. score comparisons. Miss Granger will have to exceed all my old scores on the other wager.

S.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: JKR owns it except where I do.

Author's Note: Thanks to GrammarPolice and SlytherinsHeirx for their beta and britpicking skills. Without them, this chapter would be incomprehensible. ^_^

Chapter Eleven

...New Year's Day...

"Are you sure?" Minerva asked for the third time since she and Severus had arrived at Hogsmeade on the Hogwarts Express. The carriage ride from the station had been filled with a silent and scowling Potions master, who ignored her patent concern and stared out at the well-remembered scenery.

Severus paused in the Entrance Hall and glared at the Headmistress. "Woman, ask me that again and I'll take this stick to you." He was long past annoyed; his pain was past bearable, and he just wanted to be comfortable in his own quarters. "I am perfectly capable of climbing up and down staircases. I've been doing it for better than a month at Malfoy Manor."

"Yes, yes," Minerva said, "but the Manor staircases are wide and dry, not narrow and damp. I..."

"If you suggest one more time that I allow a house-elf to assist me to my quarters, I will take my chances with Azkaban." Severus turned to the dungeons stairs and, cane in one hand, the other hand on the banister, he slowly made his way downstairs, scowling at the few students who had stayed over the Christmas holidays and ignoring their whispers.

Minerva grimaced at his retreating back and, glaring at the lingering crowd, said, "What are you doing hanging about? Do you not have something better to do... like studying?" Students scattered every which way as she stormed up the main staircase on the way to her office.

* * *

"That man is impossible." She stormed into the Headmistress' office and slammed the door, shaking all the portraits into wakefulness.

"I take it Severus is back in the castle?" Albus asked calmly, looking down from the safety of his portrait. The other portraits looked on with interest. No more pretending to sleep for them. This was far more interesting.

Minerva pointed her wand at him and said, "If you say one word in his defence right now, Albus Dumbledore, I will transfigure your portrait into an urn and heave you out the nearest window."

Deciding that discretion might be the better part of valour, Albus quietly slid out of his painting to go look for another source of gossip.

Minerva took a pinch of Floo powder and tossed it into the fireplace. "Poppy Pomfrey," she said clearly, pinching the bridge of her nose.

"Yes, Minerva," came the reply as Poppy's head popped up in the fire.

"Could you come to my office, please," Minerva requested, "and bring something for a Severus-sized headache."

Poppy smiled. "Not even back one day and the two of you are already arguing. I'll bring something better."

A few minutes later, Poppy gave a perfunctory knock at the door and stuck her head in. "Is it safe?" she asked.

Minerva waved her into the office. "Did you bring me something for this headache?"

"Do you truly have a headache, or is it just the argument didn't go your way?" Poppy grinned, holding up a bottle of Ogden's Old Firewhiskey and a platter of fudge brownies. "The chocolate will help the headache and the firewhiskey will dull any other pains."

Minerva snorted. "I had forgotten how testy Severus can be when he's hurting."

"A long trip on the Hogwarts Express, and the carriage ride from Hogsmeade station, would probably try the patience of a saint who's only been out of bed for seven weeks," Poppy said with a laugh, "and we all know Severus is no saint."

"I think your cure is working already," Minerva said with a smile, taking a bite of brownie. "I suppose *was* trying to coddle him too much on the way here, but..."

"But you were concerned. I'm sure Severus understands. He's just so damned stubborn," Poppy said in commiseration.

"It's what kept him alive during the war," Albus said, having returned to his original portrait on the wall. "If he hadn't been, Tom would have killed him a long time ago."

"You're right, Albus," Minerva said, smiling slightly, "but don't let it go to your head."

"Too late." Poppy giggled as he scowled at her for her cheek. "Come on, Minerva, it's time for dinner. We can finish the brownies and firewhiskey for dessert."

"Indeed. Do you think Severus will deign to come to dinner or will he sulk in his rooms?" Minerva's voice trailed away as she and Poppy went down the stairs to the Great Hall.

* * *

Severus managed to get downstairs to his quarters with a minimum of hesitation in his steps. He hated that infernal cane and was determined to rid himself of it at the earliest opportunity. To that end, he decided to intensify the exercises Draco had him doing to build up the strength in his legs. There were potions as well, he knew, that could help without becoming habit forming.

At the door to his quarters, he raised his wand and sketched two runes in the air. A shimmer indicated that the protection spells he'd placed on his quarters were still in place and functioning. With a grimace of pain, he lowered the spells and moved forward to open the door.

The sitting room, a relaxing contrast of book-lined walls and comfortable chairs, was just as he'd left it eight months before. Apparently the house-elves had continued to care for the rooms, keeping the dust to a minimum while not disturbing his papers. Severus grunted. All was as it should be.

He limped over to his favourite chair in front of the fire, leaning heavily on the cane in his hand, and sat down with a sigh. It felt good to sit there with the warmth of the fire in his face. Looking around, he realized that this was probably the only place he could truly call home. Not even his house in Spinner's End, where he had lived as a boy, could he truly call a home.

"Winky?" he called.

A small 'pop' and, "Yes, Professor?" Winky said from behind him. Severus smiled. At least she was still here and willing to serve.

"Could you bring me some dinner?" he asked. "I'm too tired to go up to the Great Hall this evening."

"Of course, sir," Winky said enthusiastically. "Does Winky tell the Headmistress..."

"I don't think that's necessary," Severus said abruptly. "The Headmistress met me at the train in London and rode up with me. She undoubtedly knows how tired I am."

"Winky will bring the Professor Snape his dinner," the house-elf said and, with another 'pop', she was gone. A few moments later, a tray appeared on the low table next to

his chair. On it sat a plate of medium rare beef, some roasted potatoes, and steamed broccoli with cheese sauce. A pot of tea sat steaming next to a cup, and he noticed the house-elves had even included a slice of chocolate cake...which he loved as much as Miss Granger did...for his dessert. Pleased with his dinner, and with more of an appetite than he'd had for some time, Severus fell to eating with a passion.

Later, as he finished eating with a sigh, the tray vanished back to the kitchens. He leaned his head against the back of the chair and stretched his legs out to the fire. Feeling so comfortable he didn't want to move, he sipped his tea and contemplated his future life.

Five years of basically forced servitude would actually fly by he thought. By the time he was released, if he handled it right, he could have several new potions to patent and sell. At least he didn't have to answer to two masters...just Minerva...and she would be easier on him because he wasn't being forced to share her secrets, if she had any.

Of course, there *were* the offers of apprenticeships for Draco and Miss Granger. In less than five years, they would be leaving university and looking for their next opportunity. Severus smirked. By the time he was almost free, it would be time to begin their servitude. He could only hope they would accept his offers rather than any of the others.

Standing, Severus stretched luxuriantly and yawned. He then hobbled off to the bedroom to prepare for bed. After spending six weeks with well-meaning but too attentive people, he was more than pleased to be on his own again. Once the winter term started, he knew his privacy would be a thing of the past once again.

Aside of being dust free, the bedroom hadn't been touched either. Severus smirked to think of the Aurors trying to dismantle his spells and failing. The protections were of his own creation, and he didn't think even the Ministry Unspeakables would have been able to break them without exerting a great deal of time and trouble.

Once bathed and wearing his nightshirt, Severus crawled beneath his duvet and picked up the book he'd been reading before he had been forced from the castle. He opened to the page where he'd left his bookmark and lost himself in the story of the mad captain and the great white whale. Severus always thought of Dumbledore and Voldemort when he read this particular book, although he shied away from assigning roles to either of them if only because he couldn't decide which was whom.

Two hours later, having finally finished the book, Severus picked up his wand and pointed it at the candelabra. *Nox*," he said and extinguished the candles. In the resulting darkness, he lay down and promptly fell asleep without the aid of a sleeping draught.

* * *

The next morning, Winky woke him with a fresh cup of coffee in hand, presenting him with freshly pressed clean robes as he drank. Once fully awake, shaven, and dressed, he slowly made his way up the stairs and into the Great Hall for breakfast.

The sounds of conversation diminished as he approached the High Table and the students, especially the ones who had been to Hogwarts in previous years, watched in awe as he hobbled his way past the tables. Had he possessed a different sense of humour, he might have shouted "Boo!" simply to see what would happen. As it was, he scowled at the onlookers as though he'd never been away.

Severus took his seat between Minerva and Filius and answered their murmured good mornings with a grunt as his breakfast made its appearance. The noise level in the Hall rose in response to his silence and he winced.

"Headache, Severus?" Minerva asked in concern, having seen his flinch.

"No," Severus answered with a snarl. "I had forgotten just how much noise these high ceilings can hold. I suppose I'll just have to get used to it once again."

"It'll be worse when the entire student body gets back." Filius offered him the marmalade. "This is a good time to get 'used to it'."

"I've a bone to pick with you, Filius," Severus said suddenly, turning to the smaller wizard. "Where do you get off offering apprenticeships to Malfoy and Granger when they haven't decided whether they are going to accept *my* offers."

"But you never take apprentices," Filius sputtered. "I thought..."

"You thought wrong," Severus said, "and as for you, Septima..."

"As Filius said, you never take apprentices," she said with a grin. "I'm just doing my part for the wonderful world of Arithmancy."

"Miss Granger will apprentice with *me*," Minerva interjected, "if she's a mind to take an apprenticeship and doesn't pursue Potions. I also believe I've called first dibs on her further education after Severus is finished teaching her what he knows. Of course, she might even decide to accept my invitation first."

"A moot point at the moment," Septima said. "I understand Malfoy and Granger have both expressed an interest in tertiary education... Ah, here comes the mail."

Several owls were seen winging their way across the ceiling of the Great Hall. Some of them veered off towards the High Table while most dropped their messages to the students. Minerva was one of those at the table who received a packet, and she thanked the owl with a bit of sausage from her plate before looking at the return address.

"Oh, good, it's from Professor Greyson at Cambridge Wizarding," she said. "This would be the information I told Miss Granger I would try to get. I'll have to write and tell her I received it."

"I trust you also plan to share the information with Malfoy," Severus said dryly. "After all, he also intends to study at Cambridge Wizarding."

"If he expresses an interest in classes on the Muggle side of Cambridge University, then of course I will share the information," Minerva said matter-of-factly. "As of yet, I've heard nothing from him as to his proposed course of study."

"A dark horse indeed," Sybill murmured from her place at the end of the table. "Mr Malfoy will do well in his N.E.W.T.s, so I have seen. Certainly better than Miss Granger will."

"A true prophecy, Sybill?" Rolanda knocked her elbow into Pomona's ribs. "I 'spect Miss Granger will do all right." She cackled with laughter. "In fact, I have her as beating Malfoy by seventy points and exceeding Severus' N.E.W.T.s by twenty-five."

"At least you don't think she's that much more intelligent than I," Severus said with a smirk. "Of course, I didn't parrot the information to be found in my books."

"She didn't *parrot* anything when she saved your life, Severus," Minerva said firmly. "From what she told me, Hermione and Malfoy had to improvise quite a bit. They only knew they'd succeeded when the potion destroyed Nagini's venom and left your blood cells alone."

"A collaborative effort," he said dismissively. "On her own, I'm sure she'd have never succeeded." He turned so only Minerva saw his wink. She smiled slyly.

"In that case, old boy," Horace Slughorn chuffed, "would you care for a side wager?"

"What are the terms?" Severus asked.

"I'll wager you ten galleons that Mr Malfoy has better scores in Potions by the Easter holiday. And...since you'll be teaching the N.E.W.T. classes...you'll have to be fair in your marking."

"I *always* gave my students the marks they deserved," Severus said. "If you doubt me, however, I can let Minerva do the grading as an impartial judge."

"Here," said Filius, "I want a piece of that if Minerva is going to judge."

Cries of "same here" and "me, too" came from both ends of the table. Minerva smiled and nodded, her busy mind already calculating the odds.

* * *

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: A big thank you to JKR for writing such compelling characters. I promise to return them when I am done. Hopefully, some of them will be a little bit richer than when this started. ^_~

Author's Note: Much thanks and gratitude to GrammarPolice for her beta and SlytherinHeirx for his Britpicking (especially as he was in the process of moving house at the time). *grin*

Chapter Twelve

Later, in Minerva's office, the two co-conspirators laughed over cups of coffee and slices of chocolate cake. Minerva smirked as she added some Firewhiskey to her cup and held the bottle over Severus'.

"Please," he said, holding the cup steady. "I couldn't believe Slughorn would pick up the challenge without me even trying."

"Like leading a lamb to slaughter," Minerva agreed with a chortle. "Hermione will certainly give Malfoy a run for his money these next two terms. And with Potter and Weasley not here to distract her, it will be even better."

"Indeed. The last year she spent with those two looking for the Horcruxes was probably the best thing for her," Severus said. "She learned practical experience and, as I understand it, she also studied her seventh year textbooks. I don't believe Draco even did that very often."

"No, I believe not," she said in agreement. "He has the brains, but he's lazy. Last year, he coasted through believing he was entitled as the son of a Death Eater and the godson of Riddle's right hand wizard and the teachers could do nothing to prevent it. This year, I fully intend to make sure he earns anything he's given."

"Indeed. Tell me, did Shackbolt really forgive the N.E.W.T.s for any Seventh year student who fought in the battle?" Severus asked. "I couldn't believe he would do that when I heard."

"He did." Minerva huffed in annoyance. "He believed that fighting Death Eaters and werewolves, as well as giants, was proof enough of their proficiency and the students didn't have to take the N.E.W.T.s unless they wished."

"And, of course, Miss Granger wishes," he sighed. "Though I'm not surprised Potter and Weasley gave them a miss."

"She wants to attend University, Severus," Minerva reminded him. "They won't admit her without proper scores, no matter how much real life experience she has. Harry and Ronald wished to become Aurors and, in fact, were accepted into training almost before the smoke of battle cleared, as it were."

"And Draco?"

"Mr Malfoy did not participate in the battle. As I understand it, he actually tried to hinder Harry in the destruction of the Ravenclaw Horcrux hidden here, and wished to capture him to turn over to Riddle. Of course, it was Mr *Crabbe* who started the Fiendfyre and eventually destroyed the diadem."

"I wish last year could have been different," Severus said with another sigh. "I believe the Dark Lord..."

"He's dead, Severus. You can say his name," Minerva coached.

"V...Voldemort," he stuttered. "I believe V...Voldemort was suspicious of me and wanted the Carrows to watch me as well as teach the students the Dark Arts. It's the only way Crabbe would have learnt that particular curse in this school. Of course, his father may also have taught him," he mused.

"However he learnt it," said Minerva bitterly, "he's dead because of it and his stupidity in trying to use it to harm other students."

"Yes, quite."

* * *

...Monday, 4 January...

Breakfast in the Great Hall was subdued. Most of the students who had returned to the castle the previous day heard the news that Professor Snape was back before they sat down to dinner. This made the Headmistress' announcement of his appointment to teach N.E.W.T.s level Potions for the rest of the year superfluous. By then, the idea had sunk in: Professor Slughorn was out and Professor Snape was in.

The noise level increased as owls entered the Hall with the morning mail. A good number of students still subscribed to the *Daily Prophet* and soon the rustle of newspapers was echoing in the vaulted ceiling.

"Oh, dear," Filius murmured, glancing through his copy of the paper. "This can't be good." He handed his copy to Minerva with an article folded out so she could read.

"Hmmm," she said, scanning the article. "Severus, you need to read this."

"What nonsense are they printing now?" Severus said as she handed him the paper.

Severus Snape: Risen From the Dead?

by *Rita Skeeter*

Special Correspondent

Severus Snape, double agent in the Second Voldemort War, which ended last May when Harry Potter destroyed He-Who-Shall-Not-Be-Named, has apparently risen from the dead and returned to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry to teach.

Mr Snape, the accused murderer of Albus Dumbledore, was believed to have been killed when bitten by the Dark Lord's familiar, Nagini, although his body was never found. Now, this reporter has discovered the members of the Wizengamot granted him a conditional pardon, and allowed him to return to Hogwarts as a teacher.

Did Mr Snape really die as we were told or was he spirited away by escaping Death Eaters as part of their plan to continue the war by corrupting the students of the hallowed halls of Hogwarts? Is the Wizengamot just as corrupt considering they granted this so-called pardon? Stay with us for more developments as this reporter ferrets out the truth of the matter.

"*What the hell...?*"

"Indeed," Minerva said fervently. "She certainly *won't* be allowed on school grounds during term time. I will not allow it. Don't worry," she reached over and patted his hand, "perhaps by the Easter holidays, the story will have died down."

Severus looked out over the Hall, scowling at the students who stared at the Head table and, more specifically, him. Most dropped their eyes to the plates in front of them or back to the papers they were reading. He lowered his voice and said, "How did she even find this out? Shacklebolt assured me..."

"I would assume one of the students who was here over the holidays wrote home last week and told his or her parents," Minerva said. "From there, it probably was *leaked*' to the *Prophet* and they went looking for conspiracies. That woman loves to stir up trouble."

"Perhaps she gets a commission for the papers her stories sell," Filius piped up. "But if that were the case, she'd be better paid by a publisher of fiction."

"I thought the *Prophet* was a publisher of fiction," Rolanda chortled. "After all, they print her stories, don't they?" Those staff members who were close enough to hear the lowered voices laughed and turned to spread the joke among the rest at the table.

At the Gryffindor table, Hermione sat reading Skeeter's allegations and becoming more annoyed as she listened to the whispered conversations around her. She and Neville were the only Gryffindors from their year to return for N.E.W.T.s, and he was looking decidedly green as he realised there would be two more terms of Potions under Professor Snape.

"Do ya think Snape's really a vampire?" Ginny whispered, leaning over the table to talk to Hermione.

Hermione choked on her tea. "A *vampire*? Ginevra Molly Weasley! Where did you get that idea?"

"Ron told us what happened in the Shrieking Shack," Ginny replied. "He said Professor Snape died in front of all of you. Isn't that right?"

"It all happened so fast, I really don't know," Hermione prevaricated. "He may have still been alive when we left. I didn't stop to make sure and neither did Harry or Ron."

"So he could have been taken by escaping Death Eaters?" Neville asked.

"Why would Death Eaters bother with someone they probably thought was dead?" Hermione countered. "It would have only slowed them down to carry him off."

"But Skeeter says..." began one of the younger students.

"Rita Skeeter writes a lot of rubbish," Hermione huffed, her eyes narrowing as her temper flared. "I, for one, choose not to believe a word she writes from my own experiences with her."

"Yeah," Ginny said. "I remember what she did to you and Harry during the Tri-Wizard Tournament. Mum got really upset with you because of Skeeter and her insinuations."

"I intend to ignore Rita Skeeter's insinuations and concentrate on my studies," said Hermione. "We have N.E.W.T.s to get through at the end of the year and I'm already a term behind."

"Only you, Hermione," Neville said with a laugh as they got up from the table to go to their first class.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: I make no money from this. Everything you recognise belongs to JKR.

Author's Note: Much thanks and Halloween candy to GrammarPolice for her beta and SlytherinsHeirx for his Britpicking. Also a big thank you to the admins of this archive for allowing me to post at all.

Author's Note, the second: This will probably be the last chapter posted until sometime in December as NaNoWriMo starts November 1st. I have so many voices

clamouring in my head that I don't know where to start. I suppose it will be whoever is the strongest, as Lucius was last year. At least he helped produce this fic.

Chapter Thirteen

...Monday Afternoon, 4 January...

Severus, using his stick, stumped into his seventh-year N.E.W.T.s-level Potions class expecting trouble. The class consisted of members from all four Houses...and Longbottom. After revising Slughorn's curriculum, he anticipated spending at least a week of classes making corrections to shoddy brewing methods.

"Wands away!" he barked as he sat down at the high desk. "Books out! This class is Potions, not Charms. You will have different partners this term and again next term so you learn to work with others." He opened his roll book and began to assign lab partners.

"Weasley...Lovegood, Granger...Davis, Malfoy...Longbottom, Boot...Zabini..." and so on until the class paired off to his satisfaction. No student shared a desk with another student from his or her House.

"Now," Severus said, "once everyone is situated and in their seats, we will begin our review. Yes, Miss Weasley?"

"Sir, Professor Slughorn..." Ginny began.

"I am not Professor Slughorn," rebuked Severus. "Five points from Gryffindor for even comparing the two of us. Any more comments about Professor Slughorn?" He looked around at the stunned faces of the returning students. Only Hermione and Draco showed no consternation at his comments.

"Good. Now, open your textbooks to page 394..."

* * *

"Dunderheads, the lot of them," Severus muttered as he made his way to his quarters. "Only a few gems in the lot. Horace has a lot to answer for letting that lot into a N.E.W.T.s-level class."

"Professor Snape, sir?" He turned to observe Tracy Davis as she stood in the hallway, clutching her book bag tightly.

"Yes, Miss Davis?"

"I just wanted to say, sir...", she said haltingly.

"Get to the point, Miss Davis," Severus hissed. "I have things to do."

"Welcome back, sir. I'm glad you survived."

Severus bowed politely. "Thank you, Miss Davis. I am rather glad I survived as well."

He watched as the girl turned and walked off towards the Slytherin House door. "Miss Davis?"

"Yes, sir?" She turned back.

"Five points to Slytherin for your sheer audacity."

Tracy smiled. "Thank you, sir," she said and walked off with a small skip to her step.

"So easy to make them happy, isn't it?"

Severus' wand almost teleported into his hand, and he held its tip to the throat of... "Minerva!" he snarled and his wand disappeared once more. "What are you doing in the dungeons, Headmistress?"

"Checking on my new Potions professor after his first day," Minerva replied with a small chuckle. "Besides, you said you'd teach me the protection spells you had on your quarters."

"Not tonight, please," he groaned. "I found I have to shake Horace's teachings out of the heads of all the students who were intelligent enough to maintain them. It's enough to make me want to hex him into the next year. Whoever decided the man was a competent teacher after he'd been out of the classroom for twenty years?"

"What about the students who didn't maintain Horace's teachings in their heads?" Minerva asked, ignoring his question. "What are you going to do about them?"

"I have found that my teaching style is quite good at installing information I wish them to maintain," Severus purred. "Once I've removed Horace's fallacies, then I can begin to rebuild what I had in there before everything... happened."

"Don't beat yourself up over Albus bugging Dumbledore," Minerva said, touching her hand to his shoulder in a gesture of comfort. "It was his choice to die. I just don't happen to agree with his choice of instrument now I know what he had planned. And, for the record, he's the one who decided Horace was a competent teacher."

"Of course he did," Severus said and laughed ruefully. "We're talking about the man who hired Gilderoy Lockhart to teach Defence Against the Dark Arts."

Minerva giggled as she remembered the pertinent year. "That man was an unmitigated disaster from the day he set foot in this school, although I am rather sorry Mr Weasley's wand backfired on him. I would have loved to transfigure him into a teapot and pour hot water into him every day."

"Thus matching the hot air he spewed in the classroom." Severus chuckled. "Thank you, Minerva, I needed that after today."

"Then I shall see you in the Great Hall for supper?" she asked.

Severus sighed. "Yes, Minerva. I'll be there."

Minerva smiled as he walked off muttering, "Merlin save me from managing witches."

* * *

...Two months later...

"Longbottom, watch what you're doing!"

Draco's shout brought the attention of the entire classroom to the corner where he and Neville were attempting to brew the Draught of Living Death. Everyone held his or her breath as Neville's cauldron bubbled up to the brim and breathed out as the bubbling subsided without melting or exploding the cauldron.

"Longbottom," Severus demanded, "what *are* you doing?" He swept up to the worktable and eyed the cauldron cautiously while Neville cringed away from the two Slytherins. The potion, an ominous green colour and definitely pulpy, glooped and bubbled in its metal prison.

"A zero for class, Longbottom," he said as he vanished the potion. "If I were to feed that to anyone, there would be no resuscitation to be had."

He swept back to the head of the classroom, robes billowing in the prescribed manner. "Finish up! Homework due this coming Monday is three feet of parchment on the reasons for cutting potion ingredients in a prescribed manner. *Three* feet, Miss Granger, and not an inch more."

He sat down at the desk and pulled his grading towards him. Dipping his quill into the inkwell, he continued to grade papers as the students brought their samples up and left them on the desk. Both Hermione and Draco's samples looked perfect, just as he expected. Most looked good, but only proper testing would discover if the brewing was done correctly. Severus was vaguely pleased that this class...with the exception of Longbottom...was shaping up nicely. Not quite as many dunderheads as he'd expected.

"Sir?"

"Yes, Mr Malfoy? What is it?"

"I'm glad to see you're walking easier, sir," Draco said deferentially. "Are the exercises still helping?"

Severus sighed and set his quill down. As the class was empty of all but the two of them, he relaxed a bit. "Yes, Draco, thank you. The exercises are working quite well as you can see. I am performing them morning and night with the help of a house-elf."

Draco smirked. "I could..."

"No, Draco, you could not," Severus interrupted. "I believe you have a wager with Miss Granger, do you not?"

Draco looked shocked. "How...?"

"...did I find out?" Severus finished. "I was in the library at the Manor when you made the wager, so I heard everything. I also observed your parents' wagers about your wager. As I do *not* want to hear you sing in the Great Hall, I suggest you apply yourself to your studies and win. Now, I believe I assigned an essay to your class for next Monday?"

"Yes, sir. I'll get right on it."

"Good boy."

* * *

...*Two months later*...

"Hermione, will you calm down?" Ginny said as Hermione scurried by, muttering about revision schedules and practicals.

"I can't," Hermione muttered, running a hand through her unruly curls. "There's only six weeks left until the N.E.W.T.s and..."

"And you're driving the rest of us stark raving mad," Ginny replied, pulling her down onto a sofa in the Gryffindor common room. "Relax. You already know the material backwards and forwards."

"I have to get good scores. My university career is depending on it."

"You don't have to have a nervous breakdown, though," Ginny remonstrated. "You'll get the highest scores in the class. You always do."

"There's another reason I have to do well," confessed Hermione.

"Oh, do tell." Ginny's eyes sparkled with un-suppressed excitement.

Hermione looked around to make sure they weren't going to be overheard and, to be on the safe side, cast a Muffliato spell. "Malfoy and I have a bet going..."

"A bet!" Ginny shrieked. She lowered her voice as Hermione made shushing moves with her hands. "What kind of bet?"

"We made a bet about which one of us would have the best N.E.W.T.s results this year. If he wins, I have to kiss him at the Leaving Feast in front of everyone in the Great Hall... with tongue."

"Ewww," Ginny groaned, miming a gag.

Hermione nodded and grinned. "If I win, he sings a song of my choice in front of the entire school at the Leaving Feast."

Ginny giggled. "Hermione, his voice is awful. Oh gods, that's brilliant. I hope you win."

Hermione smirked. "That's what I'm trying to do but he's not making it easy. Before this year, it was easy to get the best scores because he wasn't trying. But this year..."

"This year, he's really working at it," Ginny agreed. "Do you think it's because of the bet?"

"That... and he wants to attend university as well," Hermione said. "I've noticed, in the classes we share, that the teachers aren't letting him sit back and take it easy. They're working him almost as hard as I work myself."

"I wouldn't put it past the teachers to have a wager on about the N.E.W.T. scores," Ginny mused. "They seem to like to put up for other things. I've even seen them wager on the outcome of the Quidditch games so this would be right up their alley."

"Well, now you know why I'm stressing," Hermione murmured. "You can't tell *anyone* about the bet, though."

Ginny started to protest, but Hermione shut her down. "If it gets out that I made a bet with Malfoy, the entire school will try to influence the outcome. Our bet was the best scores with *no cheating and no hindrance*. Do you understand?"

"Yeah," Ginny said with a thoughtful look. "Somebody could make a lot of money if they bet on one of you and then did something so the other would lose." She giggled. "Besides, I want to see everyone's faces when Draco stands up and sings to you in front of the entire school."

Both girls started to laugh, rolling on the sofa with mirth. At the sudden movement, every one in the common room looked over at the two girls. Even if Hermione and Ginny couldn't be heard, they could certainly be seen. Most of the students shrugged nonchalantly, and all of them returned to their activities, figuring Hermione had finally snapped after studying too hard and that Ginny wasn't too far behind her.

* * *

...*Staff room, that same evening*...

"...and ten galleons to you." Slughorn's voice grated as he passed out gold coins to the winners of his ill-advised wager at the New Year. "If that's everything, Headmistress, I'll bid you all a good night."

"Good night, Horace," Minerva said with a smile. "I trust your fifth years are doing well?"

"Ah, yes, of course," Slughorn prevaricated. "But if I am to be effective in their O.W.L. reviews tomorrow, I must retire early this evening." He walked out of the room to a chorus of "thank you"s from the various teachers and barely restrained himself from slamming the heavy door.

"Well, I'll wish you all a good night as well," Filius said, pocketing his earnings. "I certainly hope I win as much if not more at the end of the term."

"What spread did you take on Granger over Malfoy?" Severus asked, stacking his ten galleons in a neat pile in front of him.

"Not too much," answered Filius. "Since we're only comparing the classes they have together, I went for Miss Granger with twelve points."

"You're not giving Miss Granger enough credit," Septima pointed out. "I said she'd beat Malfoy by at least six points per N.E.W.T."

Severus smirked. "Of course you did. You probably used Arithmancy to come up with your odds."

"Nothing wrong with using my field of Mastery to predict the outcome," Septima said petulantly. "Good night, everyone."

"Wait, I'll come too," Pomona called, walking out the door with Filius and Septima.

Poppy Pomfrey smiled serenely from her seat by the fire. "Just how much did *you* actually wager on Hermione, Severus?"

As she and Minerva were the only ones left in the room with him, he smirked. "Are you asking about here at Hogwarts or my wager with Lucius Malfoy?"

"Oh, heavens!" she exclaimed. "You *are* the sly one. So, how much?"

"Five galleons on Granger's N.E.W.T.s results being at least fifty points higher than Draco's and she exceeded ~~all~~ my scores in the same classes I had. That's just for my wagers here at Hogwarts."

"What did you wager with Lucius Malfoy?" Minerva asked. "You only said it would make up the shortfall on your salary, not how much."

"Mmm, yes," Severus hummed. "That's just it. If Granger does better than Draco, Lucius will pay the difference in my salary each year plus ten percent. I believe I shall be quite all right monetarily."

"You old pirate," Poppy said with a delighted laugh. "With that, I'm set for bed. Good night."

"Good night, Poppy," Minerva called as the mediwitch walked out the door. As it closed, she and Severus exchanged identical smirks.

* * *

Kudos to anyone who caught the reference to a popular fanfic challenge in this chapter.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: None of this belongs to me, not even the words to the song Draco sings. See endnotes for citations.

Author Notes: I do not claim to be a Latin scholar, so if anyone knows of the correct incantation to start music playing, please let me know. My apologies for everyone who has been waiting for this story to update, but RL comes first. Thanks to GrammarPolice and SlytherinsHeirx for their help in wrangling commas and Britpicking. Much obliged. And without further ado...

Chapter Fourteen

...Six weeks later...

"Mr Malfoy, would you come to my office, please?" Severus interrupted the party in the Slytherin common room where the students were celebrating the end of their N.E.W.T.s and O.W.L.s.

Draco looked up from his butterbeer with concern. "Yes, sir, right away."

Once seated at his desk, Severus rested his elbows on the wooden surface, interlaced his hands, and tapped his lips with his index finger as he watched Draco squirm in his seat.

"Sir?"

"Compliments of Miss Granger," Severus answered, sliding a sheet of parchment across the desk to his godson. "I believe it's charmed to play the tune."

"Oh, Merlin," groaned Draco, "she won the bet."

"Indeed. I look forward to your performance at the Leaving Feast." Severus smirked. He enjoyed the look of shock on Draco's face as he continued, "You came in second to Miss Granger for the highest marks in your year. Of course, your parents were invited to join us since the two of you have some of the highest N.E.W.T.s in the last twenty years."

"They may decide not to attend," Draco said uneasily. "Not if it means mingling with Muggles. You know how they are, sir, especially my father."

"Quite."

* * *

"Miss Granger."

Hermione turned to see the Headmistress in the entrance to the Gryffindor common room. "Yes, Professor?"

"There are people waiting for you in the Entrance Hall, Miss Granger." Minerva smiled at her. "I suggest you go down and meet them."

"Thank you, Professor McGonagall," Hermione said as she brushed past the Headmistress on her way downstairs.

In the Entrance Hall, Mr and Mrs Granger looked around in amazement. The giant hourglasses, filled with precious gems, seem to fascinate them the most, but the moving suits of armour were a close second.

"Mum! Dad!" Hermione cried as she reached the bottom of the stairs. "You're here!"

"Hermione!" Her mother squeezed her hard in an enthusiastic hug. She laughed when her father grabbed her and swung her around and around.

"Congratulations, my girl," he said, setting her on her feet. "Your Headmistress invited us to your Leaving Feast. Apparently you have some kind of award coming to you?"

"Indeed," Lucius Malfoy said with a cold sneer from behind them. "I understand congratulations are in order."

Narcissa elbowed him in the ribs. "Don't be a sore loser, Lucius. Hermione won fair and square."

She held out her hand to Mrs Granger and gave her a brilliant smile. "Hello, I'm Narcissa Malfoy. Your daughter is one of the most civilized Muggles I have ever met."

"Why, thank you, I think?" Mrs Granger said hesitantly, taking her hand. "I'm Elizabeth Granger."

"Mother? Father?" Draco said as he came up the stairs from the Slytherin common room. "What are you doing here? I didn't think you would come."

"Nonsense, Draco," Narcissa replied, still smiling. "I wouldn't miss this evening for anything." She looked at Lucius. "Especially when you consider how I'll be spending the summer."

"Apparently the Headmistress and Severus have the same sense of humour," Lucius said dryly. "We are apparently to be guests at the High Table for dinner along with Miss Granger's parents."

Hermione and Draco looked at each other. "Oh," they said, confusion evident on both their faces.

"Lucius. Narcissa." Severus looked smug as he walked down the stairs with Minerva. "We are to meet in the anteroom with the rest of the staff." Lucius and Narcissa followed him while Minerva turned to Hermione's parents.

"It's so nice you were able to make it," she said. "I hope the trip wasn't too trying. If you'll follow me, I'll introduce you to the rest of the staff before dinner. Mr Malfoy... Miss Granger... you need to find your seats for dinner." She herded the Grangers off, chatting amiably.

"Yes, Professor," Hermione said meekly. "Coming, Malfoy?"

"Yeah," he said, looking shell-shocked. "I'll be right behind you. What's going on, anyway? My mother was actually *nice* to your mother."

Hermione shrugged. "I don't know, but I'm guessing we'll find out soon enough."

* * *

"You know," Neville said, "I recognize the Malfoys, but who are the people in the Muggle clothes sitting next to Professor McGonagall?"

"My mum and dad," Hermione said, swallowing the last of her pudding. "The Headmistress invited them to the feast."

"Really?" Ginny gasped. "I don't think that's ever happened before."

At the High Table, Minerva stood and tapped a spoon against her goblet. "May I have your attention, please?" As the room quieted, she said, "It is my pleasure to announce that Miss Hermione Granger has received some of the highest N.E.W.T. scores I have ever seen in all my years of teaching." She paused as the Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, and Ravenclaw tables erupted with cheers.

"However," she continued, "Mr Draco Malfoy has come a very close second." Again, she paused to allow the Slytherins to congratulate their own house member.

"It has come to my attention that a certain wager was placed between Mr Malfoy and Miss Granger as to the scores of their N.E.W.T.s, and the time has come to pay up. Mr. Malfoy, if you would be so kind."

Draco took a deep breath and rose from his table as the buzz of questions sounded through the hall. He carried a stool to the centre of the hall, stopping in front of the High Table and turning to face the student tables. Holding his hand out to Hermione, he helped her to rise and take a seat facing him. As he pulled the sheet music Severus had given him earlier out of his pocket, he muttered, "*Cantatus*," and the song's music began to play.

"You are so beautiful to me-e-e..."

The student side of the hall erupted into laughter as his voice cracked on the final note of the first line. Face red with embarrassment, Draco continued on:

"You are so beautiful to me;

You are so beautiful to me,

Can't you see?

You're everything I hoped for;

You're everything I need.

You are so beautiful to me.

Such joy and happiness you bring;

Such joy and happiness you bring.

Like a dream,

A guiding light that shines in the night,

Heaven's gift to me.

You are so beautiful to me-e-e."

As he ended the song, his voice once again cracking on the final note, Hermione stood up and kissed him on the cheek. "Thank you for being such a good sport," she said, loud enough for the entire hall to hear her voice. "I appreciate it."

Even the Slytherins stood up and cheered as Draco blushed and simply said, "You're welcome." The nod he received from Severus as he looked at the High Table was all the approbation he needed, although his parents' smiles were good to see. Even Hermione's parents were applauding his performance along with the rest of the Hall.

* * *

...Later, in the staff room...

"Here's to Hermione Granger and Draco Malfoy, two of the best students Hogwarts has seen in a long time," Minerva said, holding her glass of firewhiskey high.

"Here, here," the rest of the staff echoed, raising their glasses in agreement.

"All right, Minerva," Filius said. "Out with it. We know Miss Granger had the higher scores since we had to witness that execrable performance in the Great Hall."

"At least Mr Malfoy was a good sport about it," Poppy said. "If I had his singing voice, I'd have quit the first time it cracked."

"Hmm, yes," Severus said. "Miss Granger was quite thoughtful when she congratulated him for being a good sport. I am sure if he won, he would not have done the same."

"So, Minerva," Pomona said. "Give us the scores. We want to know who won the pool."

"Miss Granger's combined N.E.W.T. scores for the classes we considered totalled fifty-one points more than Mr Malfoy's," Minerva said. "In all ten of the N.E.W.T.s she took, she exceeded Severus' score by twenty points."

The room erupted into cheers which quickly turned to gasps as Minerva said, "That means Severus wins the pool for the N.E.W.T. comparisons with the closest guess to the scores."

"How is that possible?" Rolanda squeaked in surprise. "He bet on Malfoy."

"That was for Lucius Malfoy's benefit," Severus said smugly. "I had Minerva put five galleons on Miss Granger for *at least* fifty points higher than Mr Malfoy and surpassing all of my own N.E.W.T. scores. At the very least, I will now have my full salary for the next five years and then some."

"How so?" Filius asked, pouring more firewhiskey into his glass and offering up the decanter to the other teachers.

"The wager was that Lucius would make up the difference the Wizengamot has docked from my salary plus ten percent if Miss Granger won the wager with Mr Malfoy," Severus said. "Of course, he also has to pay for new dress robes for Narcissa, as well as a trip to Italy for an entire new wardrobe." He smirked, holding his empty glass out for a refill.

"It couldn't happen to a nicer wizard," Rolanda cackled. "Okay, Severus, I'll concede that the better man won. Congratulations."

More congratulations were heard from various parts of the room and, feeling enough had been said on the subject, the end of year celebration continued.

* * *

Author's note: "You Are So Beautiful" copyright Billy Preston and Bruce Carlton Fisher.

Cantatus comes from William Whitaker's Words English to Latin translator .

I don't know if this is correct as I am not a Latin scholar, so I am off to ask someone I know who is. Um, hey, Master Andrioxos...?

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: The characters depicted in this fiction belong to JK Rowling, her heirs and assignees, except for those who belong to me.

Author's Notes: I want to thank GrammarPolice for her beta and SlytherinsHeirx for his brilliant Britpicking. Also, SlytherinsHeirx helped me with the various degrees awarded by British universities. I also *really* have to thank AmyLouise from Down Under for help with my Latin translations.

Chapter Fifteen

...Three years later...

Severus Snape

Professor of Potions

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Dear Professor,

I am writing to inquire if the apprenticeship you offered during my seventh year is still available. I will be graduating from Cambridge Wizarding in a few days with a Double-Starred First in Potions and Transfiguration and Second Class Honours in Charms and Arithmancy, and have been offered a position in Research and Development at the Ministry of Magic. Kingsley, Harry, and Ron have been pressuring me to take the position, but I really want to get one of my masteries first before I make any kind of decision.

Please let me know if you still want me as your apprentice. If not, I can then write to Professor McGonagall about her offer with no guilt.

Sincerely,

Hermione Granger, BSc (Hons)

Severus glared at the letter sitting in front of him at the High Table. The Leaving Feast was that evening, and the castle would be emptying out over the next two weeks as the staff finished up their grading so they could, with the sole exception of Argus Filch and himself, return to their summer homes until August for a month of holiday.

"Bad news, Severus?" Minerva murmured from her seat next to him.

"Yes," he growled. "You've been poaching again."

"I have?" she asked with visible delight. "Who have I poached this time?"

"Hermione Granger," he said, sliding the letter at her with his forefinger.

"Oh... well," Minerva said, reading the letter. "We have been corresponding while she attended University and I may have mentioned that if your apprenticeship offer fell through, she could be my apprentice."

"I have never rescinded my invitation to Miss Granger." Severus sneered disparagingly. "In fact, I've been hoping she would reconsider her decision for the last three years."

"Good," Minerva said encouragingly. "Tell her 'yes' and I'll have the house-elves prepare rooms for her in Gryffindor Tower."

* * *

Hermione Granger

Cambridge Wizarding University

Cambridge, England

Miss Granger,

The offer of an apprenticeship still stands. If you will report to Hogwarts on the 15th of August of this year, I will have a contract prepared for your services.

Severus Snape, Magister Succi

"What's up, Granger?" Draco asked curiously, as Hermione smiled over the letter she had received that morning.

"Professor Snape has agreed to take me as his apprentice," Hermione said with glee, almost bouncing in her seat. "I'm to report to Hogwarts in the middle of August."

Draco took a bite of his roasted chicken sandwich and eyed his unlikely Muggle-born friend complacently. It had become their habit to meet at least twice, and sometimes three times a week for lunch to discuss classes and instructors. He had been wary at first of some of the Muggle eating establishments Hermione frequented, but found the food at some was far superior to anything he'd eaten in Diagon Alley or any Wizarding area in France or Italy.

"That doesn't leave you much time," Draco teased her, swallowing quickly so he could speak.

"Time for what?" Hermione asked.

"To tell Scarhead and Weasel that you're not going to join up with them," he said with derision, "and that you decided to apprentice with Severus. Knowing how they feel about him, they'll go spare." He grinned at the thought.

"They're not that bad," Hermione protested with a slight laugh. "Since the war ended, and they found out Professor Snape was on our side, they've gotten better..."

"I've seen the Weasel's letters, remember?" Draco sneered. "He thinks there's some kind of spell like *Imperius* on you that's got you hanging around with me."

"You mean there isn't?" Hermione smirked. "Merlin, I must be hanging around with you on my own, then."

"Ha, ha, very funny," Draco said sarcastically. "If he hexes me at the Graduation ceremony tomorrow, I won't be responsible for my actions."

Hermione's face fell. "I know that Professor McGonagall said she and Professor Flitwick would be here, but I wish Professor Snape could come as well."

"Yeah, well, they'll tell him all about it when they get back to Hogwarts," Draco consoled her. "Come on and eat. We still have to get our robes for tomorrow's ceremony."

* * *

"Such an uplifting ceremony," Professor Flitwick enthused. "Such colours. Such music. It's too bad we don't do something like this at Hogwarts."

"And spoil a thousand years of traditions," Minerva scolded. "Really, Filius!" She smiled at Draco and Hermione as she and her small companion walked over to the Malfoys.

"I understand you still have four more years of University, Draco," she said after greeting all of them.

"Yes, Professor," he answered, "but I'll have my Healer's license at the end. I want to do more with Muggle physiotherapy after seeing the way it helped Professor Snape."

"Yes, he hardly limps at all," Filius agreed. "Once in a while you can see where it pains him, but not often."

Lucius and Narcissa listened in silence, smiling at their son and his improbable friend as they stood together. Narcissa reached over and tenderly brushed an errant curl out of Hermione's face with her fingers.

"I did hope to see your parents here today," she said. "Elizabeth and I have had the loveliest correspondence and lunches during the last three years."

"I wish they could have been here, too," Hermione said sadly, "but my grandmother isn't well and they felt they had to be there instead, in spite of her saying she wanted them here. I promised to write to them so they could read the letter to her."

"And I am to understand that congratulations are in order?" Lucius asked dryly.

"Congratulations, sir?" Hermione was confused. "For what? You've already offered Draco and me your congratulations for graduating with honours."

"But not for securing the apprenticeship with Severus," he replied. "Of course, your scholarship did cost me quite a few Galleons."

"I don't understand, Father," Draco said in confusion. "How could Hermione's scholarship cost you? I thought her parents... Did you have a scholarship?" He looked at Hermione, who shrugged, just as confused as he was.

"He made wagers with both me and Severus." Narcissa almost giggled. "When Hermione's N.E.W.T. scores exceeded Severus', he had to take me to Italy for a new wardrobe, and he is subsidising Severus' salary while your godfather is forced to stay at Hogwarts, plus another ten percent on top of that."

"I could have told you that he had a sure thing, sir." Draco smirked at his father and promptly changed the subject. "Professor Flitwick, may I come to Hogwarts in August before the new term starts here and study with you for a few days?"

"Of course, my boy." Filius was overjoyed to be asked. "Of course."

* * *

...One week before the start of fall term..

"Hermione, what is all this?" the Headmistress asked with dismay, walking into the Potions classroom.

"Potions for the Infirmary, Professor," Hermione answered from behind a worktable laden with three cauldrons, all brewing at the same time. "Madame Pomfrey needs all of this before the students get here because once the flying lessons and Quidditch practice starts, she'll have lots of patients." She gestured at another four packing cases full of potions already brewed in addition to the cauldrons.

"Surely some of this can wait?" Minerva was aghast. "Severus isn't having you do the entire year's brewing all at once, is he?"

"Of course not, Minerva," Severus said with a smirk, leaning up against the door jamb of his office, his arms folded across his chest. "This is the usual order for the beginning of term. Once term starts, we'll use the smaller lab to brew what Poppy needs to replace whatever she uses. I've done this same thing at the end of August ever since I started teaching here.

"Except the last three years," he added ruefully. "Since my probation does not include potions for the Infirmary, Poppy has had to outsource her supply, which has increased her budget. With Miss Granger doing the brewing this year, the Infirmary budget should be more in line with what it used to be."

"Oh, my!" Minerva said contritely. "I had no idea. Of course, I did wonder why the Infirmary budget had risen so drastically, but I put it down to a different supplier."

"In effect, that's exactly what happened." Severus sneered. "The Ministry, in all their wisdom, apparently didn't realise just what some of the duties of a Potions master were when he was employed by a school."

Minerva's eyes narrowed dangerously. "I *will* be having a word with them," she snarled. "The next time the Governors complain about our budget..."

"Do you really think they'll listen, Minerva?" Severus asked sarcastically. "I certainly don't think so. After all, I'm the Death Eater who's being punished. Remember?" He pushed away from the door and bowed Minerva into his office.

"Miss Granger, when you get that last lot bottled and packed, will you join the Headmistress and me in my office?"

"Yes, Professor. I'm just about done here."

"Excellent."

* * *

"What did you want to see me about, Professor?" Hermione asked a short time later. She had brushed her frizzled hair out of her face and pulled a hair band around it to form a ponytail. The humidity in the classroom had caused it to curl up tighter than ever, and Severus smirked at the corona of curls surrounding her face.

"I have a new contract for you to sign, Miss Granger," he said smoothly. "Minerva, if you would witness?"

"That's why I'm here, Severus."

"A new contract, sir?" Hermione asked, perplexed. "Was something wrong with the old one?"

"Not at all, Miss Granger." He waved away her questions with his long fingers. "But the old one was for an apprentice. This one confirms your journeyman status."

"Journeyman?" Hermione looked at him, confusion on her face. "But... I've only been your apprentice for a week."

"And in that week's time, I have studied your work and ascertained that your skills qualify you as a Potions journeyman. Of course, if you wish to continue as a lowly apprentice..."

"Where do I sign?" Hermione was quickly catching on. She read the contract, saw no changes that she felt were needed, and signed at the bottom of the parchment. Severus signed as her Master and, once Minerva had set her signature as witness to theirs, the parchment rolled itself up and vanished.

"That should be registered at the Ministry of Magic by this afternoon, and we should have our notarized copies by morning," Severus said. "Congratulations, Miss Granger. You are now a certified Potions journeyman."

"Thank you, sir." Hermione beamed, and her eyes sparkled with unshed tears. "If I might be excused, I really need to deliver all these potions to the Infirmary now."

"Of course." Severus waved her away. "Take the rest of the weekend off when you've finished. Go to Hogsmeade or the library or whatever you do in your free time."

"Thank you, sir. Good-bye!" Hermione all but shouted as she left the office. "Good-bye, Headmistress!"

"Good-bye, dear," Minerva shouted back, "and congratulations."

"If she continues at this rate, Minerva," Severus said as he smirked at his companion, "you'll have a new apprentice at the New Year."

"Are you going to be willing to let her go that soon?" Minerva asked in concern. "You may still need her to brew Poppy's supplies."

"I'll let you know in December," he said thoughtfully.

* * *

A/N: *magister succi* = master of potions

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: The characters depicted in this fiction belong to JK Rowling, her heirs and assignees, except for those who belong to me.

Author's Notes: I want to thank GrammarPolice for her beta and SlytherinsHeirx for his brilliant Britpicking. Thank you to the readers of this endeavour for all the lovely reviews.

Chapter Sixteen

...September 1st...

At Minerva's signal, Filius, as Deputy Headmaster, tapped his spoon against his goblet. After supervising the Sorting as Minerva's deputy, he had taken his seat at the High Table and now smiled at his newest Ravenclaws as the Great Hall slowly quieted.

"Thank you," Minerva said. "Before we start the feast, I have a few announcements to make: the list of banned items includes *all* Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes. Mr Filch has the complete list posted outside his office. The Dark Forest is off limits to *all* students." She glared at the Gryffindor table, although Hermione could not tell who the recipient of her glare was.

"Professor Diomedes Babakitis, from the Athenian Academy of Magic, is the Transfiguration teacher this year," she continued as the olive-skinned instructor stood for his introduction. "So please give him your complete cooperation. Some of you in the upper levels will have recognized Miss Hermione Granger." Minerva turned to smile at Hermione, who also stood up to be introduced. "Miss Granger has returned to join the staff this term as Potions Journeyman to Professor Snape." She paused as the Hall erupted into cheers. "I'm sure Miss Granger will be as easy on her lower level students as Professor Snape is on his upper level students." She smiled as the students looked in stunned silence at Hermione's smirk...identical to the smirk of the dark man sitting next to her.

* * *

After the feast, Hermione and Severus joined Minerva in her office. Albus and the other portraits seemingly drowsed within their frames, and the fire crackled as if welcoming them.

"Another Transfiguration teacher, Minerva?" Severus asked, sipping his tea and firewhisky. "This makes the third in the last three years. Perhaps Transfiguration is as cursed as the Defence Against the Dark Arts position once was."

"Three in three years!" Hermione was aghast. "What happened to the others?"

"Apparently, they seemed to feel as if the position should be a sinecure." Minerva shrugged in dismissal. "When they found out it was *not* a holiday outing, they served out their contract and left." She sighed. "I have high hopes for Diomedes, however."

Severus snorted. "Diomedes Babakitis. Could the man be any more Greek?"

Minerva good-naturedly bapped his arm with the back of her hand. "He can't help his name, Severus, and he does come highly recommended." She poured herself some more tea and added firewhisky to her cup. "He taught at the Athenian Academy of Magic for several years. Headmaster Niklos was reluctant to let him go."

"Why was he let go, Professor?" Hermione asked.

"Hermione, I think you can call me Minerva," she said gently. "After all, you are a member of the staff now. According to Archimedes Niklos, Diomedes asked for a sabbatical to come to England to study at the British Wizarding Library and visit with relatives. When he finished his studies ahead of schedule, he discovered he did not wish to remain idle and asked permission from his Headmaster to apply at Hogwarts."

"Didn't want to return to Greece, you mean," Severus said with his customary sarcasm.

"Well, that too," Minerva admitted. "His contract *is* only for this school year. I'm hoping for a more permanent solution by this time next year." She looked at Hermione meaningfully.

"Me?" Hermione choked on her tea, thankfully free of any alcoholic beverages. "You're expecting *me* to teach Transfiguration next year?"

"Minerva," Severus chided with a definite gleam in his eye, "Hermione's my journeyman. Don't poach."

"I'm not poaching Hermione." Minerva grinned toothily. "I'm hoping she'll be willing to work with me this term as my Transfiguration apprentice during what little spare time you might give her."

"*She* is sitting right here," Hermione said with a huff. "And does not appreciate being talked about when she is present."

"I'm sorry, dear," Minerva quickly apologized. "This is an old argument between me and Severus..."

Hermione smirked. "I know. It all started back in my seventh year. Professor Snape..."

"Severus. If you can call the Headmistress by her given name, why shouldn't you do the same with me?"

"Thank you, sir... er... Severus," she stammered. "As I started to say, S... Severus and Professor Flitwick asked Draco to take apprenticeships with them, and the two of you, Professor Flitwick, *and* Professor Vector asked me." She gave a quick laugh, remembering. "Draco called you the 'Duelling Professors'. That's what led up to our wager, by the way."

"Hmph," Minerva snorted. "I had wondered about that. The boy has no voice to be singing with, but ~~it~~was joyous to see the look on Lucius Malfoy's face." She giggled into her tea like a first-year student.

"Be that as it may," Severus said with a sigh, looking into his almost empty teacup, "you're still poaching on my journeyman until such time as I see fit to release her to her Master status."

"I'd not be asking much of her, Severus..." Minerva began.

"May I say something?" Hermione interrupted. Both professors turned to look at her. "Sir, if I managed to complete four courses in three years at University, couldn't I at least *try*? No, please let me finish," she said, stopping the others from interrupting as he took a breath to answer. "If I find I can't do it and still meet your rigid standards, then I will withdraw as Profess... I mean... Minerva's apprentice until such time as I do receive my Potions Mastery. But, if I can manage both at once, then I'll be that much closer to becoming the Transfiguration teacher next year. Doesn't that sound all right to you?"

Minerva and Hermione looked at him while he contemplated Hermione's words.

"I'll probably regret this," he said with a snort. "But, if anyone could do something like that and make it work, ~~would~~ probably be you. I will agree to it on the condition that you don't shirk your potions work for me. After all, you'll be teaching first- through fourth-year Potions. Those seem to be the classes most notorious for creating noxious messes and melting cauldrons. If you cannot do a proper job in my estimation, then I will have to insist that you withdraw as Minerva's apprentice. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir," Hermione agreed.

"Quite clear," Minerva murmured. "I think I will allow you the month of September to become accustomed to teaching your classes and grading, Hermione. Then, on October first, you can give me your decision. What are you laughing about, Severus? You won."

He snorted. "Filius and Septima will be beside themselves," he said. "They didn't think of this idea first, and there is no way I will split Hermione's time in four different ways."

"Not without a Time-Turner." Hermione laughed, enjoying the carefree sound of his almost unheard of laughter. "And I'm pretty sure we destroyed all of them during the battle at the Ministry my fifth year."

"No," Minerva said, smiling at her old friend's laughter. "I still have the one I borrowed from the Ministry. With everything that happened in your third year, I never returned it nor was I asked to."

"Time-Turner?" Severus said, his laughter stopping abruptly. "What were you doing with a Time-Turner, Minerva?"

"I used it to take more classes than usual that year, sir," Hermione confessed. "I couldn't decide what electives I wanted to take, and using the Time-Turner was how we figured out a way I could take the classes I wanted."

"Only in your third year, Miss Granger, or were there other times as well?" Severus asked, narrowing his eyes suspiciously.

"Yes, sir. I mean... no, sir," Hermione answered. "Just my third year. I really didn't think it was worth the exhaustion after that. But at least I found out what subjects I enjoyed most." She smiled disarmingly.

"Very well." Severus smirked. "I will amend my conditions to include not using a Time-Turner in any way, shape, or form, to add extra time to your day. You'll be tired enough just trying to get through the regulatory twenty-four hours."

* * *

Hermione all but slammed the door of the office she shared with Severus. Curious, he looked up from the papers he was grading and hid his grin at the look on her face.

"Dunderheads," she snapped angrily. "How you kept from strangling Neville all the times he melted a cauldron, I'll never know."

"Melt many cauldrons today?" he asked with a smirk.

"Oooh!" she groaned, tugging at her hair. "Gryffindor-Slytherin second-years: somebody lobbed a Fizzing Whizbang into Emily Brown's cauldron, splashing her not quite completed potion base all over her. I had to send her to the Infirmary with second-degree burns, and the entire class was assigned an extra essay as punishment since the perpetrator wouldn't come forward. Hufflepuff-Ravenclaw first-years: I had three...count 'em, *three*...cauldrons melted before the class was half through." She slumped in the chair at her small desk, which sat at right angles to his larger one, forming a T.

"Surely something went right today?" Severus asked, pouring her a cup of tea from the pot sitting on his desk and pushing the cream and sugar closer to the edge and within her reach.

"There's this one first year who reminds me a lot of myself." Hermione smiled in reminiscence as she fixed her tea. "She knew all the answers and wanted to answer every one of my questions. Hand waving included."

"A Ravenclaw, no doubt," Severus said, sipping from his cup.

"No, actually." Hermione smirked at him. "She's a Hufflepuff."

Severus choked on his tea. "*A Hufflepuff* know-it-all? Has the world ended and nobody told us?"

Hermione laughed, delighted at having astonished her new colleague. "I spoke with her after class. She's Muggle-born and from Wales. Apparently, the Sorting Hat wanted to put her in Ravenclaw, but she asked it not to because she didn't think she was smart enough. Oh, she's smart enough all right. She just doesn't have the best self-esteem."

"Does this paragon have a name?"

"Nimue Pendragon," Hermione said, as Severus looked at her with annoyance. "I know. I know." She held up her hands in surrender. "That's why I asked her to stay after class. She has almost as bad a name as I do."

"Hermione isn't such a bad name," Severus muttered under his breath.

"Anyway," Hermione continued, ignoring him. "I had to ask her about her name. Her father teaches Literature at the local Grammar School and her mother taught Celtic legends at the University before she married Mr Pendragon." She giggled. "Nimue has two older brothers named Merlin and Arthur."

Severus snorted in amusement. "At least her parents were consistent," he said. "I take it she's the only one who has any magic?"

"Yes, and her entire family is very supportive of her. She told me there's an old story her Gram used to tell about a witch in the family from a few centuries back, but that's all she thought it was...a story like most families have."

"Apparently not so much a story as a bit of family history," Severus said, leaning back in his chair. "It does happen from time to time. You may even have had someone like that in your family, and the story's been lost to time."

"It's possible," Hermione agreed absent-mindedly, and she turned to her desk to begin grading essays.

* * *

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: The characters depicted in this fiction belong to JK Rowling, her heirs and assignees, except for those who belong to me. Also, I seem to remember having read a story somewhere that mentions the "International Society of Potioneers" or "ISoP", but I can not remember the author or title. If someone could point me in the right direction, I would be most happy to acknowledge the contribution to this story.

Author's Notes: I want to thank GrammarPolice for the beta even though she had finals and SlytherinsHeirx for his brilliant Britpicking.

Chapter Seventeen

...October 1...

"I'm not sure I can do an apprenticeship with you, Minerva," Hermione said, sitting next to the Headmistress for breakfast in the Great Hall that morning. "I spend most of my free time learning about Extremely Advanced Potions with Severus. I'm really sorry."

"My dear, don't be," Minerva said. "It was a hope, but I understand your Potions mastery comes first. We'll see what happens after December."

"Why? What happens in December?"

"As of right now, Hermione, end of term exams happen in December followed by the Christmas hols," Severus purred in her ear as he took his seat. "Are you poaching again, Minerva?" he continued amiably.

"Of course not." Minerva smirked at him. "Just making conversation."

"Some conversation," Filius said, unashamedly eavesdropping on their talk. "I truly resent that I have to wait while you and Severus take all of Hermione's time."

"Hear! Hear!" Septima cheered, raising her cup of coffee. "I whole-heartedly agree."

Severus smirked at both of them. "I did ask first," he said, filling his plate from the platters in front of him. "And Minerva asked second. Your loss is our gain."

Hermione said nothing as she ate her breakfast, but she was thinking very hard about how to manage her time better.

* * *

"Dice the aconite into eighth-inch cubes so they dissolve easier and release their oils faster," Severus said while grinding moonstone and preparing the base potion that would eventually become Wolfsbane. It would be Halloween in one week, and the date coincided with a blue moon, the second full moon of the month.

Because there were still unfortunates who would be transforming during the three days of the full moon, the Ministry had Severus brewing the Wolfsbane without pay. Hermione was incensed that blaggart politicians could take advantage of the probation conditions the Wizengamot had laid down in order to force the Potions Master to brew his own improved version of the potion without even paying him for the ingredients, even the rare and expensive ones!

"I don't see why the Ministry couldn't at least pay you for your out-of-pocket expenses," Hermione argued again. "After all, they're certainly not paying for anything else."

"The Ministry *is* paying a stipend to the school for the cost of the most inaccessible ingredients. Just not as much as they should, given what we have to pay for them," Severus pointed out.

"And why should they spend galleons when they don't have to?" he continued. "This way they can point out how magnanimous they are in providing the potion at little cost to the inflicted."

Hermione scoffed. "Little cost, indeed. They're making galleons on this and you know it. You're not allowed to brew for Poppy and Hogwarts' Infirmary, but you can make the Wolfsbane for them?"

"Ah, but the Wolfsbane isn't going to one of their precious children now, is it?"

"Hypocrites, the lot of them," Hermione snorted, her hands dicing the aconite with precision even as they talked.

"When you have achieved your Mastery, then I will be able to point out that there is a qualified brewer the Ministry can use, and they need no longer sully their hands with my brewing," Severus said calmly. "That way you can charge them for your time and ingredients at a Master's rate."

"Or just give it to those in need without going through the Ministry at all." Hermione laughed bitterly. "That'd show them."

"Hold many grudges, Hermione?" Severus chuckled. "Don't make me one of your projects," he continued, frowning. "I have neither the time nor the inclination to get involved, and you do not have the time to concentrate on anything more than what I can teach you and the classes you are currently teaching."

"Yes, sir." She finished her chopping and added the diced roots to the cauldron.

Severus added the powdered moonstone and gave the potion its requisite stirs. "Now, this will be the third time you've brewed the Wolfsbane with me. Next month, we'll have you do it on your own."

"By myself?" Hermione was delighted.

"Well, I think we'll have Minerva in as a witness." Severus stroked his chin in thought. "That way, she can point out to the Ministry that I didn't have a hand in that particular brewing. She should be able to squeeze some more Galleons out of them on that fact alone."

"Don't you get tired of all the hoops you have to jump through?" Hermione asked. "You haven't been able to go home during the summer like the rest of the professors or go to Hogsmeade for a drink or to the bookstore or..."

"Enough, Hermione," he said gently. "I only have fourteen months to go on my probation. Then I can think of all the things I would want to do. Until then, I'll live my life the best way I can. At least I'm alive when I never thought I would be."

"I still think..."

"Yes, I know."

* * *

"Headmistress, this is highly irregular." The Ministry official who came to take charge of the Wolfsbane in November blustered with anger, but Minerva was unmoved.

"A competent Potions Journeyman brewed this month's Wolfsbane with myself as a witness," she said evenly. "If you do not want to pay for her time and ingredients...some of which are *quite* expensive, I believe...I'm sure we can send the potion elsewhere. St. Mungo's perhaps? I'm told they would be quite happy to handle the distribution, and with fewer caveats no doubt."

In the end, the official grudgingly agreed to pay for the Wolfsbane..."at Journeyman rates, mind you," he huffed...and went away with Hermione's brewed potions. Minerva smirked at his retreating back and waited until she heard the gargoyle at the bottom of the stairs move back into place before saying, "You can come out now."

Severus and Hermione crept down the stairs from the landing where they had been crouched, listening to the haggling. Both wore identical expressions of victory, and Minerva smiled at them while she opened the Floo and called down to the kitchens for tea and cakes.

"That was *amazing*," Hermione said, hugging the Headmistress in congratulations. "I thought he was going to have a stroke when you mentioned giving the potion to St. Mungo's."

"Hmm, yes," Severus said in agreement. "Too bad. It might have been an interesting experience to watch."

"Severus!" the two witches scolded in unison.

"What?" he said with all innocence. "I do have potions to help mitigate the effects of stroke. It would have been interesting to see if he would have asked for them, knowing they came from my hands."

"You're incorrigible." Minerva laughed as she moved back to her desk to prepare their tea as the house-elf delivered the tray. "At least we know that the Wolfsbane will be efficacious with Hermione brewing it."

"Indeed."

* * *

"Minerva, what brings you down to the dungeons this dank and dreary day?" Severus put down his quill and folded his hands, looking up at the Headmistress.

"I just wanted to see how Hermione has fared during her first administering of end-of-term exams." Minerva said, walking into their joint office.

Hermione turned away from her desk and smiled. "Just fine. I only had one cauldron melt during the exam for the second-years and, so far, only one Troll in the written exam for the fourth-years." She sighed, looking at the marked up parchment in front of her. "Of course, I was expecting this particular student to do poorly, but not this poorly."

"We all have our crosses to bear," Severus said from his own desk, also covered with exam parchments. "This dunderhead insists that *pumpkin* juice is used in Strengthening Potion." He picked up his quill and marked the parchment with firm strokes, using his favourite red ink.

"Well, I will expect both of you at the feast this evening," Minerva chided. "It's the last feast of term, so don't get so caught up in your grading that you forget the time, Hermione."

"I'll try not to, Minerva."

Severus snorted. Minerva looked at him and said, "I'll expect you to watch the time as well, Severus. After all, you know better."

Severus muttered under his breath. "Merlin, save me from managing witches."

"What was that, Severus?"

"Yes, Minerva, I'll make sure we're there."

"And on time, too."

"Yes, Minerva."

* * *

...December 31...

"Happy New Year, Hermione."

"Thank you, Filius," Hermione said, smiling down at the small man as she took his proffered drink. The staff's New Year's Eve party was in full swing in the staff room, and everyone was enjoying the drinks and food from the buffet prepared by the house-elves. Hermione filled a small plate with a varied selection of her favourite foods and

found an empty seat in a corner where she could observe, but still be out of the way.

"Attention, everyone, please. Attention," Minerva called, gathering the rest of the professors around her where she stood on the hearthstone, while Albus smiled at everyone from his portrait over the mantel. "Severus has asked to make an announcement."

"Thank you, Minerva." He cleared his throat nervously. "Hermione, would you join us, please?"

Confused, she set her plate and glass on her chair and pushed her way through the small crowd to where Severus and Minerva were standing. "Sir?"

"Minerva, I ask you to act as witness." He pulled a scroll out of the sleeve of his robe and, opening it, prepared to read aloud.

"Of course."

"*Hermione Jean Granger*," he said, beginning to read, *having completed the requirements for a Mastery in Potions...* Hermione gasped, but said nothing as he glared at her and continued to read, *as set out in the bylaws of the International Society of Potioneers, is ordained and hereby awarded such Mastery, this thirty-first day of December, in the year two thousand and two. Hereby attested to by: Severus Snape, Magister Succi, and Minerva McGonagall, Magistra Transformationis.* With that, he took a quill, signed the scroll and handed the quill to Minerva, who also signed. Immediately, the parchment rolled up on itself and disappeared.

"Congratulations, Mistress Granger," he said, handing her a copy of the scroll and shaking her hand.

Minerva also added her congratulations and shook Hermione's hand, happy tears streaming down her cheeks. "Tomorrow, if you're still willing, we'll enter into a contract of apprenticeship for Transfigurations," she said, smiling through her tears.

"Oi!" Filius said. "What about Septima and me? Don't we get a chance in this bidding war?"

"I wasn't aware that anyone was bidding," Minerva said with a laugh, wiping the tears from her cheeks. "Hermione and I discussed this at the beginning of the term, so you two just need to get in line."

"I don't know what to say..." began Hermione.

"Just sleep on it, dear." Minerva said. "You can give me your decision in the morning. Now, let's have a real party!"

With cheers, and congratulations to Hermione for attaining her Potions mastery, the professors started to party. She stood back and watched in awe at this frolicsome side of teachers she had grown to respect over the years. Then she returned to her seat, setting her food and drink underneath while she held her scroll open and read the words printed there.

"Are you happy, Hermione?" Severus said, coming up and taking the seat beside her. He took a sip from his glass of firewhisky and looked out over the room rather than at her.

"More surprised, sir..." she started to say.

"Severus."

"Excuse me?"

"You agreed at the beginning of the term to address me by my given name. Is that so hard for you to do?"

"You're such a private person, sir... er... Severus," she said, correcting herself when he glared at her. "And you are... I mean... were... my Potions master and professor." She smiled. "It's hard to think of you as Severus when I think of you as my teacher and worthy of any respect I can give you, but I do have a problem."

"And what might that be?"

"I didn't do a Master project for you," she said. "How could I have been accepted without that?"

"Oh, that." Severus took a sip of his firewhisky. "You actually did, you know."

"When?" Hermione racked her brain trying to remember what she'd done in the last five months that would have counted as her Master piece.

"Four years ago, when you and Draco saved my life," he reminded her. "I had you write it up as your Honours project for Seventh year."

"That was a joint effort," she protested.

"It still counted, Hermione." He looked at her from under hooded eyelids. "When I pointed out that you were all of nineteen when you created the antivenin potion, the examining board of the ISO-P was very impressed. The committee agreed that if you could do that at nineteen, there's no telling how high you could go *if* you continue your potions work.

"I thank you for the idea that I am respected, as well," he continued, staring into his glass of liquor. "I know you have always shown respect for me, even when I was at my cruelest. The mark of a true lady... and, might I hope, a friend?"

"I hope so, S... Severus," she stammered. "I would like to be friends with you."

"Thank you," he said, holding out his hand once more. "I am delighted to be your friend." As they shook hands, the clock in the Astronomy Tower began to chime. "Midnight," he mused, counting the strokes. "Happy New Year, Professor Granger."

"Happy New Year, Professor Snape," Hermione answered and, leaning over, kissed his cheek.

A/N: Once again, I want to thank AmyLouise from Down Under for helping with my Latin translations.

Magister Succi = master of potions

Magistra Transformationis = mistress of transformations

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: The characters depicted in this fiction belong to JK Rowling, her heirs and assignees, except for those who belong to me.

Author's Notes: I want to thank GrammarPolice for her beta and SlytherinsHeirx for his brilliant Britpicking. Thank you to the readers of this lengthy endeavour for all the lovely reviews.

Chapter Eighteen

"Come in, Hermione. Please come in," Minerva said, opening the door to her office. "I'm glad you asked for this meeting."

"Did you mean what you said last night?" Hermione asked breathlessly. "About my starting an apprenticeship with you this morning?"

"The first day of the new year is a traditional time to begin an apprenticeship," Minerva said with a smile. "I thought we might want to go the traditional route."

"My Potions classes..."

"Hmm, yes. We will have to ask Severus to return to teaching all the Potions classes since you will have started to work with me. Perhaps we should have him up here as well." She took a pinch of Floo powder and threw it into the fire. As the flames turned green, she called, "Severus Snape."

His head appeared in the flames, looking a sickly green colour. "Yes, Minerva?" he asked warily.

"Would you step through please, Severus? Hermione and I need to discuss the next term's scheduling with you."

"Hmmm, yes, I thought that might be the case. Stand aside, if you please." His head withdrew and the next moment he was stepping out of the fireplace, brushing the soot from his robes with an annoyed look at the Headmistress. "Your chimney flue needs cleaning, Minerva. There is entirely too much soot in it to be effective."

"I'll make a note of that for the house-elves," Minerva said, smiling. "Please, take a seat. Would you like some tea, Severus? Hermione?"

Assured by both that no tea was necessary, Minerva started the meeting. "I am prepared to offer you a contract of apprenticeship, Hermione, to begin from today. Your duties will include teaching the first through fourth year Transfiguration classes..."

"What happened to Babakitis?" Severus interrupted. "I couldn't help but notice he wasn't at the staff party last night."

"Well... no..." Minerva sighed. "As I understand it, he went home to Athens for the holidays and was exposed to dragon pox. His nephew, I believe. I received notice from his Healer in Greece yesterday but didn't want to ruin everyone's good mood. He won't be coming back to England or to Hogwarts. Therefore, Hermione, I would have you teaching the lower classes while I take the O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. classes, if you are willing."

"That sounds fine to me if it's okay with Severus," Hermione said, turning to him. "I wouldn't be able to teach Potions as well, though. Not without a Time-Turner." She giggled at the sight of his glaring dark eyes.

"Absolutely not," Severus said scornfully. "You won't need a Time-Turner because I'll take all the Potions classes again. I'm sorry your Greek didn't work out, Minerva. Better luck next time."

The Headmistress pulled a contract out of the top drawer and laid it on the desk. "It's a standard contract for apprenticeship, Hermione. You'll still have your room, board and remuneration. Of course, as a Potions master, we can fudge it so you receive a higher amount than you would as just a regular apprentice, but not by much, I'm afraid. The Ministry is already up in arms about having to pay you Master rates now."

"So soon?" Hermione was shocked. "But..."

"A copy of your Master's scroll was forwarded to the Ministry as soon as Minerva and I signed it last evening, if you will recall," Severus said with a smirk. "I'm surprised that someone was actually working today and saw it."

"Yes, well," Minerva said. "Percy Weasley..."

Hermione snorted in laughter. "Of course it would be him. Who else is so dedicated to brown-nosing the right people that he would come in when everyone else is having a holiday?"

"Miss Granger, please," Minerva admonished, though she did smile. "Mr Weasley was an excellent student and is a dedicated public servant." She grimaced. "Although perhaps he *is* a wee bit too dedicated if you ask me. I could have waited until tomorrow to hear the Ministry's complaints rather than be woken by them first thing this morning."

"Headache, Minerva?" Severus asked politely.

"Hangover, Severus," Minerva said pointedly.

"I do have some remedies that the other teachers had asked me to brew for them in light of their plans for last evening," he said scornfully, pulling a vial out of his robes. He double-checked the label and handed it over the desk. "This should help."

"Thank you." Minerva breathed a sound of relief and, swallowing the potion with a grimace, she sighed again as the hangover remedy began to work.

"That's much better. It's too bad Kingsley doesn't have a competent potions brewer living on site. Maybe he would have had a hangover remedy to take before he Floo'd me complaining about Mr Weasley's early morning call."

"Won't the Ministry be suspicious if I sign an apprentice's contract with you this morning after getting a Master's scroll last night?" Hermione asked, biting her lower lip in nervous habit. "I don't want to get you or Severus in trouble."

"Bless you, dear, but no," Minerva said. "The Ministry has no say over whom I take as an apprentice. If you could have managed it, this contract would have been signed last October and they couldn't have done a thing about it. However," she continued, "you cannot witness this one, Severus. They might definitely suspect collusion if you do."

"I concur," Severus said. "Might I suggest Filius?"

"Excellent suggestion," Minerva said as she walked over to the hearth and, throwing a handful of powder on the flames, called out, "Filius, are you there?"

"Yes, Minerva?" he asked as his green, glowing head showed up in the fire. "Ah, good morning, Hermione, Severus."

"Good morning, Filius," Minerva said. "Could you come up to my office, please? We need you to witness Hermione's apprentice contract."

"With pleasure." Flitwick beamed at the thought. "Does this mean I get the next chance?"

"We'll see." Minerva smiled at his enthusiasm. "That's up to Hermione. Come through now, if you please."

In short order, Hermione signed her name to another apprentice contract. Minerva signed it as her sponsoring Master, and Filius signed as the witness to both their signatures being made without duress. With a flip, the parchment rolled itself up and vanished, presumably to reappear on the appropriate desk at the Ministry to be filed.

* * *

...*One month later...*

"Minerva, Filius. Come in, please," Hermione said, opening the door of the Transfiguration classroom in response to a light tap. "Is everything all right?"

"Quite all right," Minerva said, smiling. "I'm about to pull a 'Severus'."

"I'm... I'm sorry?" Hermione asked, her brow wrinkled in confusion. She looked back and forth between the two professors. "What's a 'Severus'?"

Filius bounced excitedly on the tips of his toes, his fingers tucked into his waistcoat pockets. "May I be the one to tell her, Minerva, please?"

"She's my apprentice, Filius," Minerva said archly. "Wait your turn." With that, she pulled a tied parchment scroll out of the sleeve of her robes and handed it to Hermione.

Totally flustered by now, Hermione unrolled the scroll and read the words, their meaning not dawning on her until she had finished. "Are you serious?" she gasped. "This says I'm..."

"Officially a Transfiguration Journeyman, yes," Minerva smiled warmly at her. "Congratulations. Now, if you'll sign the journeyman contract, I will do so as well and Filius can witness it for us."

Her hands shaking with excitement, Hermione quickly signed the parchment, then offered the quill to Minerva, who signed with alacrity. Filius continued to bounce until it was his turn to sign the scroll. Turning solemn, he took the quill and signed "*Filius Flitwick, Magister Cationis*" in swooping letters across the bottom of the scroll. That done, the contract rolled itself up and disappeared once more in the direction of London and the Ministry.

"Won't they wonder what's going on up here?" Hermione asked nervously. "First Severus gives me Journeyman status after two weeks and Mastery after only four months. Now you've pretty much done the same. What are they to think?"

"Nothing at all," Minerva said. "As I told you at the beginning of this year, apprentices and journeymen are the concern of their Masters only. The Ministry has only to file the contracts and scrolls, as they are registered, for their records."

Filius reached up and shook Hermione's hand earnestly. "Congratulations, my dear. I do hope you'll give me the next chance when it comes up." He smiled. "After all, Septima didn't put her bid in until after I did."

Hermione laughed. "I promise," she said. "If I decide to try for a Charms mastery, you'll be the one I come to for my apprenticeship."

"Good to know, good to know," Filius said, repeating himself as he bounced on his toes again with excitement. "Oh dear. Look at the time." He pulled his pocket watch out and displayed it. "I've a class to teach. Thank you both for allowing me to witness this." With that, he tucked the watch away and was out the door before another word could be spoken.

"Speaking of classes..." Hermione began.

"Yes, dear, I know," Minerva said. "We both have classes to teach as well. I will offer my congratulations once again and see you at dinner." She sailed out the door after Flitwick just as Hermione's first-year Gryffindor/Slytherin students entered the classroom and took their seats.

* * *

Draco Malfoy

School of Mediwizardry

Cambridge Wizarding University

Cambridge, England

Draco,

You're not going to believe this, but I am now a journeyman in Transfiguration. Minerva and Filius came by before my first-year Gryffindor/Slytherin class and had me sign the new contract. Minerva called it pulling a Severus. I suppose she said that because he promoted me to Potion Journeyman my second week as his apprentice.

Filius is angling for me to become his apprentice next. I told him if I ever decided on that route, I would let him know. Right now, I'm still overwhelmed by what's happened here today.

How's your training coming? Still on course to have your Healer's license in another three years? Or are you going to try for sooner?

Sincerely,

Hermione

* * *

Hermione Granger

Transfiguration Journeyman

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Herms,

Congratulations. You sound a little shell-shocked there. Potions mastery in less than six months and now Transfiguration journeyman after only a month. You must be leading a charmed life. Get it? Charmed life. Ha Ha!

Training's going good here. I do miss having lunch with you, though. I go out with some of the other students, but it's not the same. Since our Easter break is the same two weeks as Hogwarts's this year, what say we meet up in Diagon Alley one day and have lunch? We can catch up in person rather than by owl.

Draco

Ferret,

It's a plan.

Herms

A/N: Thanks once again to AmyLouise of DownUnder for the Latin translations. Any misuse of the words is my own fault. I'm not a Latin scholar. Sorry.

magister = teacher

cantio = incantation or enchantment

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

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Author's Notes: I want to thank GrammarPolice for her beta and SlytherinsHeirx for his brilliant Britpicking. I also want to apologize for the length of time between chapters. It's been a long, strange summer.

Chapter Nineteen

"Merlin, I needed this break!" Hermione exclaimed, exiting the Floo in the Leaky Cauldron and brushing powder off her robes. Draco grinned at her from the table where he sat, speaking with a red-haired girl dressed in apprentice Mediwitch robes. She turned around and Hermione cried out with delight, "Ginny!"

The two girls met in the middle of the pub and hugged one another. "What are you doing here?" Hermione asked. "Don't you have your Mediwitch training today?"

"Nope," Ginny said with a grin, leading Hermione back to the table where she had been sitting with Draco. "I start working the night shift tomorrow, so I have today off. Look who I found just moping around."

"I wasn't moping, Weaslette," Draco drawled as he leaned back, arms crossed over his chest, and stretched out his legs. "I told you I was waiting for my lunch date."

"So we'll wait with you," Ginny said. "I have got to meet the woman desperate enough to have lunch with the Ferret."

"Uh, Ginny..."

"Yeah, 'Mione?"

"I'm Malfoy's lunch date." She raised her hand to shoulder height and wiggled her fingers at her friend.

"You?" Ginny had the grace to at least look embarrassed. "Why would you be having lunch with your worst enemy?"

"Because he asked me to," Hermione said. "We got into the habit at Cambridge and felt like meeting up this week while we are both off."

"Oh, you're off all right," Ginny huffed. "Just wait until I tell Ron and Harry."

"Scarhead already knows Herms and I are friends." Draco laughed. "He's joined us for lunch a few times himself over the last three years."

"You're kidding me." She gaped at the pair of them.

"Nope." Hermione grinned. "Of course, it hasn't been very often because of his Auror duties, but Harry has grown up quite a bit since Hogwarts. Now, do you want to join us for lunch?"

Ginny hesitated until Draco nodded his head at her. "Why not join us, Weaslette? You might actually find yourself enjoying it."

"Okay," she said, sighing in capitulation. "Where are you planning to go?"

Hermione shrugged and looked at Draco, who grinned as he transfigured his robes into a Muggle suit. "I found this great place not far from here in Muggle London. Best Chinese cuisine I've ever eaten."

She rolled her eyes at his obvious pleasure, but transformed her robes into a skirt and blouse. "Up until three years ago, Malfoy," she said, "you'd never eaten Chinese cuisine. I practically had to drag you into that restaurant in Cambridge."

"Have I questioned your choice of eating establishments since?" Draco asked teasingly, offering his arm, then answered his own question. "No, I haven't. So just trust me and let's go eat."

"Now that's a loaded statement." Ginny grinned at him in good humour and swiped her wand over her robes, transfiguring them into a pair of jeans and a t-shirt. "I can't wait to tell Harry."

* * *

"You're kidding!" Ginny gasped, a forkful of beef and broccoli almost to her mouth. "One week? And McGonagall waited one month?"

Draco and Hermione handled their chopsticks like old pros as they ate their meals. "I was as surprised as you are," Hermione said, dipping her egg roll in the hot mustard sauce. "But he explained to me that my three years at University were an excellent start for a Potions apprenticeship. I had already learned everything he would have taught me anyway."

"Well..." she hesitated. "Except for how to make the Wolfsbane."

"And four months later, you're a Potions master," Ginny said. "Damn! Talk about a fast track to success."

"Too bad medicine isn't as easy, eh Weaslette?" Draco said with a smirk. "I still have another three years to go after this one for my Healer's license."

Ginny shook her head in disbelief. "Draco Malfoy, Healer," she said. "Nobody who was at Hogwarts with us would ever believe me. What got you interested in healing, Ferret? I thought you'd go into business handling the Malfoy money."

"I actually want to do physical therapy," Draco said, blushing. "When I helped Severus during his recovery, it showed me what could be done to help tone underused muscles and ease pain."

"And it's a Muggle healing method," Hermione said, teasing her friend. "So, of course your parents think you're in your rebellious stage." She pointed her chopsticks full of almond chicken at him. "Are you rebelling, Malfoy?"

"If I were, do you think I'd tell you?" he asked, eyeing her plate greedily. "I'll trade you some of my sesame chicken for some of your almond chicken." Ginny watched incredulously as they traded food.

"Merlin," she said with a touch of awe in her voice. "It's like you're an old married couple." She grinned as they both glared at her. "Okay, so maybe not so old."

"Ginevra Molly Weasley, don't make me hurt you," Hermione huffed in annoyance. "I can do that, you know."

"Yeah, I know," Ginny said. "Like Ron always said, 'You're brilliant but scary.'"

"Isn't that the truth," Draco laughed, choking as he took a sip of his green tea.

* * *

"Thanks for lunch, Ferret," Ginny said as she stood by the Floo in the Leaky Cauldron, her Muggle clothing transfiguring back into robes. "It was interesting."

"Welcome, Weaslette. Don't work too hard."

"At least I only have to get through this year," Ginny retorted, "and I'll have my Mediwitch certificate."

"Where do you plan to work?" Hermione asked, trying to head off any arguments. "Are you staying at St. Mungo's?"

"Poppy Pomfrey's offered me a position as her assistant at Hogwarts," Ginny said, bragging. "And the Headmistress has seconded the appointment."

"Well, aren't you lucky," Draco sneered. Then in a lower voice, he said, "Don't look now, but Skeeter's on the prowl."

"See you later, Gin," Hermione said, hastily stepping into the Floo. "Three Broomsticks, Hogsmeade," she said and disappeared in a flash of green flame.

Draco wasted no time either. "Witch's Brew, Cambridge," he said and, in turn, disappeared.

"Miss Weasley!" Skeeter ran up, a photographer close behind. "Miss Weasley, a moment, please!"

"Sorry, can't," Ginny said hurriedly as she took her turn in the Floo. "The Burrow!" and she vanished as well.

* * *

Are Wedding Bells Ringing for Hogwarts Alumni?

by Rita Skeeter

Correspondent, Daily Prophet

Miss Hermione Granger, Potions mistress, currently a Transfiguration Journeyman and teacher at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and best friend of Harry Potter, the Man Who Lived Twice, was seen yesterday in the Leaky Cauldron with Mr Draco Malfoy, heir to the Malfoy fortune...who is currently studying Healing at Cambridge Wizarding University...and Miss Ginevra Weasley, Mediwitch Apprentice at St. Mungo's and fiancée of the Man Who Lived Twice. Miss Granger and Mr Malfoy seemed to be rather closer than was represented when they attended Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry together, and this reporter can't help but remember that the two of them also attended Cambridge Wizarding University until Miss Granger graduated last spring. Is there a wedding in the offing?

This reporter cannot help but speculate that perhaps this is what they were discussing so confidentially with Miss Weasley, who is known to be the best friend of Miss Granger. Perhaps Miss Weasley was being asked by Miss Granger to be her attendant at the wedding ceremony. When questioned, this reporter received a "no comment" from each of them.

It is to be wondered if Mr Ronald Weasley, best friend to Harry Potter, the Man Who Lived Twice, is aware of Miss Granger's interludes with Mr Malfoy. It is a well-known fact that Miss Granger, during the Tri-Wizard Tournament held at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry during the 1994-1995 school year, was dating both Harry Potter and Viktor Krum, Seeker for the Bulgarian National Quidditch Team and a competitor of the Tri-Wizard Tournament along with Mr Potter.

* * *

"Hermione! What the hell is this?" Faculty and students all turned to the double doors of the Great Hall as Ron Weasley stormed through them, brandishing the *Daily Prophet*.

"Mr Weasley, control yourself," Minerva admonished him. "This is not the place to be shouting obscenities."

"Sorry, Professor, but..."

"No buts, Mr Weasley," she said calmly. "Whatever is the matter with you?"

"Have you seen today's *Prophet*?" he asked, his face flushed with anger. "Hermione, what is this about you marrying Malfoy?"

"*What?*" she shrieked. "Let me see that." Grabbing the paper from his hands, Hermione quickly read the lead article complete with a grainy picture of Ginny, Draco and her standing by the Leaky Cauldron's Floo, their clothing transfiguring from Muggle to Wizarding and back again.

"Did you even ask Ginny what was going on, or did you just jump to conclusions as usual?" she snarled at him.

"Why would I ask Ginny?" he snarled back. "What's she got to do with anything?"

"Hermione. Mr Weasley." Minerva interrupted. "This is not the place for such an argument. Come with me immediately."

Reddening, Hermione bowed her head meekly and said, "Sorry, Minerva." She stalked out of the Great Hall, roughly shouldering Ron out of her way, and followed Minerva to the gargoyle that guarded the Headmistress' office.

"Haggis." Minerva gave her password and, silently, the battling couple followed her up the stairs and into the familiar office. Minerva seated herself behind the desk and gestured for the two of them to sit in the guest chairs in front of her.

"Now, Mr Weasley, explain yourself," she said, looking at Ron with disapproval in her voice. "What is in today's *Prophet* that has you so upset?"

"Skeeter says that Hermione and Draco Malfoy are going to get married," Ron said, turning to look at Hermione with a hurt expression. "Why couldn't you tell me yourself, 'Mione? Why did I have to learn it from the paper?"

"Maybe because it's not true," Hermione said coldly, her arms crossed over her chest as she glared at her friend.

"But..."

"Ronald Bilius Weasley, don't tell me you believe what Skeeter wrote in that rag!" Hermione was growing more and more incensed and sparks began to crackle off her hair. "Don't you remember what she's like? And look at the picture; can't you see your own sister was there as well?"

"But..."

"Hermione," Minerva said gently. "Please calm yourself, dear."

"I'm sorry, Minerva, but this is just..."

"Yes, dear, I understand. Mr Weasley, did you bother to ask your sister what *he* was doing that afternoon with Mr Malfoy and Hermione?"

"No, Professor, I..."

Minerva held up her hand. "I would suggest that you go home and discuss this...calmly, mind you...with your sister to receive the true facts. Right now, I believe you owe your friend an apology."

"I'm sorry, 'Mione, but..."

"No more, Mr. Weasley. Go home and talk to your sister." Minerva stood up in dismissal and Ron and Hermione quickly followed suit.

"I..."

"Go *home*, Mr Weasley." Minerva held open the office door to the revolving stairs. "And don't come back until you can behave in a civilized manner...which means no shouting obscenities in the Great Hall. What must your poor mother think of you?"

Ron slunk down the stairs, his tail figuratively between his legs. At the bottom, he looked up and held his hand out in supplication to Hermione.

"Go home, Ron," she said.

* * *

Draco,

Have you read Skeeter's article in the Daily Prophet? Ron came to Hogwarts livid about our supposed wedding. He didn't even ask Ginny about it! I don't think he even noticed she was in the picture.

Anyway, Minerva guilted him into calming down and made him apologize. She then sent him home with a flea in his ear. Told him to ask Ginny what was going on and scolded him about cursing in the Great Hall with a veiled threat to tell Molly. I wouldn't want to tell Molly. At least I haven't heard anything from her yet so maybe Ginny was able to talk to her.

Hermione

* * *

Herms,

Let me think on this. Why don't you discuss the problem with Severus? After all, he's had some problems with the Skeeter woman as well. Especially after she broke the news of his survival. Ask him just how many marriage proposals he got right after that.

Ferret

* * *

Draco,

I trust Miss Skeeter has gotten her information wrong once more, and you are not considering marrying Miss Granger. While I am somewhat in awe of her natural intelligence, I feel she is not the proper witch for you. Perhaps we could introduce you to some witches from proper families during your next school break.

Father

* * *

Dad,

Tell Mum not to worry. Hermione wouldn't marry me even if I were the last wizard on the planet. We're just good friends who meet for lunch from time to time. Besides, I think she's in love with someone else, and it's not the Weasel or Potter.

Draco

Herms,

My folks are considering becoming matchmakers for me. They think I'm in love with you and that you're not good enough for me. What do you think?

Ferret

Ferret,

I think they might be right. You're not good enough for me.

Herms

A/N: Halfway there. Hope everybody's enjoying this so far.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: The characters depicted in this fiction belong to JK Rowling, her heirs and assignees, except for those who belong to me.

Author's Notes: I want to thank noybate for stepping in as beta for this story when GrammarPolice went MIA. This chapter has not been Britpicked, so any mistakes are my own. Now that the madness that is NaNoWriMo is over, I hope to update more frequently.

Chapter Twenty

Is There Trouble Brewing in Paradise?

by Rita Skeeter

Correspondent, Daily Prophet

Sources close to this reporter have mentioned a small altercation in the Great Hall at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry last week after this paper reported seeing Draco Malfoy wooing Hermione Granger, a professor at the school and one third of the Golden Trio.

Mr Ronald Weasley, another third of the Golden Trio and best friend to the Man-Who-Lived-Twice, is reported to have stormed into the Great Hall at the dinner hour and demanded that Professor Granger explain her actions as to why she was throwing him over for Mr Malfoy.

While my sources did not hear Miss Granger's answer, it is said that Mr Weasley was sent away with a flea in his ear. Has Miss Granger succumbed to the lure of the Malfoy riches rather than the love of a good man? Keep reading this paper for more developments as they occur.

"More Skeeter trouble, Professor Granger?" Severus murmured in her ear as he slipped into his chair for breakfast.

Hermione glared at him as she crumpled the paper in her hands. It was the first day of the new term, and the students were noisier than usual as they greeted friends they hadn't seen for two whole weeks. Their noise covered the low conversations at the Head Table.

"Her innuendo is driving me mad!" she said through gritted teeth. "Can you help? Draco suggested I ask you."

"Let me think on it," he said, eyeing the pile of mail in front of her. "Is that an invitation?" The snowy white envelope was embossed with her name in gold.

"Neville and Hannah's wedding," she affirmed. "I think all the teachers got one." She winced as she noticed the empty spot in front of him. "Sorry."

"Not to worry, Hermione," he said with a sneer. "Longbottom knows I wouldn't have attended even if I were allowed off the grounds. But this does give me an idea, though. Minerva, a moment of your time, please?"

"Hmmm," Minerva hummed as she sipped her coffee. "What is it, Severus?"

He picked up Hermione's wedding invitation between his fingers as if it were contaminated. "You're aware of Professor Granger's recent problems with the Skeeter woman?"

"After Mr Weasley's performance last week, I'm sure everyone is," Minerva snapped at him. "Why?"

"Because I have an idea on how to swat a Skeeter." He smirked. "May we have the use of your office after dinner for a strategy meeting?"

"Why after dinner?" Hermione asked.

"Because I will want your parents, the Malfoys, and Draco there as well," Severus said, plotting out the plan in his head. "Oh, and Filius?"

"Yes, Severus?" Flitwick said from his place further down the table.

"I will need you at this meeting as well. We could use your cunning."

Flitwick rubbed his hands together with glee. "I'll be there for sure if it means humiliation for that odious Skeeter woman."

"Okay, but why my parents, Draco, and his parents?" Hermione persisted.

"Didn't you once tell me that your mother and Narcissa had become...what was the term you used...pen pals?"

"Y-e-essss...?"

"Then that will fall right in with my plans. I will take care of the letters to Draco and his parents if you will send them for me. I think Lucius and Narcissa will be willing to bring your parents along with them. You can owl your parents and let them know to expect the Malfoys."

"All right, I can do that. They were pretty upset about last week's articles anyway. I'm sure today's will upset them even more."

"Hermione, dearest, just *what* is going on?"

"Indeed, Miss Granger, what *has* that hideous woman been blathering about?"

"Mum, Mrs Malfoy, if you'd let me explain..."

"Herms, did you know your Dad is out there talking to my Dad and Severus?"

"Yes, Ferret, I did..."

"Draco, why did Hermione call you 'Ferret'? That was rude."

"I'll explain later, Mother."

"If everyone will come in and sit down," Minerva's voice rose above the questions being piled on Hermione by their summoned guests, "we can get started with this summit meeting to try and put paid to the rumours being put about by Rita Skeeter and maybe gain a little payback as well. Severus, bring Mr Granger and Mr Malfoy in here this instant."

"Yes, Minerva, we're coming."

Once everyone was seated and the house-elves had delivered their choice of beverages, Minerva called the meeting to order. "You said this morning you had an idea, Severus, of how to rein Miss Skeeter in. Would you please share it with the rest of us now?"

"Of course." He smirked. "Mr Longbottom and Miss Abbott's nuptials are upcoming, are they not?" As everyone except the Grangers...who just looked puzzled...nodded, he continued, "From looking at the envelope that held the invitation Miss Granger received this morning, I would imagine Augusta Longbottom and Miss Abbot's father are planning to make this a wedding to remember..."

"Narcissa and I also received our invitation this morning," Lucius said with a smug look. "Since the Malfoys are still considered part of the *Wizardington*, as it were, Mr Abbott would look foolish in ignoring us. I'm sure Augusta pointed that out to him."

"Splendid," Severus said. "Draco?"

"Not me," he said with a shrug. "I guess Mother and Father are the ones who rate."

"Then you'll go as Hermione's date."

"Wait just a minute," Hermione protested. "Suppose I wanted to ask someone else or go by myself?"

"Not a part of the plan, Hermione," Severus said smoothly. "Draco needs to be there for this to work. Now, do you think you can get an invitation for your parents?"

"From Neville probably, yes," Hermione mused, "but we'd have to let him in on why I'd want one for them. They've never met either him or Hannah."

"Can he keep it to himself?"

"Severus, have you forgotten what that boy did the last year of the war?" Minerva scolded.

"Be that as it may, Minerva," Severus said with a sneer, "if the boy...man...can't keep it to himself, then my plan is useless."

"Can't he even tell Hannah?" Hermione asked. "She'll want to know why he needs an extra invite because of the reception dinner. It's being catered, you know."

"I believe we can rest assured that if I speak with Augusta and tell her what's being planned, she'll be happy to cooperate," Minerva mused. "We won't have to bring Mr Longbottom or Miss Abbott into this at all."

"That's all well and good, Severus," Flitwick protested, "but what's the plan? And what about the Weasleys? They're bound to be invited, being friends of both the bride and the groom."

"Excellent," Severus said. "We need to get Skeeter to raise the ante, as it were, with her rumours and innuendo. Then we make an extremely strong statement at the wedding...after the newlyweds have left, of course."

"Minerva, we need to have the wedding here, if possible, so that I can attend as well," Severus continued, "possibly as your escort. Do you think you can convince Miss Abbott that her wedding would be best served by being held where she and Longbottom *fell in love*?" He practically sneered the words, his face twisting into an expression of disgust.

"I believe they had planned an outdoor wedding as the weather should be nice," Minerva said. "That being the case, I can probably make a case for using the grounds here at Hogwarts. Especially since Pomona has offered Mr Longbottom an Herbology apprenticeship starting next fall when they return from their honeymoon."

"Good." Severus rubbed his hands together. "Narcissa, I need you and Mrs Granger..."

"Elizabeth."

"I beg your pardon?"

"If you can call my daughter by her first name, my name is Elizabeth," Hermione's mother spoke up.

"And I'm Matthew," her father said. "If this is going where I think it's going, we're going to have to be on a first-name basis to make it work."

"Indeed," Lucius agreed. "Our wives are already on a first-name basis due to their ongoing correspondence, so I am Lucius."

"If we are finished with introductions," Severus sneered sarcastically, "then may I continue?"

"By all means," Lucius said with a smirk and a small bow. "Please continue."

"Narcissa, can you take *Elizabeth* to Diagon Alley for new dress robes suitable for a wedding?"

"It would be my pleasure," Narcissa said, laughing. "I would imagine we're supposed to be overheard discussing what to wear but not mention who's getting married."

"Correct. I want to fuel the rumours about Hermione and Draco."

"Oi," Draco said. "I'm getting grief enough about that at University. Everybody remembers the 'Brain Trust' and wants to know what she sees in me."

"See, Ferret," Hermione giggled, "I told you I was too good for you. I take it we're going to pull the rug out from under her at the wedding?"

"Yes," Severus said. "That's the general plan. Lucius, you and *Matthew* can do whatever it is that men do when subjected to wedding plans."

"I believe we could go to my club," Lucius said. "I'm still a member, and the place is a hotbed of gossip. If necessary, I can start a few rumours myself."

"Good. Filius?"

"Yes?"

"I need you to spread rumours at the Three Broomsticks and the Hog's Head. If you can get others from the staff involved without telling them what's going on, that would be excellent."

"I'd ask you to do it, Minerva," he said with an apologetic look towards the Headmistress, "but it's necessary that you appear to be above it all and totally ignorant of any plans other than the wedding is to be held here on the grounds."

Minerva held up her hand in a *stop* gesture. "I understand, Severus. I'll talk to Miss Abbott and Augusta Longbottom tomorrow. Luckily, there's still time for the guests to be notified of a change in location before the wedding as it's not until the end of June."

* * *

Wedding Plans in Motion?

by Rita Skeeter

Correspondent, Daily Prophet

Narcissa Malfoy, wife of Lucius Malfoy and mother to Draco Malfoy, has been seen shopping at Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions with the Muggle mother of Hermione Granger. Madam Malkin's stated when questioned that Mrs Malfoy and Mrs Granger were discussing what robes to wear so they did not clash at the wedding. Mrs Malfoy chose ice blue robes with silver over-ropes while Mrs Granger chose teal blue robes with silver embroidery on the sleeves and hems.

Lucius Malfoy has also been seen in Diagon Alley lunching at the Wizards' Club with Mr Granger, the Muggle father of Miss Granger. Sources report they toasted the engaged couple and wished them all happiness. They then strolled up to Twilfit & Tattings, but it is unknown just what transpired behind the doors of that august institution. Perhaps purchasing formal robes for the father of the bride?

It is certainly apparent that wedding plans are in motion for Hermione Granger and Draco Malfoy. It is the policy of this paper to wish the newly engaged couple all the best even though a wedding announcement has not been printed in our society pages.

* * *

Severus chuckled to himself as he read the story in that morning's *Daily Prophet*. It made a good accompaniment to his eggs and sausage. "She's practically salivating over this," he murmured to Hermione.

Hermione grinned. "And she's as irritated as hell that it's me," she said. "She's had it in for me since I bested her in fourth year."

"Mmm, yes," he said. "I always wondered how you managed to leash her vitriol."

"I trapped her in a jar," Hermione stated simply.

"You did *what*?" Minerva said, her words unfortunately falling into a rare calm in the Great Hall. She glared at the students who were staring at the head table, and they quickly turned back to their breakfasts. She lowered her voice. "Why did you...? How did you do that?"

"She *was* an unregistered Animagus," Hermione explained. "A beetle. That's how she was getting information about Harry. Of course, Draco and the other Slytherins were helping by giving her information she could use in her innuendo. That's also how she found out about Viktor inviting me to Bulgaria for the summer."

"I caught her in the *jar* and kept her there for a couple of months. When she agreed to stop writing false stories, I let her go. Then I blackmailed her into writing that story for *The Quibbler* during fifth year when nobody would believe Harry."

"Why were you not in Slytherin?" Severus muttered in appreciation of her tactics. "That was positively inspired."

"Is she still unregistered?" Minerva asked indignantly. "If she is..."

"No, I'm sure she probably isn't." Hermione sighed. "She took advantage of the general amnesty that was instituted after the war and just paid the fine and registered. Now she's free to write whatever she wants about me so long as she cloaks it as innuendo and rumour. You know, the usual tabloid stuff."

"I hate to show my ignorance," Filius piped up, "but what's a tabloid?"

"This is." Hermione giggled, holding up the *Daily Prophet*. "It has no stories of any redeeming value, but prints gossip, rumour and whatever the Ministry wants printed. *The Quibbler* has developed into a serious newsmagazine since my fifth year because Mr Lovegood doesn't print just what the Ministry tells him to. That's called 'Freedom of the Press', and it's sorely lacking in the Wizarding world."

"Peace, Hermione," Minerva said soothingly and patted her journeywoman's hand. "You're becoming obsessed with this matter."

"I'm sorry, Minerva," she apologized. "It just makes me so mad when I see something like this and can't do a thing about it without falling into Rita Skeeter's little traps."

"I understand completely, dear," Minerva consoled her, gently patting her hand again.

* * *

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: The characters depicted in this fiction belong to JK Rowling, her heirs and assignees, except for those who belong to me.

Author's Notes: Kudos to **noybate** for stepping in as beta for this story when my other beta went MIA. This chapter has not been Britpicked, so any mistakes are my own. Now, on with the show.

Chapter Twenty-One

"Now that end of term exams are over, what do you intend to do for the summer holiday, Hermione?" Flitwick asked, taking advantage of a rare lull in student activity to check his box in the staff lounge. Hermione looked up from the *Transfigurations Today* periodical she was flipping through to answer.

"Minerva's going to work with me to see if I can complete my training and become an Animagus as part of my Transfiguration mastery. Why, Filius?"

"I thought you might want to begin an apprenticeship in Charms, is all," he said disarmingly. "Of course, becoming an Animagus can be time consuming, and not everyone succeeds."

"I have a feeling that if anyone can learn to transform, Hermione can," Minerva said, coming through the door with an armful of scrolls.

"Oh, here, Minerva, let me help." Hermione jumped to her feet and relieved Minerva of her burden. "What's all this?"

"Some of the exams from my Sixth year students," Minerva said. "If you would help me mark them, we can have them back to the students before the Leaving Feast Friday evening."

"Of course I can help," Hermione told her. "I've finished marking the exams for the lower years and left them in your office."

"I found them, dear. Thank you."

"Can I get you ladies anything?" Filius asked, holding up a bottle expectantly.

"No, Filius, thank you. I think Hermione and I have everything we need except the peace to get these done. But your offer is appreciated." Minerva looked down at the stack of parchments and grimaced.

"In that case, I'll bid you both adieu and check on the noise in the Entrance Hall. No doubt some student has managed to smuggle in a contraband Weasley Wizarding Wheeze. I believe a detention will be called for with Argus this evening."

"You do that," Minerva said rather absent-mindedly, since she was already immersed in reading the first of the exams on the table in front of her. Hermione grinned and summoned quills and ink for the two of them, and soon the only sounds in the staff lounge were the rustling of parchment and the scratching of quills as they worked quietly together.

* * *

The Hogsmeade train station was awash with students. Some were trying to get on the train, others were loading trunks into the baggage cars, and still others were hugging their friends and making plans for the summer. Hermione strolled into the midst of the chaos and let her mind drift back to her own leave-takings while she was a student. She didn't remember it being this loud and chaotic, but perhaps she was remembering it through a haze of fond remembrances.

"Miss Pendragon, watch where you're walking, if you don't mind." The silky tones of Severus' voice caught Hermione's attention. She watched, a slight smile on her face, as he extricated himself from the aforementioned Miss Pendragon, who had been reading a large tome and managed to walk into him.

"Sorry, Professor Snape," Miss Pendragon apologised, her eyes wide with apprehension. "Maybe I should get on the train now?"

"*Maybe you should,*" he sneered. "Then the platform will be safe from your absent-minded predations."

Hermione winced. She had done the same thing a time or two, but thankfully never with Severus. *Speaking of which...*

"I thought you weren't supposed to leave Hogwarts grounds," she said, walking up to where he was supervising the younger students and making sure they made it onto the train.

"I'm not," he sneered. "But the Ministry, in their infinite wisdom, deemed this part of *mycommunity service*. Perhaps they thought I, *by myself*, could herd a group of prepubescent cretins onto a train and make sure none were left behind."

"Shall I leave you to it, then?" she teased, turning to walk away.

"Merlin, no!" he gasped, reaching for her arm. "Don't leave me by myself. Abbott, I don't care if your sister's getting married here on Saturday next. You will get on the train and come back with the rest of your family at that time. Now move it, boy!"

"Well, it just seems to me..."

"Hermione, for the love of Merlin, I can't do this by myself. I believe that's why Minerva asked you to help, is it not?"

"I guess so. Aren't any of the other professors here?"

"They're not insane enough to go through this. Usually Hagrid is here, but Minerva has him doing something to the school grounds. That leaves the criminal and the newbie..."

"Did you just call me a newbie?"

"If the shoe fits..." he said with a smirk. "Miss Brown, are you performing exploratory surgery on that young man's tonsils? I suggest you cease and desist immediately and find a seat on the train."

"Any relation to...?" Hermione asked in an aside.

"A younger sister, I believe." He sighed. "And, of course, a Gryffindor."

"A rather precocious Gryffindor," Hermione smirked. "Lavender at least waited until third year before showing interest in anything in trousers. Mr Abbott," she snapped, "Professor Snape told you to find a seat on the train. Now do it!"

She cast *Sonorus* on her throat and announced, "Your attention, please! The Hogwarts Express will be leaving in ten minutes. Anyone not on the train will have *me* explaining to their parents *why* they were left behind, *Miss Brown*."

The students around her laughed as, flushed with embarrassment, the young lady so addressed stopped snogging her fellow student and fled for the train. Her snoggee grinned sheepishly and strolled further along the line of cars before swinging himself up and into an empty compartment.

"Slytherin and Gryffindor," Hermione remarked. "That's taking inter-house cooperation to a new level."

"It's not the first time," Severus said. "Her older sister was caught several times in the corridors with Slytherins. Mostly Blaise Zabini, but I believe I caught her with Gregory Goyle at least once."

"It figures." Hermione sighed. "She went after Ron in our sixth year, and he let himself be caught for a while. Maybe I should have let her keep him."

"Mr Weasley still annoyed with you?" he asked, raising an eyebrow. "Can we expect more histrionics at the Longbottom-Abbott nuptials next week?"

Hermione waited while the engineer blew the steam whistle and the last of the students quickly hopped onto the train. As it pulled out of the station, she waved back at the students who waved wildly from the windows until the train was a small dot on the horizon.

"Probably," she replied, sighing once again. "Especially after we put your plan into action. By the way, just whom am I supposed to end up with...Draco or Ron?"

"Why don't we leave that to the young men?" He smirked, turning to walk back to Hogwarts. "After all, the whole point of the exercise is to try and clip Miss Skeeter's proverbial wings."

"Well, that should prove interesting." She looked over to see him smirk once more as he strode out of the train station.

"You're not concentrating, Hermione," Minerva said Monday afternoon. "You should be meditating, not thinking about Saturday."

"I'm sorry, Minerva. I just..."

"Yes, I realize you're nervous. That's why you should concentrate on becoming your inner animal and not on what's to happen in the future. That will take care of itself in time."

Hermione settled herself in the chair and, taking a deep breath, tried to wipe her mind of all extraneous thought. It was harder than she'd thought it would be. Her mind kept going over everything that could go wrong at the wedding.

Minerva sighed, looking at her. "Perhaps we might have better luck after the wedding," she said briskly. "In the meantime, I have some books for you to study. Pay particular attention to the act of Transfiguring yourself. And don't stay up all night reading. I want you fresh and well rested on the morrow."

"Yes, Minerva."

"I'll send a house-elf in to check on you about midnight."

"I don't need someone to look in on me, Minerva." Hermione was indignant. "I am quite capable of keeping track of the time." She reddened at the knowing look from her teacher. "Well, most of the time," she added.

Minerva nodded. "I'll tell Winky to look in on you at midnight and that she's to remind you to go to bed."

"Yes, Minerva."

Ferret,

Who knew studying to become an Animagus could be so hard? Minerva is constantly telling me to relax and concentrate on my meditation, but I keep thinking about what is to happen this Saturday. Then she has the house-elves come and tell me to go to bed if I'm up past midnight so I'll be rested the next day and we can start over again.

I asked Severus just whom I was supposed to end up with in order to spike Skeeter's guns, but he just smirked and said things would work out. I hope so, but I can't help feeling that something is going to go wrong.

Hermes

Hermis,

Just relax. Severus is the consummate Slytherin. He probably hasn't told us the entire plan, but I'm sure he has everything well in hand. What time do I need to be at Hogwarts on Saturday? I don't want to be too early, but it's considered gauche to come into a wedding after the bride. Let me know, okay?

Ferret

Ferret,

Minerva says to come for lunch. Since the wedding is scheduled for two, that will give us time to finalize our plans. She says our parents are also invited and will be dressing here at the school to give the impression of a wedding party in preparation.

I think she's been talking to Severus.

H.

H,

Lunch it is. I'll bring my dress robes and change there as well. See you then.

D.

Severus,

Granger is getting nervous about Saturday. Is there anything you can do to settle her down? She'll ruin the fun if she's too tense. I can't believe you didn't tell her the whole plan.

Draco

Draco,

You leave Hermione to Minerva and me. We'll make sure she comes up to snuff. You just worry about Mr Weasley and his reactions. I didn't want her giving everything away with her expressions.

Severus

Severus,

Just how badly am I allowed to hex him?

D.

D,

Not fatally, of course. Minerva and Molly would have our hides. And, if you do throw the first hex, make damn sure nobody sees you do it. Otherwise, protect yourself. I assure you, Weasley will be protecting himself if nothing else.

S.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: The characters depicted in this fiction belong to JK Rowling, her heirs and her assignees, except for those who belong to me.

Author's Notes: Kudos to **noybate** for stepping in as beta for this story. This chapter has been Britpicked by the incomparable **SlytherinsHeirx**, but any mistakes are my own.

Chapter Twenty-Two

LongbottomAbbott Nuptials

by Birdie Tweeter

Social reporter, Daily Prophet

The wedding of Mr Neville Longbottom, slayer of the great snake Nagini, and Miss Hannah Abbott, both alumni of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, was celebrated today on the grounds of the school where they first met.

The former Miss Abbott wore a floor-length robe of white Chinese silk embroidered with white-on-white roses around the hem, neckline, and sleeve hems. Her headdress consisted of a coronet of white roses and baby's breath braided with pale green ribbons that extended down her back, and her slippers were white satin weave silk with white-on-white embroidered roses to match the embroidery on her robes. She carried a bouquet of white roses tied with the same pale green ribbon as her coronet.

Her attendant, Miss Susan Bones, wore a tea-length robe of pale green silk, the exact same shade as the bride's ribbons and sprinkled with embroidered white rosebuds, and satin weave silk slippers in the same pale green as her robes. The new Mrs Longbottom's young cousin Jerusha, who was dressed in a miniature copy of Miss Bones' robes and slippers, acted as flower girl, leading the bride and her attendant to the altar while strewing white rose petals along their path.

The new Mrs Longbottom's father gave the bride away...and this reporter is certain she saw a tear in his eye as he did so, perhaps in memory of the bride's mother, one of the victims of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. The bride's grandmother wore robes of the same pale green as the bride's attendants, but without the embroidery that graced the robes of Miss Bones and the younger Miss Abbott.

The grandmother of the groom, Mrs Augusta Longbottom, wore lavender robes of satin weave Chinese silk embroidered with white accents along the hem and sleeve edges. The groom's robes were of white satin weave Chinese silk with complementary accents the same shade of lavender as his grandmother's robes. Mr Harry Potter, The-Man-Who-Lived-Twice, served as Mr Longbottom's attendant.

The celebrant for the ceremony was Professor Minerva McGonagall, Headmistress of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Mr Ronald Weasley, an alumnus of the school and an Auror currently stationed in Hogsmeade with Mr Potter, served as cup bearer to Professor McGonagall.

The reception was outdoors under pavilions provided by the school. Music for dancing was provided by Celestina Warbeck and the Weird Sisters. The reception was catered by the Three Broomsticks pub of Hogsmeade, with the assistance of house-elves from the school. The wedding cake was from the bakery of Madam Puddifoot's Tea Shop, also located in Hogsmeade.

The cake itself was a marvel of baking splendour...four tiers of Italian crême cake layered with chocolate ganache and covered by a creamy white fondant with coloured buttercream frosting roses cascading down the sides and surrounding the bottom tier. The top of the cake contained images of the bride and groom, spelled to kiss continuously.

The new Mr and Mrs Longbottom will begin their life together in Hogsmeade after the wedding trip. Mr Longbottom has accepted a position as apprentice to Professor Pomona Sprout, the Herbology teacher of Hogwarts. The new Madam Longbottom has purchased the Three Broomsticks from its previous owner, Madam Rosmerta, and will take over as landlady when the couple return from their honeymoon at an undisclosed location. The new couple plan to live in quarters above the pub for the time being.

* * *

LongbottomAbbott Nuptials Erupt Into Violence

by Birdie Tweeter

Correspondent, Daily Prophet

A short time after the newly married couple took a Portkey to their secret honeymoon site, the guests at the LongbottomAbbott wedding were witness to a scene of jealousy and violence almost too horrific to describe.

Mr Ronald Weasley of Ottery St. Catchpole in Devon, and the cup bearer at the wedding of his old school friends, physically assaulted Mr Draco Malfoy of Wiltshire. Mr Malfoy was attending the wedding as the escort of Miss Hermione Granger, the newest teacher at the school and an invited guest of the newly wedded Longbottoms as well.

During the altercation, Mr Weasley was heard to utter the words, 'Keep your filthy ferret paws off of my girl,' to which Mr Malfoy was heard to reply, 'Maybe you should ask Herms whose girl she is.' At that, wands were drawn and hexes flew until the Headmistress stepped in and confiscated both wands. Poppy Pomfrey, Hogwarts' mediwitch as well as an invited wedding guest, moved in and proceeded to heal the boils, tentacles, fur, and other maladies the combatants had suffered as well as the sufferings of those guests who weren't quick enough to move out of the way.

Miss Granger, the cause of all the commotion, stood back and watched the duelling pair while casting shield spells to protect her Muggle parents, guests of the groom. Mr Granger was heard to say he had not had so much fun at a wedding since his own. Both wife and daughter were seen to shush him rather forcefully. Lucius Malfoy, who is apparently very friendly with the Granger family (as reported in this paper previously), looked as if he wished to hear more about Mr Granger's wedding (as would this reporter).

In the end, Miss Granger looked very put out by the actions of both young men and scolded them indiscriminately about ruining the wedding of a close friend. In this reporter's observations, Miss Granger treated both men as brothers and not, as has been reported by another member of this newspaper staff who shall remain nameless, as potential marriage partners.

* * *

Severus finished reading aloud the *Sunday Prophet's* accounts of the wedding and its aftermath and, clearing his throat, looked at his audience. "Well, Hermione, we can only hope this will spike Miss Skeeter's guns as thoroughly as we might have wished," he said, folding the paper and laying it aside on the table next to his chair. Most of the conspirators were there, enjoying a late Sunday brunch in his quarters. "I like how it was pointed out you only care about the young men like brothers."

"Yeah, Herms, what gives?" Draco asked from where he lazed on the sofa, a cup of tea balanced on his chest. "I suffered all that because I'm your brother? And what happened to Skeeter? I thought she would be there. Not this Birdie Whatever person."

"At least you're still breathing, Ferret," she retorted from her easy chair. "I'm not sure about my dad. Mum looked really sore at him when they left. I don't know why the paper didn't send Skeeter, but I'm rather glad she wasn't there, to tell the truth."

Severus cleared his throat and looked up at the ceiling. "I believe Miss Skeeter received an anonymous gift that left her rather incapacitated. Something to do with a pound of the best Honeydukes chocolates laced with Veritaserum. I imagine the paper was more than happy to send someone else." He smirked at Hermione.

"You didn't!" She grinned at the thought of Rita Skeeter under the influence of Veritaserum.

"Of course not," Severus answered easily. "We all know I'm not allowed to leave the grounds for any reason or send owls. Even my Floo has been blocked for the last four and a half years." He sighed dramatically. "She obviously has someone else irked at her. Now, about your parents and their wedding..."

"What happened at your parents' wedding?" Lucius asked, walking in from the dining area. He eyed his son, who quickly sat up and looked innocent of anything but perfect

posture.

"I'm not really sure," Hermione said, as she stood up and took Draco's cup into the kitchenette. "Mum won't let him talk about it, and she makes sure anybody else who might have been there doesn't mention it in front of me. Must've been really embarrassing."

"Perhaps I should take your father to the pub and talk the story out of him." Lucius grinned impishly as he sat down on the sofa. "I never thought I would say this, but I like your parents."

"Who are you and what did you do to Lucius?" Severus teased his friend. "Narcissa, did you hear your husband?" he called out.

She walked into the sitting room from the kitchenette and sat down on the sofa beside her husband and son. "Of course I heard him, Severus. And I agree with him. I like Hermione's parents. I think they're very astute to have raised such an intelligent witch as Hermione."

"And they didn't even realize the wizarding world existed until Minerva came to visit with my Hogwarts letter." Hermione grinned in remembrance as she sat back down. "Mum thought it was all a big joke until Minerva Transfigured a tea set out of some of Mum's china figurines, and poured us each a cup of tea."

"Elizabeth is like a breath of fresh air," Narcissa said, sighing in delight. "She and I have discovered we enjoy many of the same interests. Your parents did an excellent job in raising you to be self-assured and proud of who you are. Most pure-bloods try to do that with their children as well."

"And succeed," Draco said, tossing his shoulder-length hair back from his forehead as he puffed out his chest.

"Not always," Narcissa chastised him, then looked back at Hermione in consideration. "But you do look a lot like your mother. You have the same facial features."

"And I believe she inherited her father's brain," Lucius finished. "Although I tend to believe Elizabeth is just as intelligent."

"And here I thought all I got from my dad was his hair." Hermione laughed. "At least it's finally taming down," she continued, running a hand through the unruly curls.

"I think it's cute," Draco said. She just glared at him. "What? It's cute in a curly way. Like that old Muggle *noo-vy* you dragged me to last year. What was her name?"

"*Shirley Temple*?" Hermione screeched. "You think I look like *Shirley Temple*? What are *you* laughing at?" She sneered at Severus.

"I haven't seen a Shirley Temple movie since I was a boy," he sniggered, "but Draco is right. You have almost the same hairstyle."

Hermione muttered under her breath and watched as Severus' black and Draco's blond hair sprang into riotous masses of corkscrew curls. "That's better," she said with a smirk.

Draco yelped and ran for a mirror while his mother snickered behind her hand and his father actually guffawed. Severus simply smirked and ran a hand down the back of his head. As his curls smoothed out, he looked over at Hermione.

"All right," he said. "I apologize for comparing you to Shirley Temple. I wasn't aware your training with Minerva had gone as far as it had."

"Who's Shirley Temple?" Lucius chortled. "And why is it an insult to be compared to her?"

"She was an American Muggle child actress in the thirties," Severus explained. "Basically, she was known for her singing and dancing in cutesy movies, which are still being shown in cinemas that showcase vintage movies. Her best known feature was probably her hair, which was always dressed in ringlet curls."

Draco yowled from Severus' bedroom, where he had retreated after being hexed. Barging back into the sitting room, his eyes wild, he shouted, "I can't get it out! Make it go away! Please, Granger! I apologize! Really!"

Hermione snickered and waved her hand. Draco yelped as he felt a tug at his hair, but relaxed as he felt the curls drop and the strands return to their usual straight length.

"Very funny, Herms," he sneered. "You have *got* to teach that one to me. Weasel would have looked *soprecious* yesterday."

Hermione laughed. "I need to keep some secrets, Ferret. Besides, he hit you with some pretty heavy hexes himself."

"Yeah, I know," he admitted. "I think he's been practicing."

"Being as Mr Weasley *is* an Auror," Severus said, clearing his throat, "such practice, I believe, is mandatory. I understand Mr Potter is just as capable, if not as hot-headed, as his red-headed friend was yesterday."

"Miss Weasley pulled him away when the hexing started," Narcissa said. "I heard her tell him not to get mixed up in something that wasn't his affair. Smart girl."

"I don't think she wanted her fiancé hurt." Hermione smirked. "She's getting him nicely trained, and probably doesn't want to start over."

Narcissa laughed. "Isn't it the truth?" She looked lovingly at Lucius. "Of course, some wizards are harder to train than others."

Lucius drew himself up to his full height. "I resemble that remark," he quipped, reducing the rest of the room to laughter.

Draco wiped the tears of laughter from his eyes and said, "I wonder what kept Weasley in check until after the reception. He was looking daggers at me the whole time from behind Professor McGonagall."

"That would have been your Mr Potter," Severus said snidely.

"You were there?" Hermione asked, looking at the Potions teacher. "I didn't see you at all."

"I observed the affair from the Headmistress' office rather than attend in person, so as not to cause Mr Longbottom any discomfort on his wedding day," Severus admitted. "The oriel window in the office has been charmed. It will allow whoever is in the office to view the entire grounds with accompanying audio. Of course, the old goat had me describing everything to him while I was watching."

"However, I did watch Mr Potter convince the youngest Mr Weasley that he did not want to make a fuss while the newly married couple was still there. I believe Augusta had a word with Potter before the ceremony to make sure he could handle Weasley even while he served as Longbottom's attendant."

"Indeed," Minerva said, stepping into the room from the corridor. "No, don't get up," she said as the men started to rise to their feet. Hermione quickly got up and fetched the Headmistress a tray filled with a plate of spinach and bacon quiche...still warm due to Winky's magic...and a bowl of mixed fruit, then poured Minerva a cup of tea from the pot on the table in front of the sofa. "Thank you, my dear."

Minerva Transfigured an end table into another easy chair and sighed deeply as she sat down to enjoy her brunch. "I told Augusta what we were planning, and she was entirely too happy to help," she said as she picked up her fork. "Augusta spoke with Harry, but didn't tell him anything other than Hermione had asked Draco to be her escort, and Augusta wished to avoid trouble during the ceremony if possible. She flattered him that he had enough influence with his friends that he could help prevent trouble. Needless to say, Augusta was right."

"Old Scarhead saves the day again, eh?" Draco said.

"Indeed," Severus said. "And where are the other members of our conspiracy?"

"Oh," Minerva swallowed her mouthful of quiche. "Filius should be here soon. The Grey Lady asked to speak with him. And Hermione's parents, of course, went home yesterday evening. I do wish they could have stayed. We could have accommodated them in a guest room as we did with the Malfoys."

"I think Mum wanted to get Dad away before Mr Malfoy talked him into telling what happened at their wedding." Hermione laughed. "All I really know is it involved my dad, his dad, and Mum's dad. And since Grandmum died last summer, the only *family* members left who know what happened are Mum and Dad...and *they* won't tell me."

Hermione looked down at her lap as she spoke. "At least Grandmum did what she said she would do. She lived long enough to see me graduate from University. Even if she couldn't attend the ceremony." She looked up, her eyes brimming with unshed tears. "I miss her."

Filius chose that moment to make his entrance. "Sorry I'm late. Ravenclaw business. What's this, Hermione? Tears?"

She wiped a hand under her eyes. "It's nothing, Filius. Just feeling maudlin and missing my grandmother. Have you eaten?"

"Yes, yes, I ate earlier," Filius said as she got up to take Minerva's empty tray. "But thank you for the offer. I will, however, take a cup of this delicious looking tea." He poured himself a cup and sat down on the sofa next to Draco.

Minerva patted her hand. "You've got an entire family here, Hermione. I'm happy that your parents would even think to share you with us."

"Hear, hear," the rest of the company said, toasting her with their teacups while she blushed.

* * *

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: The characters depicted in this fiction belong to JK Rowling, her heirs and her assignees, except for those who belong to me.

Author's Notes: Kudos to **noybate** for stepping in as beta for this story. This chapter has been Britpicked by the incomparable **SlytherinsHeirx**, but any mistakes are my own.

Chapter Twenty-Three

"Hermione?" Minerva called out as she stepped into the seemingly empty classroom.

"Hmmm?" Hermione answered from her seated position on the floor behind her desk as she looked over books left behind by her students. "What is it, Minerva?" Hermione looked up to see a quizzical expression on Minerva's face as she leaned over the desk.

"What on earth are you doing?" Minerva asked, staring at the younger witch, who was clad in blue jeans and trainers under her teaching robes.

"Oh," Hermione said. "I'm looking to see if any of these are in good enough shape to use next term. Some of them are ready for the dustbin." So saying, she tipped the book in her hand into the rubbish bin sitting next to her. Fortunately for her reputation as a bookworm, most of the books remained on the floor rather than in the bin. "What can I do for you?" She got up onto her feet, brushing dust off her robes and hands.

"I was hoping we could work on your Transfiguration training a little while this week," Minerva said. "But there's something you said that's been bothering me since before Neville's wedding last week."

"What did I say? Tea?" Hermione held up the teapot and tested it for weight. Satisfied, she set it down and cast a warming charm on the water inside.

"Not just now, thank you. What did you mean by *'spike her guns'*?"

Hermione giggled. "Oh, that. It's a Muggle saying. The popular meaning is 'to spoil her plans'. Since I haven't seen anything in *The Daily Prophet* since Sunday, maybe it worked."

"Or maybe she's thinking of what to do next," Minerva said with a dour look. "Well, at least we have Severus' brain on hand to help mastermind anything else we might try. Right, then." She clapped her hands together and stood up. "Animagus training. Do you think you can concentrate *properly* now?"

"Of course."

* * *

"That's right," Minerva said as Hermione stood before a cheval mirror the Headmistress had Transfigured from a pocket mirror pulled from Hermione's handbag. "Keep concentrating on your magical core. That's where your inner animal will come from."

"Are those... *whiskers*?" Hermione whispered, leaning into her reflection. "Am I going to become a cat, like you?" she asked the older witch.

Minerva smiled. "There's nothing wrong with cats, dear. And this time you won't need to brew Polyjuice," she said teasingly.

Hermione snorted. "I'm never going to live that down, am I?" Her concentration broken, the whiskers vanished.

"Not while there's a professor at this school who remembers your second year." Minerva sniffed in remembrance. "Imagine brewing a restricted potion in a girls' bathroom."

"It seemed to be the best place to do so," Hermione said musingly. "After all, no one ever went into Moaning Myrtle's bathroom." She huffed. "Now it seems to have become a tourist attraction."

"Yes, well, it's hard to keep students out of there when Myrtle encourages them to come in. Thank Merlin none of the new students have been Parselmouths. I shudder to think about someone opening that Chamber again, even though the Basilisk is gone."

Hermione laughed. "Well, at least the fangs were good for destroying Horcruxes. Back to practicing, then?"

Minerva sighed and smiled. "Go right ahead, dear. Now, concentrate..."

"And I managed to manifest whiskers today," Hermione said excitedly to Severus as all the teachers sat down to supper. "I don't know what kind of animal I'll be, but at least it's a mammal."

"Don't American catfish have whiskers?" Severus asked drily.

Hermione made a face at him. "Don't rain on my parade, Severus. It's bad enough to imagine I might be a cat again."

Flitwick choked back a laugh as he drank his pumpkin juice cocktail. "I don't see why you wouldn't make a good cat," he said. "After all, you've already been halfway through it once."

"That's enough of that, Filius, thank you very much." Minerva admonished the small wizard as she watched her journeywoman get red in the face. "Can we talk about something else...like how nice the wedding was this past Saturday?"

"Indeed," Pomona Sprout said. "I rather liked that Birdie Tweeter. She wasn't rude or pushy like someone else we all know."

"And you liked the fact that you were mentioned in the article as to how Longbottom will be here as your apprentice next year," Severus said with a sneer.

"Well, of course I did," the dumpy little witch answered back. "Everyone likes to get their name mentioned once in a while. Present company excepted," she said in apology to Hermione. "We all know *you* would prefer to stay out of the papers and the limelight."

"Thank you, Pomona." Hermione sighed. "It'll be good to see Neville every day. Just don't work him too hard, okay?" She grinned at the rotund witch. "~~He~~oes have a wife to go home to each night."

"Severus, are you planning to play in the Student-Alumni Quidditch game next week?" Rolanda Hooch asked, deftly changing the subject. "I understand both Mr Malfoys, Mr Potter, Miss Weasley, and four of the younger Mr Weasleys have already signed up."

"Which of the younger Weasleys have agreed to play, Rolanda?" Poppy asked. "I might need to make sure I have enough supplies on hand."

"I believe the whole family is planning to turn out for the game, but the players will be Ginny Weasley, Charlie, Bill, George, and Ron." She named four of the five surviving brothers and grinned. "It should be an interesting game. Severus?"

"I suppose I should." Severus smirked. "If only to keep the youngest Mr Weasley and Draco Malfoy from killing or severely hexing each other." He looked over at Hermione, who blushed beet red in the face.

"Excellent," Hooch said, clapping her hands once to signify approval. "As usual, you and Lucius Malfoy will coach the alumni while I coach the students. Oliver Wood has graciously volunteered to referee the match, and Lee Jordan will be here to do the announcing." She nodded as if everything were a done deal.

"I understand Mr Jordan has managed to get the Wizarding Wireless to broadcast the game," Minerva interjected. "That's quite a coup."

"Oh, yes." Hooch chortled. "He has one of the most popular shows on the Wireless, and broadcasting the game shows the confidence the WWN management has in him. I'm quite looking forward to it."

"Lucius, you're pouting."

"Nonsense, Severus. Malfoys don't pout."

"Well, you're doing a very good imitation of pouting then." Severus sounded amused at his friend's antics. He turned to watch the game in progress. "I thought we agreed that the younger men would play and we older men would deal with game strategy?"

"And maybe some creative hexes?"

"Lucius, don't make me hurt you."

Alumni Put Pressure on Students at Annual Game

by Zero Motley

Sports Reporter, Daily Prophet

Alumni of the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry took on a team of the best student players from all of the school's houses for the fourth annual Student versus Alumni Quidditch game today. The game was broadcast by the Wizarding Wireless Network and announced by the popular wireless personality, and alumnus of the school, Lee Jordan (Gryffindor). The game was refereed by Oliver Wood (Gryffindor), Reserve Keeper for the Puddlemere United Quidditch Team.

The student team consisted of: William Abbott (Hufflepuff), Seeker; Arianna Brown (Gryffindor), Astoria Greengrass (Slytherin), and Michael Boot (Ravenclaw), Chasers; Devon McLaggen (Gryffindor) and Tristan ap Dai (Hufflepuff), Beaters; and Jerome Smythe (Slytherin), Keeper. They were coached by Rolanda Hooch, the Quidditch Coach and Flying instructor at Hogwarts.

Playing for the Alumni were: Harry Potter (Gryffindor), Seeker; Draco Malfoy (Slytherin), Ginevra Weasley (Gryffindor), and Randolph Burrow (Ravenclaw), Chasers; Gregory Goyle (Slytherin) and George Weasley (Gryffindor), Beaters; and Ronald Weasley (Gryffindor), Keeper. The alumni team was coached by Severus Snape, Professor of Potions and Head of Slytherin House, and Alumnus Lucius Malfoy.

The scoring was kept close by the expert playing of both teams. It was not until the Snitch was spotted that the match truly became exciting. Both Seekers dived and bobbed and weaved around the pitch, goading each other to truly daring feats of flying. They were neck and neck down the field in the end when young Mr Abbott managed to snare the wily Snitch by the tip of a wing, causing him to tumble to the ground...luckily only a few feet below his broom...with only a broken collar bone to show for injuries. The final score was: Students, 320 Alumni, 170.

"It was a good, clean game," stated Oliver Wood, Gryffindor alumnus and Reserve Keeper for the Puddlemere United Quidditch Team. "Both sides kept their wands in their holsters, and no rules were flagrantly violated." While this reporter witnessed no hexes being thrown during the heat of the game, the student team seemed to be very much aware of Mr Lucius Malfoy on the opposing team's sidelines, twirling his wand while Professor Snape stood by, laughing.

"It was scary," Arianna Brown, Gryffindor Chaser, reported. "He never even so much as smiles in class and here he was, laughing. I didn't know what to make of it." Others on the student team reported the same thing: that Professor Snape is a dour man, and that it is unnatural for him to laugh. It is this reporter's considered opinion that perhaps Mr Lucius Malfoy hexed Professor Snape in order to cause apprehension among the student players.

Among the familiar faces this reporter spotted in the stands enjoying the game were: Kingsley Shacklebolt, Minister for Magic; Mr and Mrs Arthur Weasley and their son, Percy Weasley, Junior Undersecretary to the Minister for Magic; Fleur Weasley, wife of William Weasley...one of the reserve players in the game...and their lovely daughter, Victoire Weasley; newlyweds Neville Longbottom and Hannah Abbott-Longbottom and the groom's grandmother, Mrs Augusta Longbottom; and Miss Lavender Brown, the newest robes designer for Madam Malkin's (and recently seen in Diagon Alley on the arm of the youngest Mr Weasley). Also observed were Mrs Narcissa Malfoy and Hogwarts' newest professor, Miss Hermione Granger, in conversation with Mrs Malfoy's sister, Andromeda Black-Tonks, and her five year old grandson, Theodore Lupin.

An invitation to tea in the Great Hall after the game was extended to the players and their families by Minerva McGonagall, Headmistress of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

"I didn't know your sister had planned to come today, Cissy. Thank you, Severus," Lucius said as he accepted a Firewhisky from Snape. "And *you*, you tosser, laughing your head off at me."

"You have to admit it was funny," Draco said. "From my viewpoint, it did look like you were ready to hex someone any minute. Although I don't think the students thought it funny at all."

"I'm rather glad she did," Narcissa said, answering her husband's question. "We haven't talked a lot in the last five years, and we both felt it was time to clear the air. Little Teddy is adorable."

"Thank you," Harry said, coming over to their corner of the room with his arm around Ginny's shoulders. "As his godfather, I'll take what credit I can for that."

Ginny nudged him in the ribs. "*We'll* take what credit we can," she said. "After all, Andromeda does let me take care of him from time to time, and he practically lives at Grimmauld Place whenever you have time off."

"Yes, well," Narcissa said. "I told my sister that I would like to see more of her and Teddy, and I wanted to try and put the past behind us. She seemed very open about that."

"One can only hope, my love," Lucius said. "But I am disappointed in you, Mr Potter," he said.

"How so?" Harry asked.

"You were this close to the Snitch and didn't catch it. Are you slowing down?"

"No. The kid was lighter than me and managed to get a wing before I did. Not bad as a flyer, actually. How old is he?"

"Third year, to my detriment," Severus said with a sneer. "And as much a dunderhead as anyone I have ever taught. Did Hermione tell you about this first-year from Wales?"

"I'm pleased you decided to stay for dinner, Molly."

"Oh, Minerva, as if I would pass on an invitation to dinner at Hogwarts."

Arthur looked askance at her. "I thought you *liked* cooking for us, Molly, my love."

"I *do* enjoy it, Arthur," she replied, "but there are times when I'd rather not, and Hogwarts elves make the best food. Ronald Bilius Weasley, there's no need to stuff your mouth so full. I've taught you better manners than that."

"Sorry, Mum," he said through a mouthful of food. "I just miss the cooking here. It's almost as good as yours."

"Good save," George muttered from beside him.

"What was that, George?" Molly asked, her ears as sharp as ever.

"Uh... I said... good cake," George said, taking a second slice. "Almost as good as what you and Angelina make." He winced as his wife nudged him in the ribs. "Oi, watch it."

"May I show them now, Minerva?" Hermione asked suddenly, practically bouncing in her seat.

"Of course, Hermione," Minerva said, stifling a laugh at her journeywoman's excitement. "Use the head table dais. You'll have more room."

"Okay." And with that, Hermione jumped out of her seat and onto the low platform that supported the head table. "Watch, everyone," she said, and Transformed.

"Blimey," Ron said, his mouth agape. "She's gorgeous."

"My word," Flitwick said, gasping in awe. "That's astounding."

"Overachieving as usual, Professor Granger," Severus said with a sneer while he raised his whisky glass to her success.

"Perfect." Minerva was pleased. "Now change back, Hermione. You don't want to be stuck in that form."

The leopard-spotted cat preened a few moments more before leaping onto the head table. She walked back and forth so that her finer points could be admired, then sat on her haunches and shifted back into the familiar form of Hermione. Sitting on the table with her legs dangling, she asked, "Did you really think it was perfect, Minerva?"

"I believe a trip to the Ministry is in order for Monday," Minerva said. "Wouldn't you say so, Kingsley?"

"Oh, definitely," he said in his deep voice. He raised his wine glass in a toast. "Congratulations, Professor Granger. That is a most beautiful form." The sentiment was echoed by all the diners in the hall.

A/N: Hermione's Animagus is a breed of cat called the Ocicat, so named because it resembles an ocelot. A result of intentional interbreeding between Abyssinian, Siamese and American Shorthair, it was recognized as a legitimate breed by the American Cat Fancier's Association in 1966 and appeared in Great Britain sometime during 1990-91, before being formally recognised as a breed by the GCCF in 2008. A picture of the breed and more information can be found here: <http://www.cfa.org/breeds/profiles/ocicat.html> (remember to remove the extra spaces). I chose the breed for Hermione's form because it's bred to be an intelligent, athletic, loyal, and social animal, and in my opinion, it's a beautiful cat.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: The characters depicted in this fiction belong to JKR, except for those which belong to me.

Author's Notes: Kudos to **noybate** for ironing out my mangled grammar and wrangling my stampeding commas. Britpicking was done by the incomparable **SlytherinsHeirx**, but all mistakes are my own.

Chapter Twenty Four

Newest Animagus Is An American-Bred Cat

by Rita Skeeter

Correspondent, Daily Prophet

Sources at the Ministry for Magic today reported that Hermione Granger, the newest professor at the well-known Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and close personal friend of Harry Potter, The-Man-Who-Lived-Twice, is the newest Animagus of the wizarding world. Her form is reported to be a spotted cat bred in the United States to resemble a small leopard and called an Ocicat.

This reporter has been assured that Professor Granger's form is that of an ordinary house cat and not an actual wild leopard-type feline, but this reporter must admit she has never heard of the breed. This reporter must also wonder what is wrong with becoming a more patriotic British breed of cat rather than an upstart breed from a breakaway colony. Is Professor Granger preaching rebellion in taking this particular form? Keep reading as your intrepid girl reporter investigates these rumours.

"Oooh, that *witch*."

"Oh dear," Filius twittered nervously. "You've seen the article."

"How could I miss it?" Hermione asked angrily. "It's right on the front page. Preaching rebellion, indeed!" She balled up the newspaper and threw it across the Great Hall. The paper ball bounced twice before skittering to a teetering halt on the Slytherin table, where it burst into flames from a wandless *Incendio*.

"I think perhaps it is time to ask Miss Skeeter to visit Hogwarts," Severus said silkily, waving his hand airily and putting out the flames. "After all, I shall be the only one here besides Filch, the house-elves, and the ghosts. Intrepid girl reporter, indeed!" He snorted at the epithet the reporter had given herself.

"And do what, Severus?" asked Minerva. "Certainly you wouldn't hurt her, would you?"

"I would certainly impress upon her the facts of the matter." Severus sneered. "If that doesn't work... there's always threatening her with a jam jar." He smirked at those seated with him at the table.

Hermione giggled. "Thank you, Severus. I needed a laugh. But seriously, what can I do about it? She hasn't out-and-out said anything except she thought, in her opinion, I shouldn't have become an American breed of cat. I don't have any choice in my Animagus form, and she knows it."

"Indeed," agreed Minerva. "What self-respecting witch or wizard would actually want to become a beetle?" She shuddered with disgust. "I, for one, happen to think your form is exceptional. From what we've discovered, it suits you splendidly."

"How so, Minerva?" Pomona Sprout asked. "What is it about that particular spotted cat that suits our Hermione?"

"The actual cat itself is reputed to be intelligent..." Hermione began.

"Of course." Severus smirked at her. "You couldn't be anything else."

"Hush, Severus, I want to hear this," Filius shushed him.

"It's also considered athletic, loyal, and a very social animal," Minerva continued. "The breed began approximately forty years ago when an American breeder wanted to produce a Siamese cat with Abyssinian *points*, I believe is the word?"

Hermione nodded. "Points being the face, ears, feet and tail for a Siamese breed. However, I read..."

"Of course you did."

"Severus!" Several voices rose in protest.

"Ahem." Minerva cleared her throat, effectively silencing the teachers. "Continue, Hermione, if you please."

"Thank you, Minerva." Hermione looked down at the table in front of her. Once again, it was covered in letters from readers of *The Daily Prophet* voicing their opinions of Rita Skeeter's article, both pro and con. "I read that the first cat was a total surprise. It was an ivory colour with brownish all-over spots, much like a leopard's. It wasn't what the breeder was looking for, so it was neutered and sold as a house pet."

"But a Muggle news reporter did a story on this beautiful spotted house cat living in his city, and a geneticist saw the article. He challenged the American cat breeders to do it again if they could, so there would be house cats that emulated the look of cats in the wild. Within two years, the breeders had developed an entirely new breed. And one I had never heard of until I Transformed."

"Indeed," Minerva said in agreement. "It was quite a shock. You all saw her last weekend. Here stood a house cat that resembled a leopard. If I hadn't been there to witness Hermione's first Transformation, I wouldn't have believed it."

"I will admit you put on a lovely show Saturday night at dinner, Hermione," Rolanda Hooch said. "You even impressed the Malfoys and the Minister of Magic. Minerva, I wonder...?"

"Yes, Rolanda?"

"Why is it that someone can study to become an Animagus, yet never attain the ability?"

"I believe..."

"Yes, Minerva." Severus sneered with a teasing glint in his eye. "Tell us your theory."

"Severus Snape, you're insufferable this morning!" Minerva scolded. "Whatever is wrong with you?"

"By the end of this week, there will be no one in this castle for six weeks except for myself, Argus Filch, several hundred house-elves, and the castle ghosts." Severus grimaced. "What do you think is wrong with me?"

"But that's not true," Hermione protested. "Poppy and I'll be here for the entire month of August, as will Minerva."

"Indeed?" A quirked eyebrow.

"Yes. Since you still aren't allowed to brew for the Infirmary, I told Poppy I'd do it again this year so she doesn't have to go outside for her supplies."

"And grateful I am too," the mediwitch said quietly from her place on the other side of the Headmistress. "Until last year, the cost was almost prohibitive and wreaked havoc with my Infirmary budget. Last year, if you remember, it was a race for Hermione to have all the potions I needed finished before the first of September."

"Therefore, Hermione suggested...and I agreed...that she should take at least the entire month of August to brew," Minerva said.

"So I have something to look forward to?" Severus sneered. "Where, pray tell, is Professor Granger supposed to do her brewing?"

"I won't be disturbing your private lab, Severus," Hermione told him. "I can use the classroom for what I have to do."

"And I intend to use the next two weeks to purchase the potions ingredients needed," Poppy said, an irritated tone in her voice. "I know I am capable, and I believe Hermione is *quite* capable, as a Potions mistress, to purchase the best ingredients available, if need be. Or do you not believe someone *you* trained is capable?"

"And if you're finished with feeling sorry for yourself," Minerva said, "I should like to see you in my office right after breakfast." With that, she rose from the table and sailed majestically out of the Great Hall, her robes billowing in a fair imitation of Severus at his worst.

Severus managed a chagrined look at his colleagues. "My apologies," he said. "I can only think that I have five interminable months yet before I can leave Hogwarts without breaking my probation."

"It's enough to drive anyone to pique," Poppy said, patting his arm in a motherly fashion. "But just think, by this time next year, you can look forward to your own holidays away from the castle."

"Look at it this way, Severus," Filius said cheerfully. "Once the students return, the term will just fly by and, before you know it, we'll be into the Christmas hols. Then you'll only have two weeks to go before you're finished."

"Thank you, Filius." Severus said drily. "What would I do without your cheer?"

"Think nothing of it." Filius said, flipping his hand in an airy good-bye as he too left the table and the Hall.

"Believe me, I won't."

Hermione snickered from her seat beside him. As he looked at her, eyebrow quirked, she cleared her throat and wiped her mouth with her napkin. "Best not keep Minerva waiting," she reminded him.

"Indeed."

"You wanted to see me, Headmistress?" He stood in the doorway and waited for her invitation to enter.

"Don't be so formal, Severus," chided Minerva, waving him into the office. "I've got some good news for you from Kingsley."

"I sincerely don't believe Shacklebolt could have any good news for me he couldn't tell me himself," Severus said, sitting down in the chair she indicated in front of her desk.

"He didn't want to be seen to be too lenient with you by the Wizengamot," Minerva explained. "However, he did manage to convince them to be... shall we say... a little more tolerant towards your 'parole'. Thus the chaperoning of the students at the train station the first of this month."

"Get to the point, Minerva."

"Yesterday, Kingsley told me that you'll be allowed to leave the grounds of the school for a two-week holiday this year." She held up her hand as he started to speak.

"The caveat is that you must spend that two weeks in my company."

"Acceptable."

"And Hermione's."

"Pardon?"

"Hermione and I will be spending the next two weeks on her Transfiguration training...in short, stabilizing her Animagus form...before she returns to Hogwarts in August to begin brewing for Poppy."

"I suppose if it will get me out of this damnable school for even a short period..."

"Excellent." Minerva beamed. "If you wish, I will help you determine if you can become an Animagus as well. If so, we can work on attaining your form during the next term."

Severus glanced over her shoulder to the portrait of Dumbledore that hung on the wall behind her desk. Albus nodded silently and quietly clapped his hands in delight, indicating that Severus might actually enjoy himself.

"That might be acceptable," he said dryly as Dumbledore twinkled and beamed at him, although the former Headmaster had closed his eyes and was feigning sleep by the time Minerva turned around to look.

Chapter 25

Chapter 25 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: The characters belong to JK Rowling. The plot belongs to me.

Author's Notes: Thank you to **noybate** for her beta work and **SlytherinsHeirx** for his Britpicking.

Chapter Twenty-Five

"This is lovely, Minerva." Hermione stood on the porch of Minerva's summer house, looking out at the heather-strewn hills and the small loch that lay at the foot of them.

"Indeed." Severus was also admiring the view. "It's quite relaxing."

"And you two are the first I've shared this with since I bought it," Minerva admitted. "It's my sanctuary away from the chaos that's known as Hogwarts."

"How long have you had this place?" Hermione asked. "It seems so settled."

"Twenty-five years. I bought it precisely because it was isolated."

"The Dark Lord would've had a field day if he'd known you had this place and actually spent time here," Severus said with a frown.

"How so, Severus?" Hermione asked. "What more could he have done that he didn't already?"

"Think about it, Hermione," Severus said with a sneer. "What better way to hurt Dumbledore than to find his Transfiguration Professor and Deputy Headmistress alone in an isolated location?"

"Oh!"

"Indeed."

"Enough of that!" Minerva scolded. "The war is over. Besides, the house isn't registered with the Ministry for Magic. I dealt with Muggles to purchase the property, and my deed is registered in Auchronie as if I were a Muggle. Everyone knew Tom wouldn't have anything to do with Muggles or their transactions."

"Severus, concentrate on what you're doing. *Not* on what Hermione is doing."

"Can't help it. I have this uncontrollable urge to take a self-inking quill and connect the dots on her back." Severus smirked as Hermione Transformed back to herself.

"Well, control yourself." Minerva crossed her arms and began to tap her foot while hiding a slight smile.

"I can't wait to see if you have an Animagus form," Hermione said, grimacing. "It's probably an itty, bitty littl**ø**at."

"Well, we won't know if he doesn't concentrate, now will we? Hermione, go practice in the other room. And close the door!"

"It won't help, Minerva." He smirked as the door slammed shut.

"Severus Snape, you are seriously trying my patience."

"What in the world?" Minerva looked up at the sound of tapping at the window. "Is that a Ministry owl?"

Severus turned at her exclamation. "It's a bit small for the Ministry," he said, reaching over and opening the window so the owl could deliver its message.

The brown-feathered messenger perched on the edge of the sink and held up its leg so the roll of parchment could be removed. Severus quickly did so, and rewarded the bird with a bit of chicken off his luncheon plate before it was cleared from the table. "It's for you," he said to Hermione, handing the letter over. The owl hooted in agreement before heading back out the window.

Hermione took the parchment and unrolled it. "It's from Ginny," she said, scanning the missive. "Oh, Merlin!" she gasped. "Molly's going to go ballistic!"

"Why would she do that?" Minerva asked in concern while Severus smirked at the thought.

"Ginny and Harry have eloped rather than going through with the big wedding Molly's planning. They've gone to Gretna Green. Is that even legal anymore?" Hermione looked at her mentor with concerned eyes.

"Of course it is," Minerva scoffed. "There's even a Wizarding chapel there. Probably where they went, if Miss Weasley had any say in it."

"Which she probably did." Severus barked with laughter. "The girl's too much like her mother not to have a say in where she gets married."

"That's true," Minerva agreed. "Well, there's nothing *we* can do about it. The new Mr and Mrs Potter will have to face her mother on their own.

"Now then...if the dishes are done...Hermione, into the other room with you and practice. And Severus, you stay here and concentrate on your meditations."

"Yes, Minerva," Severus and Hermione said.

* * *

"All right, I decree today to be a day of rest," Minerva said at breakfast. "We'll be returning to Hogwarts in four days, and I, for one, intend to relax even if it kills me."

Hermione snorted into her pumpkin juice. "You sound like my mum when we would go on holiday," she said, using a napkin to wipe her face. "My dad always wanted to go some place that had a lot of activities. By the end of the holiday, Mum was ready to collapse."

"Well, I *am* ready to collapse." Minerva smiled fondly. "Between your practicing and Severus not concentrating, I am at my wit's end. Therefore..."

"Yes?" Severus snarked. "What treat do you have in store for us?"

"I've decided that we are going into Achronie today. There's a bookstore..."

Hermione's eyes lit up. "Is it a second-hand bookstore?"

"I believe they carry both new and second-hand books," Minerva said. "At least they did the last time I was up here."

"How long ago was that, Minerva?" Severus asked as he took his turn to clear the breakfast dishes from the table.

"Five years ago. The summer Tom was finally defeated." Minerva sighed. "I needed to get away where no one could find me to ask 'Minerva this' and 'Minerva that'." She shook herself out of her reverie. "As I was saying, there's a bookstore and a pub with decent food for lunch. I, for one, would also like to visit the local stationer's and the grocer's. We ought to replenish our food supplies, and I enjoy seeing what's new in Muggle greeting cards and stationery."

"That sounds lovely," Hermione said, running water into the sink to wash up. Minerva picked up a dish towel and prepared to wipe the dishes as they were cleaned. "I was hoping to go to some bookstores before we went back to Hogwarts. I doubt Poppy will want to go into Flourish and Blotts when we go to Diagon Alley to purchase the ingredients for the infirmarium potions."

"There *is* an apothecary in Hogsmeade that carries everything you'll need at decent prices," Severus said. "I dealt with them for years before this problem with the Ministry for Magic. There's no need to go to Diagon Alley."

"I know," sighed Hermione. "But Poppy said she wants to go to Diagon Alley. Since she's the one paying for the supplies out of her portion of the school's budget, I guess we'll go where she wants to go."

"True."

* * *

"A decent day. Thank you, Minerva." Severus held several shopping bags while Minerva took down the protection spells around the small house.

"You're welcome, Severus. Hermione, did you buy enough books?" She looked over at Hermione, who smiled thoughtfully.

"Not *nearly* enough, Minerva, but I ran out of money," Hermione said, grinning.

"Goodness, where did you put them?" asked Minerva, noticing that other than the grocer's bags, Hermione had nothing else in her hands except for her small beaded purse.

"In that blasted bag of hers, where else?" Severus smirked, thinking of all the books he'd watched her place in her seemingly bottomless charmed bag once they'd left the bookstore. If he got a chance in the next few days, he intended to investigate her purchases. Some of them looked quite... entertaining.

"Severus, don't be snide." Minerva smiled at the cleverness of her favourite pupil as she opened the door.

"Yes, Minerva," Severus said with a sigh. He entered the main room and set his and Minerva's bags on the sofa. Then he started pulling out his own purchases and enlarging them so he could look them over.

"Come on, Snidely, it's my turn to fix dinner, so you have to set the table. How does fish and chips with mushy peas sound?" Hermione said with a grin, placing the grocer's bags on the kitchen table. She turned to the stove and pulled out a pan to start heating oil for the potatoes and fillets of fish they had purchased in town.

"Like an excellent idea. Coming, Minerva?" Severus paused as he realized she had not yet entered the house.

"In a few minutes, Severus. I want to enjoy the peace and quiet out here for a while," Minerva said, settling into a chair on the porch. "It's going to be hard to go back to Hogwarts."

"After a few days back, you won't even feel like you've been away," Severus said, joining her outside and sitting in a nearby chair.

"That's probably the most truthful thing anyone's said to me in a long time," Minerva sighed, smiling softly. "Thank you." She reached over and patted his knee.

"You're welcome," Severus replied. "Now I believe I had better go in and help Hermione before she comes looking for us."

"Oh, yes. I had better come help as well if I want to eat this evening." Minerva laughed as she pulled herself onto her feet.

"Indeed." Severus cocked an eyebrow and smirked at her before standing.

* * *

Chapter 26

Chapter 26 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: JKR owns her own characters, as do all other authors mentioned in this fiction. Anybody left over belongs to me.

Author's Note: This fiction is brought to you by the beta/Britpicking team of **noybate** and **SlytherinsHeirx**. Much gracious thanks to them both.

Chapter Twenty-Six

The two witches who emerged from the dooryard behind the Leaky Cauldron into Diagon Alley looked like any other shoppers...intent on picking up what was needed and Apparating back home in time to fix supper for their families.

"Is a glamour really necessary, Poppy?" the younger witch asked, gazing longingly at Flourish and Blotts as they walked past.

"My dear, I have no intention of being caught by that Skeeter woman," the elder witch said. "Filius said these charms would last all day, unlike Polyjuice." She held up her bracelet as if admiring the intricacies of the dangles hanging from it.

Poppy smiled as her companion turned almost all the way to the rear. "I'll make a deal with you, Hermione," she said.

"What kind of deal?"

"Let us conclude our business in the Apothecary as quickly as we can, and then we can browse the shelves at the bookstore for a while."

Hermione looked at her in confusion. "What...?"

"Close your mouth, dear," Poppy chuckled. "I like a good book as much as the next witch. In fact, I want to purchase the latest Jean Johnson and J.D. Robb. I know they're Muggle authors, but they certainly know how to tell a story."

"I can't believe you read Muggle books," Hermione said, a breathless hitch to her voice. "Who else have you read? Any Robin Owens or Nora Roberts or Stephanie Laurens?"

"My dear, I *love* the Regencies and almost any good historical. And you can't really expect me to pass up a good fantasy or science fiction, especially if they have something to do with magic. And I *adore* the romantic thrillers that Nora Roberts and Catherine Coulter write." Poppy looked over at the display window. "Oh, yes. We will *definitely* stop in before going home."

"Even though all those writers think magic is nothing but fiction?" Hermione asked. She was definitely learning more about this side of the Hogwarts mediwitch and loving it. "I didn't even know Flourish and Blotts sold Muggle fiction."

Poppy smiled broadly. "More so in the last few years since the end of the War. Most of the books were purchased as curiosities at first, but the stories are so well written that they've caught on with the average witch or wizard." She pouted. "It's too bad Dr. Asimov is dead. I really enjoyed reading his books, and I wish there were more."

Hermione laughed. "Now you sound like my father. He loves reading Isaac Asimov."

"I think the Wizarding world and the Muggle world have more in common than most people think." Poppy winked at her and started to search in her robes. "Now, where is my list? Oh, yes, here it is." She pulled a long scroll of parchment out of her pocket.

"Now, let's see... we need ingredients for Skele-Gro, Pepperup, Blood Replenishing Potion ... oh, and don't let me forget we need some more Hiccup cure." She shook her head. "I don't know why the students think it's funny to cast a hiccup charm on a fellow student in class."

Hermione giggled. "Because it takes the professor's eyes off the other students for a few seconds while they deal with the hiccups?"

"That could be it," Poppy said in agreement. "So... we also need contraceptive potion, both male and female..."

"Do the parents know...?" Hermione was aghast.

"What? That we hand out contraceptive potions?" Poppy asked. "Of course they do. In fact, most of the Wizarding parents insist upon it once their child reaches puberty. Only the Muggle-born students are usually unaware it's available unless they come to me and ask. Obviously, you never needed it while you were attending school, or you would have known."

"No," Hermione said with a blush. "Ron and I weren't actually intimate while we were at school. Just a lot of snogging."

"Hermione, are you...?"

"Still a virgin? No, of course not. Not since I was sixteen, anyway. And not at school either. During that summer with the son of friends of my parents. Merlin! Why am I even telling you this?"

"I *am* a professional, my dear," Poppy said with a wink. "I've heard much worse."

"Oh, I'm sure you have," Hermione declared, opening the door to the Apothecary. "May I see your list, please? The sooner we're done here, the sooner we can get to all those books that are calling our names."

"That's the lot then," Poppy said with a satisfied sigh as they left the Apothecary. "The supplies will be delivered directly to the school's infirmary, and we can start brewing tomorrow. Now, let's get some lunch, and we can spend the entire afternoon in Flourish and Blotts if we wish." She rubbed her hands together in anticipation.

Hermione laughed. "I wish I'd known about your addiction to Muggle literature while I was in school. I could have borrowed books from you."

Poppy smiled benignly. "My dear, I wouldn't have dreamed of corrupting your tender sensibilities with the books I was reading. Besides, Albus told me not to." She opened the door to the little café situated across the street from Flourish and Blotts and waited for Hermione to enter first. "After all, he did know his students rather well, and you

had the entire library to browse."

"Well, not the entire library..." Hermione hedged, giggling when Poppy eyed her with reproach. "Okay, so I did sneak into the Restricted Section a time or two. But it was in a good cause," she hastened to explain.

"I'm sure it was, dear," Poppy said, settling into a booth at the back of the café and picking up a menu. "All the same, Albus wanted you to concentrate on your schoolwork, not on what kind of Muggle literature I might or might not have had on my bookshelves."

"May I join you ladies?" A lofty-toned voice caused both to look up from their menus.

"Mrs Malfoy, how are you?" Hermione said, sliding over towards the wall to offer more room on her bench.

"Just fine, Her..." Narcissa started to say as she sat down.

Hermione shushed her quickly. "Don't," she said. "We're here incognito."

"I thought as much," Narcissa confessed. "I'll admit I didn't recognise you, but I heard you discussing Muggle literature and Albus in the same breath, so I made some inferences. Very good charm work. Flitwick's?" She examined Hermione's bracelet with a critical eye.

"Oh, yes," Poppy said. "He does the best work. No offence, dear," she apologized to Hermione.

"None taken. I know I couldn't do something like this without a lot of thought," Hermione said. "He just flicked his wand and there they were, all ready for us to put on this morning."

"So handy to have a Charms Master at hand," Narcissa mused. "Now, tell me about this Muggle literature you've been reading. Is it any better than what's available across the street?"

The three witches were laughing as they exited Flourish and Blotts later that afternoon. Both Narcissa and Poppy were loaded down with book bags...although it was a tossup as to who had purchased the most books...while Hermione carried her ubiquitous beaded bag.

"I can't believe I bought so many books," Narcissa gasped in laughter. "Lucius is going to think I've gone mad."

"Give him the Piers Anthony first," Hermione suggested. "If he doesn't like that one, try the Tom Clancy."

"Yes," Poppy agreed. "But whatever you do, don't let him have the Terry Pratchett until you've read it first. The man is a genius."

"I'm looking forward to reading the thrillers you've recommended," Narcissa admitted. "I always did enjoy reading good mysteries. And with a romance included..." She sighed. "I'd better get home before Lucius sends Aurors to look for me."

"With any luck you'd get Ron or Harry," Hermione giggled then stilled. "Uh-oh." Out of the corner of her eye she spotted Rita Skeeter bearing down on them. "Skeeter alert. Bet she's wondering just who you could be shopping with that has you laughing so hard."

"I wouldn't take that bet," Narcissa said. "I'll talk to you later, and thank you again. I had a wonderful time." She waved her bags at them as she Apparated back to Malfoy Manor.

"We're off as well," Poppy said. "On three?"

Hermione counted down. "Three... Two... One..." and they both Apparated to just outside the gates of Hogwarts.

Laughing, Hermione caught her balance and helped Poppy settle her bags. "I don't know why you didn't just have them send the books to you," she said.

"What? And have nothing new to read tonight?" Poppy grinned. "Hold your tongue, child. Besides, we don't all have bottomless bags like yours."

"I could charm one for you," Hermione offered.

"Too tempting," Poppy said. "I'd have all my worldly possessions in there and not be able to find a thing. But I thank you for the thought."

Narcissa Malfoy and Unknown Companions Laughing in Diagon Alley

by Rita Skeeter

Correspondent, Daily Prophet

Narcissa Malfoy, wife of reformed Death Eater Lucius Malfoy, was seen in Diagon Alley today, exiting Flourish and Blotts with two unknown companions.

Mrs Malfoy and one of her companions were carrying several bags with the Flourish and Blotts logo. When questioned, the assistant manager admitted the three ladies had purchased a great many books from the shop's line of Muggle literature. Mrs Malfoy's two companions were overheard giving advice on which books she might enjoy and which books they thought her husband might read.

Investigations into the unknown ladies' movements showed that they had purchased supplies at the Apothecary for Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry earlier this morning and, upon leaving, had lunch at the Lucky Witch café where Mrs Malfoy joined them.

It is this reporter's considered opinion that the unknown witches are teachers from the school using a glamour to enter Diagon Alley. The question is: why would a glamour be necessary unless the supplies purchased at the Apothecary were for a nefarious purpose? Does the Headmistress know of this excursion by two of her teachers? Was one of the two so-called ladies actually Severus Snape, who is known to be on exceedingly friendly terms with the Malfoys?

"Okay, I'm going to hex that witch until she doesn't know what hit her," Hermione said after reading the latest article in *The Daily Prophet*. "How she can write this drivel with a straight face, I'll never know."

"She's going to stir up trouble with the Ministry by insinuating that Severus was in Diagon Alley yesterday," Minerva said. "I'll alert Kingsley as to what really happened. Maybe he can head them off."

"I certainly hope so, Minerva," Severus sneered. "I've come too close to freedom to be sent to Azkaban because one petty witch is spewing vitriol."

"We'll get her to print a retraction, Severus," Minerva assured him. "Even if I have to Imperius her to do so," she muttered.

"I would prefer it if you could stay out of Azkaban as well," Severus said calmly. "Go talk to Kingsley. I'm sure the Wizengamot will accept the testimony of Hogwarts' Headmistress, all the professors, Poppy Pomfrey, and one third of the Golden Trio, as to where I was yesterday, and just who exactly was in Diagon Alley shopping with Narcissa."

"If not, then I'll help Imperius Skeeter," Filius said. The other professors sitting at the breakfast table agreed heartily.

A/N: The mention of Jean Johnson as a published author five years after the final battle is a tribute to the fanfiction of our own **Ladyofthemasque**, even though she didn't publish her first book, "The Sword", until 2005...two years after this story is set. I also think Poppy is mistaken in believing that the Lady is a Muggle. Anyone who can write about magic the way the Lady does must have some wizarding blood in her.

Chapter 27

Chapter 27 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: The characters depicted in this fiction belong to JK Rowling, her heirs, and her assignees, except for those who belong to me.

Author's Notes: Kudos to **noybate** for stepping in as beta for this story. This chapter has been Britpicked by the incomparable **SlytherinsHeirx**, but any mistakes are my own.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Severus Snape Not in Violation of Parole

by Barnabas Cuffe

Editor, Daily Prophet

It was erroneously speculated in this newspaper the other day that Severus Snape, Order of the Phoenix spy and reformed Death Eater, had violated his parole and appeared in Diagon Alley under the guise of a Glamour charm. This has now been proven to be false.

Kingsley Shacklebolt, the current Minister for Magic, has verified that the Headmistress and teachers at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry have testified, under Veritaserum, that Severus Snape never left the school that day. When questioned as to who, then, was purchasing potion ingredients, Minister Shacklebolt would only state, "There are two Potions masters at Hogwarts these days."

It is, therefore, the thoughts of the editor of this newspaper that perhaps Professor Hermione Granger felt she needed a Glamour charm in order to avoid creating crowded conditions during her visit to the apothecary (see sidebar, page 4). As a heroine of the War, Professor Granger is no doubt used to being in the public limelight with Harry Potter and Ronald Weasley, although it has been noted that she has refused many perfect opportunities to be interviewed by this newspapers' reporters.

It is the custom of this newspaper to print only the facts and to offer apologies when those facts are in error. Therefore, the management of this paper would like to apologize to Professor Severus Snape for the assumption that he would break his parole in such a blatant manner.

"Hmph," Minerva said, reading the *Daily Prophet* at the breakfast table. "A not-so-subtle insult veiled within an inadequate apology."

"And placed below the advertisement for 'Mrs Scower's Magical Mess Remover'," Filius pointed out.

"Naturally," Severus said sourly. "Why place an apology where anyone could actually read it? And I'm *on probation*, not parole. Perhaps someone should point out the difference."

"Now, Severus," Minerva said, trying to soothe the irate wizard, "just think of the fact that in four and a half months, you won't have to stay on the grounds anymore. And," she pointed out, "your salary will be returned to what it should have been in the first place."

"Hurrah," Severus said drily. "Winning my wager with Lucius has given me my entire salary plus another ten percent. I'll lose Galleons come January."

"At least you've got your health," Poppy said cheerfully.

"Bah!"

"I received a letter from Lucius today," Severus said, leaning up against the door to his office with his arms crossed over his chest.

"Hmm?" Hermione replied absent-mindedly while she placed the last of her filled vials of Blood Replenishing Potion into the proper boxes and cast cushioning charms. "Oh, yes?" she said as she turned to look at him.

"Yes, he said to thank you and Poppy for the books," Severus said.

"Oh, he's welcome." Hermione turned to clean her work area. Casting *Wingardium Leviosa* sent the cauldrons and her other tools to the sink area for a magical scrubbing. An *Evanescio* cleaned the work tables of the spills inevitable to any brewing project. "What did he think of them?" she asked, walking over to the sink to supervise the clean-up there.

"He enjoyed the Anthony and the Pratchett," Severus said, grinning, "but didn't understand one word in three of the Clancy. What exactly did you give him?"

Hermione looked over her shoulder at the Potions professor. *Merlin!* she thought. *He's really good-looking when he smiles. Who'd have thought it?*

"Hermione?"

"Hmm? Oh! Poppy and I suggested some books to Narcissa that we thought Lucius might enjoy when we were in Flourish and Blotts last week."

"Yes. I recognized the names Pratchett and Clancy, but wasn't sure about Anthony?"

"Piers Anthony."

Severus looked scandalised. "He writes science fiction."

"Also this amazingly funny series about a magical land called Xanth."

"Zanth?"

"No, Xanth with an 'X'. They're full of puns and improbable situations and incredibly well written." She moved out of the way as the cauldrons, now clean, swept out of the sink and starting stacking themselves on the shelves. The knives, stirring rods, and other tools placed themselves neatly in the cupboard drawers.

"Yes, well, Lucius said he enjoyed Pratchett's wizards, but didn't understand much about what Clancy was talking about. You recommended a techno-thriller to Narcissa for Lucius?"

"It was *The Hunt for Red October*," Hermione explained. "It's a classic. I thought he might enjoy the defecting Russian submarine captain."

She finished her clean-up and turned to the boxes of potion vials. Casting a levitating charm on the packed boxes, she led the way out of the classroom and up the stairs. Severus followed behind the boxes to make sure they didn't glance off the walls along the way and spill.

"So you and Poppy spent part of your day in Flourish and Blotts. Why am I not surprised?" he smirked. "Did you buy very much, or is that a rhetorical question?"

"Actually, I bought quite a few books," Hermione said in confirmation. "So did Poppy. I didn't know Flourish and Blotts carried a line of Muggle books until she told me. Narcissa overheard us talking in the café, and we invited her to join us for lunch."

"Lunch does not equate to Anthony, Pratchett, and Clancy." Severus reached over and nudged a box back into line.

"Well, no, but Narcissa was curious about Muggle literature, so we asked her to join us," she explained. Starting up the main flight of stairs, she felt like she was leading a line of wayward ducklings as the boxes floated awkwardly into the turn

"Once Poppy and I started exclaiming over all the authors and books that were available, she asked us to give her some recommendations for herself." Hermione giggled. "By the time the three of us were finished, she had almost as many books as Poppy and I. It was fun."

"At least *you're* able to buy new books," Severus grouched. "As you know, the Ministry has blocked me from sending out any letters. That includes orders for books from any and all booksellers or publishers. I haven't had anything new to read since I recovered and came back here." He thought for a moment. "Well, except for the few Potions journals Irma keeps for the library. Oh, and whatever Minerva's managed to pick up for me over the last few years without arousing overt suspicion."

Hermione turned and looked at him. "I'm sorry," she said. "If you had said something, I could've bought some books for you. But didn't you buy some while we were in Auchronie?"

"Yes, and I have read everything at least twice since then," he grumbled. "I didn't have enough Muggle money on me at the time to buy every book I wanted."

Hermione turned into the corridor leading to the Infirmary. "Well, if you want to browse my bookshelves for something to read, you're more than welcome."

"I might just take you up on that, Professor Granger."

Hermione had just poured herself a glass of elf-made wine and sat down with the newest book by Jessica Bird when there came a knock at her door. Without thinking, she waved her hand to drop the protection spells and called out, "Come in."

She started when Severus stuck his head around the door and glared. "Don't you check to see who's outside your door before inviting them in?" he scolded. "I could have been anybody."

"Anybody who's living in the castle right now," Hermione shot back. "What are you doing here?"

"You told me this afternoon I might come up and browse through your books. Have you changed your mind?"

"Oh! No, of course not," Hermione said, coming to her feet. She set her wine glass down on the side table and walked over to the bookshelves lining most of three walls of her quarters. "Help yourself," she said, waving at the hundreds of books sitting on the shelves. "Would you like some wine?"

"That would be enjoyable," Severus said, starting at one side of the room and moving methodically along the shelves. "You have a great many Muggle romances here."

"Hello," Hermione said, pouring the wine. "Muggle-born here. A lot of these authors are also favourites of my mum's."

"Understandable, then. Ah," Severus said, pulling a paperback from its place on the shelf. *Naked in Death?* He turned the book over to read the blurb on the back. "A futuristic mystery? Is it any good?"

"J. D. Robb?" Hermione was aghast. "You've heard of Tom Clancy and Terry Pratchett, but you've never heard of J. D. Robb?"

"Did I not just say so?" The sarcastic tone was back.

"Sorry. Yes, she's very good. You might enjoy it." Hermione placed the second glass of wine down on her coffee table. "The sofa's quite comfortable."

"Thank you," he said, still perusing the shelves. "I see you have a great many of these *Death* novels."

"My mother buys the newest one when it comes out and passes them on to me when she's finished. They're published about every six months. That one you're holding is the very first, and they're shelved in series order."

He walked over to the sofa and sat down with the book still in his hands. "I thought I had a great many books," he said. "But *still* probably have more than you do."

"These aren't all of mine," Hermione said, sitting back in her chair. "Most of them are still at my parents' house."

"Indeed," Severus agreed. "I kept the majority of mine at my house in Spinner's End. I can't wait until I can get back there and assess the damage."

"Harry made sure nothing was taken from there after the war," she reassured him. *And* he and I cast the tightest protection spells we could find to make sure."

Severus scoffed. "Two teenagers?"

"Who had just survived almost a year on the run without being found by Death Eaters, *and* we helped to destroy a madman," Hermione reminded him.

"Point taken."

"I set the spells to alert me if anyone tried to enter the house," she continued. "In the last five years, I haven't felt anything, and the spells have been undisturbed every time I've gone to look."

"I thank you for that." He picked up the glass of wine and took a sip. "The wine is good. I'll reserve judgement on the book." He smirked and sat back to read.

Hermione smiled to herself as she picked up her own book. Shortly, the only sounds in the room were the turning of pages and the crackle of the fire.

* * *

"This was quite an interesting book," Severus said a couple of hours later, closing the cover. "Might I borrow the next one to take back to my quarters? I'll return it to you in the morning."

"Certainly," Hermione stood and stretched. She held out her hand for the book he held, then walked over to put it away. *Glory in Death* is basically a continuation of the first one. Actually, they all are. Each one advances the story by a few weeks or months. This entire series," she waved her hand over the books, "encompasses probably a little more than two years in fictional time."

"And this woman publishes twice a year?" He was astounded. "She must be a prolific writer."

"She also publishes under the name of Nora Roberts," Hermione told him, pointing at another section of shelves. "At least two books a year come out under that name. I don't think any of her books have ever been out of print since she started being published."

"Astounding." Severus took the next book in the mystery series and bowed towards Hermione. "I thank you for the loan of the book and for a most enjoyable evening."

"You're welcome. I hope you enjoy the book."

"I'm sure I shall."

Author's Notes: For those few who do not know, Nora Roberts and J. D. Robb are one and the same person. When she started writing the *Death* novels, Miss Roberts decided to publish them under a pen-name since they were mysteries rather than romances. The initials J. and D. came from the first names of her two sons, according to her J. D. Robb website. When the books turned out to be popular, her publishers convinced her to add "Nora Roberts writing as J. D. Robb" to the book covers.

Chapter 28

Chapter 28 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: All canon characters and book titles belong to their respective authors. I own nothing except the title and plot of this story.

Author's note: Beta'd by **noybate**. The chapter has not been Britpicked; therefore, any and all language mistakes are mine own.

Chapter Twenty Eight

"All right, every one. Settle down, please." Minerva rapped on the table with her knuckles. "This will be our last staff meeting before the students arrive tonight. Severus, please put the book down." She frowned at the title while he bookmarked the page where he'd had to stop reading. "*Purity in Death?* Severus, *whatever* are you reading?"

"It's a mystery novel, Minerva," Poppy quickly said. "Not at all what you're thinking."

"Thank you, Poppy," Severus said with a mild sneer. "I believe I can speak for myself."

"Be that as it may," Minerva said with a firm tone, "we need to finish up before the train arrives. I want all of you to welcome mediwitch Ginevra Potter to Hogwarts. She will be the new Infirmary Assistant." She smiled at her former student while Ginny grinned and waved at the other teachers. "Poppy, do you have everything you need?"

"Thanks to Hermione and her manic brewing last month, yes, I do," Poppy answered with a smile towards the younger woman. "We also saved almost twenty-five percent over what we spent last year because we didn't have to go outside to purchase any potions, *including* the students' contraceptives."

"Excellent," Minerva said, making a note on the parchment in front of her. "That leaves our infirmary budget in good shape starting out the school year. Now, we need to start planning for the Hallowe'en Feast this year. If anyone has any ideas, please bring them to me. Yes, Severus?"

"My idea is to cancel the festivities this year," he said snidely.

"You say that every year," Filius said, grinning at his fellow teacher. "It hasn't worked yet."

"I'll leave some parchment here in the staff room for you to write out your ideas," Minerva said firmly. "The sheets will be charmed to be sent to my office as soon as they're written on and folded. We need to have the theme settled by the fifteenth of this month. And no, Severus, you cannot use up every piece suggesting cancellation."

He smirked as the rest of the staff laughed at the idea of Minerva being overwhelmed by Severus' spiky handwriting. Minerva let them laugh for a bit; then, she rapped on the table again to gain their attention.

"Now then, Filius. Is the Sorting Hat ready?"

"Ready and eager, Minerva. I have the list of new first-years here."

"Good. Mr Filch..." She frowned at the caretaker who was staring out the nearest window. "Argus?"

"Oh. Yes, Headmistress?"

"Is something wrong?"

"No, Headmistress. Just watching Mrs Norris chase a bird." He smiled indulgently.

"All right. Do you have the newest list of contraband from Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes?"

"Posted on the door to my office. Not that it does me any good," he complained harshly, his smile fading to the usual morose scowl.

"At least the students can't claim they didn't know about the list," she said. "Is there any other business that needs to be addressed before the train arrives?" No one raised a hand. "No? Good. I have some new business that we can deal with before we adjourn."

The staff glanced around at each other in wonder. Wasn't all the business finished?

"Hermione, this concerns you, dear," Minerva said. "Would you come up here, please?" She nodded at the head of the table.

Hermione stood up from her seat between Poppy and Severus to walk up to Minerva. "Is something wrong?" she asked.

"Not at all, dear," Minerva said, unrolling a scroll. "I just wanted to read this:

"Be it known by all here present that Hermione Jean Granger, having been tested and deemed acceptable, is hereby adjudged to be celebrated as a Mistress of Transfiguration, with all rights and duties as appropriate to her position.

Dated this first day of September, Anno Domini two thousand and three.

Signed and sealed by our hand,

Minerva McGonagall, Master of Transfiguration.

Filius Flitwick, Master of Charms.'

"Congratulations, dear," Minerva said, handing Hermione the scroll.

Hermione looked at the headmistress with brimming eyes and impulsively hugged her. "Thank you, Minerva," she said. "I didn't think I was anywhere near ready."

"You never do," Severus said, smiling in congratulations. "But if the master believes the journeyman is ready and other masters in the discipline agree, then the journeyman is ready. I traded owls...with Minerva's aid...with five other Potions masters last Fall about your skills and knowledge. Without hesitation, they all agreed with me. You will find their letters of recommendation at the Ministry in your file."

"Indeed," Minerva agreed. "I spoke with seven other Transfiguration masters, including your professors at Cambridge Wizarding. They were very impressed with you and your level of scholarship."

"Now, if there is no other business? Good. I hereby close this meeting and will see all of you this evening at the Welcoming Feast. Severus, if you would come with me?"

* * *

"Minerva, are you crying?" Severus asked with concern, seating himself in the guest chair in the Headmistress' office.

"Of course not." Minerva snorted. She sat in the desk chair, then brushed at her cheeks. "Well, maybe a little. It's a rite of passage to raise a new Master. You know that."

"Yes," he agreed sulkily. "You can take her out to celebrate this weekend. / have to wait until January first."

"I spoke with the other members of the staff..." Minerva started to say.

"And they agreed with you," he said with barely veiled sarcasm.

"Yes," Minerva said tersely. "We will have a party this coming weekend, here, in the castle, to celebrate Hermione's attaining both Masteries within a year of beginning her apprenticeships." She eyed him cautiously. "Then, if you want, you can still have your private celebration with her after your probation ends. / certainly intend to have one with her sometime this week once things settle down with the students."

"It's your choice." Severus started to rise. "If you're finished?"

"I'm not finished yet," she said. Reaching across the desk, she took the paperback book he'd brought with him and looked at the bright yellow cover. "The title is somewhat disconcerting..."

"Considering my recent chequered past?" Severus sat down again.

"Yes. Poppy said this is a mystery. A Muggle author?" She turned to the back cover and began to read the description.

"Yes. The book belongs to Hermione. I've borrowed it from her."

"Is it any good?"

"I have enjoyed the others in the series immensely."

"There are more?" Minerva asked incredulously, while at the same time she was intrigued.

"This is the fifteenth book in the series. I was quite surprised at the writing. It is very...I suppose you could say refreshing...for a Muggle writer." Severus paused then continued, "Hermione tells me this particular author publishes under this name twice a year and publishes more books under a different name within the same year."

"And he's a *Muggle*?"

"She."

"Pardon?" She glanced down at the book in her hands.

"The author is a she and, yes, she is a Muggle. A most prolific writer."

"I must speak with Hermione about her books," Minerva murmured, turning the book over and over between her hands.

"You might wish to speak with Poppy as well."

"Poppy?"

"I am given to understand that she has been a fan of selected Muggle literature for some years now." He smirked. "How do you think she knew the genre of this particular book?"

"I see." Minerva looked at him with consideration, her eyes narrowed.

* * *

"...and last, but not least, I should like to congratulate Professor Granger on achieving her Mastery in Transfiguration. Professor Granger will be taking Transfiguration classes this year, rather than just the first four years, and is the newly appointed Head of Gryffindor House, thus freeing Professor Vector for other tasks.

"Now, let the Welcoming Feast begin." Minerva sat down and leaned over towards Hermione. "I spoke with Severus and Poppy this afternoon after the staff meeting."

"Oh?" Hermione kept her voice down, but she could see several staff members straining to hear the conversation. "What about?"

"Muggle literature. Severus tells me you have an entire series of the type of book he was reading this afternoon."

"Oh, you mean the J.D. Robb books?" There was relief in her voice. "Yes, I do. Did you want to borrow one?"

"Might I? The one he had looked interesting, and he mentioned there were some fourteen books that came before it?"

Hermione giggled. "Yes, there are, and the latest one came out last March. He hasn't read that one yet." She glanced at the wizard sitting next to her, sporting his trademark smirk as he unashamedly eavesdropped. "I'll loan you the first book of the series after my new Gryffindor firsties are taken care of."

Minerva patted her hand. "That's fine, dear. You take care of your other duties first. I can wait."

A/N: Nora Roberts, writing as J.D. Robb, does indeed publish two *In Death* novels each year for a total so far of thirty-five novels and eight short stories. The thirty-sixth novel is due to be released in September of 2012.

At the time this particular fanfic chapter is taking place (August/September 2003), she had published sixteen novels and two short stories, with the seventeenth novel coming out the end of September of 2003. *Purity in Death* was published in September of 2002, and *Portrait in Death* came out in March of 2003. A complete listing of all the novels and short stories (including their original dates of publication) for this series can be found at <http://www.fictiondb.com/author/jd-robb~6286.htm> (remove the excess spaces).

Chapter 29

Chapter 29 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: I own nothing but my original ideas. The rest belongs to JKR and Blackwell's.

Author notes: Thank you to **noybate** for the beta on this chapter. It has not been Britpicked, so any mistakes are my own.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

"Professor Granger, may I speak with you?"

Hermione looked up from the essays she was grading in the staff lounge to see the Muggle Studies teacher standing in front of her. "Professor Murdoch, how may I help?"

"I understand you have Muggle literature." Sheila Murdoch looked rather uneasily at Hermione. "I need some help."

"With Muggle literature?"

"With making it easier for my students to understand Muggles," she explained. "Goodness knows the books I have for them now are useless. They were useless when I attended school."

Hermione giggled. "I know what you mean. But I thought you were a half-blood. Didn't you...?"

"My father is a wizard who fell in love with a Muggle, so I was raised pretty much in the Wizarding world. Especially after I started showing signs of being a witch."

"Oh." Hermione looked thoughtful. "That must have been hard on your mother...not being able to do magic."

"We have house-elves, and they adore Mother," Sheila said, smiling. "She and my father live very well without her having to do any kind of magic."

"I'm glad for them," Hermione said. "So you want me to recommend some Muggle books? For what years?"

"First through fifth, I should think," Sheila replied. "I rarely have any N.E.W.T. classes for Muggle Studies, but I do have a few O.W.L.s."

"Let me think about it and get back to you," Hermione said. "I may want to see what I have at home that I enjoyed reading at that age."

"I quite understand and I really appreciate this."

"No problem."

* * *

"Professor Murdoch?" Hermione held out a parchment of book titles. "Now, these are just recommendations..."

"If it will help," Sheila Murdoch said, "that's all I ask." She took the list and scanned it quickly. "Some of these authors I've heard of," she mused. "Jules Verne, Rudyard Kipling, Jane Austen, C.S. Lewis, Tolkien..." She looked at Hermione. "I don't know why I didn't think of these. They're some of my mother's favourites."

"But some of these others I've never heard of: Brian Jacques, Lloyd Alexander, Lois Lowrey..."

"I might suggest a field trip, Professor Granger," a familiar, silky voice said from behind the two women.

"A field trip?" Hermione turned to face Severus. "Why a field trip?"

"To Muggle London and a Muggle bookstore, of course."

"That's a wonderful idea, Severus." Sheila clapped her hands gleefully. "We could go this weekend, Professor Granger, couldn't we?"

"Hermione."

"Beg pardon?"

"You can call me Hermione. Professor Granger is a bit formal between colleagues, don't you think?"

"Oh. Of course." Sheila blushed. "You can call me Sheila. What about this weekend?"

Hermione laughed. "You have to ask *me* if I want to go to a bookstore? Haven't you been listening to the gossip in the staff room?"

"I don't pay much attention to gossip," Sheila giggled. "It's the bane of my husband. He lives for information of any kind."

"What does he do?" Hermione asked curiously.

"Mike's an Auror," Sheila answered. "He's stationed in Hogsmeade, which makes it wonderful for me. I can be home every night without Apparating to London and back."

"Shall I ask Minerva about going to London this weekend?" she continued. "I really want to have something for my classes on Monday."

"I have no objections so long as I'm not needed here," Hermione said.

Sheila grinned and almost ran out of the staff room towards the Headmistress' office.

"Hermione, might I ask a favour?" Severus said from his seat in the corner.

"Certainly, Severus," she replied. "What do you need?"

"If you do go to London, may I give you a list and the Galleons to pick up a few books for me?"

"I'd be happy to." Hermione smiled at him. "Don't worry about the money. We can figure it up when I get back."

"Thank you."

Hermione decided to tease him. "Is that why you suggested a field trip?" she asked. "So I could buy you some books?"

Severus smirked. "Of course. How else am I to have something new to read when the Ministry won't let me order anything from either Muggle or Wizarding establishments?"

"Nothing?"

"Not a thing. Minerva has been good enough in previous years to purchase what I needed in the way of journals and periodicals in Hogsmeade or Diagon Alley, but she won't venture into Muggle London very often. I was unaware of the fact that Flourish and Blotts was now selling Muggle literature..." He paused. "Of all my restrictions, I find that I miss reading the newest books the most."

Suddenly serious, Hermione said, "I'll do what I can. Just give me your list."

"I am most appreciative."

* * *

"This is fabulous," Sheila exclaimed, her eyes moving constantly over the many shelves of books in Blackwell's. "I'm sure to find what I need here."

"Indeed," Narcissa said from behind her. "Elizabeth, you never told me this was here."

"You never asked, Narcissa." Elizabeth smiled. "Hermione, isn't this where you and Draco bought the medical books you researched?"

"Yeah, Mum, although we went to the Guys branch," Hermione said as she ran to keep up with Sheila. "They've got almost everything..." Her voice trailed off into the distance.

Narcissa smirked. "Lucius won't like it if I come home with more books, but I did tell him I was going shopping."

"Matt's the same way," Elizabeth said with a laugh. "It's their own fault for not wanting to come with us."

"Indeed. Now, where do we start?"

* * *

"May I help you ladies find something?" The snooty-voiced salesclerk looked askance at Sheila's attempt at Muggle clothing. There wasn't anything he could place as being *wrong*, but her clothing seemed off somehow.

Hermione drew his attention. "We're looking for books for our students. Most of them have no idea of how British society works, so we're hoping to find something they'll

enjoy reading and yet manage to learn at the same time." She looked at the clerk, who decided that, as teachers, they were to be accorded some respect.

"Of course, Madam," he said. "Do you prefer fiction or non-fiction?"

"I'd say some of both. Wouldn't you, Sheila?"

"Hmmm?" she said, looking up from the cover blurb of the bestseller she held. "Oh, definitely. A little of both, especially on how things work and why."

"I see," the clerk said. "And what age group are we looking for?"

"Grammar school," Hermione explained. "First year through fifth. We... er... teach at a small public school in Scotland, and we're only here for the weekend."

"I see," Obviously this particular teacher knew what she wanted. "If you would come this way..."

"Oh, that's perfect!"

* * *

"Okay, I think I have enough books here," Elizabeth said. "What do you think, Narcissa? Narcissa?" She looked around. "Narcissa, where are you?"

"Are you looking for the blonde lady you came in with, Madam?" a sales lady asked with a suppressed giggle. "She's over in our Romance section."

"Thank you very much."

"Don't mention it."

Elizabeth hurried over to the Romance section only to find Narcissa knee-deep in books. A harried salesclerk was busily trying to pick up the books from the floor, while Narcissa kept looking at one after another, replacing them on the shelf only to have them fall off.

"I'm terribly sorry, Elizabeth," she said, turning around as Hermione's mother called her name. "I seem to have lost track of time."

"What is all this?" Elizabeth asked, trying unsuccessfully to suppress a smile. "Narcissa, there are more books on the floor than in your basket."

Narcissa looked down. "Oh, dear. How did that happen?" She replaced the book in her hand back on its shelf and it promptly fell to the floor. "That's not right." She started to draw her wand.

"It's all right, Narcissa," Elizabeth said, placing a hand on her arm. "Do you have everything you wanted?"

"Yes, indeed, Madam," the salesclerk said, looking up at her customers as she stacked the books. "This happens all the time." Her expression said just the opposite, however.

"I believe so. Where are Hermione and Professor Murdoch?" Narcissa asked, stepping over the floored books, leaving the salesclerk to pick them up.

"I saw them in the queue waiting to pay for their purchases," Elizabeth said. "Why don't we join them and then go find someplace for lunch?"

"An excellent idea."

* * *

Author's notes: Blackwell's is a real bookstore with over forty shops in Great Britain, including Oxford, Edinburgh, and Charing Cross Road. For the purposes of this chapter, I used the shop in Charing Cross Road. If you're interested in an online listing of all locations, go here: <http://bookshop.blackwell.co.uk/> (remember to remove the extra spaces) and click on the "Our Shops" link at the top of the page.

Chapter 30

Chapter 30 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: All belongs to JKR except that which does not. No Galleons have changed hands in the writing of this fiction.

Author's Note: All hail **noybate** for her work as a beta. Any mistakes are mine.

Chapter Thirty

"Never again," Hermione moaned as she kicked off her shoes, stretched out on a sofa in the staff lounge, and closed her eyes, her beaded bag hitting the floor more or less at the same time.

"Problems in London?" Poppy asked, looking up from her latest thriller. She looked around quizzically. "Where's Sheila?"

"About now? Probably being pampered by her husband and three children," Hermione snarled. "My mother and Narcissa Malfoy are *Power Shoppers*." She groaned as she stretched her feet and wiggled her toes. "I don't want to go shopping with both of them together ever again."

She moaned as someone sat down on the sofa, picked up her feet, and started massaging them. "I'll give you to forever to stop that," she said, opening her eyes.

Severus smirked. "Now you know why Lucius so often refuses to go shopping with Cissy. She has the stamina of a Hippogriff." He rubbed the sole of one of her feet with his thumb to work out the kinks, while her other foot twitched with anticipation. "Call this a down payment for purchasing my books."

"Oh, Merlin," Hermione moaned. "You are so welcome." She closed her eyes again and slid further down into the sofa as her entire body relaxed. "I wasn't able to get everything on your list, but the assistant manager at Flourish and Blotts assured me the rest of the books should arrive by owl sometime this week."

Severus quirked an eyebrow at her. "You didn't tell them the books were for me, did you?"

"Of course not." One brown eye cracked open. "At least being a Potions master gives me an excuse for purchasing the books you wanted. I'll want to read them too, just so you know. Consider it part of my payment."

"Indeed." He picked up the other foot and started rubbing as she moaned her pleasure. "Just what do I owe you in Galleons for the purchase price?"

"Hmmm. Oh! The receipt's in my bag with your books. The cost of shipping the other books is included," she said sleepily. "Oh my, but you are good with your hands."

"If you think a foot rub feels good, you should try one of my back rubs," he said evenly.

Hermione sat up so fast she almost kicked a sensitive part of his anatomy. "Severus Snape, are you *flirting* with me?"

Poppy started laughing, interest in her book forgotten in observing the much more interesting interaction going on across the room. "My dear, I haven't heard Severus offer anyone else a back rub since he came on staff. You *are* the lucky witch."

Severus smirked at Poppy. "Considering how everyone thinks of me as a greasy git..."

"I do not!" Hermione interrupted. "I've always respected you, even when you were mean to us."

"Respect does not mean stealing from my private stores," Severus scolded with a knowing smirk.

Hermione shrank back into the corner of the couch and tucked her feet up under her, making herself as small as possible. "You knew that was me?" she asked faintly.

"Indeed," Severus sneered. "But it wasn't until you turned halfway into a cat that I realized who my thief might have been." He smiled at her...a most alarming prospect. "Being a cat for a few weeks was, I felt, proper retribution. *And* I gave you an Acceptable for the potion."

Owl post was always a welcome part of breakfast for the denizens of the castle. This morning, when a large parcel was brought to Hermione, she offered the two owls who delivered it the rest of the sausage on her plate as thanks. In addition to the package, the owl post also brought her the latest issues of *The Practical Potioneer* and *Transfiguration Today*, as well as her copies of the latest Muggle science periodicals forwarded by her parents. Without a thought, she pushed the science and potion journals towards Severus while she picked up the *Daily Prophet*.

"Why I read this rag, I'll never know," she muttered.

"For the entertainment value, of course," Severus replied as he opened *The Practical Potioneer* and began reading.

"Well, there certainly can't be any other reason," Hermione said, unfolding the paper to the front page. "And it's just not that entertaining. Especially when the only news that seems to be worth printing is a sighting of my mother and Narcissa shopping together in Diagon Alley."

"A most unlikely friendship," Severus said absently, scanning the first article to see if it was one he wanted to read in depth at a later time.

"And they said it would never last," Hermione said with a laugh.

"Indeed."

Hermis,

Did you read in the Daily Prophet last week where Skeeter made a noise about our mothers shopping together? You'd think the Dark Lord had risen again. If she's not careful, she'll lose her job over this. People are trying to forget the War ever happened.

How's Hogwarts' treating you? Professor Bettz said now you've got your Potions mastery and some experience in the classroom, you could come back and teach at Cambridge Wizarding. I miss my lunch partner.

Ferret

Ferret,

Yes, I read it. Severus and I both commented on what an unlikely friendship they have. The thing is, they're more alike than they are different. Both only had one child, both have been married more than twenty years to the man they first married, and...the most important part...they're both Power Shoppers.

I made the mistake of inviting them to go shopping with the new Muggle Studies professor and myself to Blackwell's a couple of weeks ago. They then proceeded, after lunch, to shop the feet off Sheila and me. Just because my mum's a Muggle and yours is a pure-blood doesn't mean they can't be friends.

Hermis

Hermione,

I read the article in the paper about your dear mother and Narcissa Malfoy being seen together in Diagon Alley again.

Not to butt in, dear, but do you think it wise to encourage your mother to be friends with a Malfoy? After all, they do support Blood Purity. Perhaps you might tactfully suggest to your mother that, if she must have friends in the Wizarding world, someone other than Narcissa Malfoy might be a better choice.

Yours,

Molly

"Oh, bloody hell."

"Professor Granger, really. There are children present." Minerva was aghast to hear her Transfiguration professor swearing over the morning mail.

"Sorry, Minerva, but this is too much," Hermione said, handing the Headmistress the letter she'd been reading.

Minerva scanned it quickly and then put it down, her lips pinched. "You're forgiven, Hermione. The nerve of that woman..."

"What woman?" Severus looked up from the new book he'd brought to the table to read.

Hermione handed him the letter. "Molly Weasley is a spiteful busybody who isn't exactly one to talk about friendship. The problem is... how do I tell her to bugger off without jeopardizing my friendship with the rest of the family?"

"Let your mother do it?" he suggested.

"She can't defend herself if Molly decides to hex first and ask questions later."

"A valid point. Any ideas, Minerva?"

"I might try to think of something." Minerva mused. "Molly is a witch who holds a grudge rather than letting it go."

"Speaking of grudges..." Filius said, looking at the front page of the *Daily Prophet*. "I think you'd better read this." He handed the paper to Severus.

* * *

Severus Snape Violating Parole

Abetted by Hermione Granger

by Rita Skeeter

Correspondent, Daily Prophet

It has been learned by this reporter that Severus Snape, former Death Eater and currently professor of Potions at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, has been violating his parole, ably abetted by Hermione Granger, also a professor at Hogwarts and supposed friend to Harry Potter, the Man Who Lived Twice.

Professor Granger has apparently been seen giving Professor Snape copies of various magazines as well as other books to read. It is the understanding of this reporter that Severus Snape has been banned from receiving any books and/or periodicals for the duration of his parole. For Professor Granger to disregard this ruling is tantamount to saying she does not care about the wizarding world's fate should Severus Snape decide to resume his illegal activities.

It has also been suggested Severus Snape is brewing the potions used in the Infirmary at the school, also a direct violation of his parole as prescribed by the Wizengamot. It is the opinion of this reporter that such actions should be investigated immediately and, if necessary, the perpetrators punished to the full extent of the law.

* * *

Chapter 31

Chapter 31 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: I am not J. K. Rowling. That said, everything that does not belong to her belongs to me, except that which does not.

Author's Note: Much thanks to **noybate** for the beta of this chapter. As it has not been Britpicked, any language mistakes are my own.

Chapter Thirty-One

"There is nothing in the Wizengamot ruling that says I can not share my books and journals with Severus," Hermione protested to Kingsley as they sat in the Headmistress' office. "He's on *probation*, not parole. She couldn't even get that right."

"Now, Hermione..." Kingsley tried to placate the irate witch.

"Don't, Kingsley," she said, holding up her hand. "He's a Potions Master. How is he supposed to keep up with the newest developments if he can't read about them? I've been sharing my books and subscriptions with him for more than a year. *Now* someone decides to complain?"

"Hermione..." Minerva started to say something.

"Don't tell me that you agree with the Wizengamot?" Hermione cried. "He can't order books or journals, yet the hate mail still comes through? Where's the justice in that?"

"Professor Granger," Kingsley all but shouted in his deep voice, "will you at least *listen* to me?"

Hermione's tirade screeched to a stop. "I'm sorry, Kingsley." She took a deep breath and sat back in her chair.

"Yes, well..." Kingsley said. "I happen to agree with you that stopping Severus from ordering books and journals went far beyond what I agreed to five years ago *and* I told them so when they ordered this investigation. As you said, Severus is a Potions Master and needs to be able to find out what's going on in his field.

"However, it is the allegations that Severus has been brewing the infirmary potions that I am here to investigate." He held up his hand as she started to speak. "Or at least supervise the investigation to make sure Severus isn't charged erroneously as *some* people seem to wish."

Poppy spoke up from her seat in the corner. "I have all the infirmary potions records for the last five years, Kingsley. Your people are more than welcome to peruse them, but they do not leave this school."

Minerva nodded. "I agree with Poppy. Those records are confidential and *not* for the titillation of the public by being published in the *Daily Prophet*. The school's Board of Governors will back me on this as we have already discussed that possibility."

"Agreed," Kingsley said. He turned to the Aurors who had accompanied him to the school for the investigation. "If any, and I do mean *any*, of the information we are about to receive is leaked to the media outlets...be it print or wireless...I will have the lot of you sacked. I don't care who the leak is. Do I make myself clear?"

The three wizards and one witch nodded.

"Good. Poppy, if you would lead the way, please?" Kingsley bowed the Mediwitch out of the office. She was followed by the Aurors. "I will let you know what the results of this investigation reveal," he said, turning to Minerva and Hermione. "Severus shouldn't be made to suffer because some imbecile in the Wizengamot thinks he needs a more severe punishment."

"Thank you, Kingsley," Minerva said.

"Yes, Kingsley, thank you," Hermione echoed as he bowed to each of them and left the office, following his people to the school's infirmary.

"Don't say it, Minerva," Hermione said as the door clicked shut. "I am well aware of my actions today. I almost made Severus a *Cause*."

"Indeed you did," Minerva replied with a smile. "But he is so deserving of being a *Cause*, as you put it. The poor man is lucky to have a friend like you."

Hermione shook her head. "I don't know if we're friends," she said. "Colleagues, yes. Friends...?" She shrugged.

* * *

Aurors Find No Violations at Hogwarts

by Rita Skeeter

Correspondent, Daily Prophet

Aurors descended on Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry yesterday in response to allegations that Severus Snape had violated his parole with the aid of Hermione Granger, a Professor at the school. Kingsley Shacklebolt, Minister of Magic, has since stated, "No violations of Severus Snape's probation have been found."

The Minister then proceeded to point out that Professor Granger was sharing her books and journals with Snape so that he might remain *au courant in his field as he will be considered a free man at the end of this year. This is not a violation of the Wizengamot ruling as Snape is not receiving any books, magazines, or journals in his own name.*

It was also pointed out that Snape is being denied equal process with regards to his mail. It has been alleged that the only mail he has received for the duration of his parole has been so-called hate mail. If he is receiving any other letters, the owls apparently are not delivering them to their intended recipient.

Minister Shacklebolt was also adamant in pointing out that Snape is on probation, not parole, as he has served no time in Azkaban for any crimes. It was the Wizengamot's judgement that, having survived the bite of Nagini, the familiar of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, Snape had been punished enough.

When asked about the allegations of illegal potions brewing, the Minister said, "I supervised the investigation of the infirmary's potions records yesterday. All records are in agreement. Until Professor Granger joined the Hogwarts' staff, infirmary potions were purchased for use by students from outside manufacturers. Once Professor Granger returned to the school, she took over the brewing of all potions meant for students, thereby saving the school budget a great deal of money. Severus Snape has abided by the agreement of his probation, and has not touched any potions brewed for the school infirmary."

This reporter also asked about the rumour that Snape was still brewing the Wolfsbane potion and selling it to the Ministry for distribution. Shacklebolt replied, "The Ministry did not pay for any Wolfsbane potion until Professor Granger started brewing it for us last year. Up until that time, I recently discovered, the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures: Werewolf Division had been using Professor Snape's expertise to brew the potion, with all costs being borne by the professor and Hogwarts itself. The department then turned around and sold the potion to those who so desperately needed it. This is a direct violation of Ministry law, and the violators have been dealt with.

"Professor Snape received no monetary gain from his brewing of the Wolfsbane potion for the Ministry," the Minister continued. "However, Professor Granger has been reimbursed for her brewing of the Wolfsbane potion. Firstly at Journeyman rates and later at Master rates, as is only proper with any craftsman."

It has been alleged that Professor Granger blackmailed the Ministry for payment by stating that she would give the potions she brewed to St Mungo's to hand out, rather than the Ministry. This has been proven not to be true. Professor McGonagall, Headmistress of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, is said to have pointed out that the school was using its budget for the potion and that it was only fair the Ministry reimburse the school for the ingredients and Professor Granger's time. The Minister denied any threats were made to send the potion to St Mungo's.

* * *

"Where does she get her information?" Hermione asked, balling her paper up in her fists. "I can understand Kingsley wanting to set the record straight, but what about the rest of it?"

Minerva looked grim. "I don't know, but I'm sure Kingsley will find out. There's still corruption in the Ministry even with all the housecleaning he and his people have done."

"Indeed," Severus said, as he set down the copy that had been passed to him by Flitwick. "I doubt Kingsley will ever get rid of all of the corruption. Even with *Potter* as a member of Magical Law Enforcement."

Ginny giggled from her place on the other side of Poppy. "Harry told me Auror Dawlish was furious when they got back to the Ministry because he couldn't find anything to charge the professor with. He thinks Dawlish may be part of the problem."

"The corruption is why Mike asked for the transfer to Hogsmeade after the War," Sheila interjected. "He felt he had to get away from the Ministry, and when this post was opened, he applied."

"Which was excellent for the school," Minerva agreed. "It put you here just when we needed someone to teach Muggle Studies."

"And lets me go home every night," Sheila giggled. "My kids love having Mummy there to tuck them in."

Severus snorted. "Better you than me," he said. "I have my hands full with all the Slytherins and their little peccadilloes."

Dear Molly,

I don't think it's any of your business whom my mother befriends. She has very few friends outside the dental profession, and Narcissa Malfoy has quite a bit in common with her. I, for one, am glad they could become such close friends.

Hermione

Breakfast once again brought a flurry of owls bearing mail to students and teachers. Hermione looked aghast at a bright red envelope that was dropped on top of the pile of journals she usually received.

"Uh-oh," she said, poking at the envelope with her wand. "It's from Molly."

"What's from Molly, dear?" Minerva asked, turning to face her. "Oh." She looked at the red envelope. In fact, everyone at the head table looked at the envelope with horror evident on their faces.

"What're you going to do, Hermione?" Ginny whispered. "It could go off any minute." She pushed back from the table so as to have a clear path to run, if necessary.

"*Incendio*." The envelope burst into flames as Severus tucked his wand away. "That should take care of it," he said as he picked up Hermione's latest issue of *oAr's Alchemica*. "I don't know why everyone was panicking."

"Because it was from Molly," Hermione said meekly. "You know what she's like when she's crossed."

"Indeed."

Chapter 32

Chapter 32 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: That which belongs to JK Rowling does not belong to me. I am making zero Galleons, Sickles, or Knuts on this story.

Author's Note: Thank you to **noybate**, beta extraordinaire.

Chapter Thirty-Two

"Hermione, would you care to join me in my quarters for a nightcap?" Severus asked casually. "I thought I might return your journals and perhaps discuss some of the articles."

Hermione looked up from where she sat in front of the fire in the staff room, her lap full of papers she was grading. The wind blustered outside the windows, and rain lashed against the castle walls. All in all, it was a night for staying indoors and being comfortable.

"I would enjoy that very much," she said smiling, putting the essays away in her dispatch case. "How did you find Marcus Bettz's article on the effects of belladonna as it is used in various doses of the Dreamless Sleep potion?"

"I thought the man was an imbecile when I studied under him before taking my mastery," Severus said with a sneer. "I see no need to change my opinion."

The door clicked shut on Hermione's answer as Minerva and Poppy smiled satisfied smiles at each other. Ginny looked from one witch to another and said, "Don't let Hermione see you do that. As my brother, Ron, likes to say, 'She's brilliant, but scary.'"

Poppy laughed. "It just feels so good to see them get along like that. Did you know that there are only four adults in the castle under the age of fifty? Sheila's married with three children, you're married to Potter, and that just leaves Hermione and Severus. Allow two old witches to have the fun of matchmaking."

Ginny grinned. "Can you let a young witch in on that fun?" she asked conspiratorially. "Ron thinks Hermione will break down and marry him some day. He can't see she's totally wrong for him."

"Are you saying that as a sister or as a friend?" Minerva smirked at her. "I'm only asking because I agree with you about the wrongness of such a match."

"Both, actually," Ginny explained. "Ron cares about Quidditch and food and being an Auror. He can hardly talk about anything else. I know that used to drive Hermione mad when they were together."

"But you saw her and Severus as they left the room," she continued. "They were discussing some musty old journal article and in seventh heaven, the both of them. They're just plain *right* for each other."

Minerva and Poppy looked at one another again. Their unspoken conversation must have been agreeable because Minerva looked at Ginny and said, "Okay. You're in."

"Great," the redhead exclaimed, rubbing her hands in glee. "What's the plan?"

"Severus, I would like to discuss the Halloween Feast with you," Minerva said, catching him in the Entry Hall after dinner.

"You know how I feel about that, Headmistress," he said irritably. "I have a detention to supervise this evening." He turned to the dungeon stairs.

"You can come to my office when you're finished," Minerva said. "This has to be done tonight."

He sighed. "Very well. Will nine o'clock be satisfactory?"

"Quite."

"Hermione!"

"Hey, Gin, what's the problem?" Hermione turned on her way up the stairs to watch her friend approach. "I was on my way to the library to talk to Irma."

Ginny wrinkled her nose. "Why?" she asked.

"Because she wants to talk about adding a room dedicated to Muggle literature appropriate to the age level of the students." Hermione smiled. "If the teachers are going to assign such reading, then the library had better have room to house the necessary books," she quoted, approximating the librarian's querulous tones.

"Merlin, you almost sound like her." Ginny laughed at the impersonation. "I just wanted to discuss your costume for the Halloween Feast."

"Costume! What costume?" Hermione asked in bewilderment.

Severus was just as bewildered a short while later that evening as he faced Minerva in her office. "Why are we wearing costumes? It's a feast, not a costume party."

Minerva smiled at him. "It was Albus' idea. Rather than a feast for the school and a Masked Ball for the older students, we combine it into a Masked Feast so the younger students can dress up as well."

"I'm sure it was." He glared at the former Headmaster, who just smiled benignly and twinkled. *How can a bloody painting twinkle?* he thought petulantly.

"Now, Severus, all the other teachers agreed..." Minerva said.

"When? And why was I not notified?"

"I'm notifying you now," Minerva said testily. "If you would come up out of your bloody dungeons once in a while for more than just meals and staff meetings, you might actually find out what's going on without having to come up to my office."

"But it's such a lovely office," he grumbled with barely veiled sarcasm. "And I'll remind you that I cannot leave this bloody castle for another three months."

"Severus," Minerva snarled in warning, "that's enough. You *will* wear a costume for the Halloween feast just like the rest of us. I suggest you start thinking about what you're going to wear."

"Do the students know of these plans?" he asked.

"They will once I announce them tomorrow morning," she replied calmly. "That will give them two weeks to devise costumes or have their parents send them something. Look on the bright side, Severus. You might actually have fun."

"Minerva!" The office door slammed against the wall as Hermione stormed in, followed by Ginny, who was frantically signalling at Minerva. "Why are we wearing costumes for a Halloween feast when we've never done so before?"

"Because that's what was decided by the other teachers," Minerva explained, waving the door closed.

"When?" Hermione demanded. "The first I heard anything about needing a costume was from Ginny this evening."

"Join the club, Professor Granger," Severus said with a great deal of irritation. "I just now found out myself."

"Last weekend in the staff room—" Minerva began.

"Where was I?" Hermione interrupted. "I was there last weekend."

"Not all the time," Minerva said, holding up her hand to stop any more comments. "You and Severus were discussing an article and left for the library to check your references before the subject came up."

"How convenient," Hermione snarled.

"Indeed," was Severus' reply.

"I think the two of you have been spending way too much time together," Minerva quipped with a slight smile. "You're beginning to sound alike."

"Now, the subject of the Halloween party is closed. You *will* wear costumes to the feast and you *will* enjoy yourselves. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, Minerva," Hermione and Severus said, identical sneers on their lips.

Chapter 33

Chapter 33 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of

Disclaimer: The characters portrayed in this story belong to JKR. The actions and reactions I put them through belong to me.

Author's Note: This is it. We're coming into the far turn. Thanks **tonoybate** for her beta work on this story.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Saturday brought clear skies and warmer than normal temperatures for October as Hermione trudged along behind an excited line of students going into Hogsmeade. Ginny paced beside her, almost as excited as the students they were to chaperone, while Hermione muttered to herself. Some of the closer students looked back at her and started walking a little faster to get away.

"I don't know why we have to wear costumes for a Halloween feast," she muttered to Ginny. "Dressing up to look like someone else is silly and infantile."

"I think it sounds like fun," Ginny said encouragingly. "Just think, for one night you could be anyone you wanted to be."

"I could do that with some hair and a vial of Polyjuice," Hermione snarled. "I don't need some stupid costume."

Ginny laughed. "That's cheating. So let's do this right. Minerva is really counting on all of us making this a good holiday."

"What are you going to do?" Hermione asked, looking her friend up and down. "You'd have to wear a wig to hide your hair, or use charms so no one will know it's you. How can it be cheating if I use Polyjuice?"

"Hermione," Ginny whined. "Please? The rest of the staff is really looking forward to this dinner. Please try to at least make an effort?"

Hermione sighed. "I'll see what I can do," she said, more to stop her friend's whining than to actually promise anything.

"Really?" Ginny clapped her hands in glee. "Good. Now, the first thing we need to do..."

Hermione interrupted. "The first thing we need to do is our jobs. Mr Abbott *get down* from that tree at once. Ten points from Hufflepuff. This is an excursion to Hogsmeade, not an attempt to break a record for climbing all the trees on school grounds."

Still sulking, Hermione stalked the streets of the village, terrorizing the students and doing her best imitation of Severus Snape. Luckily, the students left her to her sulking for the most part, and few points were taken. After a while, Ginny dragged her off the stationers where she was able to satisfy her cravings for parchment and ink.

Having lunch in the Three Broomsticks alleviated her temper somewhat. Neville was serving behind the bar while Hannah worked the dining area. She seemed thrilled to show off her wedding ring to those who asked, but by the time she got to their table, Hermione could tell she was becoming peeved.

"Can you take a break?" Hermione asked, her bad mood forgotten in concern for her friend's well-being. "No one's going to starve if you do, are they?"

"No, they won't," Hannah said. "Oi, Henry, tell Cook I'm taking a break and that you've got the tables." She sighed as the waiter waved that he'd heard and sank into the seat Ginny pulled out for her. "Thanks, guys. I needed that."

"It's really busy today," Ginny commented. "Is that because it's a Hogsmeade weekend?"

"Actually, it's like this most weekends," Hannah said as Neville brought a butterbeer over to the table for her. "Thanks, love." She half rose from her seat and kissed his cheek.

"Yeah," Neville agreed, his cheeks reddening from the rather blatant public display of affection. "Ever since they opened the new Auror post, everyone comes in here hoping to see Harry and Ron." He wandered back to the bar to fill the newest orders being brought by customers.

"Harry and Ron?" Hermione asked. "Whatever for? They're in London, aren't they? Ginny, haven't you been Apparating back and forth from London?"

Ginny grinned. "Oops. I guess I forgot to tell you."

"Tell me what?" Hermione said, eyes narrowing as her bad mood returned.

"They were transferred up here just before the start of term to help man the new Auror post," Ginny explained with a dreamy smile. "You haven't been to Hogsmeade since then so I guess nobody thought to tell you they were here."

"And you couldn't have said something this morning?"

"Sorry. Was too busy thinking about meeting Harry. And speak of the devil..." The noise level in the pub was definitely growing louder. Hermione looked over her shoulder to see her two best friends making their way over to the table. With a laugh, Hannah excused herself to continue serving her patrons.

"Hey, 'Mione. Hi, Gin," Ron said as Harry bent down and kissed his wife. "Glad to see you were able to make it after all." He pulled a chair around and straddled it, arms folded across the top of the chair back.

Hermione frowned. "What are you talking about, Ronald Weasley?"

"Well, Gin said... OW!" Ron bent over to rub his shin. "What was that for?"

His sister smiled. It was a 'Molly' smile, and he winced when he saw it. "I swear, Ginny, you're getting more like Mum every day."

Harry just grinned. "And I'll still love her," he said. "Hermione, what are you going to wear to the Feast next week?"

"Does everybody in Hogsmeade know about the Masked Feast?" Hermione muttered. "This is intolerable. Maybe I'll go as Severus Snape. Then the students would have twice as much to complain about." She glared around the room as gazes dropped to their own tables and glasses.

"That's brilliant, 'Mione," Ginny crowed. "Although you're a bit short and... er... rounder than Professor Snape..."

"Ginevra Molly Potter," Hermione huffed. "You are not taking me seriously, are you?"

"Why not? I think it's brilliant too," Harry said. "At least Minerva couldn't say you didn't try."

"And *no* Polyjuice," Ginny said.

"...and then she said *no Polyjuice*." Hermione paced the small area between the sofa and fireplace in her quarters while Severus watched in amusement. Their now weekly meetings for conversation and a nightcap rotated between quarters, and this week was Hermione's turn. Her agitation had been apparent all during dinner, and he hadn't been sure if he'd get a drink or be hexed.

"I don't see what the problem is," he said, swirling the elf-made wine in his glass. His eyes looked up and met hers. "If you go as me, I can go as you."

Hermione plopped onto her chair. "You're not making any sense," she said. "We can't use Polyjuice."

"We won't have to," Severus explained. "I've been told several times this week...by several faculty members...that we may be spending too much time together. You're beginning to sound like me."

"So I'm annoyed..." she began.

"So you go as me and I go as you," he repeated. When Hermione just glared at him, he raised an eyebrow and explained, "We don't need Polyjuice. You wear your own robes and act like me; I wear *my* own robes and act like you. Since we've both been rather upset about this so-called Masked Feast, no one will suspect that we are not the other."

Hermione smirked. "Can you act like me?" she asked. "*I* have been told that I can do a pretty decent 'Severus Snape'."

"We have a week to practice," he said with a smirk. "Why not start now?"

The flames in the fireplace flared green, and Harry's head popped into sight. "Hermione, are you there?" he called. His eyes went wide as he realized who sat on the sofa. "Oh, hello, Professor."

"Potter."

"What do you want, Harry?" Hermione asked peevishly. "Didn't you do enough damage this afternoon?"

"I wanted to apologize, 'Mione," he said. "I didn't realize you weren't too happy with this Masked Feast. Everyone else I talked to was ecstatic about it. Even Ron was whinging about how we never got to do something like that while we were in school."

Hermione sighed deeply. "Apology accepted, Harry, but you tell Ginny I'm still peeved at her."

He grinned. "I'll do that. 'Night, 'Mione. Good night, Professor."

"Good-bye, Potter."

Friday night before dinner Hermione, dressed in her best robes, flung a handful of Floo powder into the flames and said, "Severus Snape's quarters."

As she spun out into his study, he put out a steadying hand and caught her before she fell to the floor. He too was dressed in his best robes and had washed his hair so it was not as oily as it tended to be by the end of the day.

"Okay," Hermione said, cleaning her robes with a swish of her wand. "I hope this works. Remember, I call Ginny by her given name and..."

"Hermione, I am not such an idiot as those *two friends* of yours."

"Sorry, I'm just nervous. Suppose Minerva finds out earlier than we planned?"

"We'll just have to make sure she doesn't. I've already set the protection spells for my quarters to accept you. Did you do the same?"

"Yeah. You should be okay. Merlin, I'm nervous."

"You'll do fine. I'll meet you in the Entrance Hall." With that, Severus floo'd to Hermione's quarters so he was not seen coming from the dungeons while Hermione left his quarters to walk down the corridor and up the stairs to the Entrance Hall where they would begin their charade.

"Merlin, 'Mione. I didn't think you'd actually do it." Both professors turned to Ginny, who was disguised as Harry, and gave her a supercilious look. "P... Professor Snape?"

"Yes, Madam Potter," Hermione said in her best Snape tone. "Did you have a question?"

"No... uh... no, sir," Ginny stammered. "You look..."

"What, Ginny," Severus said, his deep voice making her name sound like a curse. "You did dare me to become Severus for a night, didn't you?"

Her eyes narrowed as she stared at the two of them. "I also said *no Polyjuice*," she griped. "That's cheating."

"There is no cheating involved, Madam Potter," Hermione said with a smirk.

"And no Polyjuice either," Severus said, grinning his best 'Hermione' smile.

"This is utterly amazing," Minerva exclaimed as she came up behind them, her beard wagging as she spoke.

Both Severus and Hermione winced, realising she was dressed as the late Albus Dumbledore.

"Well, come along then. The students are waiting for us. However did that man control this confounded beard?"

Chapter 34

Chapter 34 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: This story is a product of my imagination. However, most of the characters used belong to J.K. Rowling. She makes the money, not me.

Author's Note: Thank you to **noybate** for the beta of this chapter.

Chapter Thirty-Four

At the head table, Hermione (as Severus) remembered to hold her regular chair for Severus (as Hermione) to sit down. They had practiced their roles all week, and she was determined to do this right. After seating Severus, she took his usual chair next to hers and sat down to try and enjoy the evening, interminable though it might be.

Filius, who had charmed himself to look like a goblin, tapped his goblet with a knife as Minerva stood. "Thank you to all students and staff who made an effort to make this evening enjoyable," she said, nodding to the tables on both sides of the room as well as the teachers seated at the head table. "I notice Mr Potter is rather popular this year." There were grins from the thirty or so students...and Ginny...who had impersonated Harry. "Also, I see many Muggles present, especially those of the Slytherin persuasion." Those students at the Slytherin table who were wearing jeans, loudly patterned t-shirts and trainers smiled wryly.

"I don't think they were trying very hard," Hermione muttered to Severus. He just smiled.

"Since I don't intend to be as long-winded as our former Headmaster..."

"Too late," muttered Severus.

"...let the feast begin." Minerva sat down and tapped Severus on the shoulder. "Hermione, dear, such comments are unbecoming to a member of the teaching staff, even if you *are* trying to imitate Severus."

Hermione giggled.

"That was well done, Severus," Filius said. "You almost sounded like Hermione for a moment."

Severus rolled his eyes. It was *definitely* going to be a long night.

Minerva nodded at Filius, who once again tapped his goblet to gain everyone's attention. She stood up and thrust back her sleeves as she pulled her wand from its arm holster.

"Now, since we have completed dinner and it is almost curfew for the younger students..." She let a few half hearted protests be heard as she waited. "We will have the unveiling, and then all students will report back to their common rooms. *Finite Incantatem.*"

Those who had made an effort to actually charm their costumes found themselves back in their school robes. Others, who had merely put on regular clothes and gone as Muggles, ended up wearing dunce's caps on their heads. Every one in the room turned to look at Severus and Hermione as the students started to empty the Hall.

"Hey, they didn't change!" Ginny pouted. "They *must* have used Polyjuice."

"I assure you, Madam Potter, no Polyjuice was necessary," Severus said smugly. "We simply had to make you believe we were the other."

"It worked," Hooch said grouchily. "I really thought you were Hermione, you black-hearted git."

"He's not a git," Hermione protested. "This was his idea and I thought it was brilliant."

"Indeed," Minerva said with pursed lips. "However, it was supposed to be *acostume*, not an impersonation."

"You didn't specify," Severus pointed out, "so we took matters into our own hands. You should applaud our efforts to at least pretend to be each other. I, for one, would have preferred to remain myself."

"I most certainly agree," Hermione said emphatically. "At least we made an effort."

Minerva opened her mouth to speak, but Severus forestalled her, the noise of the departing students covering any conversation at the head table. "I was most emphatic about *not* dressing up for a so-called *Masked Feast*, Minerva. As was Hermione."

Hermione nodded her head fervently in agreement.

"We both thought that, as we had made the effort of pretending to be each other, you would applaud our intelligence. Instead, you chose to castigate us for not following the letter of the law, as it were," Severus continued.

"I am trying to get through these last few months with no friction. However, you can send me to Azkaban if you wish. I truly don't care any more!" He stood up from his place at the table with enough force to tip over his chair and stalked out through the teachers' entrance behind the head table.

Minerva watched him go and turned to Hermione with pursed lips.

"Not a word, Minerva. I happen to agree with everything he says. If you want to send *me* to Azkaban as well, then do so!" Hermione followed Severus out the teachers' door, leaving those remaining with mouths agape in shock.

Minerva cleared her throat and looked at the few remaining students. "Return to your houses at once!" she said. "You are in danger of violating curfew and losing points." All but one student turned and almost ran from the room.

"Miss Pendragon," Minerva said with a scowl for the errant girl. "Did you not hear what I just said?"

"Yes, Professor," Nimue said. "I just wanted to tell you..."

"Return to your House, Miss Pendragon," Minerva interrupted in a harsh voice. "I don't want to have to tell you again." She watched as Nimue's shoulders drooped and the girl walked slowly out of the Great Hall on her way to the Hufflepuff common room.

"Minerva..." Filius started to say something.

"Not now, Filius, please," she said and exited the Hall as well.

* * *

Hermione followed Severus to the Rose Garden, where she found him standing stiffly in front of Minerva's favourite rose bushes, his ebony wand held stiffly in front of him. From what she could tell, he hadn't begun blasting...yet...but the set of his shoulders said it was just a matter of time before all the bushes would be denuded and black.

"Severus?" she whispered softly, placing a hand gently on his back. She stepped back as he stood taller and turned to face her. "Are you all right?"

The agony in his face was gut wrenching. It was as if he couldn't believe he was back where he'd been six long years before, losing the friendship of the one woman he respected almost as much as his oldest friend, Lily Evans.

"Why?" he asked almost plaintively. "Why did I lose my temper like that?" He didn't seem to expect an answer, but Hermione gave him one anyway.

"Because it's easier to lose our temper with someone we love than with a stranger," she whispered consolingly.

"Is it?" he asked, sitting down on a nearby bench, his wand sagging in his hand until it pointed to the ground.

"Yes, because we know they will eventually forgive us." She sat down next to him and cautiously put her hand on his back once again. When he made no move to shrug her off, she began rubbing small circles across his back in a soothing rhythm. "Minerva will come around in time. If it helps, she's angry with me right now as well."

Severus snorted. "Her *Golden Girl*? What did *you* do?"

"Agreed with you," Hermione said softly. "I told her she could send me to Azkaban with you."

He stiffened and she ceased her backrub, but then he relaxed into her hand once more. "That feels good," he said, changing the subject.

"What?" she asked with a teasing tone. "Has no one ever rubbed your back before?"

"Not since I was a baby," he snorted, closing his eyes. "And sometimes I wonder if my mother ever did."

Tears brimmed in her eyes, and daringly, she put both arms around him in a hug. He stiffened once again but did not try to pull away. Instead, he opened his eyes and looked down at the top of her head where it lay on his chest. Awkwardly, he reached up and stroked the unruly curls that were the bane of her existence. As she looked up, questions in her eyes, he leaned down and kissed her lightly on the lips.

Hermione gasped, but didn't pull away. "Why?" she asked.

"It seemed the logical thing to do," Severus murmured. Then he bent down and kissed her again. This time, Hermione reacted and kissed him back. The tingle that remained on his lips when they pulled apart was echoed in her cinnamon-coloured eyes. He smiled at her just as an "Awwwww" was heard from the direction of the garden gate.

With a start, both Severus and Hermione were on their feet, wands at the ready. The sight of Poppy Pomfrey and Ginny Potter at the entrance to the rose garden with smug smiles on their faces did nothing but increase the embarrassment of being caught kissing. Severus smirked evilly as his partner reacted first.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Hermione asked angrily. "If Minerva sent you..."

"Relax, Mione," Ginny said. "The Headmistress doesn't know we're out here."

"Indeed," Poppy said. "We were concerned when the two of you disappeared. Minerva left the Hall just after you did, but she went upstairs. However, I can see that everything is quite alright with the two of you." She smiled pleasantly. "Come, Ginevra. I believe we can safely leave these two to their *discussion*, don't you?"

"Of course, Poppy." Ginny winked at them. "I'll just get the gate, shall I?"

"Insufferable chit," Severus groused as the school matron and her assistant left the rose garden. "Did you see her wink?"

"They think they're... Did you see...?" Hermione sputtered, almost incoherent with indignation.

Severus smirked. "Dear me, Professor Granger, your language skills are sorely lacking," he said, teasing her in turn. "However do you manage to convey anything to your students?"

Hermione swung on him, wand at the ready. "Don't tempt me, Severus Snape," she said angrily. "I'm one word away from hexing somebody."

"Point it at Minerva," he said with a laugh. "Then we can both claim credit."

As quickly as her anger had developed, it dissipated just as fast. "Merlin," she said, relaxing back onto the bench. "My heart's still racing."

"Indeed," he said, also sitting down. "Was it my kisses or the interruption?"

"I don't know." She looked up and smiled at him. "Why don't we try some experimentation and see?"

"Hmm, yes. Empirical results are always looked upon favourably when experimenting." He leaned over and kissed her forehead. "Well?"

"Heart rate normal," she said, frowning. "I don't think that was it. Let's try this." She reached up and pulled his head down to hers. "I always think..."

"You think too much." He smiled and sealed her mouth with his.

Hermione gasped as his tongue sought entrance past her lips. Just like that, he was inside and she tangled her tongue with his, tasting the chocolate cake and raspberries from their dessert. With a deep sigh, she settled down to the task of snogging the Potions master silly.

Both were breathing heavily when they raised their heads for air. Hermione looked up at him and smirked. "Evidence indicates the preceding exercise..."

"...elevated our heart rates a great deal." Severus concluded. He looked around and, seeing they were alone, pulled Hermione to her feet. "Come with me."

"Wait," she gasped. "Where are we going?"

"I believe further experimentation requires a laboratory setting, don't you?" He smirked. "I was thinking my quarters might be..."

"...an excellent testing centre," Hermione said in concurrence and grinned. "Lead the way."

Chapter 35

Chapter 35 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: The characters in this story belong to JKR. I only borrowed them and will return them when finished.

Author's Note: I subscribe to what I call the "Nora Roberts" style of writing, where sex scenes are seen more in the imagination of the reader rather than in explicit detail on the page. Thank you to **noybate** for her beta of this chapter and the moderators of this archive for their corralling of my commas.

Chapter Thirty-Five

Severus awoke Saturday morning with the feel of fur in his face. Starting up, he realized he was cuddling *cuddling*...with Hermione Granger! Memories of the night before flooded his mind as he watched her peacefully sleeping.

Pulling Hermione by the hand to his secret entrance into the dungeons... removing the protection spells to his quarters hurriedly as she kissed his neck... moving as one into the bedroom while disrobing, not caring where garments landed... hours spent playing and laughing and loving only to fall asleep in each other's arms...

Hermione stirred and yawned as she opened her eyes. With a slight screech, she sat up and looked around in confusion, but her face cleared as her memories of the night came back. She turned to Severus, and he breathed a sigh of relief as she smiled shyly.

"I would say our experimentation was an unqualified success," she said. "Wouldn't you agree?"

"Actually," he said with a smirk, "I believe more experimentation is in order. After all, we do want to show a consistency in results each time."

"Mmm. I couldn't agree more," she purred, reaching for him.

"Severus? Are you there?" Minerva's shout made them start guiltily.

Severus looked disgruntled at Hermione's nervous giggle as he answered wearily. "Yes, Minerva. I'll be right out." Looking around, he spied his dressing gown hanging on the front of his bathroom door. "*Accio* dressing gown," he said with a display of wandless magic. As he stood up and pulled it on, he caught Hermione ogling his backside with a satisfied air and smirked.

"Severus?" Minerva sounded antsy, so he didn't bother to delay any further. In the study, her head sat bathed in the green glow of the Floo. "Are you all right?"

"Why wouldn't I be?"

"You missed breakfast."

"Minerva," he said in an exasperated tone, "I have missed a great many breakfasts over the years I've been a teacher here. There is nothing new about that."

"Yes," she said with a smirk, "but you weren't snogging Professor Granger the night before either."

Severus felt the heat in his cheeks flare up. Certain she could see his blush, he dropped his head to allow a curtain of hair to conceal his face. "I see Poppy and Madam Potter wasted no time. By now I'm sure everyone in the entire school knows we shared a kiss. We did not snog."

"It's early yet." Minerva smiled benignly. "I don't expect the entire school to know until sometime this afternoon. May I come through?"

"Don't you think we said enough last night?" he temporized, looking around for the garments he was certain he and Hermione had discarded in their hurry the night before. He didn't see anything and, as the room look neat, hoped the house-elves had already been in to clean. "If you must come through, then do so."

Minerva grinned, no doubt discerning what was on his mind, and withdrew her head from the fireplace. A few seconds later, she stepped through the Floo and stood on the hearth. Severus caught sight of the scrap of blue lace just as Minerva picked it up from the seat of one of the armchairs.

She grinned, twirling the bra by its strap. "Rather unconventional undergarments for you, aren't they? Tell Hermione I know she's here."

"I heard you," Hermione said as she walked out of the bedroom wrapped in a sheet. "May I have my bra, please? I would like to finish getting dressed." She held out her hand imperiously, and Minerva dropped the lacy scrap into it.

"What about you?" She turned to Severus. "Don't you need to dress as well?"

"As these are my quarters," he snarled, "I see no reason why I couldn't sit around on a Saturday in just my dressing gown." As Minerva drew breath to speak, he continued, "However, to protect your delicate sensibilities, I will endeavour to clothe myself in a more modest fashion." He bowed and walked back into the bedroom, where he found Hermione laid across the bed, silently laughing and dressed in all but her outer teaching robes.

At his quirked eyebrow enquiry, she cast *Muffliato* and explained. "I heard what you said about sitting around in your dressing gown. I can just imagine the look on Minerva's face." Once again she dissolved into silent laughter, helpless to do anything but lie on the bed.

Severus harrumphed and, as he picked out a clean set of clothing, decided to retire to the bathroom to dress and shave. "You might go keep her company," he said. "I wouldn't put it past her to come in *here* if one of us doesn't get out there soon." Hermione gasped, and he smirked as he closed the bathroom door.

Donning her outer robes and straightening them as she walked out of the bedroom, Hermione braced herself to face the Headmistress. Rather than the angry Scotswoman she expected, Hermione found a smiling and vastly amused Minerva sitting in Severus' favourite armchair, looking at the potions journal he had borrowed from Hermione just the other day.

"A most interesting article," Minerva said, looking up. "It's too bad I can only comprehend about a third of what this author is trying to say." She sighed. "But then I'm not a Potions master, am I?"

Sensing this was a rhetorical question, Hermione very wisely held her tongue on the subject. Instead she offered tea as if she belonged in Severus' quarters and would ask the house-elves for tea every morning. By the time Winky had returned with tea for Minerva and breakfast for Hermione and Severus, he was dressed and sitting in his *second* favourite chair. After all, one did not eject the Headmistress of the school where one taught out of a chair once she was seated.

Minerva gave an almost imperceptible cat-like smirk. She knew full well whose favourite seat she was in and just what the rules were as per said seat. Settling back with her cup of tea, she slowly sipped as she watched the two of them eat their breakfasts. When they were finally replete and their plates disappeared with a *pop*, she set her cup down on its saucer and spoke.

"I owe you both a most sincere apology for my behaviour last evening after dinner. No, don't speak," she said as Severus opened his mouth, "I need to do this. It was inexcusable to treat you as if you had broken some rules when you hadn't.

"I agree that the two of you pretending to be the other was a good joke on the rest of us and was in the spirit of a masquerade which this was. I am truly sorry and hope the two of you will forgive me."

Severus looked at Hermione, who shrugged. "I was told by a very wise young woman last night that people get angry easily at those they love because they know they will be forgiven in time," he said. "Since that is the case, I must beg your forgiveness for my anger last evening as well."

"And me, too," Hermione added. "It just seemed so unfair to treat him that way, and I just... exploded. If I hurt your feelings, I truly apologize."

Minerva gave a strangled laugh. "I take it *you* are the *wise young woman* he's talking about," she said. "It's very good advice, my dear. I shall have to remember it. Of course I forgive you. I forgave you last evening, but I thought you might still be angry with *me*."

"I think I was over my anger even before I got outside," Severus said. "I was all ready to blast your favourite rose bushes, then found I couldn't do that to you. Perhaps, if Hermione hadn't come along when she had, I might have still done it." He shrugged. "I really don't know."

"Poppy told me she and Ginevra found you kissing in the Rose Garden," Minerva said. "I wasn't sure they hadn't made the story up to make me feel better." She smirked. "But this morning I can see I was wrong."

Hermione coloured up prettily. "We were conducting empirical experiments to see what could raise our pulses to the same extent that Poppy and Ginny did when they startled us last night."

"Mm-hmm." Minerva smiled. "If that's your story, dear..."

"...and we're sticking to it." Severus said with finality.

* * *

Chapter 36

Chapter 36 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: Nope (looks at bookshelf). Still not mine.

Author's Note: I apologise to all about the length of time between this chapter and the last one I posted. I lost the motherboard in my pretty blue fast laptop and had to make do with a desktop dinosaur for two months. Said dinosaur does not handle the same files as my pretty blue fast laptop. Now that I have the aforementioned pretty blue fast laptop back, I'm hoping to get the last three chapters of this fic quickly posted, being as how I'm once again using my pretty blue fast laptop. Oh, and by the way, thank you to **noybate** for the beta of this chapter.

Chapter Thirty-Six

"How do you plan to spend the Christmas hols, 'Mione?" Harry asked. It was the last Hogsmeade weekend before school let out for the holidays. He and Ginny sat at a table with her in the Three Broomsticks while they waited for Ron to return with their lunch order and drinks.

"I promised my parents to spend Christmas Eve and Day with them," Hermione said. "I want to be back here on New Year's Eve to help Severus celebrate the end of his probation."

"I can't believe the black bat actually made it this far," Ron said, setting four orders of fish and chips down on the table. "I would've thought he'd have done something to put himself into Azkaban rather than teach another five years." He carelessly snagged the bottles of butterbeer floating along behind him and, with a flourish, set them on the table.

Hermione was sure he was just showing off for the seventh-year girls sitting at the table behind them. She was positive when he winked at them; they giggled, then started whispering among themselves.

"So," he said, sliding into his chair, "Mum wanted to know if you were coming to the Burrow this year." He liberally poured malt vinegar over his fish and started eating. "She's trying to find out how many to expect," he continued, his mouth full of chips.

Hermione sighed. Some things *never* changed. "I've already told Harry that I promised my parents Christmas Eve and Day," she told him. "Besides, Molly's twitting me about my mother's friendship with Narcissa Malfoy probably made me *persona non grata* at the Burrow."

"Huh?" Ron asked in puzzlement. "What's that mean?"

"It means somebody who's not welcome," Harry said. "Why do you say that, 'Mione?"

"Because after I told her to mind her own business, she sent me a Howler."

"Well, there you go then." Ron nodded. "She got any anger she had at you out of her system with the Howler. Er... what exactly did she say?" He eyed Hermione nervously.

Hermione smirked. "I wouldn't know," she said. "It was treated just like every other Howler I've ever received since I started working at Hogwarts."

"How?" Harry asked. "If you don't open them within a certain amount of time, they open themselves."

"Not if you *Incendio* them first," she said smugly. "It's gotten to be habit to keep my wand handy when the post arrives."

She turned to Ron. "You can tell your mother I've already made other plans for the holidays, but thank you very much for the invitation."

"You sure?"

"Quite sure."

Hermione,

Ron has written and told me you have plans for Christmas Eve and Day with your parents, and New Year's Eve at Hogwarts. Could I prevail upon you to come to the Burrow for dinner on Boxing Day? It would be delightful to see you outside of Hogwarts if you can make it.

Sincerely,

Molly

Molly,

As I told Harry and Ron, I've already made plans for the holidays. While I discussed my Christmas and New Year's plans with them, I did not tell them my plans for the rest of the holidays. Therefore, I must decline to come to the Burrow for dinner on Boxing Day.

If Harry and Ron had not left the invitation to the last moment, I might not have made other plans. My apologies.

Hermione

The final Friday of term was, naturally, more frantic than any other Fridays as the students made their plans for departure the next day. Most of the tables were hotbeds of activity as students kept changing places with their peers to talk to others. Not even the morning's owl post made an appreciable dent in the noise.

Hermione eyed the pile of envelopes in front of her. Most would probably be letters from readers of the *Daily Prophet* reacting to the latest salvo in the 'Severus War', as she privately called it. However, there were letters from both Molly Weasley and Narcissa Malfoy. With a sigh, she picked up Molly's letter to get it over with.

Hermione,

I am disappointed to hear that you can't make it to dinner on Boxing Day. However, any day you can make it for dinner would be fine. Please let me know which day so that I can make plans.

Molly

Hermione sighed again, causing both Severus and Minerva to look at her in concern. With a grimace, she handed the letter to Minerva, who read it and passed it on to Severus.

"What plans have you made that you don't want Molly to know about?" he asked. "Surely you can spend one evening in her company without hexing her."

"Only if she doesn't find out my parents have accepted an invitation to Malfoy Manor for Boxing Day," she said. "Then I'll never hear the end of it."

"You still have several other days of leisure," Minerva said. She looked askance at Hermione's grimace. "What is it? I thought you liked the Weasleys."

"It's not the family in general," Ginny said from her place further along the table. "It's my mum in particular. She's a little ... overbearing. Even I don't intend to spend more than Christmas Eve and Day at home. She's been pushing Harry and me to set a date for a *proper* wedding ever since our elopement last summer."

"And what might be wrong with that, Ginevra dear?" Minerva said. "Your parents have probably been planning your wedding since you were born."

"Yeah, but as soon as we set a date, Mum will want to take over. Then it won't be *my* wedding, but what *she* wants my wedding to be."

"I see."

"And she's been hinting that Ron and I should be discussing wedding plans as well," Hermione said. "She doesn't want to believe that I can be friends with him without wanting more. I'm sure this invitation is another way to get me there so she can try to meddle."

"What does Narcissa want?" Minerva asked, looking at the other envelope. "She doesn't usually write to you."

"I know." Hermione picked up the envelope and tucked it into her robe. "I'll read it later. She may be asking what foods my parents enjoy. We'll be having dinner there on

Boxing Day." The rest of the letters left in front of her were quickly opened, scanned and either put aside to file or disposed of with a quick *Incendio* as trash. By the time breakfast was over, she had only Narcissa's letter to read.

Hermione,

Lucius and I are looking forward to hosting you and your lovely parents here at Malfoy Manor for dinner on Boxing Day. I hope you don't mind, but we have also invited some other friends to dinner as well.

Draco will be returning home from Cambridge within the next week for the holidays. I am certain you are looking forward to seeing him again. While he insists the two of you are just friends, his almost constant mentions of you in his letters to his father and me seem to say something more. Might we hope there will be an announcement sometime in the near future?

Yours,

Narcissa Malfoy

"Bloody hell," she muttered, reading the letter during her free time between classes. She had come to the staff room to do some correcting on end-of-term exams, but had to read Narcissa's letter first.

"Problems, Professor?" Severus' deep voice ran shivers up her back. He came around from the back of the sofa and sat down next to her. "Is it bad news?"

"Depends on what you consider *bad news*," Hermione told her lover. "Narcissa is hinting she'd like to see an engagement announcement between me and Draco on Boxing Day."

"Bloody hell," he echoed.

Chapter 37

Chapter 37 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: To reiterate, that which you recognise belongs to JKR and her assignees. The plot and anything you don't recognise belongs to me.

Author's Note: Kudos to **noybate** for her help as the final beta for this story.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

"We're so happy you could join us for dinner, Hermione dear," Molly gushed as she opened the door and greeted Hermione. She took the bottle of inexpensive wine Hermione had brought and beamed as though she saw some greater significance in it. "Ron!" she called up the stairs. "Hermione's here, dear."

"Coming," he yelled, his footsteps heavy on the stair treads.

"Isn't there any one else here?" Hermione asked, hoping the answer would be 'yes'.

"No, dear," Molly answered with a small smile. "It's just Arthur, me, you and Ron. I thought we could eat in the kitchen. It's warmer."

"Yes, of course." Hermione tilted her cheek to Ron's lips as he bent to kiss her. "Hello, Ron."

Dinner over, Molly shooed Ron and Hermione into the sitting room while she and Arthur cleaned up the kitchen. Ron nervously shifted in his chair as he listened to his parents in the other room and cleared his throat.

"Er... Hermione?"

"Yes, Ron."

"Could you... would you..."

"What, Ron?"

"Wouldyoumarryme?"

Hermione parsed his rambling sentence and smiled sadly. "No, Ron, I can't."

"That's great! Wait... what?"

"I can't marry you," she repeated. "I don't love you like that."

"It's Draco the Ferret Malfoy, isn't it?" he all but yelled, jumping to his feet. "You're *not* going to marry *him*, are you?"

"WHAT!" Hermione was furious. "Just who are you to tell me what I am and am not going to do? Just because I love you as a friend doesn't mean I love Draco any more than that. Where the hell did you get that idea?" Her wand out and pointed at Ron, she leapt to her feet. "If that's what you think of me, then you can go to Hell!" she yelled and abruptly *Apparated*.

"FINE!" Ron yelled as though she could still hear him. Molly and Arthur rushed in just as he sat back down. Looking up at them with tears in his eyes, he said, "She said no."

Molly sat down and cradled his head to her chest in comfort. "She wasn't good enough for you anyway, Ronald dear. You'll find the right witch one day."

Hidden in his mother's bosom, Ron allowed himself a smug little smirk.

* * *

Boxing Day dawned for Hermione with a dread she couldn't quite get rid of. She'd told her parents of Ron's proposal, her answer and the subsequent argument. Now she had to get through dinner at Malfoy Manor with perhaps another proposal to come. Lucius would see to that if it was what *he* wanted...despite her wishes and, perhaps, even despite Draco's.

"Hermione, it's time to leave," her father called up the stairs to where she sat in her old bedroom. "Netty's here to take us to the Manor."

"I'm coming, Daddy," she called back, as she wiped her eyes and checked the mirror to make sure they weren't too red. "Be right there." Hermione tripped lightly down the stairs...though her thoughts were heavy...to the front hall where her parents were waiting with Netty. "Sorry," she apologized, "I wanted to make sure I didn't forget anything."

"You look beautiful, sweetheart," her mother said. "New robes?"

"No, they're old ones, but the best I had with me." She took her father's arm. "I didn't feel like going shopping for new ones just now. Shall we go?"

"Yes, Miss," the house-elf said, bowing to her and her parents. "Netty will take you... now."

With a jolt, they arrived at the door of Malfoy Manor, Netty's magic allowing him to bring them within the Anti-Apparition spells surrounding the property. Lucius opened the door before they could even knock and genially welcomed them to his home, where Narcissa and Draco awaited to greet them as well.

Dinner went well, Hermione thought. The *other friends* that had also been invited included Kingsley Shacklebolt, as well as several members of the Wizengamot and their spouses. Andromeda Tonks had also been invited, and Hermione was glad to see she had accepted her sister's olive branch. Some good might have come out of the war after all.

During dessert, Lucius brought out the big guns. "Draco, don't you have something to tell us?" he asked. He looked at his son suggestively, then nodded at Hermione.

"No," Draco answered petulantly. "I told you earlier that it wasn't going to happen, Father. Hermione and I are friends, yes, but we don't love one another. Do we, Herms?"

"Of course you don't," Narcissa said before Hermione could answer. "Your father and I didn't love one another when we got married. That came later."

"Mrs Malfoy... Narcissa..." Hermione began. When all the guests looked at her, she blushed. "I don't want to marry Draco any more than he wants to marry me. I've already turned down one wizard this week. Please, don't make me have to refuse another."

"Another wizard?" Lucius queried. "Just who... ah... Ronald Weasley, I presume?"

"Yes, sir," Hermione answered in a small voice. "I'm not in love with either Draco or Ron, and I really don't want to lose the friendship we have. Although I may have lost Ron's."

"He'll come around," Draco assured her. "He always does... eventually."

"But, Draco, in your letters you sounded like you were in love," Narcissa protested. "If not Hermione, then who?"

"I plan to ask Astoria Greengrass for her hand when she graduates," Draco said. "She's reading law at Cambridge Wizarding. We met up this fall in the bookstore." He smiled dreamily. "She's *really* smart and very pretty."

"Greengrass, eh," Lucius mused. "Good family. Pure-blooded. Oh, no offence, Matthew."

"None taken, Lucius." Matthew Granger lifted his wine glass to show there were no bad feelings. "I, for one, am glad. I don't think I want to give my baby away yet."

"*Daddy!*" Hermione cried, mortified. The entire table laughed, then toasted her father's words.

* * *

"Happy New Year, Hermione!" Filius said, handing her a drink. "Drink up now."

"Thank you," she said, taking a sip. "Merlin! This is strong!" She choked on the alcohol in her glass and looked around for an empty table to set it down.

"Now, now, it's almost midnight," the diminutive professor said. "You don't want to bring in the New Year sober, do you?"

"*Someone* should," Severus said from behind her. Taking the glass from her hand, he took a sip. "She's right, you know, Filius. Too much Firewhisky and not enough soda." He smiled at her and set the glass down on the mantelpiece. Tugging at her hand, he led her over to a sofa that had been pushed out of the way so the others could dance to the music coming from the Wizarding Wireless if they wished.

"Are you all right?" he asked softly. At her quizzical glance, he explained his concern. "Lucius wrote and told me what happened Boxing Day. Draco didn't hurt you too badly, did he?"

"Oh, no." She laughed. "He knew I wouldn't marry him despite his parents' wishes. And our parents remain good friends."

"Oh?"

"Mmm. As a matter of fact, Mum and Narcissa are meeting up to have brunch tomorrow. Not sure where exactly, but Mum says it'll be Muggle London because Narcissa really likes the little cafés they've been to on their shopping excursions."

"Never thought I'd see the day when Narcissa Malfoy would deliberately walk around in Muggle London," Minerva chimed in, sitting down next to them and carefully balancing her drink.

"Minerva, are you drunk?" Hermione asked, giggling.

"Of course not." Minerva smirked. "Just pleasantly buzzed. By the way, why is there an owl tapping at the window?" She peered with drunken short-sightedness at the

window in question. "Yes, there is *definitely* an owl there."

Severus smirked at Hermione, sharing an amused glance with her about the *pleasantly buzzed* headmistress before walking over to open the window. The Ministry owl, for that was what it was, held out its leg for him to take the letter it carried. Giving it a bit of sausage roll as a tip, Severus sent it on its way and closed the window.

"Who's it for, Sevvie?" Rolanda called from her place near the drinks table.

"That's Severus," he replied absent-mindedly, glancing at the address on the scroll, "and the letter's for me."

"Well, read it, man," Minerva urged, her brogue growing deeper the more she drank. "It must be important if they sent it tonight."

Severus unrolled the scroll and began reading.

"Out loud," everyone shouted in encouragement and differing stages of inebriation.

"Yes, please," Hermione said quietly. "Put us out of our misery."

He smirked and began reading aloud:

Professor Severus Snape

Potions Master

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Severus,

Congratulations. As of midnight this night, 31 December 2003, you will have successfully completed the probation period (here Severus paused as his fellow teachers cheered) as laid down by the Wizengamot five years ago, despite the best efforts of Rita Skeeter(boos) to sabotage you with innuendo.

In honour of this occasion, it would give me great pleasure to be the first to congratulate you in person. If you would appear to my offices here in the Ministry first thing in the morning, I would be honoured to shake the hand of a true war hero and welcome you home.

Sincerely,

Kingsley Shacklebolt

Minister for Magic

Severus looked at Hermione, tears in his eyes, as the clock in the Astronomy Tower started to chime midnight. "I'm free," he said. "Hermione, I'm *free*." She gasped as he sank to his knees in front of her. The room fell silent as the others watched him take her hand.

"Hermione Jean Granger," he said with a solemn expression. "Would you do me the honour of becoming my wife?"

Hermione's free hand rose to her lips as tears shimmered in her eyes. "Yes! Oh, yes, Severus!" She flung her arms around his shoulders, and their lips met as the room erupted into cheers.

Minerva sniffed into her handkerchief and turned to Poppy. "I always knew there was something between them. Told you, didn't I?"

"You certainly did," Poppy replied, draining her glass. "Now, let's get you to bed before you fall down."

"I'm not drunk," she protested as Poppy and Ginny helped her up. "Just pleasantly buzzed."

"Yes, Minerva," Poppy repeated as they went out the door. "Pleasantly buzzed."

Severus smirked and looked down at the witch in his arms. "Pleasantly buzzed, indeed."

Author's Note 2: This is the end of my little story, with the exception of a short epilogue to follow. I'm happy that I managed to please and entertain so many excellent writers over the last three years. Thank you.

Epilogue

Chapter 38 of 38

Severus is found alive after the final battle, and the Wizengamot, in their wisdom, sentences him to five years of probation at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: I own nothing but the plot and my original characters. All hail JKR!

Author's Note: All author's notes are at the end of this chapter.

Epilogue

—*King's Cross Station (Fourteen Years Later)*—

"Eileen! Elizabeth! Don't run!" Hermione shouted over the noise of parents' shouts and students trying to board the Hogwarts Express this September morning. The twins

stopped and looked back to where she was standing with Ron Weasley and his wife, the former Lavender Brown, and their children, Rose and Hugo.

"But, Mum," Eileen said, "I just saw Uncle Harry come through the barricade with Aunt Ginny. That means James and Albus and Lily are here."

"And they'll find us soon enough," Hermione said sternly. "You don't want to run in this crowd. Hi, Harry." She reached out and hugged her friends. "Ginny, you look great."

"You don't look too bad yourself," Ginny said. "I see you finally talked Severus into letting the girls ride the train."

"Mum told Daddy it was a rise of passion," Elizabeth said. She giggled to see the shocked looks on the adults' faces.

Eileen nudged her twin in the ribs. "Not rise of passion," she corrected didactically. "Rite of *passage*. You know... when all the first years cross the lake in the little boats with Hagrid and come into the Hall to be sorted. Mum told Daddy we're only first years once, and we really needed to come into Hogwarts with the rest of our class."

Harry smiled. "Well, she's right. You'll help Albus out, won't you? James has been teasing him again about what House he'll be sorted into."

"Sure," the twins said as one.

Elizabeth took Albus' hand. "C'mon. We'll find a good seat," she said, towing Harry's youngest son down the platform. "Scorpius Malfoy is supposed to start this year, too."

"Yeah. C'mon, Rosie. We can save a seat for him," Eileen said, grabbing Rose's hand. "Uncle Draco!" She waved at three figures standing further down the platform.

"Eileen, please!" Hermione reproved with a smile. "You don't need to shout." She also waved at Draco and his little family as they stood by the train. "Don't run, girls. The train doesn't leave for a while yet."

She laughed, shaking her head at the antics of her children as she turned back to her friends. "I've been dreading this day for the past eleven years," she sighed. "So has Severus. Living at Hogwarts during the year was bad enough when they weren't in classes, too. This year..." her voice trailed off softly.

"Has Severus gone north already?" Harry asked, eyes bright behind his glasses. "I had hoped to catch him before he left. Minerva appointed him Deputy Headmaster when Flitwick retired this year, didn't she?"

"He left first thing this morning," Hermione confirmed. "Filius worked with him all last year so he could take over. Severus said something about looking at the list of incoming students one more time before he had to pronounce their names and making sure the Potions classroom was prepared for the first class of dunderheads tomorrow morning."

She smirked. "It's just an excuse, of course. He doesn't like the idea that his little girls are growing up into witches or that he might catch them snogging some boy in a dark corner one day. I think if he could, he'd keep them as babies forever." She looked fondly over to where her twins were talking to, or was it haranguing, Draco and Astoria about letting Scorpius sit with them and their friends. "I think I know how he feels."

Porters finished loading the luggage car, and the engine's whistle blew as Hermione and her friends watched students scramble for the train. The twins got hold of both Rosie's hands, as well as one hand of each of the two boys, and towed them toward an empty compartment to the evident amusement of several parents nearby.

Once inside and seated, one of the children dropped the window and Albus leaned out. "Good-bye," he shouted, waving as the train started to move. Hermione, the Potters and the Weasleys tried to keep pace with the compartment as the Hogwarts Express started its trip north.

"Don't forget to write," Harry shouted.

"Yeah, let us know when you get sorted into Gryffindor," Ron yelled.

"Not me," Eileen shouted. "I'm for Slytherin. Daddy said so."

Hermione started laughing again and had to stop to catch her breath. "She's probably right," she said, wiping the tears from her eyes as the train receded into the distance. "Severus has always said she was the quintessential Slytherin. Of course, the Sorting Hat may have other ideas."

"Like it did with you, Herms?" Draco asked, coming up behind them.

"Exactly." She hugged him hard. "So, how are your parents enjoying the South of France?"

"Surprisingly well," Astoria said. "I was surprised, though, that your parents have gone as well."

"Why not?" Draco interjected. "They've been friends for years, you know that."

"Well, yes. But Matthew said just last Christmas that he wasn't ready to retire, remember?" Astoria reminded him. "Now all of a sudden they sell out and move to France?"

"I think it was Mum's health scare that did it," Hermione said quietly. "Having heart arrhythmia last spring really did it for them."

"Well, I hope they're happy," Ron grumbled. Lavender rapped him across the bicep. "What?"

"Be nice," she said.

"I was being nice," he protested. "Wasn't I?" He looked at Harry and Hermione and then at Draco. "Sorry."

"No hard feelings," Draco said, holding out his hand. "After all, *we* are supposed to be adults."

Ron grinned wryly as they shook hands. "A good example to our children, is that it?"

"Exactly."

"And, besides, it's not like Rosie'll end up in Slytherin. *What?*" he said as Lavender rapped him again.

"Come on, everyone," Hermione said with a laugh. "I have just enough time for someone to treat this Hogwarts' Transfiguration Professor to lunch before I have to *Apparate* north so I can be there when the students arrive."

"Do you want Chinese?" Draco asked eagerly. "I know just the place."

"Of course you do!" his friends said together, their laughter echoing as they left the now empty Platform 9 and 3/4 to the ghostly sounds of parents' calls of good-bye and children's laughter.

* * *

~~FIN~~

A/N: And so we come to the end of my little tale written, with the dubious help of Lucius Malfoy, between November 1st and November 30th of 2009 for the NaNoWriMo. I

hope you enjoyed reading my interpretation of what happened after Harry did in Tom Riddle and my take on the so-called Epilogue of Deathly Hallows.

In reminder, I own only copies of the Harry Potter books. All characters and descriptions from the books belong to JK Rowling. The original characters in this story are figments of my own imagination, and resemble no person living or dead.

I really want to thank **SlytherinsHeirx** for his assistance in Britpicking the chapters before he had to quit and **GrammarPolice** for her indulgences as a beta after my first beta had to drop out due to computer problems. A very big thank you to **noybate** for taking over for **GrammarPolice** when she had to step aside.

Of course, many 'thank yous' are owed to the admins as well for their insistence that my writing be the best it could be. Cheers to you all.

Blessed be

MsTree