

Quantum Mechanics

by Rose of the West

Much can happen in that place where Potions and Arithmancy meet. Snape & Vector

Introductory Mechanics

Chapter 1 of 101

Much can happen in that place where Potions and Arithmancy meet. Snape & Vector

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They met at an inter-departmental cocktail party. It was the sort of affair advisors put together to convince themselves that they were getting their students out and about, but it rarely resulted in anything more interesting than a great many headaches the next morning.

Knowing this, Severus Snape planned to skip this next event. However, Nick said there was a new wonder girl in Oiler's group. She might understand the arithmantic properties behind the materials he was studying. He prepared himself for a lot of inane jokes about how his name sounded like "seven" and her name was derived from a word meaning seven as a jittery girl barely out of Hogwarts tried to pathetically break the ice.

There was something about the arithmantic angle of his work that he couldn't quite resolve. It would be worth meeting the twit to see whether she could help him at all. He walked into the room and looked toward Oiler. There should be a foolish child somewhere near him.

There wasn't one. Oiler and Nick were talking to a young woman who had an intelligent look of interest in her face. Her hair had been hastily pulled back into a ponytail, and her robe was a bit rumpled, yet there was a sort of glow about her. She looked as though she'd just come from a round of intense studying in which she'd made a breakthrough. The other option is that she had just left a man's bed.

He pulled himself up short. Why would he think of sex in terms of a woman he'd never met? He looked at her again. She had the glow that he felt whenever he'd done something great with a Potion. The fact that he found it alluring was troublesome, and he entertained fourth and fifth thoughts about his decision to come. He looked toward the drink table, but Nick saw him.

"Oh, Severus! Come meet Septima. I took the liberty of describing your current project to her, and she's quite fascinated."

The girl with the ponytail reached her hand out, realized her drink was still in it, and blushed. She switched hands and shook with him. "Mr. Snape! I'm so glad to finally meet you! I was a couple of years behind you at Hogwarts, of course, and the professors always told me I'd never be as good as you."

"Oh?" She was starting to gush. He glanced at the drink table.

She shrugged. "Professor Erwin was wrong, of course."

"Oh?"

"Yes, he finally admitted when he told me my N.E.W.T. grade that I'd gone beyond you, and oddly enough, in the area where Arithmancy meets Potions."

"You've been doing work in that area?"

"I'm hoping to write my thesis in that area."

"How far have you got?"

"I've found equations to describe some simpler materials. I'm not sure how they would relate to whatever you're working with."

Snape had carefully worked them over as they spoke so that now he could get something from the drink table. Now he sipped and looked at her over his glass. He coughed and looked at his drink. Who in the same of Salazar would ever think a pumpkinini was a good idea? He looked at her again. That shine was for her work. He found himself again wondering if she had a shine for a wizard and decided it didn't matter. Tonight she would be with him as they discussed quantum mechanics.

He put his drink down and leaned over, speaking confidentially. It gave him an opportunity to gauge her reaction. Her eyes got wide and she sucked in her breath, but she kept eye contact. He smelled something... she was interested.

"Why don't we go get some coffee and discuss it?" he asked. She nodded, and he noted with satisfaction that there was a new shine in her eyes.

A/N: This was in response to reviews of the one drabble, indicating that there was some interest in what came before that night. This story will be a series of drabble-length vignettes. As always, although I try to stay consistent with the canon, I don't trouble myself with absolute compliance.

Thank you to Trickie Woo for beta reading and to my friends here for reading and reviewing!

Mechanics of Wool-Gathering

Chapter 2 of 101

Septima discusses a collaboration with Severus... when she can get her mind out of the clouds.

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Septima couldn't stop looking at him. She had never before thought Severus Snape was good looking, quite the opposite, actually. Yet tonight, as she watched him describe his work and its difficulties, he seemed alive and alight in a way she would not have expected.

He was an artist, a Newton, a Monet, a Picasso... a Descartes. She blushed at that thought. Until now in her life, any romantic bone in her body had yearned after an ideal presented by the French mathematician René Descartes. She stared at the man in front of her and realized that her ideal existed in the flesh. He even looked similar.

"So do you think we could start with these elements?" His intent stare turned curious as he looked at her.

She started and blushed. "I'm sorry. I was thinking about something that Leon Oiler said. Would you mind repeating what you were telling me?"

He started again, describing the particular materials he was working with. She now became amazed with his mind. His grasp of the topic was amazing. Truly he was worthy of his mentor. Only Flammel could possibly delve within that mind and refine the brilliance of it. Only Flammel could have found a way to challenge the magnificence that was Severus Snape.

"I hope I can offer any useful help to it."

"What do you think about those elements?"

"Let me think for a second." She closed her eyes and imagined the question at hand. She pictured the elements he wanted to start with, but they sat, lifeless, at the edges of her mind. Two others came to the middle of her mind and began to dance. After a moment the other three joined in and she suddenly felt like dancing herself.

She opened her eyes and smiled. Then she turned her place mat over and pulled a pencil out of her pocket. "It's your project of course, but I think you might start here." Under her hands, diagrams of the elements and equations started to appear. She added the arithmantic terms, and they began to dance and move. She took out her wand and nudged the place mat until they suddenly settled into place.

Septima put both pencil and wand back into her pocket and stared at it for a minute. "Well, it's a start." He got up and came around the table to sit beside her. Barely breathing, she glanced at his face from time to time, feeling as uncertain as she had in fourth year when Billy Lawrence had sat too close during lunch. He looked so serious, and then he frowned. What must he be thinking? She thought she might have been too presumptuous. Maybe she should backtrack.

"It's just an off-the-cuff impression, of course, and after looking at it, it may be that your idea was better..."

Suddenly he shook his head. "No, this is just right to start with, just as you say." Now he was nodding. "It's a good way to start. In fact, I think with very little work, we might be able to send this in to the correspondence section of a publication right now."

She shook her head. "It's not that much."

"It's good work."

"You started to speak, and I saw all of this in my head."

"We should work together a great deal, I think."

She blushed and put her spoon in her coffee. It had almost reached her lips that he could say anything to her and she knew she would see beautiful things in her head, but that didn't seem quite appropriate. She didn't understand why she felt this way about someone she hardly knew, but his presence came upon her in waves, just as his work had caused the numbers to dance in her mind.

Suddenly he put his hand over hers, causing the spoon to stop. "You didn't add anything to your coffee, Septima. You don't need to stir it."

She giggled foolishly. "Nervous habit, I suppose. It's exciting to think of all we might discover together, isn't it?"

He smiled. "I had my doubts, but I think our work together will be brilliant." He returned to his side of the table and flagged the waiter.

"I'm sorry, René," she said to herself as she admired the flow of his fingers.

A/N: Thank you to hexgirl for a bit of brit-picking on the previous chapter, and to Trickie Woo for beta reading!

Mechanics of Admiration

Chapter 3 of 101

Septima makes a bold request, to which Severus is surprised enough to agree.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Septima was a disaster in the Potions lab. Severus glanced over and revised his thoughts. She wasn't entirely a disaster. She was quite clever and insightful, and she understood the theory better than anyone he knew outside of himself and his advisor. She was obviously clever and well able to handle the work.

The problem was that she didn't pay very close attention to what she was doing with her hands. She must have spent extra time studying Arithmancy to make up for the fact that she simply wasn't very careful with the things she did. He resolved every morning to watch her closely whenever they were brewing, knowing that he would have to fix her mistakes or bear the consequences.

She didn't really need to brew. He was simply enough of a purist to think she should. It was his stated opinion that she would have a better feel for their work if she actually touched and worked with it. It was his unstated opinion that it would even things up a bit if she was as lost in his area as he sometimes was in hers.

Over the weeks, he found that he didn't mind fixing her mistakes. She was kind of cute in her blue jeans that molded to her derriere, and the snug t-shirt that molded right around a figure that seemed otherwise unrestrained. When he found ways to correct her mistakes without her noticing and enjoyed the smile she made when the potion came out right. It was rather nice to cause that reaction in an attractive witch.

On balance, he hadn't had so much fun in a Potions lab since he and Lily had stopped being friends. There was some adventure every morning in trying to figure out ahead of time what mistakes she would make and how he would expend his skill in preventing disaster. It had to be that. It couldn't be looking at her lips and wondering which wizards had kissed them. It couldn't be the feeling that went to his middle when he looked at her in the morning chill and realized that she wore nothing under her t-shirt. It was never the sensation that he felt when he stood near her and his hand was just a whisper away from the back pockets of those blue jeans. His sense of anticipation for the coming day was certainly due to the intellectual stimulation he knew was coming. She kept him at the top of his art.

Just now, she was absent-mindedly stirring a potion and looking at him inquisitively. He wondered what was on her mind. It was never quite what he expected. He would have to ask. "Is there something you need?"

"I honestly don't know if I do or not."

"What is it?"

"A potion."

"You've come to the right place. What potion do you need?" He held his coffee cup up to his lips.

She blushed dark red, looked at the floor, and whispered. "Contraceptive."

His coffee spurted across the floor and landed in front of her trainers. "What do you need that for?"

She shrugged. "I don't, I guess."

"Why do you think you want it?"

"Because I really like... I very much hope... I just want to be ready when it happens."

He quashed the sense of irritation that rose at the idea of her body beneath that of a wizard and nodded. "That's quite prudent. Do you have anyone in mind?"

She looked away. "Not exactly. At least, I want to, but I'm not sure about him."

"You're quite a desirable young woman, Septima. I think if you just give him a hint, he'll be eager."

"Really?" She had stopped stirring and was staring at him intently. He had the briefest glimpse beyond her eyes and into her mind. Suddenly he understood. He backtracked from her mind and looked for a way to change the subject.

He cleared his throat. "I'm sure *most* wizards would feel honored." He rescued her potion, which would be just about done with a little vigorous stirring. Setting that cauldron aside, he Summoned a clean one and filled it with water, which simmered quickly. "Let's start that potion."

She looked more carefully into the cauldron than she had in a long time. He wondered if he should have started such a potion sooner. Or perhaps he had discovered the source of her distraction. He put in a few base ingredients and pondered a few others. "Do you mind if I ask an embarrassing question or two?"

She bit her lip as she looked up at him. "It will work better if I answer them, won't it?"

She really was adorable, if he was looking. "Have you ever been with a man before?"

She shook her head. "No one has ever even kissed me."

He selected a bottle based upon that and then asked a question or two about her cycles, which for some reason came easier after the first question. The potion came to a simmer, and he allowed it to cool and thicken. He wrote the directions on a label, which he fixed to a bottle.

They worked on their notes in silence as they waited for the potions to be cool enough to put away. He wondered if he should have made the contraceptive for her. It might encourage her fantasies where he was concerned. He ought to have just sent her to the Apothecary.

He couldn't make good on those fantasies. She was kissable and very fit, but she wasn't Lily. Surely she knew that he had seen what she was thinking. Would Septima think that his making of the potion was a declaration of intent on his part?

She took the pony tail out of her hair. He couldn't believe just how messy the girl let it get. His fingers itched to take a brush to it. He watched through the curtain of his own hair as she shook it out and smoothed it with her fingers before putting it back into its elastic band. The scent of her wafted over the table and hit him. He got up and bottled her potion. He handed it to her.

"Here, Septima. Every night, just as it says on the label."

"Thank you, Severus."

She looked up at him in gratitude and longing, and he found himself leaning over. The next morning they would meet again, and he would wonder the same questions about her as he ever did. One question was answered, however. Exactly one wizard had now touched her lips.

A/N: Thank you to those who have read and reviewed! Thank you especially to beta reader Trickie Woo.

Mechanical Courtship

Chapter 4 of 101

Severus and Septima make some progress in their research and a different sort of progress as well.

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Septima didn't know what possessed her to request that potion. Severus must have realized that she was hoping to become—involved—with him when she asked for it. It was entirely his fault. He stood in the lab, looking so good, and the wireless was playing a song she loved. When he asked what she was thinking about, she blurted the first thing that came to mind.

Now she had to take the potion. She could never face him if she didn't. Somehow she knew he would know. The first dose didn't kill her. She took it and read textbooks long into the night as she always did, falling asleep sometime after one in the morning. Perhaps she couldn't be blamed if she spent more time thinking about that kiss than about her study, but at least outwardly things were normal.

The potion didn't affect her morning habits, either. She woke, showered, brushed at her hair just enough to get it into a messy ponytail, and ran to her daily meeting with her advisor. After her meeting, she went to the lab where Severus worked.

She was a little early, and she caught him working on a sketch he fussed with from time to time. She'd once gotten close enough to get the impression of one of those girls whose hair always fell into exactly the right spot. Maybe he had a girlfriend, or he was in love with someone.

He had a whole life she didn't know about. A lot of people stopped in to speak with him from time to time. By the way they dressed and acted, she figured they must be from Slytherin House. Some of them seemed a bit dodgy, but she wasn't there to critique his friends, only to learn.

"Hello!" she said loudly, before she got close enough to see what he was drawing.

In a single movement he looked up, swept his notebook off the table and into his bag, and stood. "Good morning. How did you sleep?"

She blushed and pushed a stray wisp of hair behind her ear. "Fine."

"No nausea or other strange symptoms?"

She shook her head.

"Let's get started then." He had ingredients and a cauldron set out.

Stung by his abrupt change of subject, she pulled her shoulders straight and resolved to do better today than ever. She cut and minced carefully, she stirred exactly as he directed her. This time, she didn't want him to have to fix her mistakes. Sure, she let him think that she didn't realize what he was doing, but today she had the feeling that she needed to actually prove herself.

When her cauldron bubbled over, she moaned in exasperation. "Even when I do it exactly right, something like this happens!"

His chuckle went down her spine. "You didn't read all the way to the end, did you? You did do it correctly, and that's exactly what was supposed to happen."

"Oh." She read a little further, saw that was indeed the case, and followed the last instructions about lowering the heat and stirring in one last ingredient. "So I did it right this time?"

He couldn't help smiling at her enthusiasm. "Yes, you did." He pointed to the directions. "I think we've identified why you don't succeed more often. You know you should read the directions all the way through before you begin."

"I know... it's just that it takes up time..."

"But if you knew what was going to happen..."

"All right, I see your point."

"Good."

She bottled her potion and cleared away her mess, feeling awkward. Sometimes she thought they had a good working relationship, but that was right when he said or did something that pulled the rug out from under her. Knowing that he was watching to make sure, she filled out her notes perfectly, instead of waiting until later like she often did. She was rewarded by a nod of his head and kinder look than usual.

"I was thinking..." he said.

"Yes?"

"You're ready to move on to the next level of potions. In a few weeks, we can even try a few that will prove or disprove whether the Arithmancy you've worked out is correct. How would you like to have dinner together tonight? We can discuss things that way."

"Oh! Of course!" she answered. Then she cleared her throat. Did she sound too eager? "I agree. There are a great many things I've thought about as I've read up on texts in the evenings."

"Shall we meet at seven, then?"

She nodded shyly. "I'd like that."

"I'll see you then, Septima."

"Yes, Severus, seven o'clock."

She moved toward the door but there was something around her wrist. Before she realized that it was Severus's hand, his lips were over hers again. This time she was aware enough to taste him. He tasted of cigarettes, coffee, and some indefinable something that was him.

Dinner was in a cheap Chinese place down the street from student housing, but the quality of the food didn't matter. She could listen to him forever. When he spoke, numbers and symbols danced in her head as had happened in the coffee shop. She pulled a small notepad out of her bag and made small sketches that she could use later. He scoffed at some of her notes and praised others. As dinner ended, she was going to head to her apartment, but his hand closed over her wrist again.

"We still have more to discuss," he said as his mouth closed over hers.

A/N: This story is back! I'm going to post it pretty consistently for at least a couple of weeks, now. I have several chapters ready to go. Thank you for reading and reviewing. Thank you to Trickie Woo for her virtual red pen and great advice!

Mechanical Conversation

Chapter 5 of 101

Severus and Septima decide what's next.

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Severus told himself that he couldn't possibly be interested in Septima. Her hair was messy to the point of being slovenly, she was inattentive to some types of details, and most damning of all, she would never be Lily. There was much about her that provoked his indifference, if not his dislike.

Of course, she shared many endearing qualities with Lily. Her approach to magic had the same sort of charm to it. Although a pure-blood, Septima behaved as though Magic had come to her as a delightful gift and not her birthright. She had the same wide-eyed respect for him that Lily once had, as well. It was hard not to bask in the glow of such admiration. Yet at the same time it reminded him of what he had lost during that fateful afternoon after the Defense Against the Dark Arts O.W.L.

Septima was outside of all that. She simply shared his love of learning and desire to push the limits in this one area they shared. Part of Severus thought about working with her long into the future, while another part of him wanted to move on the power and greatness that was due him. He doubted that a position in research would net him quite the prestige he wanted.

Another path was opening to him. If he worked carefully, he would be able to claim a part in another's greatness. That didn't trouble him as long as he received his fair share. There were some who warned him against working with that wizard, but they were poor weaklings. Severus would tame the snake and put it to his own use. He would be the wizard that other wizards reckoned with.

That didn't solve the problem of what to do with Septima. He had brought her to his flat and kissed her some more the other night. They had kissed pretty hard, their bodies straining for something they both wanted but weren't quite ready for. When forced to make a choice, Severus walked her to her own flat. Then he stood outside that door and kissed her some more.

That hadn't happened again, but ever since, he had been in the habit of grabbing her wrist and turning her into his kisses. He didn't really want to, at least he didn't think he wanted to, yet somehow he found himself kissing her and enjoying it. Just thinking about it now made him ache for a cigarette.

He never smoked in the laboratory. With so many things lying about, it was never safe. There were many things that might go up in flames or worse, and they would kill or maim him in the process. He was smoking out by the door of the building when she walked up. He'd never really watched her walk before. At least, he had not had the opportunity to watch her walk in the open, when she had perfect freedom of movement. She walked as if she owned the place, as if she had no care in the world, as if she was still a little girl, and yet with a feminine wiggle that was all woman. It made his mouth fall open.

When she reached him, he tossed his fag and grabbed her arm. He didn't know why he did that, but he liked it. Somehow it told them both who was the boss, which made their relationship clear. It was a good thing, since he had no idea what he felt for her. Right this minute, the most important thing was to pull her into his arms and kiss her.

"Mmm..." she said when he let her up for breath. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"I received an Owl this morning."

"Oh?"

"Our letter is going to be published."

She clapped her hands in delight. She was so adorably happy that he wanted to kiss her again. So he pulled her closer to do so. "They really liked it? It seems so fast!" she said when he lifted his head.

"Yes, the referees said that they found our beginning quite promising."

"Promising!"

"Yes. They want us to publish our complete findings in their periodical when we're ready."

"That's amazing."

"They want some edits to the text, and we can go through that this afternoon, if you're game."

"Oh, yes!"

"After that, let's go to dinner again."

"Actually, why don't we have dinner at my flat? I'll cook."

This was a new development. "Are you sure?"

"I want to... and," she swallowed hard and licked her lips, "I'd like you to consider spending the night."

"Septima!"

"Or not... I just thought..." she sighed and shrugged.

"I can't promise you anything."

"I don't expect you to."

"I also have other obligations."

She turned bright red. "Forget I suggested it, then. I just... I'm not horrible to kiss, am I?"

Severus realized that he was being a bit boorish. "Quite the opposite." The next time he stopped kissing her long enough to speak he suggested, "Why don't I come for dinner and we'll see what happens next?"

"I'd like that."

A/N: Thank you for reading and reviewing! Thanks to Trickie Woo for beta reading!

A Quantum of Romance

Chapter 6 of 101

A meal is shared.

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After dinner, they sat in Septima's little sitting area and spoke in monosyllables about stupid things they never spoke about—the weather and if they thought Pernelle Flammel's hair was really that shade of orange. Septima thought she would throw her head back and howl if it went on another minute.

Finally, she simply stood up. Severus was forced, by courtesy, to do likewise. "I won't keep you," she said. "I know I suggested... never mind."

He was close but stepped closer. "It wasn't a bad suggestion, Septima. I simply wanted to be very sure, before taking that step, that we're both ready. You've never been with anyone. I've only been with one or two, and neither was anyone I really liked."

She looked down. "When you're near me, I feel like I should slide up next to you. It's like the way my wand fits into my hand. I don't know why it should be that way, Severus. I just know that I feel close to you and I want to be as close as possible. I should have—I never asked if there was someone else or if you feel like I do."

A shadow passed through his eyes as he said, "I'm not with anyone else. You may rest easy on that account. And yes, I feel almost compelled to be with you, too. I don't want to take advantage, though. You're so young, and there are so many better looking, wealthier, and more powerful men than I.

"I want you. It's you who has attacked my dreams." She put her hands on his shoulders and raised her lips up.

She felt forward for initiating the kiss this time, but he didn't seem to mind. She backed toward the bedroom. The feeling of his kisses changed and she felt him unleash a passion that she didn't know was there before.

He groaned into her neck. "Are you absolutely sure?" His hands were fingering the zipper pull at her back.

"Oh, yes," she said. "I've wanted this for weeks."

He took control of things, and she lay under him quietly as he undressed her and then himself. He touched her and made her feel things she'd read about in books. Her body joined him in doing things she didn't understand, arching and reaching in a rhythm that she never would have guessed that she knew. She was right about Severus. He would make this moment magical.

It was all very exciting, and then it stung, and then it was... pleasant. "Ah... Septima... sweet..."

Severus flopped down next to her and breathed heavily for a long while. Then he was quiet, and then he summoned his pack of cigarettes. "Do you mind?"

She looked at him curiously and said, "I guess not, but is it over, then?"

He chuckled. "Of course, you goose. Didn't you feel the rush?" Her curiosity must have been in her face because he said, "Well, if you look like that, perhaps not."

"Did the others?"

"The others who?"

"Your other women. Did they feel the rush?"

He took a long drag on his cigarette while he thought about it. "I'm not sure whether they did or not. It wasn't the sort of situation where it would come up in conversation."

"Oh."

He whispered something and his cigarette disappeared. "I've heard that sometimes the man has to take his time for the sake of the woman. I guess I was just too excited. You're quite sexy, you know."

"Not really."

"Oh, but you are." His arm came around to where she was lying on the bed and he started to caress her. The pleasant feelings came back and quickly grew into more intense ones. He seemed to know what she was thinking and feeling as he touched her everywhere on her body.

"I've never had the time to just do this," he said. He leaned down to nibble around her belly button and she sighed hopefully. "I think we'll learn about how this works."

"Will you be able to take your time?"

He looked up into her eyes. "This time I will." His head lowered again and she moaned with the sudden pleasure his lips gave her. Now his caresses were for her to enjoy. She had watched him touch and manipulate various specimens and ingredients, touching them as though they were the most important thing in the world to him. She supposed that for the few moments before they were added to the potions he worked on, they were that important.

Now she knew what those specimens and ingredients felt like. She didn't ask herself if she was as forgettable as those other things. She only knew what her body felt as he made love to her the second time. She was so absorbed by her feelings for him that she almost didn't notice how she squealed when she felt the waves of passion rush upon her. She could only look up at him in bliss as he groaned and pulled her tighter.

Afterward, she looked up at him in adoration. Now he would say what she'd longed to hear from him. He was breathing even harder this time, but he started kissing her face. "That was incredible, the best I've ever had. You're an amazing, sweet girl."

It wasn't what she thought. Didn't the man say he loved the woman once they had sex in all the books? She almost sighed but knew it wouldn't be the best response. She could live with being amazing. After all, the experience was amazing. "That was... incredible."

He sat up again and looked over at her dresser. "Accio hairbrush." It sailed into his hand and he nudged her until she sat up. "We're going to take care of something that's been bothering me," he said.

When he brushed her hair, it was somehow an expression of disappointment, yet the act itself was so pleasurable that she submitted willingly. When her hair was untangled and it hang in a gleaming mass down her back, he gently nudged her to lie down again. Then Septima began her education in doing the sorts of things to Severus that he had recently done to her.

A/N: Once again, thank you for reading and reviewing. Thanks to Trickle Woo for beta reading.

Mechanical Morning

Chapter 7 of 101

Severus ponders the near future.

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Severus had not intended to stay at Septima's place so late. He had certainly not planned to stay in her bed for so long, if he had thought to be in her bed at all. She had a way of tucking her form into his when they kissed, and then there was something her one knee had done. She didn't shift her body weight much, but her knee went right around his, and he couldn't think beyond it.

At first he thought to only do it a single time, to get it out of their systems. He needed a cigarette when it was over, it was so... and then he realized that she hadn't felt what he had, and he decided it was only right to correct the error. Yet then, as he combed her hair and found himself enveloped by her scent, which now included his scent as well, he was somehow ensnared by her. He set the hairbrush aside and found his face buried in her neck even as his hands had reached around her, looking for ways to make her want him again.

So it went all night. Whenever he was ready to say his goodbyes and leave, she smiled up at him, or he felt a twitch of his own. Instead of rolling out of the bed, he rolled closer to her so that he could start touching and kissing her again.

After they were completely spent, something incredibly odd happened. Septima, barely conscious, curled up to his side and wrapped an arm around him. She went to sleep that way, not noticing or minding that her hair was curled around him. He might have been able to move her arm, but there was no way to extricate himself from her long hair. He wasn't sure he wanted to. It felt far more natural to put his arm around her and stroke his fingers through her hair, smoothing it away. He kissed her forehead and pondered her sweetness.

He awoke right before the sun came up and quietly got up. He found his clothes and was putting them on when she rolled over and raised up on her elbow. "Are you leaving?"

"I should get a shower and everything before my meeting with Nick, later."

She glanced at a clock. "Yeah, I have an early meeting too, with Leon." She lay back into the pillows and smiled up at him. "Do you think they'll know?"

"If we keep professional about it, then it won't matter."

"Oh." She looked as she did whenever he explained what she was doing wrong with a potion. "I should have thought about that."

She was so sweet that he felt a little guilty. He covered it by leaning over the bed and kissing her one last time. He hadn't counted on what her naked body would do to him, and one kiss became several. He finally decided he had to leave and pulled away. "I'll see you later."

He met with Nick and showed him what they had done and what they would be working on. Then he went back to his lab and started laying out the items they would need that day. This potion would have some bearing on their work together, and it would need to be done perfectly. He drank his coffee and paced back and forth. He would need his nerves steady so that he could steady her and keep disaster from happening.

He pondered how he would tell her that it would just be a one night thing. They couldn't afford to become involved; it might ruin their working relationship, which he admitted to himself he enjoyed more than he had enjoyed any intellectual pursuit in the past. He resolved that it was over. There would be no more kisses, no more touches, and definitely no more of that... amazing... shagging.

All of his resolve melted when she walked into the room. She wore a mini dress today in a shrieking hue of blue that somehow suited her. She wasn't one of those pretty girls who men whistled at, but right at that moment she was beautiful. All of his blood ran to his middle.

She came close, and he grabbed her wrist as he often did. He tugged her into a small office he sometimes used for notes and thinking when he wanted to step away from his potions. He pushed her up against the chalkboard and lifted her skirt up.

"Wha—"

"I can't seem to help myself," he responded.

He nuzzled at her neck as his hands roamed at will. She started to gasp with surprise and then with other emotions as her hands were first pushing against his shoulders, then held at her own shoulders as though she didn't know what to do with them. She finally put her arms around him, and her hands found their way to his backside, which she pulled toward herself as he caused them both to shudder with passion.

It was short, explosive, and just what he needed to focus on the morning ahead. She, however, looked stunned for a few seconds. He helped her down from the ledge where the chalk was kept and dusted off her back. The board was clean, but had a layer of chalk dust everywhere except the spot where there was now a Septima-shaped dark spot.

She was breathing hard. "What are we working on, today?"

"We're actually going to test a little theory in changing some materials into others. Are you game?"

"I think so, if I can stop thinking about what you just made me feel."

He kissed her forehead. "Let's get to it."

She smiled at that and moved toward the door, straightening the skirt of her dress over her bum as she went. Just before she went into the lab, she looked over her shoulder. All of his resolve left him.

He cleared his throat. "As soon as we're done here, we'll go to my place. We can study and work on our notes in between—other things."

She smiled more brightly, and he reflected that it might not be so bad. He'd heard other boys talk about the fact that they sometimes shagged some girls at every opportunity for a couple of weeks. It took that long to get some girls out of one's system, they'd said.

He walked out to the lab and watched her put her hair into a hasty ponytail. It was exactly the way it always looked. This time it really was mussed by a night of passion. He couldn't wait to take a hairbrush to it again.

A/N: Thank you for reading, and special thanks to beta reader Trickie Woo.

A Quantum of Doubt

Chapter 8 of 101

Septima learns that she shouldn't be too curious.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they live in are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Septima was in love. It was the only explanation. She couldn't otherwise account for the way her tummy responded to his nearness. It was the only thing that explained the odd sensations she felt all over her body whenever he kissed her.

She and Severus had been lovers for months now. They spent hours in their apartments, studying their work together and then making love. Severus seemed to find sexual energy in everything, especially when they made a small breakthrough. Septima was liable to find herself on the table among their scrolls and quills as he did unspeakable things to her.

He insisted on brushing her hair every night they were together. After a few weeks it took on a new sheen that it hadn't had under her own care. She should be ashamed by the silent admonition it gave her, but she didn't care. His hands felt so good, whatever they did to her, that she was secretly glad of her lifetime-long bad habit.

She learned to be a little less timid around him when he was stern. He was very serious about his work, after all. She was very serious about it, but he took it to a different level. She studied his way of doing things and tried to imitate him. His sternness would soften when he noticed, and sometimes he would even touch her hand and smile.

His odd friends seemed to come around with increasing frequency. They stopped in his laboratory, where he gave them small vials of potions he carried in his pockets. She only asked about them once. "Why do they come around so much?"

"They need my help." He nodded toward her work space. "You need to chop that a bit finer."

She turned down to her cutting board and corrected her error. "Are they Death Eaters?"

"I believe at least a few of them are, yes. Look, Septima, that's bubbling a little too violently."

She adjusted the heat and stirred in the root she had just chopped. After a moment she had things back under control and asked something she felt she must know even if it made him angry. "Are—are *you*... a Death Eater?"

It was a sign that she'd gone too far when he stopped sorting his leaves and placed his hands flat upon the table. His knuckles went white and then looked normal. He picked up his knife again and selected another leaf. "Not at this time, Septima."

"Are you going to—"

"Septima, you need to attend your potion. It's just about done. Do not let it over heat." He swept his minced leaves into a mortar and started working at them furiously with the pestle.

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't pry, I just want to know about y—"

"*SEPTIMA!*" he hissed, turning and holding the pestle not far from her face. "You are here to explore the subtle art of potions-making. You are not here to pry into my private affairs."

She opened and closed her mouth, knowing she'd gone too far. Her potion gave her something to do. It needed to be stirred as it cooled or a film would form on the top. She had a meeting with Leon soon, and she went home after that.

Severus didn't come round that night. It wasn't that strange; he didn't come over every night, after all. Yet tonight it stung and haunted her. What did he mean by "private affairs?" What was she to him? She looked at a page describing the uncertainty principle and pondered the man who held back nothing physically with her but shared so little about his mind or heart.

In her lonely bed she wondered what he was doing that night. Then she wondered what he did on all the nights they weren't together. Did he do things with those Slytherins? Is that when he made the potions for them? She wondered about other women. He had never actually said there wasn't one; just that it wasn't for her to worry about. Now she did worry.

He met her outside the lab the next morning. With his hand around her wrist, he led her to the little office, where he suddenly seemed to grow more hands. "I missed you last night."

"Oh, I did, too..." She couldn't speak after that, and it was better to say nothing after all. What could she say to describe what had happened the day before that would satisfy his requirement of being impersonal?

Thus Septima learned not to ask questions he didn't want to answer. Instead she enjoyed learning from him, researching and discovering things with him, and writing about their discoveries. The nights they spent together were nothing short of a miracle in her mind. She didn't know why he saw it differently, but she learned not to ask.

The term passed and Septima found herself alone on Christmas night. They both had gone to their respective homes for the day, but had vague plans to meet in the evening. It was nothing definite, but she thought that it was certain enough that she made plans.

She bade her parents good bye and went back to her apartment early. She wanted to prepare a nice dinner for Severus. She straightened the apartment up and decorated it as well as she could with some creative wand work. Her hair shone after she brushed it herself, an homage to what he had done with it.

The gloomy afternoon gave way to twilight and then full dark. Septima finished her preparations and sat on her couch, wondering why she had gone to all this work if he wasn't coming. He might have owled, or sent some sort of message. What could have held him up?

A/N: Thank you, as always, for your kind attention. Thanks especially to Trickie Woo for beta reading and advice.

A Quantum of Merriment

Chapter 9 of 101

Severus enjoys Christmas in spite of himself.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Severus was sitting on his couch in the dark and clutching a bottle of gin when Septima found him. She looked upset at first, but then her eyes turned sympathetic. He should have gone to her; she was always good for some sympathy. "I'm sorry," she said, "I thought you'd be coming to my place. I got everything ready there."

He looked up at her. She was smiling at him. One person in the whole world was happy to see him. Why wasn't it good enough? "I was, but I just..." He sighed. "Nothing ever works out the way I wanted."

He had argued with Lily again. It had started by his going to visit and wish her a Merry Christmas. He would only admit it in his deepest heart, but he had hoped that she would make some sign. Then he would be with her forever. Instead she had shown him her engagement ring. He had begged her not to marry Potter, and she had told him that a Death Eater had no say in the matter. When he had told her he wasn't a Death Eater yet, she had sniffed and shrugged. Clearly she thought it didn't matter whether he was a Death Eater or not.

He looked at Septima again. She was dressed up, and she had gone to some trouble about her hair. He couldn't decide whether to feel irritated or happy that she had taken the time. Why did it have to be her instead of the one he wanted?

"This is for you." She held out a box.

It was a glass-lined cauldron. It would save him a great deal of trouble. One of the potions they had been making required either such a cauldron or a spell to line a regular cauldron that had to be maintained during the potion's entire brewing. He stared at it in amazement. "Septima! It's too much... I can't accept it. These cost a fortune."

She smiled. "I have a friend who got me a deal, and I can afford it. Besides, it's an investment in our work together. It will make certain potions come out better, right?"

He was looking at her with an expression that on him was almost wistful. "Yes, it will make some things much more easy." He handed her a long, thin package. "This is for you."

It was a print of a portrait of René Descartes. She was overcome by happiness. She climbed into his lap and started tugging at his robe.

"Septima!"

"If you only know what this means to me... that you noticed... and you must have looked for ages..."

"Se—" Her kiss silenced his protest. He wasn't really protesting, anyway.

She made love to him with wild abandon. He suddenly felt a little guilty and bereft, that he would have given this up if Lily had just held out her hand. Then conscious thought left him as the intensity of the woman in his arms overcame him.

In an odd moment of loose connections, he recalled being told that wands choose the wizards who will use them. Septima had compared the ease with which they fit together to holding her wand. Were women like that? Did they choose the wizard, too?

He tried to shake it off. Septima might have chosen him, and Lily might have chosen against him, but Potter had chosen Lily, hadn't he? Yet Lily had made Potter wait long enough, and had only just succumbed. Perhaps witches were like wands. Perhaps that's all there was to it.

Lily had made Potter wait, but Septima hadn't been like that. In fact, Severus had been the one to hold back with her. Did it matter? Somehow there was something in the back of his mind that told him a witch that was so easy could not be of the value that Lily was.

Septima shifted her position and squeezed him tight. Severus's full attention was captured by the present. She encouraged him to come to her apartment. When they got there, they ate the meal she had set out. There was an exquisite elf-made wine.

They spoke about visiting their parents. He glossed over his family interactions and didn't mention Lily at all. She described the sort of family he envied. It brought up questions about the sort of family he could form with the witch of his choice. Had Lily seen his family and judged that he would be lacking in that department? If she would only see him as he wanted to be...

Septima cleared the table and asked Severus to help decide where to hang the print. They decided upon her bedroom, in a spot she couldn't miss it. She had smiled delightedly. "On the nights we're apart, René will keep me company." Then, pointing to the mistletoe over her bed, she kissed him. After that she undressed for him in a dance that, combined with the wine, made him forget. He couldn't do anything but reach for the witch who did it all and more besides.

He held her tightly when it was over. "Ah, Septima," he whispered, "if only..."

A/N: Thank you for reading & reviewing! Thanks especially to beta reader Trickie Woo!

A Quantum of News

Chapter 10 of 101

Septima tells Severus something but doesn't hear what she's hoping in return.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

The kitchen was a mess of half-drunk coffee cups and full ashtrays mixed with piles of parchments. Some were full of notes while others contained results from their work. Septima swallowed back her lunch and started by clearing the table. She had dinner in the oven when Severus walked in. He looked at the now-sparkling clean kitchen and said, "Whatever it is smells delicious."

"Thank you."

"I have to say that I'm smitten by the look of you in my kitchen, doing my housework."

"You should go back to the cave."

He smirked at her. "An excellent idea, my dear." He reached around her hips and tossed her over his shoulder. After taking her to the bedroom and depositing her on the bed, he said, "I do feel like a cave man around you."

He undressed her and looked at her as he undressed himself. "I don't know why," he said. "You seem so full and lush. You are like life itself." He made love to her eagerly.

She lay in his arms, unable to speak, barely able to breathe. He carried her to a dizzying height and then held her tenderly when it was over. "You're incredible, Septima."

She loved him so much. There was so much to share with him, and she had her whole life to do it. She brushed his hair out of his eyes and whispered. "I wasn't feeling very well, so I went to a Healer today, Severus." She swallowed hard and blinked. "She told me that I'm pregnant."

She knew he was practicing Occlumency, but she was amazed at how well he had developed the art. Not a muscle in his face was different. There was no change in his eye. Yet somehow she knew he had closed something away from her.

"I want to reassure you that I have been taking the potion, every day just as you told me. The Healer told me that there isn't one we could have used that was better. She said that sometimes they just don't work. One or two percent, she said..." She drifted off, not sure how to continue.

Severus sat up and reached for a cigarette. He signaled for her to sit up next to him and put his arm around her when she did. "Did she say everything was all right?" he finally asked.

"She said everything is perfectly healthy."

"When did it happen?"

"Around Christmas."

"Almost three months? *Merlin*, Septima, why can't you keep better track of things like that?"

"I... I don't know. I'm just so interested in other things...There's our research, and then our time together..."

"Are you saying this is my fault?"

She shook her head. "No, Severus, it just happened. It's my fault I didn't notice sooner. I just never expected... and we *have* been working hard..."

"I suppose what's done is done." He took a drag that seemed to suck the cigarette down to its filter and with it all the air in the room.

They were quiet for a few minutes. She had known all day that he wouldn't be happy, but their work had gotten to the point where he could possibly start writing his thesis that summer and do just a few last experiments over next winter. He would be finished in just about a year. Her own work would proceed more slowly. With a baby due in September, if the Healer was right, she would have to take that semester off and delay her own work for that long.

She looked up at his profile. He was reaching for another cigarette. "I'm sorry," she said. "I know this puts the cart before the horse..."

There was something in the way he shrugged and sneered that told her what she had been hoping not to know all along. Septima had recently been trying equations that no self-respecting arithmancer would meddle with. It was a branch of the science that only fortune tellers and fools would pursue. The numbers never told her what she wanted to know, but now she knew they were right.

She lay back among the pillows and tried to remember how to breathe. Her eyes welled up and her breath came back with a sob. She finally sat up and tried to find her underwear. "There isn't going to be a 'horse,' is there?"

He just looked at her, his cigarette held halfway between the ash tray and his mouth.

She shook her head. "We're not putting the cart before the horse because you have no intention of marriage, do you? You said I didn't need to worry about anyone else, but that doesn't mean she doesn't exist. She does, doesn't she? I know you sketch a woman, the same woman, all the time."

She couldn't find her underwear and couldn't remember the spell to retrieve it. "I fell in love with you that first night in the coffee shop, but you never did. I was just a fun time for you... an easy lay..."

She couldn't focus on anything that was on the floor except her robe. "Oh, screw it," she whispered. She could wear the robe and her cloak as far as her apartment with no one the wiser about her lack of clothing underneath. "I should have listened to the numbers. I'm sorry for the presumption, sorry for throwing myself at you, sorry for everything. Have a nice life."

A/N: I was hoping to cover twenty years worth of relationship in just a few chapters. I didn't quite manage that, but there will be some skipping around. Thanks for reading and reviewing, and thank you to Trickie Woo for beta reading!

Mechanical Reflection

Chapter 11 of 101

Severus reflects and decides upon a course of action.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling.

Severus sat in his bed smoking until the cigarettes ran out. Then the smell of cooking brought him to the kitchen. Septima had made him a delicious dinner and he ate while he thought. He put his dishes in the sink and realized that she had cleaned up quite a bit. He checked and found the parchments she had sorted. She had arranged everything, even their mistakes, in the perfect order.

He wasn't going to marry her. He couldn't. He would only have one wife, if any. Yet, she was a dear little thing, and now there was their child to consider. Somehow, he would have to make it all work together.

He prepared for bed and thought of Septima. Every time she had been near him came to mind. All of the jittery nervousness, the absent-mindedness, the forthrightness whenever she was asked a direct question came to his mind. No, he could never love her, but there was something endearing about her. He owed her so much.

He lay awake long into the night, pondering the way Septima had been as they had made love. She clung to him and buried her head in his chest just as her passion gave way. It was something he'd come to depend upon, and he looked forward to it. He recalled the way she would sit quietly as he combed her hair out and scolded her for letting it get so tangled. He recalled the way she stood in the shower, under the spray of water and his searching hands.

He woke late and stumbled into his lab to discover that she had already been in and cleared away all traces of her presence. He looked more carefully and discovered that she had actually sorted through all of their joint notes and arranged them in just the order he needed them. It was just as she had done at his apartment. There were times when her attention to detail was stellar.

He wouldn't let himself admit to missing her. She was just a woman. He'd been promised many women. He could have a different one every day of the week if he wanted. He looked at his sketch book, something he could do for once without worry of being caught, and thought of the one woman he wanted.

He asked himself, for the first time ever, why he had never wanted Septima to see the pictures of Lily that he drew. What would be the harm? He couldn't imagine why he had hidden Lily from her, it was just important that he had.

I fell in love with you.

He'd never hoped to hear that said to him, ever. Septima loved him. She was pregnant with his child. Why couldn't he love her back and marry her? They would work together in perfect accord for the rest of their lives, like Nicolas and Pernelle.

He hated the idea. He couldn't love her. Yet he missed her. Her mind was quick and in tune with his own. She wasn't very careful, but she was eager to work with him. Her body... he already missed her body.

He found himself on her door step after spending the usual amount of time at the lab. No work had been done; he had simply passed the time thinking of her. As soon as he could possibly justify it, he left the laboratory and went to her apartment.

She looked awful when she got to the door. Her clothes were mussed as though she had slept in them and her hair was a mess. "Did I lose one of the scrolls?"

"No.

"Did the dinner I made burn?"

"It was a little crispy, but it was perfect. You're a wonderful cook."

She turned and walked toward her sitting area. "Then I don't know why you're here."

"I'm here for this." He grabbed her wrist and pulled her close. He kissed her hard, and the feeling was that of returning home. He kissed her again.

She shook her head and broke away. "I don't think I can... knowing you'll never love me."

"I love many things about you. I discovered so many today. It will take years to tell you."

"It's not the same."

"It's the best we'll ever have."

"I don't know if it's enough... without love?"

"We'll both love the baby... we'll have a life full of love."

She looked uncertain and shook her head. "I just don't know..."

"Yes, you do." He kissed her again. "There's nothing else for you, no one else."

"No, but for you—"

"I told you long ago not to worry about it. You don't need to worry now, either."

He wasn't sure what he would do in her circumstances, but he hoped she would say yes. Instead, she simply leaned up to accept his kisses again. "I should say no, but I'm willing to try anything if it means being with you."

A/N: Thank you for continuing to read. I also enjoy the reviews. Thanks so much to beta reader Trickie Woo.

Mechanical Failure

Chapter 12 of 101

Septima comes face to face with the reality of her situation.

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Unquantifiable Pain

Chapter 13 of 101

Severus faces the reality of his life. Caution: Implied character death in this chapter.

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Severus was uplifted when he returned to his lab. His arm ached, but he had pleased the Dark Lord. What's more, the Dark Lord promised that he would get everything he wanted. Severus would have power, he would be recognized, and he would have Lily. Regulus had been sent to fetch her on the pretext of speaking with his brother. Everything was working out.

The only problem was Septima, but she was understanding. She knew Lily existed. He hoped that once he explained how he planned to take care of the baby, she would be all right. There would be no more nights of studying and working out theory until he got so hot that he shagged her on the table or the couch, but they were almost done with their collaboration, and there would be Lily. She would be—He didn't know what Lily would be, but it would be wonderful.

Following the note he found when he got back to his office, he went to St. Mungo's.

"She had a hard go of it for a few hours, but she's resting comfortably now. She's going to stay here for a day or so, and we'll see how it goes," the Matron told him as they walked toward Septima's bed.

She looked completely washed out and mousy. He would talk to her about Lily at another time. It wouldn't do to have that conversation now. It could wait.

"How are you?" he asked.

"You're one of them now, aren't you?"

His arm tingled, and he twitched. "Yes."

"You're going to leave me."

She seemed to know. Perhaps she'd been using those equations again. In the hands of a witch with her native talent, they could be surprisingly accurate. "We weren't exactly together, were we?"

"You bastard," she whispered, "making sure I knew every moment that you were just with me until you got what you really wanted. I know that last night you were getting everything you wanted and I'm—" She winced and her body seemed to fold in on itself.

The Matron suddenly appeared. "Hush, dearie. The pains will ease if you can relax. You must try."

Septima nodded and lay back against her pillows. "Go ahead, Severus. There's no baby for you to worry about any more."

His arm started to hurt. He realized that Regulus must have come back even at the same time he realized what Septima was telling him. "That's sorted then," he said aloud.

Through the haze of physical pain that commanded his attention, he saw the shock and anguish in Septima's eyes. "Go to hell," she said.

He couldn't wait to go, so he left. He found Regulus at the Death Eaters' meeting place and *she* was with him. "Here's your Mudblood. It was pretty easy to find her. She's been confounded so that I wouldn't have to listen to her."

Severus put his arm around Lily and Apparated to his apartment. He gently reversed the charm on Lily and sat down near her. "If you only knew how much I've wanted this," he said.

"Clearly, if you've sold your soul for it," she said. "You're really one of them, now, aren't you?"

"Just this afternoon."

"I knew it would happen all along. What's supposed to happen now? Are we supposed to do it on this sofa? Do I have to pretend to like it?"

He stood up. He didn't know why, but it couldn't happen where Septima had—"We're going to be together forever now. I want to marry you."

"You must be kidding. Are you sure it's me you want?"

"Why would you say that?"

"I've seen your little lab partner, Severus. I've heard that you can't keep your hands off her. You're the father of her baby, aren't you?"

"Septima was just... we were just having some laughs together. At any rate, there's no complication there. I've just been to see her. The baby... is gone." For the first time, he suddenly realized what happened. That warm bump in Septima's belly, the squiggly movement he'd just felt this afternoon, it was all gone.

Lily stared at him in horror. "That's pretty ironic. You became a Death Eater while your own child was dying?"

Suddenly Severus couldn't stand the sight of her. "Go," he whispered.

"Lord Voldemort—" He stiffened at use of the name, but she didn't notice—*obtained* me for you. Won't there be a problem when you get rid of me so soon?"

He shrugged. "I'll tell him you displeased me. He tried to convince me to take a wife who was of purer blood anyway and not some Mudblood..." Now it was Lily's turn to stiffen. "I want you to stay, Lily. I've loved you since I was ten years old, but I can't do this now. If you can't be happy with me... I release you."

"You're too good for this," she whispered. She kissed his cheek as she passed him. "Good luck, Severus. I'm sorry that James or Sirius will probably end up killing you."

He went back to the hospital but Septima was already gone. The Matron said a great many things about young women who didn't know any better before he could get away. He went and knocked on the door to her apartment. "Septima, I need to talk to you."

The door opened a crack. "I'm not supposed to be up."

"Then let me come in and talk."

"I can't anymore. It's over. Let me mourn in peace." The door shut.

There was nothing left to do but go back to his own apartment. There was a picture from an early ultrasound on his bedroom dresser. He looked at it, and—for reasons he couldn't understand—tears began streaming down his face.

A/N: I think this might be the saddest chapter of the story. I hope you'll all forgive me for it. Thank you for reading and for the reviews. Thank you especially to Trickie Woo, who beta reads.

Quantum Mistakes

Chapter 14 of 101

Septima hopes to leave the past behind. Severus tries to help her with the future.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

October 1979

Septima ached. Every part of her body was sore. The Healers said that everything she went through, compounded by the depression, could do that to a person. After the incident in May, she had gone back to work. She had finished a few last equations for Severus's research and for the joint papers they would have published. Then she had tried to assess the angle to take on her own work. It had proven to be one thing too many.

Now she was back in the hospital, but on a different floor. She had done everything she could, but she couldn't quite shake it. Finally a potion was suggested. Lethe's Milk was fairly aggressive, but it would allow her peace from some of the more upsetting portions of the last year.

There was a long discussion regarding whether she should forget Severus altogether. The decision was made not to do that. Although the counselors never learned her partner's name, they pointed out that the affair was so entwined with her work that it would set her back in her professional goals. Likewise, the child she had lost would not be forgotten, but some of the more distressing moments would be softened. After a long stay at St. Mungo's, working with the Healers on what would be forgotten and what remembered, she was given her dose of the potion.

Septima went to sleep and woke late the next morning, feeling refreshed. The Matron brought her breakfast and her discharge papers. "How are you feeling, deary?"

"Quite well. Am I going home today?"

"Yes, the Healers are sure that you will be fine now. You've been ill for almost six months. Won't you be glad to get back to your work?"

She thought of her research. Severus would be writing his thesis by now, but she still had a few months worth of research to do. She was a year behind him to begin with, but their work together gave her a basis for her own. "Yes, I'll be very happy to get back," she said.

July 1980

Severus hated everything about his life right then. He'd failed Septima, he'd failed Lily, and he'd failed himself. He emptied a box of books and discovered the ultrasound picture of little Renée. If he had stayed away from the Death Eaters, Septima's baby might have lived. He came upon a notebook from long ago. It was filled with pictures of Lily, who was in danger now because of a stray prophecy he had heard and repeated. He had already hung his accreditations on the wall, surrounding himself with the future he would never truly realize because he would have to spend it here, working for Dumbledore.

"Hello?" He looked up to see Professor Erwin at the door.

"Yes?" he asked suspiciously. Erwin was leaving for the university. There was no reason for him to stop by unless he wanted something, and Erwin always seemed to want a bit more than people wanted to give.

"I have heard things about Septima Vector. I understand you and she were together often."

"That's one way to put it."

"I've thought of taking her on. I thought I would ask your opinion on the matter before I approached her, as a sort of courtesy between gentlemen and all."

Severus was looking in a box full of scrolls she had written and didn't want his face to be visible to the other man. As a result, he missed the look in Erwin's eyes. From the sound of it, the man was planning to poach Septima as a student from Oiler, who was known to be almost entirely blind by now. He was sharp as a tack and usually knew where the terms would end long before the numbers settled, but perhaps Septima should have a new advisor. At any rate, Severus would help her as much as he could.

"I can't recommend her highly enough."

"Oho, it's like that is it? Why didn't you bring her with you?"

"Surely you realize that she still has this last year to finish. She's brilliant, though. I understand that even with her leave of absence she's going to finish her thesis on time."

"I remember her from her Hogwarts days. Is there anything you could tell me about her?"

Severus shrugged and pretended he was sorting through the scrolls. "She's conscientious, but she occasionally gets absent-minded. I found her to be eager to learn and extremely inventive. She has her awkward moments, yet she manages to behave in a manner that's quite pleasing."

The other wizard's hands clapped together in a way Severus found odd, but he let it pass. "Again, I can't recommend her highly enough. I suppose someone new might even draw out hidden talents I never found. She's quite capable and the best partner I ever had. She's had a raw deal this last year, and she deserves better."

Erwin chuckled. "Thank you, Severus. I assure you, you're placing her into very careful hands."

A/N: As always, thank you for reading and reviewing! A special thank you goes to Trickie Woo for beta reading.

A Quantum of Disaster

Chapter 15 of 101

Septima pays the price for Severus's help.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Caution: As always, I tried to minimize it, but this chapter does contain non-consensual sex

He had her now.

Professor Erwin had flirted with her all through the school year. He stood too close, he whispered off color comments into her ear, and he touched her—just on her arm or shoulder—in ways that were innocent but didn't quite feel so. Septima, still unhappy over the loss of Severus, tried not to pay attention. It was an approach that got her all the way to the Easter Holiday, but now he had her.

Erwin sat behind his desk, his hand on Septima's thesis, and smiled. "I'm sure it's excellent work, my dear, but I think we both know what would induce me to make sure I read it, and in the proper frame of mind."

"Professor Erwin—"

"Call me Richard, dear."

She shook her head. "Profess—"

"Richard." His voice had the tone of a teacher drilling students in basic runes.

"I'm quite attached to someone else."

"Severus?" She blushed, and he smiled kindly. "I fixed it up with him. He said he couldn't recommend the situation highly enough. He spoke quite well of you, too. He said you were eager to learn and quite inventive." Erwin stood and leaned over the table. "He spent several minutes recommending you to me. He said you were the best partner he ever had. Why don't we move over to that couch and find out just how well you merit his recommendation?"

Septima felt as though she were in a bad dream. Severus had not objected. He had even given Erwin a sort of report about her. Tears sprang to her eyes as she realized yet again that he really had not cared. The only man she could ever love cared so little about her that he handed her over without a second thought. All she had left was her career. There was an opening at Hogwarts she was hoping to fill. If Erwin didn't read her thesis, that would go up in flames as well. What were her options?

There was nowhere to turn. The professors and administrators were all men; they wouldn't understand. When she had asked the other female students whether he flirted too much, they had rolled their eyes and frowned. One had gotten quite shirty and told her she shouldn't brag about being the teacher's pet.

She cleared her throat. "I can't do it now, Professor."

"Richard."

"Rrr—I can't do it right now. C—come to this address for dinner. Eight o'clock." She gave him the address of her apartment and ran from the office. She ran several errands, including one that left her in tears over the loss of her memories, and went home.

Fortunately the last two bottles of potion that Severus had made her were still in her cabinet. Even more fortunately, they were both still good. She took a dose to prepare for this evening and set to work on dinner and some other preparations.

As she looked over her arrangements, she heard the door's buzzer and jumped. It was time to... perform.

"Septima, you look ravishing."

He brought a bottle of wine. She got the glasses out, and Erwin made a production out of removing the cork, testing the aroma, and finally pouring it. He took a large gulp with a smile on his face. She sipped it, but it tasted bitter to her. Septima served the meal, and they sat down.

He ate thoroughly and quickly. When he was finished, he stood and came to assist her in getting up from her chair. "I've waited for this moment for months," he said. He moved down and pressed his lips on hers.

When he finally let her breathe again, she said, "I thought you had a wife, and a mistress."

His hands were fumbling around the edges of her collar as his lips came at her again. "I do, but they're both too demanding. You, on the other hand, ask so little of me. I can breathe with you."

With one overly practiced move, he separated all of the buttons on her dress. Septima took her first deep breath as he took a step back but then felt dismay when she saw his eyes, which assessed everything about her.

"Quite nice, Septima. I think we shall get on admirably. Where's the bedroom?"

As soon as it was over, Septima slid to the edge of the bed and pulled the sheet up to her chin. Erwin chuckled. "Severus was right. There's something quite pleasing about you."

He reached over, and she looked up him in fearful worry. He chuckled again. "I'm not going to hurt you, my little innocent. I want you to learn to feel comfortable in my arms, eventually. I can see that's not going to happen tonight, so I will bid you adieu."

He dressed, and she put on a robe as well. She wanted to walk him to the door and make sure he was actually gone. "Until tomorrow then, my dear." He tapped her on the nose and then went out the door.

Septima ran to the bathroom and threw up, glad it was over... until she remembered his last comment.

A/N: Any woman who finds herself in the sort of situation where a teacher or employer takes advantage of her should have recourse to some higher authority such as the human resource department or the employment commission. There's no excuse for the sort of behavior Professor Erwin shows, here, and it should never be allowed.

As always, many thanks to Trickie Woo for beta reading, especially when the chapter needs delicate treatment, as this one did.

A Quantum of Fury

Chapter 16 of 101

Severus ponders the woman he scorned as she begins her professional career.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

July 1981

Severus anticipated Septima's arrival more than he had expected to. When Dumbledore had announced that Septima would be joining the faculty, he couldn't account for the sudden leap in his chest. Her dissertation was complete. She would be allowed to come to Hogwarts to begin working on her curriculum for a few weeks before she did her final oral defense, which was postponed for reasons arising from the leave of absence she had taken the previous year.

He wanted to be on hand when she actually arrived but instead saw her at the table when Dumbledore and Hagrid both jumped up to seat her, and Filius was chatting with her, no doubt about house matters. She was different. There was a sadness in her face he wanted to try to erase. He thought she was far too young to be so unhappy. She looked up and happened to see him staring at her. The look in her eyes was heartbreaking. He tried to see more, but she shook her head and turned to answer a question Minerva asked her.

He looked at her again. Something was materially different. Then he realized what it was, and for some reason he was unaccountably sad and angry. He would have to ask her about it, but just now his arm was starting to tingle. He caught Dumbledore's eye and nodded before leaving the Great Hall.

When he returned, he had to go speak with the Headmaster about what he had learned. There was a great deal of activity going on these days among the Death Eaters. They were hot on the trail of the Potters, and every night they were sure they had found the right house. Every night resulted in the deaths of other people. Witches, wizards, Muggles... it didn't matter. If the Potters didn't die, then someone would.

He found her the next day in the Arithmancy classroom, where she was sorting through some books. "You cut your hair."

She hadn't heard him come in and dropped her books in surprise. "I—this way is easier to manage." She fingered her shorter hair self-consciously.

"I would have thought you would find someone else to manage it for you."

She sounded like she was choking when she said, "I couldn't stand for anyone else to touch it."

His hand reached out to grab her wrist but then stopped. He felt angry at the thought that anyone other than him would touch her hair. Based upon the way she wouldn't look at him, it seemed likely that she had become close with another wizard. Rage surged through him at the thought of another man touching what was his.

Then it completely dissipated. He had essentially left her, after all. He couldn't expect her to still love him when he had given her so little hope of anything in return. Women were faithless creatures even when offered undying devotion. He'd learned that long ago. His hand fell to his side. He would never reach for her like that again.

He regained his composure. It would be between them as though she was not the same creature he had known before. "I wanted to welcome you to Hogwarts, and to reassure you that it is my intention that things between us remain professional."

He watched as she turned her face away and nodded. Did he imagine the way her shoulders seemed to set in place? "I appreciate that, Severus. I look forward to maintaining that professionalism." Her voice drifted down to a whisper.

Whenever his schedule allowed, Severus watched Septima. He realized that when she arrived, she was completely on edge and skittish. As the month before the students arrived continued, she seemed to relax a little. He saw her smile and laugh with Minerva and Pomona. She had what appeared to be long, engrossing talks with Filius. The only person she was still nervous around was him.

He didn't know how to break the ice with her, and he wasn't sure he wanted to break that ice. She might not appreciate it. He couldn't get the idea of another man out of his mind. When he went to bed at night, the pictures of some man, far handsomer, tortured him.

On the morning she had to go back to the university for her last oral defense, Severus watched her push her breakfast around her plate as Filius spoke with her. She nodded seriously and smiled. The older professor was no doubt giving her advice. Then she looked at Severus. He was able to slip in for once, and he saw anguish and distress. There was no worry about her oral defense, but there was something about Erwin. She turned her head and it was gone.

Septima was given high honors. Dumbledore received a note from Nick Flammel and spread the word among the faculty. When the week-long ordeal was over and she returned, Septima was elated. Of course, Severus had received such honors himself. Since both his and her work had been rooted in the same principles, he felt gratified by the reflected glory of it. He smiled and nodded when their eyes met, and she smiled shyly back. For an instant she was the sweet girl he had known when they were partners.

When the conversation died down and everyone went back to their usual conversations, he watched her. She looked miserable and as though her dinner sickened her. Severus looked for her later, and he found her leaning against a window frame. Her arms were wrapped tightly around her body, and she was staring out at the grounds. Peeves was doing his best to upset her, but she ignored him completely, causing the poltergeist to finally blow raspberries and leave.

Suddenly she turned and saw him. He saw pleasure in her face, but then uncertainty. Finally it was covered by pure rage. Then she closed her eyes and shook her head. When she opened them, she looked at him but not as she always had before. She nodded coolly and said, "Professor," before walking past him toward her rooms.

He had to admire this new poise. Septima had matured. Gone was the coltish girl he had worked with. Gone, also, was the special look in her eye whenever she saw him. He realized he'd never been just a person to her before. Severus wasn't sure how to interpret it any more than he was sure he liked it. His arm started to tingle, so there wasn't time to think about it.

A/N: Thank you again for reading and reviewing! Thank you especially to Trickie Woo for beta reading.

A Quantum of Grief

Chapter 17 of 101

At the worst moment of his life, Severus goes to the one person who's always there for him.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

She could only assume that the knocking would not go away until she answered her door. She unlocked it and pulled it open a crack, but as soon as he could get the toe of his boot into her sitting room, he pushed the door wide and reached for the edges of her dressing gown. He grunted in satisfaction to discover that she still wore nothing to sleep in and picked her up just enough to carry her to the bedroom.

She could do nothing but cast a spell at the door to shut it.

His hands were rough as he touched and searched out her body. She should blast him or cast a jinx that would make him stop, but all she could do was moan out her need as he remembered every single spot that would make her want him. There was not much time to think about it. As soon as she was panting from want due to his touches, he moved on.

What should have been an intrusion was a welcome pleasure. She was whole again, united with the one man who ever mattered. He worked quickly, frantically, making her see stars from the intensity of his motion. Then the stars exploded and she screamed, unable to stop herself from succumbing to his intensity.

After that she couldn't move. There was no sound in the room except his ragged breathing as he came to his shuddering conclusion. Then he was silent.

She lay quietly underneath him, unwilling to end whatever it was that had brought him here. Her hands were loosely at his shoulders. It was an awkward position, but did she dare move her arms and remind him she was there? She was so eager to keep him near.

The next thing she knew, he was weeping with his head between her breasts. "She's dead, and I'm one of the ones who killed her."

Who was he talking about? Was he here to mourn their daughter together? "It wasn't your fault, I'm sure. These things just happen." She folded him into her arms and patted his shoulders. She pressed her lips to his head. "There was nothing you could do to prevent it."

He didn't hear her and simply cried himself out. She awoke later to find that he was touching her again. It was more gentle than they had ever shared in the past. The driving need of their youth was gone. Tonight their passion was about their grief. He never kissed her, but she sensed that he was back. "I missed you so," she whispered just before he brought her waves of pure bliss.

She couldn't stop the tears that came. She knew he hated them, but she loved him so much, and she was so grateful that he was back that they simply burst out of her. She lay on her side with her back to his chest and breathed deeply, hoping that he wouldn't notice. His arm encircled her and she heard snoring in her ear. Feeling comforted beyond anything she'd known in months, she fell asleep.

When she woke, he was gone. There was no note or really anything to indicate that it had happened at all, other than the residue on the sheets. She remade the bed with a soft smile on her face. He had an early class, and perhaps he didn't want to embarrass her in front of the students or faculty. He could be a considerate man at times.

Maybe it could still work. A flame of girlish hope sprang up within her. Maybe the last year and a half was a big mistake and they could learn from it. Maybe they could go back to the way it was around Christmas that year. There was still the thing he had told Erwin, and there was what she had done with Erwin, but maybe even that could be made all right.

She saw him at breakfast and knew her first misgivings. He carefully avoided eye contact and in fact turned away when she smiled at him. She was left feeling awkward and uncertain. Things didn't improve at lunch time, and by dinner she had been made to understand that He-who-must-not-be-named had been killed... but not without casualties.

Septima slowly realized that Severus had not come to mourn their common loss, but to mourn a loss of his own. She realized that he was not coming back, either. A day came when they were facing each other in an empty hallway. For a moment they looked at each other. She was sure her love and desire were oozing from every pore. He looked bored and annoyed.

"Do you even remember what happened?" she asked.

He winced. "I apologize for the presumption." He walked past her.

She canceled her classes that afternoon.

November passed and the Christmas holidays approached. The Hogwarts Express couldn't have been gone for more than twenty minutes before he cornered her in the library. He descended upon her, looking very much like the bat some students compared him to.

"Was there any result due to that night I spent in your room?"

"Result?" she said. "My heart has broken all over again." He looked impatient, and she continued. "You just want to know if you knocked me up again." She turned around, not willing to let him see her face. "It was the wrong time of the month. It was *sorted* for you rather quickly this time. You might have asked at any time since the first week after it happened."

Now she wished she could see his face. Was he doing that thing where he swallowed hard, his adam's apple bobbing like crazy, whenever she caught him out in an argument? Perhaps he was smiling and sighing in relief, thanking whatever force had prevented his being captured by her again. Most likely he was long gone.

She wanted to look, but she simply couldn't bear it. Instead she pressed into the corner between two shelves of books, shuddering in her agony. Eventually a book on beauty charms said, "Do you mind, dear? Salty tears are bad for the complexion of leather, you know."

"I don't know what I was thinking," she replied absently as she turned and left.

A/N: I am making use of certain canon events without necessarily mentioning them.

Thank you to Trickie Woo for beta reading.

Mechanical Interactions

Chapter 18 of 101

The years pass, leaving Severus and Septima at an impasse

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

What would he have done if she had said yes?

He didn't know. He spent months watching her and wondering what he would have done. His sense of relief was so intermixed with a sense of disappointment that he couldn't quantify his reaction. Dumbledore would have disapproved for several reasons. It would have complicated a great many things. Yet there was a part of him that wondered if it could somehow have got past the anger Septima always had toward him. He stayed as much in his own rooms as possible while he sorted—no, he would never use that word again—*figured* it out.

He pictured a little girl. He would call her Lily. It would be a way to recapture the childhood dream he had lost. She would be smart—the smartest student at Hogwarts, and cute, like her mother. He stopped short in a hallway. Septima was seated in a window, arms wrapped around herself and looking out at the moon. The child would indeed be cute, but the mother she looked like would be Septima.

He stopped thinking of the child after a while, since there was no child to think about. Instead, he watched Septima from time to time. She was not the witch he had known at all. As months became years, he realized that she had changed completely. Part of him mourned the loss of the girl she had been. Another part of him scratched at the phantom sting on his left arm and said that he wasn't the same man, either.

He could feel her watching him during meals or Quidditch matches. He could feel her desire emanating toward him as though she were casting a spell. She still loved him, he thought. She was reaching for him, sending him a sign that she wanted to be with him again. They could work together... and they would have the rest together, too. For some reason, perhaps because Lily was gone, he found that the future with Septima that had once seemed awful was now quite attractive.

He would look up to meet her eyes. He would find the sign in them, and then he would send one of his own. When he managed to lock eyes with her, however, all he could find was livid anger. If he looked for more than a count of five, he would start to feel rage radiating at him from her. It was definitely different from the sensation he received only seconds before, and it confused him that she should be filled with both desire and anger toward him.

She usually treated him indifferently. Minerva was actually warmer toward him, a circumstance he deplored. Septima spoke to him when strictly necessary but otherwise looked right past him or through him. The only time she had any animation in her demeanor toward him was when he came upon her late at night. She looked out the windows and had the appearance of being tightly wound.

He chanced contact one time, shortly after the start of a new school year. "Septima..."

"She would be turning three, right about now," she whispered. "I just saw children around that age in Hogsmeade. She would be smarter than they are, I'm sure. If we had her, I could have avoided—" Suddenly she actually saw and recognized Severus. "Why do you spy on me?" Her voice took on a sharp edge.

"I was just on my way to get a cigarette."

"You had to come down this hallway?"

"I like to keep my eye out for stray students. It's after curfew."

"There are no students here. Just go."

"Septima, is there something—"

"Is there something *what*, Severus? Is there some way you can hurt me yet again? I dare say you're a smart wizard and can figure one out." She slid past him and moved down the hallway. "If you don't mind, I'd like some privacy."

He was left watching her, wondering if the loss of their child could inspire so much rage. He supposed it could, but he wondered if there was something besides. He supposed he would have to wait until she felt like explaining it to him. As he got closer to the door, he mentally shrugged. Bah, women found ways to complicate matters without even trying. Look at how the Umbridge witch had ruined his life without even meeting him.

* * * * *

Septima shouldn't be amused at the misfortune of others, but the educational decree that required all smoking to be done outside of the building was one of her few bright spots. She came upon Severus or saw him from a window, huddled in some corner or dry spot beneath an underhang, smoking for all he was worth. Whoever Dolores Umbridge was, she sure yanked his chains. Septima giggled, but then sighed.

She didn't want Severus to be miserable. She did want him to acknowledge what he had done. He had betrayed her and essentially given her to another man. She wanted some sort of apology for that. If he would only say something on the subject, admit that it was wrong to meddle in her life like that, perhaps...

If there was some way to explain it all, she would find some way to go to him again. She had attracted him once; she was sure she could do it again. Perhaps there was something they could work on together professionally, and perhaps it could lead to something else. She was certain that he was not pursuing anyone else. In fact, there were times she thought that perhaps he would be interested in her. He seemed almost interested in her.

She watched him eat his dinner, chatting with other professors, and fell in love with him all over again. He had such intensity. She watched his hands move and remembered discussing their work in the past. Beautiful things would start to dance in her mind. She watched him at Quidditch matches, too. He would get so serious, watching his Slytherins fly. She could feel her love for him bubble through her like a charm and move across the space like a spell. She could see it surround him and how he would bask in it for a second or two before looking for her.

He would look up with a half smile on his face. Suddenly she would have a very different reaction to him. He had come to expect her love, and that made her more angry than anything else. He knew how she felt. He had taken what he wanted from her until he had the life he really wanted within his grasp. Then he had turned around and tossed her to another man without even asking her opinion. Finally, in his deepest grief, he turned around yet again and came to her, taking what she would have willingly given, knowing she would do anything for him. After that he had forgotten her again, leaving her to wonder what she could possibly have done to deserve such treatment.

Yes, when she glimpsed that half smirk, a blind rage as hot as Fiendfyre built within her and focused in such a way that it surrounded him. With her anger outside of her, she could coldly focus it so that it never actually touched him, but she saw that he recognized it and accepted its existence.

Maybe if he could just make a sign, they could come together again. Then again, perhaps it wouldn't matter. It wouldn't change the fact that she had given in to Erwin and become the sort of woman she looked down upon. If Severus had only seen her in that light to begin with, perhaps that's all she was. Maybe he thought she slept with him for the same reason, and that was why he so easily agreed to Erwin's request.

She thought to herself that if only she could have Renée, none of it would have happened. She would have had a reason to say no to Erwin and she could have remained true to Severus, no matter what he thought of her. She would sigh and imagine a time when she could get rid of this horrible anger and grief, but she couldn't imagine getting rid of it, either. It was all that kept her company.

She spent the months and years haunting the hallways of Hogwarts, getting into sparring matches with Peeves as necessary and avoiding Severus as much as possible. He learned to avoid her when he saw her looking out the windows. She hugged herself tighter and told herself that she preferred it that way.

A/N: Thank you to Trickie Woo for beta reading!

A Quantum of Professional Disappointment

Chapter 19 of 101

Septima confronts Severus about a less important topic.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

December 1990

"It wasn't enough to make me thoroughly unhappy, you had to kill my work, too."

Severus looked up from his cauldron. From her stance, he realized she must have been standing there a while and that she had waited until this instant, when he could actually turn away from his potion. He had to be grateful for her consideration, even if it looked like he would need to beware of her fingernails.

That thought wasn't worthy of him. She wasn't going to claw at him, but she did look as though she intended to get a pound of flesh. Whatever this was about had broken through the rage she usually felt for him. He wondered what could be troubling her until he recognized the research journal in her hand.

After a few attempts at conversation, they had given up trying to work together. Severus had tried every opening he could think of, only to be met by anger or rage. He finally decided to simply give up. Their few interactions since had ranged from cold to indifferent. He cut the heat and walked toward her.

"Incredible stuff they're doing at Durmstrang, isn't it?"

"This is my project.. the one you told me was idiotic!" She stabbed her finger at the open page. "They're going to win an award with this one!"

"You're exaggerating."

"It wasn't enough that you had to drop me and trade me off as if I were—" She shook her head. "It's as though you planned the whole thing out. How to ruin the life of a woman in three steps."

"I have no idea what you're talking about, Septima."

"You said this wasn't a good path for study, and when you withdrew your support, so did Oiler and Flammel. Zosimov's group is just a few steps away from the potion I wanted to try."

Ah, she wanted to go back over the old argument. "The one that converts poisonous materials into their own antidotes? Why would anyone need that when the Philosopher's Stone is handy?"

"Will it always be?"

Actually, Dumbledore had mentioned recently that it might not, but it wasn't a topic of conversation for this moment. "There are other excellent potions out there, Septima. Surely this one would be superfluous."

She shook her head. "I never told you, because I felt so foolish, but back when I was trying those equations, one of them told me that we are going to need that potion desperately. You and I, Severus." She looked up at him, and he was suddenly lost in her brown eyes.

"I'm sure I'll have plenty of the Elixir of Life to draw upon," he answered. "Now, as to your other claim that I ruined your life—"

"How can you be so dismissive?" She was angry again, and he backed toward the desk in his classroom. "Do you have any idea how you hurt me and then hurt me again? Do you have any feelings at all?" She reached him and was shaking as she held the journal up in her hand. He feared she would throw it or hit him with it, so he grabbed her wrist and twisted so that her back was against the chalkboard.

She just looked between his hand on her wrist and his eyes in shock. He looked down at her in surprise. Giving in to a long-buried instinct, he pressed his body into hers, up against the chalkboard. Then he kissed her.

One question was instantly answered. Whatever else she had done in the decade or so since their breakup, Septima Vector was not seeing another man. The passion within her was like that of a hibernating creature waking after an overlong season of slumber. Severus could feel her body become taut and eager as she began to press back into him. Her knee did that maddening thing along his. He had no idea why he started this kiss, but now he felt his body responding to hers.

He had just about maneuvered the hem of her robe up to her hips when suddenly she tensed up. She pushed against him and shook her head. "Stop."

"Ah... sweet..." he murmured, lowering his lips to her neck. "The students are gone, we can do this..."

She shook her head again. "No, I can't do this. Please, Severus, *stop*."

Sighing, he took a step away from her but then a half step back as she nearly tumbled down. After righting her, he turned and took a deep breath. "What's the problem? I

want to, and I know you want to.”

“I do,” she said, and he could hear it in her voice, “but I’ve learned a lot in the last ten years.”

“Such as?” Now he was feeling impatient.

“When we were together, before, I wasn’t that important to you.”

“You mattered to me.”

“Not like the other woman.”

“There was never anything between me and her.”

“There was in your heart.”

He sighed. “I suppose. What does that have to do with us here and now?”

He watched her breathe deeply for a moment or two before she answered. “It would mean far too much to me and nothing whatsoever to you. I accept that I was just a sort of plaything to you. I can come to terms with that in our past. I just can’t allow it to be part of my present.” She moved up on tiptoe to kiss his cheek. Then she picked up her journal and left.

He watched her back as she moved down the hallway. No one walked like her, he thought to himself. He should go to her, explain that she was never just a plaything to him, but he wasn’t sure what he could say. If she had gone along with his urges just now, what would have happened after that? He somehow knew he would need to answer that question before approaching her again.

He sat at his desk and considered the Septima-shaped smudge on his chalkboard.

A/N: Thank you to Trickie Woo for beta reading!

Quantifiably Banished

Chapter 20 of 101

Dumbledore plans for the eventual destruction of the Philosopher’s Stone.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Spring 1991

“Headmaster, I can’t.”

Septima was sitting in a comfy chair, being dosed by hot cocoa. What she thought was going to be an end-of-the-year discussion about updating the curriculum was turning into a conversation about her banishment. Dumbledore wanted her to go back to the university for a year.

“My dear, it has to be you or Severus, and we can’t do without our Potions Master.”

“There are dozens—well, maybe not dozens—but half a dozen anyway who would be just as good.”

“No, it must be you. You’re the only one trained in all of the Arithmancy involved, and I’ve been told your brewing skills where these potions are concerned are quite superior to anyone except Severus. Oiler and Flammel will be delighted to have you back, and Erwin sounded giddy.”

“Erwin?” A wave of panic went through her. “I *cannot* go.”

“I’ve already told them you will. I made arrangements for a temporary replacement for you, and everything will work splendidly.”

They went round and round for several more minutes. She tried to think of reasons she shouldn’t do it, and he parried every one with a bright smile and twinkling eyes. The room seemed to shift, and she pressed her hand to the side of her face in an effort to clear her head. Almost as though someone else was saying it, she heard her voice come from far away. “When do they expect me?”

She made her way down the stairs and into the dungeons. Severus looked up at her in surprise. “To what do I owe the honor?”

“I need something. My head is all woozy.”

“Sit down. What happened?”

“I was up with Dumbledore, and then all of a sudden I didn’t feel very good.”

His eyes narrowed. “What did he give you?”

“Hot cocoa.”

She saw him wince. “He must have really wanted something from you.” He walked over to a cabinet. “I have just the thing.”

Septima could watch his fingers work forever. For some reason, she didn’t feel the hurt and anger she usually did around him. The back of her mind said it was dangerous to be close to him, but she ignored it this once. “He’s sending me away.”

“I had heard that might happen.”

“I don’t want to go.”

"We need the potions in question."

"If you had let me work on it before, it would be done by now."

"Are you going to blame me for everything?" He was smirking at her, humoring her mood. She couldn't seem to care.

"I can't go," she said in a very small voice. "I can't face what happened there, what he did to me."

He looked at her questioningly as he brought her a steaming mug. "You're mixing your pronouns. I'm very sorry for what I've done to you. All of it, Septima. I was a foolish young man."

She looked up into his eyes and wondered if she could finally let go of the thing that hurt her most. "I've watched the boys here, and now I understand how you could sleep with me without any attachment. I can even understand the way you acted about the baby. It's the other part."

She took the mug he handed her and sipped it. It was warm, and bracing, and started to feel more like herself. She looked up at him, and while her usual rage didn't come back, neither could she say what she had been about to say. She took another sip.

"There's another part?" he prodded.

She shook her head. "It's silly really. Never mind." She sipped the drink some more and pondered her situation. It was a chance to take her work into the area she wanted, and perhaps to even precede the Durmstrang group on a few things. "If I really have to go, I'd like to finish as quickly as possible. I've been playing with some equations... It will be good to test them out at the university with Flammel and Oiler. Do you have any notes or suggestions about what should be done?"

Severus was not easily distracted and looked at her for a few minutes. She kept a refusal on her face and finally looked away. He sighed and went over to his desk. He unlocked a drawer and slid it almost all the way out. Pulling out a notebook, he said, "I've tried over the years to assemble my thoughts and notes in here. I do have a few other things scattered around, so if any questions come up, feel free to owl me."

She made sure their hands didn't touch as she took it. "Thank you, Severus. I appreciate this, and I'll try to return it as soon as possible."

He held it for a beat longer than necessary. "What did I do, Septima? What can be done to make it up to you?"

She shook her head. "It can't be undone. Maybe—maybe if I do go back and face it all..." She looked him in the eye, determined for once to fight her battles and win. Erwin couldn't prevent her from getting a degree this time, at least. "I'm sure I'll be in touch."

A/N: Thank you, as always, to Trickie Woo for beta reading

The Mechanics of Surprise

Chapter 21 of 101

Severus makes an acquaintance with two giant clue bricks.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Severus sat at the next start-of-year feast and watched the first years come in with some trepidation. He didn't know how to look at the one child whose name would no doubt garner a great deal of attention. As long as Harry Potter didn't look too much like James, he thought he could handle it. On the other hand, if he looked a great deal like Lily, he might not be able to stand that either.

Severus's attention was snatched away by a little girl who walked in. She had hair that could have used a good combing and a way of walking as though she owned the place. She had an intelligent look that he had first seen across another room thirteen years before. He watched as she looked around curiously. He quickly calculated dates, and they matched what was before his eyes.

"Renée."

He looked down the table to where Septima usually sat. She, of course, was gone. Was this the secret she had been keeping? She'd obviously had their child and put it up for adoption. His mind ran through the times he'd seen her that spring. There'd only been a handful, and then she'd had that nervous breakdown. She had worn loose robes, and she had been very protective of her middle. Yes, she could have just about done it, he decided.

He watched in helpless rapture as the little girl sat down on the stool. He tried to gain access to the Hat's mind, begging it to put her in his house or perhaps her mother's. "Gryffindor!" it said, and she smiled as she gave the Hat back to Minerva. Then she walked over to the red table and sat down in obvious satisfaction. He was so angry that he barely noticed what happened after that. Was there a gleam in the Hat's eye?

When he wasn't teaching or tied up in business for Dumbledore, he investigated the child. When one knew where to look and how to whisper a Confounding charm or two, it was much easier to obtain certain documents. He discovered that her parents had adopted her at two weeks of age. With a little careful prying into her mind, he realized that they had never told the child herself, so he could not ask her about it. His further investigation discovered some rather hazy paperwork, a definite indicator that magic was involved.

When he pulled a couple of strings at St. Mungo's, he discovered that Septima had walked into the hospital as a maternity patient and had been discharged from the Janus Thickey Ward. The nervous breakdown may not have been entirely a ruse; he would have to tread carefully.

In the meanwhile, he had no idea how to behave around his daughter. She was as smart as both her parents and fortunately lacked that annoying tendency of Septima's to get distracted. Unfortunately, it seemed she also had some of his worst characteristics, like a desperate need to show off her knowledge and prove herself.

"Severus, I need a potion."

He wanted to smile at how he enjoyed hearing Septima's voice, but he didn't look up from the essay he was grading. "I'm sure you don't need my skills for what you desire."
"I need the potion you made for me before, for contraception." The last word was barely audible.
He did look up at that. "It didn't work."
She looked at the floor. "It worked well enough, and later... I used the rest when Professor Erwin..."
"You slept with Professor Erwin?" He looked at her in surprise. He would never have imagined it.
Her look was of horror. "There wasn't any sleeping. It's was—He said you told him that you thought it was an excellent idea."
He made a dismissive noise. "I did no such thing."
"He told me that he had asked you, and that you had given me a glowing recommendation."
"He and I were discussing his becoming your advisor."
"No." For the first time he really looked at her. She looked ready to throw up. "I stayed with Oiler the whole time, of course. Erwin was on the committee and wouldn't read my thesis unless I—and he said you told him that you couldn't recommend the situation highly enough."
"As his *student!*" Severus shook his head. "I can't believe you traded your body that way."
There was a squeaky gasp. "He told me you said—I wanted—" She shrugged and whispered, "It doesn't matter any more."
He frowned at his ink pot. "I can't imagine what was worth your self-respect."
"You were."
They looked into each other's faces and then both looked away. "I wanted to be close to you, and I would have done anything. I needed my degree, and he refused to read my thesis unless—I guess it didn't work out the way I hoped."
This was it. This was what he'd been waiting ten years to discover. This was the secret she had been holding, and very likely the source of her rage. He felt a little sick himself at the role he had played in all of this. "Surely you can use whatever you've used since then."
"I haven't used anything. There's been no one."
Some little flicker lit within him but was quickly doused. "Until now, you mean."
"There really isn't now, either." She was looking at him now, and he didn't need Legilimency to see that she still loved him.
A/N: I can't tell you how I appreciate your reading. Thank you, and feel free to drop a line to tell me what you think. Thank you especially to Trickie Woo, who has beta read this chapter at least three times.

Absolute Zero

Chapter 22 of 101

For Septima, things are as bad as they'll ever become.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Septima's mind couldn't get a grasp of what he had just told her. It wasn't what she had thought at all. He hadn't given her to Erwin, at least he hadn't intended to do so. He had given a professional review of her work. She didn't know whether to be relieved or sick. At least Severus had not sold her, but she had still—

"If there's no one in your life, why do you need a contraceptive potion?"

She felt her cheeks burning, but having started this conversation, she needed to finish it. Besides, she needed the potion. "It's Professor Erwin, again. He's blackmailing me. I've avoided him since the summer, but now he says he'll tell the provost I deliberately traded my body for my degree unless..." Her voice broke; she was unable to say it aloud.

"You must have enjoyed it if you're going to do it again." Why did he have to say something so hurtful? Didn't he know how she hated it?

"I'd rather dice flobberworms. I was just there beneath him... and I stared at that picture of Descartes. You know it." He nodded. "I think that picture is all that saved my sanity," she said.

He cleared his throat. "So you're going to sell your body in exchange for his silence?"

"I know I shouldn't," she said sadly, "but I'll lose everything. Surely you can imagine what it's like, to want something so badly?"

She watched him think. Did he understand what she had gone through, what she had given up so that she could come to Hogwarts to be near him? He was staring at her, and suddenly she remembered the spring after they had broken up. She recalled her breakdown the week after finishing her contribution to his work. There was a hazy blur and then the day she left the hospital. Why would that come up now?

He was looking at her as at one who was unfortunate. "I don't know if I care for your pity..." she said.

He shook his head. "On the contrary. I've been thinking about our past a great deal this school year, myself. Today you've given me a great deal to think about."

She couldn't blame him for that. She now had much to think about herself. She looked into his eyes and wanted to climb onto his lap, as she had done the night he gave

her the picture of Descartes.

Severus sighed and came to his decision. "All right, I'll make it for you. Would you like to come to my laboratory?"

He stepped around his desk. She looked up at him, desperately wanting him to touch her. He reached a hand to cup her face, but stopped before he touched her short hair. Was he giving her a chance to make a move, or was he signaling that she could only depend upon him for so much? She stepped away skittishly. "No, I'll go upstairs for a while. I have some notebooks in my room that I wanted to glance through. When should I come back?"

"In about an hour."

She went upstairs, wishing that she had stayed. They had always brewed that potion together, and his eyes had always burned into hers as it cooled. As soon as they bottled it, they always ran to one of their apartments, where Severus couldn't seem to wait to undress her. The first time they had made the potion they had kissed, but after that, they had always made love.

Hadn't she hoped that her visit would trigger a response from him? She had thought that perhaps after the potion was mixed he would tell her she couldn't be with Erwin. She had hoped that he would carry her to his bedroom. She knew that he was cunning enough to figure out how to get her away from the situation she found herself within. She had hoped he would be willing to do it.

Instead, the whole sordid mess had come out, about how Erwin had twisted Severus's words and used them in a way Severus had not intended. Septima caught a glimpse of herself in the bathroom mirror and realized that she couldn't blame Severus for making her that sort of woman. Whatever she might have been or not been to him, she was not that.

Yet she had become that, and he was not to be blamed if he didn't want her any more. Septima had read the papers over the last decade. She knew as everyone did that he often accompanied one young witch or another to many Ministry functions that Septima could never go to. She knew the young witches were protégés of Narcissa Malfoy. Severus had been rumored to be considering marriage to one or another of them at least half a dozen times. There was no reason to think he'd been celibate this whole time.

Yet she nursed a hope that preparing the potion would awaken memories in him. He'd once claimed she was the best he'd ever had. Was that still true? The mirror told her there were a few lines in places that had once been fresh. Gravity had required the use of certain garments she never worried about when he had known her before. And her hair—her hair was gone, sacrificed to an ideal that something Severus had worked over with such pleasure to them both should never be enjoyed by another man. She might have made the potion herself, but she was here because she hoped that he would be waiting for her when she returned to the dungeon. He would take her into his arms and the nightmare that started the night she lost the baby would be forgotten.

Instead, the bottle sat in his empty office, mocking her. Underneath it was a terse note stating that he had to be elsewhere. It was a chastisement; she had taken up his time, and he had none to spare. She took the bottle and left.

* * * * *

She arranged foods she knew Richard Erwin would like, hoping to distract him. He ate with gusto, and she watched, unable to even touch it. With luck this was all he had meant when he had said, "We will spend some time together." She knew in her heart that it wasn't all he wanted. That was why she had gone to Severus.

Now she sat at her own table in her own apartment, dreading the moment that was sure to come. At length the man stood up and smiled. "That was delicious, Septima, but I admit I came for something else." He took her hand and tugged at her to follow him. He took her to the lounge and whispered into her neck. "Undress for me."

"No." She looked at the floor and willed him to leave.

Instead he chuckled. "Ah, you want me to see you as the innocent. I'm to attack you. Is this how you like it, now?"

"Please, just go away."

"Not until I've had what I came for."

"I can't!"

He grabbed at the front of her robe and tugged. "You will."

There was a pounding on the door and it flew open. Septima looked over Erwin's shoulder and saw her worst nightmare come to life. It was a wraith, or Death himself.

"Leave us, witch," said the apparition.

Thank you for reading. Thank you especially to Trickle Woo for beta reading.

Mechanics of Intimidation

Chapter 23 of 101

Severus takes care of Septima's problem.

Disclaimer: The Characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling.

Severus had been unable to face Septima when he finished the potion. Just making it had brought up too many memories. His hands had shook as he bottled it, and he was grateful that she hadn't been there when he took it back to his office. Instead he had quickly penned a note and gone to his rooms, where he had shed his robes and laid upon his bed.

Now that he understood Septima's anger, Severus wanted nothing more than to punish the wizard who was responsible. He stood where he could see her apartment window for two nights, waiting for her undesirable guest to arrive. Once he saw Erwin go into her building, he waited until he judged the moment was right.

He watched them through the window. Seeing the man stand so close to her while she tried to move away was all the impetus Severus needed. He put his mask on and knocked on the door before blasting it open with a spell he had learned from Dolohov. He stepped toward the room that served as dining room and lounge and took in the

struggle.

He didn't expect the terror in Septima's eyes when she saw him. It was not to be avoided. He didn't want her to see what he might have to do with the predator in her sitting room. "Leave us, witch."

She seemed eager to comply, but Erwin held his ground while he fondled Septima's shoulder. Severus couldn't remember the last time he'd been so angry. It took everything within him not to sever the man's hand at the wrist. He looked at Septima and realized she couldn't take much more, and merely sent a stinging jinx from his wand, instead. He would save the other spells for when she was not watching.

Richard Erwin fell to his knees in fear. "Don't hurt me!" he cried.

He had heard that most predators were actually cowardly children. Perhaps he would not need to do anything extreme. "Give me a reason not to kill you."

"I've done nothing wrong."

"Oh? Suppose you tell me in which employee code of conduct you found any sort of reason to think it was acceptable to force students to have sex with you. Septima Vector is a pure-blood witch. We don't take kindly to their abuse."

"My relationship with Septima is none of your business, and now you've upset her."

"I don't think *I'm* upsetting her, *Dick*. She favors another man."

"I have a gentlemen's agreement with the other wizard."

"You never asked the witch herself."

"She was compensated, and if we chose to renegotiate the terms of our arrangement, it's no one else's affair."

"You know as well as I do that you have coerced her. I will not allow it to continue."

"Oh? Am I supposed to fear you?"

Severus's voice sounded almost caressing and playful as he said, "Don't you...*Dick*?" He stood tall and casually flicked his wand. An ivy plant in the corner was quickly reduced to ash.

There was a shrug. "That's just a plant. If you try to hex me, Magical Law Enforcement will come."

"I know many spells, *Dick*. Not all of them are Unforgivables." He looked into Erwin's eyes and pointed his wand. The other wizard fell to the floor, screaming.

When the spell wore off, he pulled himself back up and hissed, "You can't use *Cruciatus*! You'll be arrested now."

"You're making an inaccurate assumption about the spell I used. If I am arrested, you won't be here to see it. Tell me how the thought of Septima affects you. Do you desire her? Or do you find the very thought of her causes you to feel fear and distress?"

Severus pointed his wand again. Erwin reconsidered his position and quickly gathered his wine bottle, his robes, and his hat. Severus held his wand upon him the entire time. When Erwin looked as though he wanted to travel down the hallway to the bedroom, Severus stood in the way.

When he was certain that they were alone, Severus repaired the apartment door and removed his mask. He slipped out of his robe and walked down the hallway. He tapped on the door. "Septima?"

There was a lump in the middle of her bed that looked forlorn. It didn't move. He stepped around the bed and knelt near her face. "Septima? He's gone."

She looked at him and then closed her eyes in relief. "He'll come after me again."

"No, he won't."

She looked up at him uncertainly. "Do—do you want to..." She sat up and reached to unfasten the top button of her blouse.

He put his hand over hers to stop her. "You don't ever have to trade your body for anything again. I didn't do this just because I'd rather it be me in your bed than him. I didn't come to your apartment tonight because I was hoping you would reward me with your body. I did it because it's the sort of thing a man should do when he sees a lady being mistreated."

She shook her head. "I wasn't trying to trade... I thought maybe..."

"You told me that you don't want to be a plaything. If we come together again... *when* we come together again, I want you to know that it's because we have a connection together, not because it's convenient for one or both of us, and not because you feel you owe me something."

"You must care for me at least a bit."

He shrugged. "I appreciated the chance to have a decent smoke while I watched outside your window. That Umbridge cow has passed another decree. Now I'm not allowed to smoke anywhere on the school grounds."

She giggled, "Oh, you!"

He stood up, now sure she would be all right. "I suppose I'll be getting back, then."

"Severus?"

"Yes?"

"Thank you." She moved up to her knees and kissed him on the cheek. He kissed her back and moved around toward the door.

"Severus?"

"Yes?"

"Would you mind staying, just for tonight? I would feel better if someone was here."

He sat down gingerly on the other side of the bed. "Just as a friend, Septima."

A/N: Thank you for reading and reviewing! Thanks especially to beta reader Trickie Woo.

Mechanical Aftermath

Chapter 24 of 101

Severus and Septima pick up some of the pieces of their long-shattered relationship.

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A Quantum of Understanding

Chapter 25 of 101

Severus and Septima begin to Communicate

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

They lay facing each other in her bed. Severus felt the need to say something to Septima. "How is your work going?"

"Slowly."

"Is there a problem?"

"The terms don't dance the way they used to. It all stopped after—"

"After Erwin?"

"I don't recall. They still danced those last couple of weeks that we were finishing your work I think... After that I don't know. It was just a sluggish shuffle right before Erwin started—and since then it's been gone. I blamed you for not being able to publish anything in years, but it's really me. I can summon enough magic to *teach* Arithmancy, but I can't take it any further."

He chanced reaching and touching her shoulder. "I'm sorry." They were quiet for a minute or two until he said, "How have you managed this year?"

"I would have been nothing but a glorified lab tech for the others if it weren't for your notebook. Whenever I hit a dead end, I look for what I'm working on in your notebook, and I imagine you reading it to me. I can see everything in my mind again, but it's different, as though I were dreaming it. It makes for slow going."

"So you've made progress?"

"We've been able to replicate some of the features of the stone, but not everything. We're far ahead of the Durmstrang group, though."

He could hear the pride in her voice. "What about the conversion potion?"

He felt her shake her head. "Nothing yet. I go over the terms, and I just can't make them work. Yet it's as though I've seen it. I get so far, and then it disappears on me."

He caressed along her shoulder. "I know you'll get it."

"If you keep talking to me, I'm sure I will."

"What shall I talk about?"

"Anything. I hear your voice tonight, and marvelous things dance in my head. Tell me about Hogwarts this year."

What he wanted to do was ask questions, but for some reason he shied away from them. He had looked into her mind when she came to request the potion, and he had learned just enough to know that he'd have to go carefully. There was a Memory Charm or potion involved, he was sure. He would have to find a way to pry into her mind enough to figure out what it was, and then he would need to reverse it. Tonight wasn't the night.

She had stopped trusting him. He realized that now. The something different about her that saddened him years ago was the loss of her trust. He had just regained the slightest bit of it back, and he wouldn't damage it by Legilimancy tonight. He would have to find another way in.

She had asked to hear about Hogwarts, so he told her. He described Quirrell's odd behavior and the trouble they had all gone to in trying to keep the stone safe. He stayed away from mentioning either of the first-years whose presence was at the forefront of his mind, but after a while he ran out of news and gossip. He felt her relax and start to breathe evenly and realized he wouldn't need to worry about that. He pulled the covers up over her shoulders and slid back onto his side of the bed. He was tired from the past few nights of watching outside her apartment and could use the rest himself.

* * * * *

He awoke with a raging desire. Septima was in his arms, and he was fondling her familiarly as his lips caressed her shoulder. She tasted better than he remembered. As he lay there, he realized her behind was pressed firmly against a sensitive spot. She was driving him mad by gently moving against him.

Suddenly she sighed and rolled to her back. She stared at him for what might have been a full minute but might have been just an instant. She seemed to make up her mind then. She smiled, reached her arms around his neck, and pulled him close. She kissed him, and he was reminded of the first night he had spent in her apartment.

"We shouldn't—"

"We both want this, and we both know it's just for now."

Her knee hooked around his, and he was lost. Clothing seemed to melt away and he couldn't seem to hold her closely enough. He was with the person who was always glad to see him, and she was smiling the smile that he owned. She managed to move even closer.

"Gah... sweet..."

It was like coming home, but without the selfish urgency of their youth. Yet he was unprepared for the intensity of it. He couldn't stop or slow down. He was aware of a need to take care of her, but he didn't think he could manage.

"Septima, I can't—"

He became aware of a keening sound from somewhere around his chest. Her head was buried there as her body shuddered. He needed nothing further; he allowed himself to lose control as a loud groan passed through his own lips.

* * * * *

The dawn light lent a glow to the satisfaction in her face. He kissed where his lips were and looked up into her eyes. "We shouldn't have done this."

"Mmmm..." She stretched, somehow putting more skin within reach of his lips. "Perhaps not."

"What am I to do about you?"

She gave him a genuine smile. "Stay for the day."

He looked at her clock. "I need to be back for a meeting after lunch. I can stay the morning, though."

She giggled like a delighted school girl. "Do you want breakfast?"

"What are you offering?"

"Why don't we go see?"

A/N: As always, I greatly appreciate the comments I've read about this story. Thank you for reading and reviewing. Thank you very much to Trickie Woo for beta reading.

A Stolen Quantum of Time

Chapter 26 of 101

Severus and Septima spend the morning reliving their earlier experiences.

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Somehow it was all better. Nothing was substantially different. Erwin still existed, Septima was still banished, and most likely Severus was still hopeless about the other witch. Yet today existed. All those things might be true, yet it was likewise true that he had come to rescue her from something she couldn't face. He was still here. She would make the most of it

Septima went to her closet and pulled out a couple of robes. Severus looked at her when he realized one of them was his and that she'd kept it all this time. They pulled them on and moved toward the kitchen. As they cooked a small fry-up, Septima closed her eyes. The numbers were dancing, and she would be weeks catching up with them in her notebook.

They ate and discussed the various projects they were each working on. They had always been able to talk about their work in the past and it was easy again, now. It was exciting and fresh, and yet it was comfortable, too. They kept talking as they cleaned up. Septima smiled as she gave her opinion on a tricky potion. "But you don't want it to go all the way, do you? Don't you want to be somewhere in the middle? It sounds as though you want a buffering agent before the brew reacts completely..."

She was unprepared for the feel of the table under her back. She looked into his face and saw the expression of triumph she always had seen before while in this position. "Simple table salt," he said. He silenced her with his kisses as he climbed onto the table with her. One long, heady moment later she found she had to stay lying down. His passion at having a breakthrough always left her dizzy.

"Was it that important?" she finally gasped out.

"It's escaped my grasp for over a year." He slid off the table and reached a hand over to steady her. They moved back toward the lounge and sat on the couch, cuddling and talking some more. "I don't work on research the way I used to. I haven't had anything like that in a long time, Septima. I've missed it."

After a while they stood and went to her room, where they stared at the bed. Severus leaned down and started gathering his clothing. "I should prepare to leave," he said ruefully.

"Then you'll be wanting a shower," she said, tugging him toward the bathroom.

They fought each other for the soap as they lathered each other's skin. Septima found that she needed to remember how his chest tasted when it was wet and soon found herself holding on for dear life as she was pressed up against the tiles.

They towed off and lay on the bed quietly for a while. She looked at him. "This has been a lovely day. I'd be lying if I said that I don't wish..." She shrugged and stopped talking. She had wanted too much before and ended up with nothing. At least she would have this one beautiful day to draw from. It wouldn't be full of taint like the night he had come to her in grief.

"My life is not my own."

"I thought it would be different now, with You-know-who gone."

"I've made a habit of going from one demanding master to the next."

"Oh."

"If I had been more open with you before, perhaps it would be different."

"How so?"

"You would have discouraged me from certain activities, I think."

"I would have discouraged you from anything that kept you from being with me, if I had the chance."

He kissed her nose. "Your motives have always been transparent."

She looked at him and pulled closer. "They still are."

He shook his head in disbelief. "How can you still want me, after everything?"

"I don't know, but I do."

They lay quietly, dozing off for a while. Suddenly, Severus sat up and pulled her close, his hand over her abdomen. "You'll tell me if you become pregnant, won't you?"

"It's not likely. I've been taking the potion."

"Actually, the potion isn't foolproof."

She sat up at that. "Are you saying that Erwin would have gotten me pr—"

"No," he responded, "it's a side of the potion that I didn't understand, before. I did a lot of research right while the professors were reading my dissertation. I discovered that a single hair of one man added while simmering will prevent your pregnancy with any man except him. I suspect that's how we conceived Heh—Renée."

"So you think you might have accidentally dropped a hair in a batch of the original potion, but this time you did it on purpose?"

"I wanted to protect you as much as possible."

"It's still not likely."

"No, it's not, but you will tell me if it happens, won't you?"

"Yes, I'll tell you if I have the slightest suspicion."

He kissed her neck. "When do you come back to Hogwarts?"

She put her arms around his neck. "A couple of months. Do you have to leave quite yet?"

He looked toward the clock as their lips met. "I can skip lunch," he said as she felt his arms wrap around her one more time.

A/N: Thank you, again, for your kind attention! Thanks, Trickie Woo, for beta reading!

The Mechanics of Making Plans

Chapter 27 of 101

Some plans don't get even get the opportunity to go astray.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

He felt lighter of heart for many days after that weekend. He imagined Septima working on her equations with a new eagerness, now that they were friends again. He laughed at himself. Friends were the last thing they were. They were lovers again, and there was no reason not to continue after she came back. Severus would glance at the Headmaster from time to time. As soon as this business with the stone was ended, he would bring up the subject of his own future.

He remembered the weeks of Septima's pregnancy, when he had looked forward to the child in spite of himself. He had planned to be a good father and prove to Lily that he wasn't as awful as she seemed to think. He looked toward the Gryffindor table during meals and imagined becoming a family even now with Septima, their daughter, and perhaps a new one already on the way.

He received her tear-stained note less than a month after their weekend together.

Severus,

I don't wish to hold you in suspense a moment longer than necessary. It didn't happen, and you need not fear any responsibilities due to that most magical of days that we spent together. I won't lie; I had such hopes that my dreams were filled with you and a future that doesn't exist.

My feelings for you are unchanged from all those years ago, but I understand if you don't wish to continue anything beyond a professional relationship.

Septima

He re-rolled the parchment and held it to his forehead.

"Unhappy news, Severus?"

"It's fine, Headmaster."

"Would it have anything to do with Septima Vector and that week you were away from the school so much?"

"I don't care to discuss it."

"I received a rather distraught visit from Richard Erwin on a particular evening."

"Indeed." Severus forced himself to breathe slowly and willed his heart rate to decrease.

"He told me the most fantastic story about Death Eaters spoiling his romance. I discouraged his inclination to go to the Ministry."

"That might have been the best solution for everyone involved."

"That's why I advised him to let it go. Now, suppose you tell me what is between you and Septima."

"It's my private affair, Headmaster. I don't wish to discuss it at this time."

"You have no affairs private from me, Severus." The Headmaster was leaning close and looking at Severus over the lenses of his glasses. Severus was irked at being required to explain.

"Fine, then. I wish to marry her."

The Headmaster's face was bland as he said, "You cannot do that."

"Headmaster?" Severus tucked the letter into a pocket and looked at his employer.

"You need to be unhindered as we continue our fight. Now that Harry is growing and developing his skills, you will be needed more than ever. It seems your other master is somehow regaining strength. Quirrell will only be the beginning, I fear."

"You can't dictate our private lives."

"No, but I can tell you that you are not to get married, and I will be forced to fire any unmarried female professor who becomes pregnant."

"You would throw a witch and a defenseless child on the street like that?"

Dumbledore shrugged. "It would be out of my hands. The governors would demand it. There's only one child who matters. Without him we're all defenseless."

He didn't know how to respond to Septima's note in the light of Dumbledore's comments. While mulling it over and patrolling the castle he was alerted by one of his students to some mischief that Potter and Granger were embarked upon. Once he discovered the miscreants he had to give detentions to Potter, Granger, and Longbottom. Unfortunately he was also forced to give a detention to Malfoy.

One hundred fifty points from Gryffindor was not a bad night's work however, and it was with a cheerful heart that he penned a response to Septima's note:

Septima,

I regret your sadness. However, it is perhaps as well that nothing happened. I have discovered that I shall be quite busy for the foreseeable future. I do not wish to lead you on nor suggest that our relationship can progress beyond working together.

I hope that we can have a positive working relationship; I look forward to your return to Hogwarts.

Severus

He posted it before he had a chance to change the wording. All they would have in the future was working together. Perhaps now that could include further research. From what he heard, the project would be unfinished even though the stone would soon be destroyed. Perhaps he and Septima would be allowed to continue working on the potions that weren't yet worked out.

He imagined late nights together, working. They would discuss their work, argue about it, agree, and sometimes they would have breakthroughs. He closed his eyes and tried to even his breathing as he thought of what would happen whenever there was a breakthrough. He shook his head and decided it couldn't happen. He couldn't allow the possibility that Dumbledore would cast her out of the school without any means of supporting herself. Perhaps in a year or two things would finally be resolved and Severus could finally have a future that mattered. Without Lily, it made sense to have that future with Septima.

Once the decision was made, he looked forward to her return. Sometime after the finals were completed and graded, she would come back. After that he would at least be able to look at her and enjoy her presence at the school. Anything beyond that, however, would be folly.

A/N: Thank you, as always, for your kind attention. Thanks to Trickie Woo for beta reading!

A Quantum of Distance

Septima struggles with the concept of a professional relationship.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

July, 1992

Septima returned to Hogwarts late in the afternoon and went straight to the dungeons. She wanted to speak with Severus about the Owls they had exchanged. When she arrived, he was nowhere to be found. His office and work rooms were sealed shut, and knocking the doors echoed as though the rooms were empty of people.

She decided the best thing to do would be to report to Dumbledore. She had a packet of the papers being sent to various periodicals and flasks filled with sample potions. She paused foolishly when she reached the gargoyle at the staircase. She didn't know the password.

Her question was answered when the Headmaster himself came down the stairs. "Ah, Septima! I was headed down to have an early dinner, but I see you have come to report."

"Yes, Headmaster."

They went up to his office and Septima, mindful of the dinner hour, quickly presented the general breakthroughs and progress made. Dumbledore tested the potions and glanced at the abstracts of the articles. Then his blue eyes twinkled brightly.

"I've heard great things about you from Nick and Leon. They made it sound as though they would like to keep you, but I told them that we need you here." He looked over his glasses at her. "Make sure my faith in you is not misplaced."

"Of course not."

Dumbledore sat back reflectively. "One of my other professors spoke to me about marriage a month and a half ago. I was forced to tell him that it was quite out of the question. I don't know what you've heard, but Voldemort is regaining strength, and I need that professor unfettered if we're going to beat him once and for all."

Parts of Severus's owl clicked into place in her mind. "Oh. I see."

"Yes, I told him, and now I'm telling you, that should I discover that any of my unmarried female professors is pregnant, she will be sacked."

"H—Headmaster?" That sounded barbaric.

"The governors will demand it as a protection for the students."

"I-I see." Now she understood everything Severus's note had told her. Her mind spun as Dumbledore escorted her downstairs and to dinner. She made non-committal comments and noises whenever a colleague spoke to her. After dinner, she took up her old practice of looking through a window at the moon.

Peeves came and practically sat on her shoulder, but she didn't look at him. Instead she looked out the window and wondered. Was there a future for her containing the things a woman desires? Could she maintain a professional relationship with Severus or would her longings cause her to say or do the wrong things, like she had so many times in the past? She never knew when Peeves left.

"I used to wonder why you stood here so much. Now I know."

She had to breathe deeply for a minute or two in order to quiet the look of delight she was certain was on her face. She turned around when what she hoped was simply a pleasant smile lingered there. He looked at her and smiled back. "You were always so angry. Were you angry at me for letting you fall into Erwin's clutches?"

Her head dipped as she said, "Yes." She was ashamed that it was the case. What if she had ever once told him the truth?

"Are you still angry?"

"Not about that. Tonight I'm pondering the situation between us."

"Oh?"

"Dumbledore told me some things. Did you really tell him you wanted to get married?"

"Yes."

"To me?"

"Yes."

She closed her eyes and willed the joy in her face to fade. "But he says you can't."

"I bound myself to him in ways I should never have done. I'm not a free man."

They started walking toward her rooms in a general sort of way.

"He says he'll fire me if I get pregnant."

"I believe he will. Septima, we can't be... together... under the circumstances. I couldn't bear for you to lose your job because of me."

There was nothing more to say. Yet when they reached her door she asked him in. "I wanted to show you what we worked on."

He followed her in and sat down. That was when she saw the smear of lipstick on his face. She couldn't look at it and instead gazed at his dress robes, complete with bow tie. He'd been out with one of those socialites again.

"I should have realized." She took a deep breath and met his eye evenly. This was to be the way of it from now on. She would have to get used to it.

"Septima, she was like all the others. She couldn't stop talking about her father's money or her mother's influential friends, and when she'd had a little too much wine she got sloppy." Severus was unfastening his cloak as he spoke and quickly revealed that his coat was fully buttoned over a waistcoat that was likewise fully buttoned.

She felt herself turning red even as she smiled. "Here are the papers," she said to cover her happy embarrassment.

He sat down, and the real conversation started. They discussed the work that had been done, and Septima found that she needed to grab a notebook and pencil to capture the runes dancing in her mind. She summoned a house-elf and asked for coffee and snacks. The two spoke for hours as if they'd never stopped discussing their work together. Somehow she knew they were setting a pattern that would continue through the following school term.

At length they decided it was too late to continue and Septima walked Severus to her door. Because it was late she spoke imprudently. "Severus, I wish—"

He leaned toward her but didn't touch her. "I wish it too, Septima, but it's simply impossible. I will tell you a wish of mine." His fingers came up to touch her hair. "I wish you would let it grow again. It was so beautiful..."

Right then and there, Septima promised herself that scissors would never again touch her hair unless Severus held them.

A/N: Thank you to Trickie Woo for beta reading!

Quantum Improvements

Chapter 29 of 101

Life at Hogwarts is not ideal, but Severus finds much to enjoy now.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Severus found himself enjoying the summer break more than he had in a very long time. During the day, the professors in residence went over their curricula and straightened their classrooms. They submitted requests for materials and assessed the likely abilities of returning students even as they pondered the students who would be new to their classrooms in the coming year. Septima would have a head start with that since no one entered her classes as a first year and she could ask other professors.

This summer she chose to ask Severus. They spent their evenings in one or the other of their studies, going over class lists. After Septima knew everything she could about the two years' worth of students she would meet this term, they moved on to various periodicals they received. They enjoyed reading other people's work together and then picking it apart, searching for the flaws in another wizard's research or deciding to congratulate a witch on her astute work. Those evenings always ended at the staircase, with Severus heading toward his rooms in the dungeons and Septima climbing up to the faculty rooms near Ravenclaw tower.

Severus often wondered, as the conversations occasionally shifted to their own work, what would happen if they discovered something brilliant. There were times already when he looked at Septima and too quickly imagined pulling her into his arms. He was sure that the elation of intellectual triumph would be too much to resist.

Already he was becoming aware of her as he had been back in their university days. He watched her explain a tricky equation and realized that the glow he had originally found attractive had returned. At night he pictured her in the bed beside him. Then he imagined her face as she told him she was pregnant and the look of betrayal that would follow when she was barred from the school. He couldn't allow it to happen. This glow, this joy in her work, must be preserved even if it killed them both. From the reproachful looks she gave him as he bade her goodbye without a touch, he knew it was as difficult for her as it was for him.

As the school year began, they spent less time together. He decided it was for the best even as he found grading essays and tests to be cold and empty work. He had such hopes during the first hour or two of the Welcoming Feast that his obligation to James Potter's whelp would be at an end, but the boy finally showed up, and the Headmaster denied that the boy had done anything worth expulsion. A great many hopes had surfaced and were forced back down for an indeterminate future.

A strange sign was painted in the school, and rumors began. A mythical Heir of Slytherin supposedly opened an equally mythical Chamber of Secrets. The situation got more serious when Filch's cat, Mrs. Norris, was turned to stone. Severus was brought to consider how to return Mrs. Norris to her proper state. After discussion with Poppy, it was decided that the best restorative would be a potion made with Mandrake. A new crop of the plants was currently growing, and Severus could easily make the potion when the plants were harvested.

One night he found Septima standing before her favorite window. Her hair had grown down to her shoulders since she arrived back. Usually she wore it in a bushy pony tail reminiscent of their early days together, but right now it was loose and gleaming. He snuck up behind her and whispered, "What would you do now if I was the monster from the Chamber of Secrets?"

In response she leaned back into his body and reached behind her head to circle his neck with her arms. "Oh, Heir of Slytherin, if I promise to do *everything* you desire, will you be gentle with me?"

He was assaulted by a great many desires and inclinations at once. At the forefront, his desire to put his arms around her and explore the soft flesh close at hand warred with his inclination to drop her and run to the dungeons. Why must pleasure and disaster be married in his life?

"Why are you doing this?" he whispered into her ear as he nibbled the lobe. "Why are you even here?"

"I've been thinking."

"I could safely theorize that part." He moved down to her neck as his hands worked the fastenings of her robe.

"Severus, what if I made the potion?"

He stopped and took a step back, his hands grasping hers and gently removing them. She turned around and stepped toward him. He stepped backwards again.

"If I make it, then none of your hair or skin can get into it by mistake, and we won't have that problem. You could supervise me."

"But if the slightest thing goes wrong..." He stopped speaking and turned away from her. Then he realized... "You wouldn't mind, would you? You would allow yourself to be banished from the life you know over this." He took several steps away from her and then turned around again.

"I—You know how I feel about you."

"That's the problem, Septima. You would give yourself to me, body and soul, and while there are many things about you that I love, I—I can't do that. I can't promise myself that way."

She started blinking fast. "It's still the other witch, isn't it? It always has been. You've always shared your body freely with me, but she's got your soul fast."

"I can't deny it. She's gone far beyond my grasp, but I still—I can't give you what you should have from the man you love. I'm sorry. I wish you could try to forget me."

She nodded and said, "I understand," but he could tell that she was just being brave for his sake.

A/N: Thank you to Trickie Woo for beta reading!

A Quantum of Confusion

Chapter 30 of 101

Septima uses her art to discover more questions than answers.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Septima realized that Severus was avoiding her. He allowed one night per week for discussing research, but he always made sure it was a night when one or both of them had early classes the next morning. He kept the conversations professional and avoided too much animation even then.

Occasionally during lulls in their discussion, she looked at him and remembered her picture of Descartes. Shortly afterward she would find herself thinking about their early days. Sometimes it was her pregnancy, and sometimes it was her hospital stay. She would come back to herself and see him looking intently at her. Was he trying to see into her mind? She didn't ask, not wanting to start an argument, but she didn't want to constantly think about it. She started hiding her eyes from him. Maybe he enjoyed torturing himself with the what-ifs of their life, but she couldn't take it.

Although many were worried about the Chamber of Secrets and whatever had caused Mrs. Norris to petrify, the true plague in Septima's life was Gilderoy Lockhart. For some reason he had fastened on to her in the early days when he wanted a guide around the school. She had shown him around, making non-committal replies to his self-aggrandizing advances. At dinner she was forced to endure the amused look that came from beneath Severus's raised eyebrow.

She tried to turn Gilderoy onto Aurora, but that professor smilingly admitted to being already attached to another wizard. She tried to turn him toward Sibyll, Poppy, or *anyone*, but he shook his head. "They're too busy with unimportant matters. I can't be bothered with those things, and you're a good listener."

He started asking for long walks on the grounds. She retreated into her own mind, imagining that she was discussing research with Severus. When finally left to herself, she dashed back to her rooms and captured her thoughts in her notebooks.

When a student was petrified, Septima was almost grateful to be asked to consult on the case. She was summoned to the Hospital Wing to take a good look at the child, who looked hardly old enough to even be a student. "He's so little and helpless!"

Minerva's lip twisted. "He's small for his age, but he has the true heart of a lion."

Gryffindor, then. "Oh, I'm sorry. I meant, he *seems* helpless."

Severus stepped close. "We need to know what's causing this. Do you think Arithmancy might tell us?"

"I can try." She got information about the boy and his habits and went back to her office. Severus followed.

"Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Tell me about him."

Severus told her about a boy who would touch any ingredient no matter how vile but who was an indifferent brewer. Septima looked at the terms she had sketched and added one for the stony nature of the child now. She added one each for the expressions "Chamber of Secrets" and "Heir of Slytherin." The terms started to move around in her head, and she made adjustments to her parchment. She took her wand out and tapped the runes as she usually did.

The terms started to move on the parchment, and she found that she couldn't move her wand away. For several minutes she felt magic flowing from her as the runes swirled and formed new patterns. Something sinister moved through her, something that frightened her. She looked up at Severus.

"Stop it," he said, but all she could do was shake her head. The magic was having its way with her. Severus took out his own wand. "*Finite Incantatem!*" Septima remained trapped as the magic simply intensified.

Finally the parchment shook itself, and the runes settled as Septima's wand finally yielded to her will. She stood up and stepped away from her desk. "I've never had something like that happen in my life."

Severus came around the desk and stood next to her. "Are you all right?"

"I think so."

They had been looking at each other and now looked at the parchment. There was clearly some sort of organization to it; the runes were in rows and aligned perfectly. Yet there was no way to interpret it. Where Septima had put standard terms for the information she started with, there were now squiggles and curves.

"What's happened?" he asked.

"It must be another language."

They stared at the serpentine marks, amazed at the way they seemed to be made by bold pen strokes. Septima's own hand was quite different, more economical. Severus tilted his head. "This rune is very similar to a pattern in the fireplace in the Slytherin common room."

"Another language... that looks almost like snakes... do you suppose it's—"

They both said it at the same time. "Parseltongue."

"Can you read it?" she asked.

He shook his head. "I can only understand a certain amount of it, as I can understand any language through Legilimency. For that I need some sort of eye-to-eye contact

with the speaker.”

“Do you suppose Dumbledore can read it, then?”

Severus picked up the parchment. “I’ll ask him.”

* * * * *

Over the next weeks, Septima worked on the materials side of the question, trying to calculate how the flesh of a living thing would turn to stone and what sorts of spells or potions might reverse the process. Another student was petrified and the atmosphere of the school became tense. The answers were sometimes confusing, and the ones that made sense all required the Mandrakes.

One night, Severus asked her to turn her attention to figuring out who might be injured next. “You know that no self-respecting Arithmancer meddles in the art that way,” she answered.

“You’ve done it before. Please, for me?”

She sighed and took out fresh parchment. She put her runes down and made her adjustments. She tapped it with her wand and watched as the terms arranged and rearranged themselves. They settled down somewhat quickly. What she saw mystified her. It couldn’t be—it simply wasn’t so. Septima looked up at Severus and shook her head. “It’s no good. I must have done something wrong.”

She looked at the equations again, searching for her error. She found none, yet the result was impossible. Unable to face what made no sense, she ran from the room.

A/N: I'm very grateful to Trickie Woo for beta reading.

A Quantum of Fear

Chapter 31 of 101

Severus faces a different angle of fatherhood.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Severus picked up the parchment Septima left and stared at it. Perhaps he would be able to decipher whatever it was that had upset her. Then he saw it. He was almost as shocked as she had been, but for a different reason.

When they were together as students and Septima had been pregnant, she had fancifully merged runes for each of them to create a third rune. “That’s the baby,” she had quietly said when he asked. He had not wanted to be reminded of the baby, so he had shrugged and gone back to the potion text he had been reading. Yet now, today he was staring at that very rune, which clearly answered the question, “Who will be attacked next by the monster?”

He ran out of her office and followed her to the window where she stood staring at the grounds. It was a snowy night, and there wasn’t much to see. She turned her head slightly, indicating that she was aware of his presence, and then she turned back to the window.

“Is that what happened to your research?” he asked.

“It’s so long ago that I don’t really remember.”

“Not at all?”

She sighed and shook her head. “When I got out of the hospital, they told me I would be fine, and I was. I just wanted to know about the baby, what she would have been like and that sort of thing. I thought that maybe if I knew... The numbers kept telling me that she was happy and well—”

For once Severus didn’t ask her not to cry. He understood. Instead he slipped his hand around hers. “So it was easier to simply not let any terms dance inside your head.”

“I suppose that’s it.”

“I believe you will come to understand it all, eventually.”

“Do you think so?” She looked up at him with such hope that he nearly kissed her. It wouldn’t be right. It was the sort of thing loved ones might do for each other. He limited himself to tightening his hold on her hand.

“Why don’t I see you back to your rooms? That monster may target you, next.”

She shook her head. “I’m a pureblood, Severus, and you’re you. Somehow I doubt either of us would be attacked.”

“Nevertheless,” he said. He tugged her hand and drew her back down the hallway to her office. Neither spoke during the short walk, but it was quite companionable. They arrived at the door and he was again tempted to hold her in his arms. Instead he released her hand and moved a half step away. “Good evening, Septima.”

She leaned up and kissed his cheek. “Thank you, Severus.”

Why would the monster target their daughter next? Severus pondered the question long into the night. With three magical grandparents, the girl was not truly Muggle-born. The monster must be using the same perceptions that everyone at the school had. It must have been getting its directions and information from someone who only knew what he or she was told. It was a clue, but he wasn’t sure how to use it.

* * * * *

He couldn’t help trying to influence events. As his next second year class ended, he said, “A moment, Miss Granger.”

She stayed behind and looked up at him expectantly. He looked down, unable to control his thoughts for a moment. Had he ever had a chance to look at her this closely?

He memorized everything about her. Then he remembered what he wanted to tell her.

"I wanted to remind you that there's some sort of monster wandering the halls of the school, seemingly at will. Please be careful and encourage your friends to do the same."

"All right, Professor. Is that all?" At his nod she looked at him searchingly and went on her way. He couldn't remember where else he'd seen that facial expression until he was shaving the next morning.

* * * * *

Later in the spring, Severus was summoned to the infirmary to check the latest victim of the monster and his heart stopped. Renée was there, turned to stone. "Has anyone told her mother?"

"It's harder with Muggles, but we're in the process of contacting her parents," said Minerva. Severus looked at her in confusion until he remembered that no one knew—even Septima didn't seem to know—that this was their daughter. He remembered that for practical purposes he wasn't the child's father, either. He had been summoned as a professional who might have an idea about her case. He forced himself to confer with Poppy, agreeing that the Mandrake potion would be the proper remedy for both of the students affected today.

Late at night, he returned to the bedside of his daughter. Poppy appeared to have retired for the night and everything was quiet. The only inhabitants in the infirmary were unable to move or speak. He walked toward her and stared for a long while. She had Septima's hair and eyes. Somehow the rest of her face reminded him of his mother's, during the brief moments she had smiled at him. He stared for several minutes and wondered what would have been if he had made different choices.

He finally leaned down and touched her as he had never been allowed to do before. She was turned to stone, but he could at least touch her hair and pat her hand or her shoulder. He did this for several nights while wondering how Septima could possibly have given her up. Didn't she know that their daughter would be better with their own kind?

He'd gotten nowhere in ascertaining the nature of her memory modification, so he could only guess. When they had broken up, he had just become a Death Eater. Perhaps Septima wanted to protect their daughter from that life. For eleven years she had grown into a brilliant child, free of danger and distress. Perhaps it was for the best.

"Perhaps what was for the best?" Severus turned and beheld the child's mother.

Thank you so much for reading and reviewing! Thanks especially to beta reader Trickie Woo.

Mechanical Snooping

Chapter 32 of 101

Septima learns what is on Severus's mind.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Severus never came for their weekly conversation this time. It was a small enough thing, and it never satisfied her longings, but it was the best Septima had, and she hated to miss it. She went down to his office, thinking she had the place wrong, but it was locked tight. He wasn't there or in the dungeons where he sometimes worked late into the evening.

Perhaps something came up, or he had a date and couldn't tell her beforehand. Her eyes stung at the thought of being so easily pushed to the side. She went up to a window where she would see him return to the school and waited.

An hour or two later, she saw him come *downstairs*, and then he passed her as he went toward the dungeon. He was wearing his normal teaching robes. She looked at the staircase he came down. Where had he been? Why hadn't he even noticed her standing there? She traced his steps to the stairs he came down, but the staircase started to move. By the time she got back around to where she thought he had been, she was so twisted around she wasn't sure where he could have come from.

The next night brought her some luck. She watched him go into the Hospital Wing. Very quietly, she followed him, sure he'd notice. Yet he never did. She followed him and watched him stop at one of the beds.

It must have been a first or second year, since she looked so young. Jealously, Septima watched as he caressed the girl's hands and hair. He whispered as he kissed her forehead. Then he sat and seemed lost in thought. He leaned forward again and patted the girl's hand. "Perhaps it's for the best," he said.

She could hold her peace no longer. "Perhaps what is for the best?"

Severus turned and looked at her. "I didn't think I'd spoken aloud, Septima. I had no idea you were there. Have you been following me?"

"You missed our night." She wanted to slap herself for how whiny it sounded.

"She's..." He didn't know how to explain it to her.

"I can see she's special to you."

"I look at her and I see... Septima, what if Renée lived?" She looked at him in dismay. Why must he torture her like this? "What if she didn't die and you had her?"

"Don't do this, Severus."

"Then tell me she's dead."

"She's—" Her eyes went wild when she couldn't say the word— "She's *gone*, lost. You went away with that dodgy friend of yours, and I waited. I tried so hard to avoid looking at the numbers. All evening I kept myself away, but at some point I had to look, to see what they would tell me. You were dead, I was in a living hell... and then there was such pain, like nothing I know. You came to the hospital. I told you she was—"

"You said there was no baby to worry about."

"Yes."

"You've never once told me she's dead."

"She's *gone*, Severus, and I can't get her back."

She didn't know why she was trembling. Her whole body recoiled from something. Septima was somehow frightened of the child on the bed and what she meant to Severus, but there was something within herself that disturbed her, too. "I—I have to go."

"Wait." He reached toward her, and she went to him. He pulled her into his lap and whispered, "I'm sorry."

"Why do you want to know about all this? I know you've been trying to look into my memories, too. How could any of it possibly matter?"

"She'd be in the same class as the girl there," he answered. "I've started to wonder what she would be like. This girl is the smartest of the second-years."

Septima had a thought. "She's your favorite pupil."

"She'll be yours too."

"She may not take my classes."

"I've heard her say that Arithmancy fascinates her. I believe she enjoys my class, but I think she'll love you."

Septima looked speculatively over at the bed. "She's a good student, then?"

"And a bossy know-it-all. You will be able to challenge her in ways I can't, since you only have students who want to learn your subject."

They sat quietly together. Septima's sense of unease faded, and her trembling stopped. After a few minutes, Severus said, "Still fancy a bit of brewing, then?" She suddenly realized that he was holding her tightly and that his hand was caressing her bum. She became aware of where she was sitting and suddenly stood.

"I'm sorry."

"Perhaps we should get to the dungeon?" He held out his hand, and she smiled when she took it.

He sat across from her and quietly gave directions as she mixed and stirred. When she nearly made a mistake, he tapped her hand with his wand and calmly put her right. When he judged it done, he came around the table and bottled the potion. He'd seemed so calm throughout that she was surprised when he held a portion to her lips with a trembling hand.

The glass in his hand fell to the floor and smashed when it was empty, forgotten in his hasty kiss. Septima gasped as he pulled her tight and backed her toward the wall. Her hands found the chalk tray and held on for dear life as he pressed her into the chalkboard. He didn't waste time but touched her in all the places designed to make her want him. This time when her robes were tugged up over her hips, she reached around to pull him closer.

A/N: Thank you all so much for your support in this story. Feel free to drop a line and tell me how you think it's going. This has been beta read by Trickie Woo.

A Quantum of Springtime

Chapter 33 of 101

Severus throws caution to the wind and finds much to enjoy.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Severus was amazed by the woman he was getting to know. Septima had a soul as well as a body that haunted his dreams. There was a time when he would have ripped through her memories, searching for the choices she had made concerning their daughter. As he took the time to know her this year, he realized that he couldn't do that.

There was something in whatever magic had modified her memory similar to a Muggle-Repelling Charm. The memories were charmed or jinxed in such a way that if she strayed close to them she would quickly shift to a different line of thought. When he forced her to get closer, she became agitated. He couldn't risk the damage such a spell might do if he pushed too close.

He'd spent this last week in a maelstrom of emotion. Septima was never far from his thoughts, and he had struggled to keep a professional distance from her. The idea of letting her make the potion had been growing upon him as well. He had pulled her onto his lap, thinking to soothe her distress, but soon had found himself almost overcome with desire for her.

Now he leaned weakly against the chalkboard, barely supporting the limp form that was wrapped around him. His first great desire was a cigarette, but it had been months since he'd had one. He wanted to send her away, sure that disaster would follow their inability to stay apart. He wanted to undress her and make thorough love to her now that his initial passion was spent. The only thing he didn't want to do was remain standing against a dusty chalkboard. He slid his fingers into her hair to kiss her and had a sudden urge.

"Stay with me?" he asked.

"You don't even need to ask," she replied.

He took her hand and drew her into his bedroom. She moved over to the bed and tested it with her hand as he fumbled with a package in his dresser. She turned, and he showed her the brand new hairbrush. Her whole face brightened.

"You've been planning... or hoping for this all along?"

He didn't answer, but pointed to the bed. She giggled and sat cross-legged. He sat behind her and started stroking the brush through her hair. "You've been much better

with your hair, it appears.”

“I’m not twenty years old anymore. Besides—”

He was curious. “Besides, what?”

“You always put so much effort into it.”

He brushed it for at least an hour, sitting on his bed and stopping to kiss her from time to time. She smiled at him whenever she caught his eye. When he was finished, she lifted her hair over her head and let it fall. He went very, very still as he watched it tumble.

Instead of being irritated that her hair was no longer a single shining entity, he wanted to trace each and every tress and lock with his fingers and mouth. Septima was quickly gasping and sighing as he touched her. He chuckled at her distress when she started begging. It was pleasure to lean over and kiss her whimpering mouth and to cover her body with his own. She was going to make many noises tonight he was sure, and they would sweeten this stolen moment that couldn't possibly last.

* * * * *

It was the beginning of a new time for the two of them, a new realization of what could have been if they hadn't both been so stubborn. They didn't move in together in any real sense of the word. Severus had to sleep in his own bed so that he would be there if Dumbledore summoned him. Much of the time, it was more convenient for Septima to sleep in her own bed as well. They shared what moments they could together, and then one or the other would go back to the other rooms via the Floo.

It was a pleasure to teach class now, knowing that when his last morning class was over he could go to the Arithmancy classroom, seal the door, and press Septima against her own chalkboard. On one such occasion, she had just finished writing out the directions for her first afternoon class. He left a smear in the middle that matched the chalk dust on the back of her teaching robe. She had to change before she went to lunch, causing one or two raised eyebrows among the staff. Severus had merely smirked into his soup.

Septima waited for several days to retaliate, choosing to accompany him back from lunch on an afternoon when he had double Potions with Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff. He had tried to ignore her, but she unfastened her robe to reveal a mini dress from their research days. When they were done, she fastened her robe back up and then slipped her panties from his hand as she walked toward the fireplace. Instead of re-writing the directions for the class he gave them a surprise quiz. While the students wrote two feet on the properties of flowering plants in memory potions, he stared at the smudge on his blackboard.

Every day brought some sort of new interest as Severus waited for the Mandrake plants to mature. Pomona assured him that the second-years were doing a good job with them and that they would be the perfect potency. He whispered that to Renée as he visited her at night.

Septima never came back to the infirmary, and Severus didn't pressure her on the subject of their child again. He believed that she was sure of the facts as she had described them. He was equally sure that this child was Renée. He would have to find a way into her mind to uncover what had been changed, but he wouldn't ask her point blank again. That had hurt her, and he shrank from the pain it caused. Likewise he couldn't Legilimize her again. She knew when he was doing it. He would need to tread slowly.

* * * * *

Septima helped him work out the quintessential formula for the Mandrake potion. The formula had resonated when he looked at it, necessitating a quick spell to shut the door before pulling Septima onto the worktable. There was a magical explosion of physical pleasure. Afterward, they had sat and giggled like children. A day or two later the potion would be made.

Severus had hoped to brew the potion with Septima there, but she didn't come. There was probably something she had to look after. He couldn't believe how well it went together. Each step naturally flowed into the next. The cauldron practically hummed as the potion boiled and matured. He carried several bottles to the infirmary and was not surprised in the least to see how well it worked.

He forced himself to hang back as his daughter's friends embraced her. The important thing was that she was in perfect health again. He slipped away, knowing where he would find someone who would share his joy even if she didn't understand it. He knocked on Septima's office door, anticipating the smile that always crossed her face when she saw him.

The door was ajar and swung open. He stepped in and saw her. She was huddled in her chair before the fire, trembling and holding a handkerchief to her face.

A/N: Thanks to Trickie Woo for beta reading!

The Mechanics of Misdirection

Chapter 34 of 101

Septima has a conversation with Dumbledore and chooses to be quietly noble.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Septima would never understand why Severus took such a personal interest in the Mandrake potion, but she was happy enough to help him with it. Anything that meant more time spent with him was a bonus in her mind. She planned to help him prepare the potion, but there was a note from the Headmaster that afternoon.

He spoke before she even had a chance to sit in the chair he indicated. “It has to end, Professor Vector.”

Should she even bother to pretend not to know what he was talking about?

“I’m not some recalcitrant child that you need to discipline. Neither is Severus.”

“You deliberately went behind my back to defy me. You must understand. He needs to be free of distractions.”

“Do you have any complaint of his job performance this spring?”

“Well, no, but—”

"Then why can't you let us enjoy the moments we spend together? Why can't you let us be happy?"

"He'll never be happy with you."

That stung. "I give him a small measure of—"

"You give him love, Septima, and what does he give you in return? He'll never love you."

She could feel herself start to become upset. "I give him what he will take. I don't need anything in return."

Dumbledore nodded understandingly. "Oh, yes, you give to him and you never ask anything. Yet how long before your very giving becomes a demand upon him—a demand he will resent? Can you answer for the damage it will do? There are other people's lives at stake, Septima. Everyone's life is at stake."

The silence was uncomfortable. She felt as though the fate of the world was in her hands. Could she afford to be selfish? Could she in good conscience distract Severus when so many things depended upon him?

"What do you want me to do?"

"Don't make any plans this summer. I need to send him away. I may have some small jobs for you to do, as well. Next fall, you will return to things as they were before this new sympathy between you and Severus developed."

"I don't know if I can do that."

"I've discovered, Septima, that you are capable of a great many things. Who knows? You need not be alone. Perhaps you will find someone who can love you with the same capacity you've shown toward our Potions master."

* * * * *

She couldn't share in the triumph Severus was sure to have. She went to her office and waited. She imagined him cutting and stirring, muttering and preening as the potion went from good to perfect. She pictured the scene in the Hospital Wing as he took the bottles upstairs and the potions were applied. First they would be sprinkled on the children and then spooned between increasingly flexible lips. Severus would stand back in triumph as the students and their House Heads celebrated the return of the children to their proper lives.

The monster had already been identified and destroyed; there was no concern about that, now. Dumbledore had finally deciphered Septima's parchment, after the fact. Her equations had invoked some spell Salazar Slytherin had cast. The handwriting and information had been his.

She felt so cold. The evening was chilly, and she couldn't remember the last time she'd had a cup of tea. Yet she couldn't rouse herself to stir up the fire or call a house-elf. She could only sit and mourn the life she couldn't have.

"You didn't come." She turned and saw Severus in her doorway. His voice was quiet; his eyes were curious.

"I, um, had a meeting with Dumbledore."

"Curriculum for next year?"

"Oh... yes, I suppose that was it." She looked at him and decided she couldn't tell him what she had discussed with the Headmaster. He wasn't to know that she was dying inside. She wouldn't burden him. He would know nothing of her misery. Her love for him would be free and clear of any hint of obligation.

"Is everything all right?"

She forced a smile. "It's not quite what I was hoping for," she admitted, "but everything is fine." She looked into his face. He was delighted. "I'm sure everything went well in the hospital wing."

He walked toward her then and reached for her. "Everyone is perfectly fine now, even Mrs. Norris and Nearly-headless Nick." He hugged her tightly, lifting her from the floor in his exuberance. She tightened her hold on him as he pulled her toward the bedroom.

She was determined to make the most of every moment they had together after this. Dumbledore might have some illusion of matchmaking, but there was no one who could touch her as this man could. He was, as ever, an artist. His hands touched her delicately, caressing and rousing her. His mouth was greedy as he covered her sighs with his own lips.

When their bodies merged, did she tighten her hold on him more than usual? Did she hold her breath, hoping to prolong the moment? When he tipped her over into bliss, did she pull him tight? Did she whimper when he would have rolled to her side, wanting to be part of him for that extra moment?

"What got into you tonight?" he asked tenderly. He chuckled and held her close as they slept for a while.

When he left her side for the night, kissing and caressing her face, she pondered whether it was time to stop taking her potion. If it had to end anyway, she could at least have that. Yet she couldn't do it. Happy as she was sure it would make her, it was more than she could do to Severus.

"He cannot have a child," Dumbledore had said. "He's watched Voldemort hold the children of Death Eaters as hostages who in turn become Death Eaters themselves. Severus knows how that will play out. It's happened for two generations already. Do you want that for your child?"

"You would send me away. My child would be safe with me."

"You're a clever witch, Septima, one of the cleverest I've known in years, but don't flatter yourself. No matter how you hid the child and yourself, Voldemort would discover its existence, and the game would be up. Do you honestly think Severus would allow the child of his body to become a bargaining chip? Are you willing to take that chance with your own child?"

Septima considered the girl who left the Hospital Wing that night. If Severus was so fond of her, what would their own baby be like? She thrilled at the idea of how he would respond... and knew she needed to make one more batch of the contraceptive potion. It would last until the school year ended.

A/N: Thank you for reading and reviewing. Thanks especially to Trickie Woo for beta reading.

The Mechanics of Annoyance

Chapter 35 of 101

Severus returns from a distasteful summer project to discover that things have changed for the worse at Hogwarts.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Early August, 1993

Severus peered into the forest. The frightened witch in the local pub had been right. There were some strange shadows in these woods. He quietly followed the trail he found and watched. He came to a clearing and swore. It was yet another community of vampires. Perhaps Quirrell had met the Dark Lord here. Perhaps the Dark Lord was still lurking here. However, if he was, he clearly didn't want to be found by Severus Snape.

He made his way back to the inn where he was staying and ordered his dinner. The literature rack of the inn had a newspaper that was new to him. It was a *Daily Prophet* from late July. It was now August, if he recalled correctly, but that was how long it took for British news to reach this small town. He settled down to read but quickly cursed and stood up.

It was like ripping a scab off an old wound. Sirius Black, the man he had sworn to kill if he ever saw him, had done the impossible and escaped from Azkaban. The man responsible for Lily's death was at large, and Severus was not able to capitalize upon it.

He remembered the morning after Lily died. He'd stolen comfort from Septima in an act of grand larceny, but she had done the impossible and kept him from destroying himself or anything else. At some point he'd had to go back to his rooms. He'd wallowed in the cold emptiness and mourned the loss of his love.

In the days that followed, he had learned, as everyone Magical had learned, just how perfidious Sirius Black had been. He'd had his own legal troubles to overcome in those days, but he swore to himself that Azkaban or no Azkaban, he would find a way to even the score. Now he would be able to do that. It was time to go back to Hogwarts, anyway.

Suddenly he ached for the woman who would comfort him again. The last weeks with Septima had been glorious. For some reason, she had been unusually free with her passion, staying the night in his rooms quite often. They were discreet as always, but once the door was closed, she had been completely unrestrained with him.

He had been furious when Dumbledore proposed this trip to the Continent. When they had parted for the summer, she had given him a sad smile. "Always remember that I love you, Severus Snape," she had said with her hand along the side of his face. "I don't want you to feel any obligation or strain because of it. I just want you to know that someone loves you, and that you're important to me. Whatever does or doesn't happen, I'll never stop loving you."

Septima would comfort him. Of that he was sure. She would soothe him and ask nothing in return except permission to continue loving him. He welcomed it. He could admit to himself that he needed it.

* * * * *

She wasn't at Hogwarts when he arrived. The elves told him that she had been gone for over a week and wasn't expected until the term started. There was nothing left but to go to Dumbledore's office. The Headmaster went straight to the current crisis.

"It's a concern, but the boy is safe and there's been no sight of Black."

Severus felt the blood leave his face. "The boy is in danger from Black?" If Potter was in danger, what was the fate of the boy's two friends, particularly the one who happened to be his daughter?

"Well, yes, we can only assume so, since Black helped Voldemort kill the boy's parents. He's well protected for now, and he'll be at the school soon enough."

Severus took a deep breath and prepared to angle into the next topic. "I was hoping to see Septima when I got back..."

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled in the way Severus found most annoying. "Ah, yes, she's taking care of some things for me."

"Indeed?" Severus felt his eyes narrowing.

"Given the fact that Black is at large, I took it upon myself to offer the Defense job to one of his best friends."

Since Potter and Pettigrew were both dead, that left... "Remus Lupin? I protest!"

"You have no reason to protest, Severus. You can make him the Wolfsbane, and he will help us. He's one of the few people who really knew Sirius Black, after all."

Severus forced himself to let it go with a sigh. "What does this have to do with Septima?"

"I took her with me when I offered the job to Remus, and she tipped the scales in our favor. They've become quite close ever since. I believe she's helping him prepare for the school year. At least that's what they're calling it."

"Septima... and the werewolf?" He refused to believe it. She loved *him*.

"He's not always a werewolf, Severus, and you can make the Wolfsbane, of course."

Severus closed his eyes. During their schooldays, Lupin was not the womanizer that Potter and Black had been, but he had enjoyed a certain popularity with the witches. Was Septima the sort of witch to be sucked into that? Or was Dumbledore meddling again? Strike that. Dumbledore had definitely been meddling, he couldn't help it.

"You've tried your hand at matchmaking, haven't you?"

"She wants a husband and children, Severus."

"I would give her all of that."

"Nonsense. You're a man of the world, like me. We don't need wives or children. We have the memory of that one perfect love to hold us. It will be nice to see some new little ones from the old Order of the Phoenix."

Suddenly Severus felt ill. Not only had Dumbledore maneuvered Septima out of his life, but he'd turned her into a mere vessel for the werewolf. He couldn't stay in this office any longer. He stood up. "If that's all, Headmaster, I believe I'll retire for the night."

"That'll do for now. Welcome back."

Black eyes glared into the blue ones for a moment before Severus left Dumbledore's office.

A/N: Thank you for continuing to read! Thank you to Owlbait and Kyria of Delphi, who beta read while Trickie Woo is taking what we hope will be a short break.

A Quantum of Meddling

Chapter 36 of 101

Dumbledore tries to rearrange things to suit his purposes.

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It was a long summer without Severus. Septima didn't know what he was doing, but suspected it was either very dangerous or very tedious. Dumbledore seemed to delight in giving such tasks to Severus. She ached over him, willing him to be safe and hoping that he would come back soon.

Yet she dreaded his return, too. She didn't know what Dumbledore had told him, but she feared it would be up to her to maintain a professional distance. She woke up from nightmares in which he had a hurt look on his face, but even worse were the nightmares where he shrugged and walked away.

There was a lot of notice in the paper and among the staff about an escaped prisoner from Azkaban. Everyone rehashed the night of the Potters' deaths. Some said it had to be due to Sirius Black while others wondered if something else had happened. The fact that a dozen people had been killed on a London city street was insurmountable, though. The fact that Black had laughed while waiting for the Aurors was proof of his guilt... and of him being unhinged, like his mother and his cousin, Bellatrix Lestrange.

It wasn't important to Septima. After several weeks of moping around the castle, she was summoned to Dumbledore's office for another meeting. She went with trepidation, knowing that he would have some unpleasant task for her to do. Maybe it would be news about Severus. Suddenly she was awash in fear that Severus was hurt... or worse.

"Ah... Septima, there you are. I wonder if you would accompany me today. I have a meeting with a prospect for the Defense Against the Dark Arts position."

"I don't see why you need me, Headmaster. I'm pants at Defense."

"You're a good *teacher*, Septima. Perhaps I just want to see you outside of this castle for a few hours. I need to look after my staff, you know."

That was a bit rich, coming from him. Yet it didn't really matter. "All right then."

"Why don't you go put on something nice, prepare to stay in town for a while, and we'll meet at the gate in about half an hour?"

She shrugged. "I'll be there."

She remembered Remus Lupin from her school days. He had aged a great deal, and he seemed rather low. "Remus, perhaps you remember Septima Vector. She teaches Arithmancy at Hogwarts."

"The answer is still no, Albus. I can't be around the students, and you know it."

"There's a potion that will make your condition... ahem... less contagious, and you know you'll enjoy being at the school again. Plus, as Septima can attest, there are other compensations. Tell him, Septima."

She had to say something. "I'm sure you won't regret it, Mr. Lupin."

Remus looked at Septima, and she felt him appraise her as a woman. It was a new experience. Most of the wizards she'd dealt with assessed her abilities as a witch or scientist. This was a man, looking at her as a potential mate. He took her hand and kissed it. "All right, Albus, I'll give it a try," he said with a sigh. His eyes never left Septima's face as he smiled at her.

"Excellent!" The Headmaster clapped his own hands together. "Septima, why don't you help Remus make his arrangements? You have an apartment in London, don't you?"

"But Headmaster, I know nothing about teaching Defense."

"You know all about *teaching*, Septima. That's the part Remus will want help with."

Dumbledore was quickly gone, and Septima found herself looking awkwardly at her new colleague. "Well," she said, "there are several bookstores where Hogwarts has accounts. Dumbledore is pretty lavish with letting us choose our materials."

"Perhaps you'll take me?"

She sighed. "I need to look into a few things, too."

"Excellent." She realized that he had a crooked smile that added a certain charm to his face.

Septima spent many days during the rest of the month working with Remus, helping him choose curricula and coaching him on different styles of classroom management. He was interested in many things and asked her many questions. His style was very different to the wizards she had known in her mostly scientific professional life, yet he was clearly just as studious as any of them.

He also seemed interested in her personally. He had asked whether there was anyone in her life and after her quiet “no” had started asking about her personally. He often brought her a flower when they met. She wasn't sure whether to feel charmed or awkward.

They had dinner together on the last night before school would start. Remus was nervous but cheerful. She hadn't seen him for a few days, and tonight he looked particularly tired and worn. She mentioned it as they walked to her apartment. “It's nothing,” he said. “I have a—condition—that occasionally makes me feel ill. If Dumbledore has arranged for me to get a potion to ameliorate the worst of the symptoms, I shall be all the better for working at Hogwarts.”

“You have a lot of good ideas. I'm sure you'll be brilliant.”

“It means a great deal that you think that, Septima.”

“Well, you can't be any worse than Lockhart,” she teased.

“Impertinent witch,” he laughed. They reached her door and stopped walking. He drew close to her. “Septima,” he said.

“Yes, Remus?”

“I wondered if it would be acceptable to kiss you.”

“Oh. I'm not sure—”

“For luck?”

He didn't wait for an answer but leaned over and touched his lips to hers. She gasped at his boldness, and something like a growl came from his chest as he opened his own mouth and kissed her more fully. Before she had a chance to panic, he pulled away and smiled at her. She put her fingers over her mouth and looked at him. He took the key from her trembling hand and put it in the lock. He glanced inside her apartment before standing aside for her to go in.

“I've wanted to do that for a while now. I'm glad you wanted it, too. I'll see you tomorrow night, then.”

Septima had her hand over her mouth and just nodded. He smiled once again and walked away. She shut the door behind him and stood against it in confusion. She hadn't meant to let him kiss her, let alone like that. She certainly hadn't wanted to learn that his teeth were a bit crooked, like Severus's, and that while kissing Remus she could think of the man she loved.

A/N Thank you to Kyria of Delphi and Owlbait for beta review.

Mechanical Complications

Chapter 37 of 101

The term starts, and Severus and Septima adjust to the change in their relationship.

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It was not until the start-of-term feast that Severus saw Septima. He walked into the Great Hall after the students started arriving and found her there, seated next to Lupin. The chair on her other side was empty, so he sat there.

“Septima.”

“Severus.”

The light—the glow that was for him—was in her eyes as he sat, but she otherwise looked worried. She looked nervously between Dumbledore's still unoccupied chair, Severus, and Lupin. He had wanted to heartlessly glower at her, so he did, but his conscience was pricked. She was clearly miserable, and she turned white before turning red under his glare.

He'd had a couple of weeks to think about it and realized that Dumbledore had been pulling strings again. As the anger that she could forget him and move on to Lupin receded, he played back the entire spring term and found that her behavior had been markedly different during the weeks after the Mandrake potion was made. She hadn't discussed curriculum with the Headmaster that day, at least not the students' curriculum. She'd been given orders to end her involvement with him.

“Severus?” The werewolf was looking at him. He had not wished to acknowledge his presence.

“Lupin.” He nodded and deliberately turned his attention to the Headmaster, who was just sitting down.

The Sorting ceremony began and he was spared further conversation. Then Dumbledore started talking and introduced the new Defense professor. It was torture to hear this other man introduced. Lupin, who along with his friends taunted him all through school... Lupin, who had the job he wanted... Lupin, who was leaning toward Septima to smile intimately and whisper with her.

When dinner started, he was forced to make some sort of discussion. “It's quite curious that you should be selected for the Defense Against the Dark Arts position, Lupin, with your history.”

“I think you can call me Remus, Severus, and I didn't want to take it, initially. Dumbledore asked me several times, and I would have continued saying 'no' if he hadn't brought Septima the last time.”

Severus glanced at her. Her cheeks were pink. “I can't imagine what she brought to the conversation,” he murmured. “Defense is her weakest skill.” Septima's face turned bright red as her fingers crumpled and released her napkin.

Lupin merely smiled and patted her hand on the table. "I like to think she simply hasn't found the right teacher."

"You're the man to take that position, too?"

"I think I could be." Remus looked him directly in the eye.

Septima cleared her throat. "I'm sorry, but I'm not feeling well. If you gentlemen don't mind..."

"Of course not," said Remus, rising to help her with her chair.

Severus watched her walk from the Great Hall. Was she sick? Was she—perish the thought—how fast would Lupin get her into bed anyway? That brought up another question.

"Does she know about your... affliction?"

"No, it's not exactly a conversation starter with the ladies. Tell me something, Severus, how is it that no wizard has taken her away from all this?"

"She loves her work, and she loves—" He wasn't sure if he could say that any more. He certainly *shouldn't* say it if Dumbledore was calling the shots-- "She loves being part of Hogwarts."

"Perhaps I shall be the man to show her a different sort of love."

The students were leaving and Severus rose from the table. "I think I shall watch as my students go to their common room."

* * * * *

He found her in her usual place in the hallway later that night. "I hear congratulations are in order."

She shook her head. "I'm not so sure."

"Dumbledore sounded quite determined that you and Lupin will be a match."

"What did he tell you?" She looked up at him nervously. He wanted to tell her that he understood, but hardened his heart. She didn't have to always go along with whatever some wizard told her to do.

"About whatever orders he's given you? Nothing." She looked up at him and it was all in her face. Dumbledore had definitely pulled some strings. "He behaved as if some great romance had suddenly sprung up between you and Lupin."

She shook her head. "It's not like that. I'll try for your sake, but it's hard, Severus. He's sweet, and smart, and quite gallant, but he'll never be you."

It was a soothing balm to his ego, but it was all wrong. "Why my sake? Septima, what did Dumbledore say?" He spoke sternly, and suddenly he was holding her by her shoulders and shaking her gently until she looked up into his face.

"He said I'm a distraction... and that if you have to worry about me it will ruin everyone's life... and that if we have a child it will become a pawn of V-Voldemort... *But*ow, Dumbledore says he thinks I might be one of his favorite staff members... *me*. He even gave me a hug when I came to the castle this morning."

Severus averted his eyes as he saw her face. Something turned inside of him at the thought of her so desperate for respect and affection. He could give her both, but he had other responsibilities that would always come first. Did he have a right to stand in the way of something that could possibly give her happiness? Could he let her go, to give her that happiness with another man and that man's children? He quickly asked the next question, although he hated that he wanted to know. "Are you—have you..."

She shook her head. "I can't face sex with him yet. He's only kissed me once."

He let her go because he couldn't help smirking. "Dumbledore expects children."

"He'll have to wait. I'm still..." She looked at him thoughtfully... "That is, I don't want to rush into anything."

They were both consumed by their own thoughts. He wondered if she had been about to say that she still loved him. Perhaps it was time to further a project of his own. "Septima?" he finally said.

She leaned toward him, hope oozing from every pore. "Yes?"

"What do you know about Oenology?"

She seemed deflated as she turned back toward the window and shrugged. "I know one puts grapes at the front of the process and gets wine at the end, but I don't really know anything at all about it."

Severus smiled. For some reason, he was quite pleased to hear that.

A/N: Thank you to Owlbait for beta reading!

The Mechanics of Winemaking

Chapter 38 of 101

Remus is away for a day or two, and Severus has a way for Septima to pass the time.

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A Quantum of Normalcy

Chapter 39 of 101

Severus and Septima share a moment that's all too familiar.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

As soon as he gave the werewolf his Wolfsbane on the night of the full moon, Severus put together his supplies. They included the few drops of potion he would need, along with the wine, glasses, and text that were his excuse for seeing her. Of course he did hope to discuss some amount of their research together, but this was the chance he had hoped for. This potion would allow him to map Septima's mind and unlock the memory that was so important to them both.

The first thing he discovered was that Septima would never love the werewolf. She was playing along and playing for time. He almost laughed when he found her memories of those two kisses. He was startled and a little pleased by her reflection that the shape of Lupin's mouth allowed her to think of him. He recalled the conversation he had with Lupin as he had finished brewing the Wolfsbane.

"She's so innocent, Severus. I don't think she's ever been with a man."

"Are you sure? For all you know, she's had a lover for years. Maybe she's even had his child."

"No, I would be able to tell if that was the case. Dumbledore said that she had fancied a wizard but that the situation was impossible. When I kissed her, I could tell that she was unsure. No, she knows nothing of what happens when a man loves her."

"And you're going to teach her?"

"I think I'm just the man to do it."

"You should stick to teaching her Defense. How is that going, anyway?"

He probed her memories, trying to go way back. He couldn't get anywhere near her pregnancy. Instead, he found himself reliving a night shortly after that Christmas. They had used the glass-lined cauldron to make a successful potion. Nick had been delighted with their results and had sent them to an expensive restaurant where he had an account. After eating very well, they had gone to Septima's apartment where Severus had made love to her on what seemed like every surface in the flat. Every time Severus had thought he had surely used himself up, she had smiled at him, and he had wanted her again.

This potion did the sort of thing he wanted, but not to the extent he needed it. He would have to look at the formula again and adjust it, probably many times. It was too bad that he couldn't ask Septima to look at it. With her help, he could probably figure it out within a matter of hours.

* * * * *

The next afternoon, Severus watched Septima at a meeting in the staff lounge. He couldn't help it after the erotic memories he had surreptitiously shared with her. Dumbledore droned on about ways to watch for Sirius Black and the importance of keeping the students away from the Dementors during Hogsmeade weekends. Septima doodled in a notebook in a way he recognized. There was a look in her eye as she caught his glance. She was close to figuring something out.

Dumbledore finally stopped talking. The professors filed out, but Septima walked over toward the chalkboard and started jotting her notes, working frantically, as if she couldn't get it out fast enough. Severus walked over and sat in Dumbledore's chair, leaning back and watching her work. Finally, she tapped the board with her wand and stepped back to watch the terms move into place. When nothing happened, she groaned.

"I didn't get it down fast enough, and now it's gone," she muttered.

He didn't look at her, just at the board. "I take it that this is for a potion to turn elements into gold?"

She sighed. "It's obvious, isn't it?"

"It is to me because I'm familiar with your work," he chuckled, "but someone else might not realize it, due to the glaring lack of gold in your terms."

She squealed and leaped back to the board, where she erased several terms and started scribbling again. She tapped the board with her wand and, as the terms started to move, she cast a spell to lock the door. She then knelt before him. Severus didn't realize what she was doing until his fingers were buried in her hair and he was groaning. His head slammed into the chair back, rubbing up and down as the rest of his body moved in the rhythm she evoked.

Suddenly he had to stop her. He tugged at her hair until she her head lifted up to face him. "Septima, what of Remus?"

"I don't belong to him, at least not yet. This is us, Severus. For some reason I woke up today, and I couldn't get this old, unsolved equation out of my mind. I had to work at it until I got it right or I lost it again. Since I got it right..."

"Since you got it right, let's do this right." He pulled her up and lifted her on the table. Her pleasure in her success gave her some innate passion that was infectious. He wanted to savor the moment, but the way she sighed and whispered his name was too much for him. Afterward, they stood at the edge of the table and stared at the finished equations. They slowly started to refasten each other's clothing.

"You still have that improbability factor to work out," he observed as he fastened the final hook under her chin.

"I'll get it. Once I get all of these other equations worked out to that point, I'm sure I'll be able to use them together to figure that factor out." She smoothed his robe over his shoulders.

He kissed her. "What are we to do, now? Shall we skip dinner and move on toward what we do best? You're hair's an awful mess, now."

She raised a hand to her head. "We can't. Dumbledore would... Oh, Severus, we can't."

He knew she was distressed because she clung to him, fitting her body to his. He tipped her chin up. "How can we not? How can we possibly stay apart? This table bears witness to what lies between us."

She turned and looked as he pointed out the Septima-shaped section that gleamed after its unconventional polishing. She giggled and pointed to the shiny spot on the headrest of the Headmaster's chair. Then she looked sad and shook her head. "He says it's better for you, and he's been so happy with me lately. How can I go against that?"

He crushed her close again, wishing he knew the words to change her mind and knowing it was useless. Her mind was made up and there was no way to change it at the moment. He would have to wait. Perhaps when she remembered everything...

At length she drew back and turned to unlock the door. "Tell Remus that I'll be down for dinner as soon as I copy this." She sighed and added, "I'd appreciate it if you didn't tell him—"

"He thinks you're a virgin."

"Does he? Well, I guess I'll have to avoid unicorn-hunting expeditions with him then." With a humorless laugh she picked up her notebook and started writing the equations that filled the chalkboard. Severus was dismissed.

A/N: Thanks to Owlbait for beta reading!

Portions of this chapter were inspired by a discussion with Sunny33. ;)

A Missing Quantum of Control

Chapter 40 of 101

A couple of months pass, and Septima's conundrum intensifies.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

In October, Severus brought Septima a Reisling wine to learn about. When she awoke, she'd been having dreams about her work after Severus started writing his dissertation. Right before lunch the next day, he came to her office on the pretext of discussing the Arithmancy grades of a fifth year Slytherin student. She pointed her wand at the door to lock it over his shoulder just as he took her into his arms. A moment later she was pressed against the chalk board.

"Stop, what are we doing?" she asked.

"Don't you know?" He seemed reluctant to remove his hands from the inside of her blouse. He nudged her with his nose until her face was tipped toward his own. He kissed her hungrily. She greedily kissed him back. "You want this," he said, stating the obvious.

"Oh, yes... more, Severus... touch me..."

"Where?"

"Everywhere..."

She felt herself being pressed against the board. His hands lifted the hem of her robe and she could do nothing but welcome him with a gasp. He pressed her harder into the board, and a pressure that had been building since the night before grew within her until it burst. She needed this. She sighed loudly and heard him groan her name.

As he helped her regain her footing and her breath, he asked her to come to his rooms. She shook her head. "You know I can't do that."

He nodded his head and left. When she arrived at lunch, the only seat she could take was several seats down from him. Remus smiled when he saw her. "You look like a witch who's in love," he said. "I can't help but hope you're thinking of me." She could only blush and look at her plate. When she looked back up, Severus was watching her inquisitively.

"I was thinking," Remus said, "that we should go out dancing sometime. I have the next several Friday evenings off."

"I think I do, as well," she observed.

He made a leering grin at her. "I pulled a few strings with Minerva." She looked down at her meal and poked at it. "Is it a date, Septima? For the next three Fridays?"

"I suppose."

He smiled and kissed her cheek as he got up. "That's sorted, then. I need to run to the library. Irma said she would try to get me a reference book I wanted to use for my fifth-years."

She was left to pick at her meal again. Sibyl Trelawney left and Severus moved closer. "You've never danced with me."

"You never asked me."

"It seemed counterproductive."

"Oh?"

"I can't hold you in my arms without looking for a bed, although tables and chalk boards seem to work, as well."

He leaned close and whispered it. Septima shivered at the sound of his voice. He was right. She would never be able to dance with Severus.

"He wants to dance so that he can make his move."

At that, she pushed her plate away completely. "You think he's going to expect me to... put out?"

"Dumbledore, too."

"He says he just wants me to be happy. He's been so kind, and since my parents died..." She shrugged. Waiting for a little affection from Severus was a lonely past-time.

"He's got some ulterior motive or plan. I worry about it.. about you."

She looked at him. For once he seemed genuinely concerned about her. Her eyes blurred slightly and refocused on the chair in the middle of the table. Remus was on his way out the door after a short conversation with Dumbledore, who was smiling benignly at her.

* * * * *

In November, Severus brought a Gewurztraminer, and Septima had dreams of discussing children with Remus mixed up with a midwife appointment when she was pregnant with Renée. The next morning, a Saturday, found her knocking on Severus's door. Just as she recalled that she shouldn't be there, he opened the door and pulled her in. This time he brought her to his bedroom where he combed her hair. When that was done he brought her to his office and sat her down. "I'm almost done with this potion, and you're going to help me," he whispered.

She worked hard at it and after a while they arrived at a result that pleased him. He lifted her onto his desk and softly touched her face. He leaned down over her and kissed her into a frenzy. Then he sat back in his desk chair and smiled at her.

"Why don't you get on with it?" she asked in a passion-induced fervor.

"Because I know as soon as we're done, you'll leave."

"You know I must."

"I don't agree, but if that's how it is, I'm keeping you here for as long as I can."

"Severus, please..."

"I'm doing what I please, Septima. If you're only going to come to me once per month, then I'm getting a full month's worth." He slid her down and put her on a chair. "Why don't we have some lunch brought in?"

It was after dinner when she left. He'd kept her in a state of desperation for hours and ended by bringing her to his bed and shagging her until she shrieked. When she arrived in her own rooms, she found a note had been slipped under her door by Remus. She felt guilty for missing him, but not for what had happened with Severus. Yet she resolved that no matter how good the wine was, this couldn't happen again.

A/N: Thanks to Kyria of Delphi for looking this over for me!

A Quantum of Clarity

Chapter 41 of 101

Remus's head is grazed by the giant clue brick.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

The morning after the third dancing date, Severus happened upon a glum-looking Lupin at breakfast. "Did something go wrong?"

"I don't think she's a virgin after all," said Lupin.

"I see."

"Do you?"

"You don't want a woman who's damaged goods. Forget about her then, Lupin, and find another cauldron for whatever potion Dumbledore has in mind."

"She's more to me than that! Today I'm genuinely worried about her."

"Oh?"

"She lets me kiss her pretty passionately. Oh, I see you smiling Severus, but she does. Yet when it comes to touching her... she always giggles and moves away.

"Last night we danced, and she seemed to invite my touches for once. After we came back, she invited me to her room. I started unfastening her dress, and she pushed my hands away and unzipped it, herself. It wasn't in a sexy way, either. She simply unzipped and dropped the dress.

"She stood there in her underwear and turned her head so I wouldn't see her eyes. She was—well, I'm sure there are prettier women in this world, but she was everything I wanted right then. It was all right there at an arm's reach, too. But then I saw a tear break free and travel down her face and realized that she expected me to practically rape her.

"I couldn't touch her. What happened to her, Severus? Has she been hurt?"

He sighed and considered what to say. "There was an unscrupulous Hogwarts professor who got himself hired at the university. He tried to seduce her all through her last year and finally got himself put on her thesis committee. He refused to read it until she acquiesced. He forced her to perform sexual favors for him for three months, including the week she had her oral defense. She had no recourse, and the man she trusted most in the world betrayed her at that time, leaving her to believe he wanted her to take up with the unscrupulous professor."

"How awful! Who was the professor? I'll kill him."

Severus shook his head.

"What about the man she trusted?"

Severus shrugged.

"I have every intention of protecting her, of caring for her, Severus. There's something delicate about her. I believe she needs to be watched over."

"And you're going to do that in spite of your condition?"

"Dumbledore says there may be a way around my condition."

Severus leaned on the table and looked at him. "And so, I suspect, we come to the reason you're rushing her to bed. Whatever it is you have planned had better not pose the slightest danger to Septima, or you will have to deal with me."

* * * * *

Severus watched Septima closely and pondered her mental stability. The fact that she so easily fell in with Dumbledore in exchange for a little kindness troubled him. He worried that her memory modification was causing some fundamental change to her. It was as urgent as ever that he discover how it had been done so that he could undo it.

Her relationship to their daughter was a source of interest to him. She never showed the slightest interest in her except as a student. When Lupin waxed eloquent about Miss Granger's great skills and abilities, Septima's response was lackluster. During lunch one day, Lupin observed, "She admitted to me that Defense is her weakest subject, but she reads voraciously and works hard to overcome it. In watching the way she attacks her school work, I think she might be the brightest witch in her year."

Septima nodded. "She's extremely smart. Severus said she would be my favorite student, and she is..."

"You say that as if there is something wrong with her."

"There's something about her that affects me. I can never put my finger upon it."

"How can you not like her? She's brilliant, and she carries some of her friends in their school work."

"It's not that I don't like her, but it's something... For example, does she have to be so bossy? She came to me the other day to complain because her partners in the Arithmancy class wouldn't read ahead with her. In the dozen years I've been teaching, I've discovered that most of the children learn best at the pace I've laid out for them. She's welcome to move ahead at her pace, but she needs to let the others move at *their* pace as well, or they'll become frustrated and give up."

"Did you tell her that?"

"I felt as though if I did, she wouldn't listen. She reminds me of someone—it's as though they were related..."

"Who would that be?"

Severus lost his breath, wondering how Septima would resolve the difficulty in her mind. He watched her carefully as she seemed to struggle. She looked worried and upset. She pressed her hand to her head and then shook it off. "What? Oh, yes, she's quite brilliant, isn't she? I'm hoping that she will pursue Arithmancy when she gets older. She has said it's her favorite class, and she comes to my office hours, just to chat, all the time."

Remus shook his head and laughed at her. "You're a wonder Septima."

Severus watched her carefully. She laughed along with Lupin, but to a wizard who'd known her for years, she seemed worried and a little confused. At some point, a crisis would occur, and he hoped he would be around to take care of things when that happened.

A/N: Thank you all in advance for reading and reviewing. Thanks to Kyria of Delphi for looking this chapter over!

The Mechanics of Infuriating a Witch

Chapter 42 of 101

Severus finally crosses the wrong line. Then he does it again.

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In December it was an elf-made wine. Septima woke in Severus's arms after having nightmares. At first she had dreamed of that recent discussion during which Dumbledore had told her to break it off with Severus. Then she had dreamed of Professor Erwin. As she came to awareness, Severus was holding her close and muttering, "That bastard is still going to pay..."

She looked up at him and understood what must have been happening. She had helped him with this potion just a month ago. "You've been dosing me with different versions of that potion. You weren't content with the peeks of my mind you got before."

"Septima, please." He tried to pull her close and kiss her, but for once she wasn't having it. She pushed away and moved to the opposite end of the couch.

"What in a bloody snitch are you seeking?" she asked him.

He stared at her helplessly and a little foolishly. She knew it was one of the few times he'd ever been caught out. He looked at his hands and then at his wine glass. After draining it, he looked at her again. Then he nodded to himself.

"Septima, your memories have been modified."

"You're lying." She could feel her heart start to beat quickly. This conversation was making her very angry... and worried... and... and... angry.

"I have a Calming Draught if you would like it."

That was insulting. What was he implying? That she had no cause for anger? "I don't need a Calming Draught. I don't need any more of your potions tonight. There's nothing wrong with my memory, Severus Snape. Take it back."

"The way you feel now is a symptom. When you come close to the memories that are modified you become agitated or you suddenly switch to a different train of thought. I've watched you do both during the same conversation. I'm getting close to figuring it out."

"I don't believe it, and I think you should go now."

He nodded and used his wand to direct the wine and glasses back to the box in which he brought them. He very deliberately placed a vial of Calming Draught on her coffee table. "All right, then. If you decide to pursue this, I'm at your service." He moved close enough to carefully kiss her forehead and left.

* * * * *

Remus had been kissing Septima with greater frequency over these months and indicated his interest in moving even closer to her. "I'd like to start on a future with you, Septima, and I can't imagine the need to wait."

She usually felt addled after his kisses, since they tended to remind her of Severus, but his hands did not. Remus's gentle hands were better than Erwin's overeager groping, and her lonely body welcomed the physical touch. Yet they were nothing like what she had known with Severus. When Severus touched her, he was an artist bringing life to a canvas. She stared at the shiny spot on Dumbledore's chair during staff meetings and wondered sadly if the way Remus touched her would always remind her of what she had lost, or more accurately, what had never truly been hers.

She tried, after dancing, to do what she knew he wanted. He held her so tightly when he kissed her that she couldn't ignore his desire. When he fumbled at her zipper, she simply undid it herself. She stood there, practically naked and turned her face so she wouldn't see what he looked like. She couldn't take it if he leered greedily as Erwin had. Instead, Remus leaned down. Septima could feel her knees shaking. What was he going to do down there?

He picked up her dress and held it in front of her. "I'm not going to pretend that I don't want you, Septima, but I can tell you don't really want this. It would be something like rape if we did it tonight, and I can't stand the thought of that."

She turned and saw that his face was kind. "I-I guess I'm not ready yet, Remus. I hope that I'll be ready soon. I'm just not ready now."

He smiled indulgently. "I look forward to it, Septima. I know it will be worth the wait."

Severus's forays into Septima's mind made her furious. It changed everything. After her argument with Severus, she went to find Remus at breakfast. "How about New Year's? I think I'll be ready, then."

In response, he beamed tiredly at her and reached for her hand to kiss it. "I can't think of a better time to start our life together."

Septima tried not to look at Severus, yet she couldn't help but notice his face from the corner of her eye. He was completely white, and his hands were clenched. He looked angry, but to her it seemed that he was hurt. She hardened her heart just a little bit, but then she turned quickly away. Dumbledore said this was for Severus's good, and besides, she was still feeling betrayed by what Severus had done last night.

* * * * *

The look on his face when she went to brew her potion in the dungeon was even worse. She'd been making it all along, but today was different. He turned his back to her and quietly asked, "Is it for you... and him?"

"He says he loves me."

"Do you love him?"

"You know the answer to that."

"Then why, Septima? Why couldn't we go on as before?"

"Thanks to your snooping, you know the answer to that, too." She couldn't help saying it bitterly.

He stepped closer to her. "Does he know about us... that we made love in the staff room, or the other times?"

"Don't call it that! It was just sex... meaningless..."

He could smell the change in her just at the thought of it. He spoke softly as he reached out to trace her wrist. "It wasn't 'just' anything, Septima. It was us, as brilliant and wonderful as ever. The table still gleams where I pressed your body down and we moved together. That table has never been so forcefully rubbed... or your chalkboard... and tell me he could ever do what we did the last time."

She took a gasping breath. "It didn't mean anything; it never does."

"It's always meant something to me."

"How can you say that? We both know that when it started it was just sex to you. For a while, maybe you cared, but..."

"You don't care for Lupin. How can you treat him this way?"

She shook her head. "He's so kind and gentle that I'm sure we'll be content and besides, you—you betrayed me. I'm not sure I can forgive you for that."

Sucking in a deep breath, he turned away and spoke quietly to her. "When you're angry at me, there's nothing to compare to it. You told me to go to hell all those years ago, and in a way I did. Your rage kept us apart for ten years after that. Septima, are you truly angry enough to separate us forever now? Are you that irrational?"

A/N: Thanks to Kyria of Delphi for looking this over for me, and thank you all for your continued support.

A Quantum of Rationality

Chapter 43 of 101

Septima has a crisis.

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Septima rushed at Severus and he did the only thing that came to mind. He pulled her into his arms and held her tightly. In her rage she pushed him into his desk chair and fell on top of him. Anger had never been part of their sex before, but it was this time. She was a swirl of motion, taking until he was empty. He was more than willing.

After a pause in which they had both cooled off a bit, he said, "You know you belong with me, not with him."

Septima shook her head. "I'm on this path now. I have to do it," she said.

"Why the potion? We all know how much you want a child." Severus had asked.

"His child? It would be a travesty," she had replied.

"But Lupin and Dumbledore are both so eager..."

"If I don't kill myself after the night is over, I'll discuss it with you later."

"Shouldn't you discuss it with *him*?" She had looked up at him as though the idea were a novel one. He had to ask, "Septima, if the idea of being with him makes you want to destroy yourself, what are you doing?"

"Dumbledore says it's the best thing for everyone. He's so happy with me right now... He said he was proud of me..."

It wasn't the first time Severus wondered what really went on between Septima and Lupin. It wasn't the first time he'd wondered if Septima understood what she was doing.

Severus tried not to think of Septima with Lupin. He couldn't stand the thought of what they would do together. He turned his thoughts to the holiday. Narcissa had been begging him for months to escort one of her protégés. She had become insistent about it as her New Year's party approached. He decided to accept, hoping that something would happen to take his mind off Septima. He prepared a potion of his own and had the house-elves press his dress robes.

Severus was bored by the party, even if it was destined to be celebrated in the *Prophet* as "the highlight of the social season." He'd been required to tell the story of Sirius Black at the School on Christmas at least half a dozen times. The girl Narcissa had forced upon him, an indifferent student from years back if he recalled, had long since become a sloppy drunk. She kept tugging at his robe, and eventually he thought, why not? His last conversation with Septima had been particularly unsatisfactory. Of course, that comment about being irrational might have upset her.

A silvery glow appeared in the Malfoy drawing room. It walked up to him and became a canine-like creature that said, "Come quickly to the Astronomy Tower." Narcissa and Lucius came over to find out what the fuss was about. Severus smiled ruefully and shrugged. "It appears that I'm needed at Hogwarts, so I'll take my leave now." Narcissa kissed his cheeks as Lucius shook his hand, and he left.

When he arrived at the requested spot, he found Septima crouched and clinging to a wall with her arms wrapped over her head, crying softly and muttering to herself. Lupin was standing near by, watching but not touching. Whenever he tried to step closer, she shrank away from him. Severus looked at the scene analytically. Had Lupin told her his secret?

"What have you done to her?"

"Nothing. We were kissing, and then we got a little closer. She suddenly started shrieking and raving about something. I know that you and she work together, so I thought you would be the best person to contact."

"You're smarter than I gave you credit for, then." Severus bent down. "Septima?"

She sort of flung herself against him and whispered it in a rush. "I can't do it, Severus... I tried, you know. I've been trying all this time. I wanted to do it for you... and to make Dumbledore happy... He's going to scold me again... but he touched my hair—*your hair*."

He hid his smile and kissed her forehead. "Hush, it's all right. Shall we go downstairs, now?" She nodded her head, so he whispered a charm that would enable him to carry her and lifted her into his arms.

"I don't understand," said Lupin, "what happened?"

Severus looked at the third person on the tower and pondered his response. Finally, he said, "I believe Septima has discovered tonight that there's only one man in the world for her."

"But she's letting you touch her, Snape."

"Indeed." He let it trail off behind them as he carried Septima down the stairs and through the halls of Hogwarts down to her rooms. He shut the door behind them and sealed it carefully. He sat down on the couch, bringing Septima onto his lap.

He started running his own hands through her hair to comfort her, and she leaned against his chest. She hiccuped and sighed until he suspected she was asleep. Then he carried her into the bedroom and laid her on the bed. He laid down next to her, planning to watch her. She rolled against him, and he found it quite natural to put an arm around her and hold her close.

At some point during the night she snuggled up against him. "Severus... I want you."

He couldn't say no. He simply groaned and helped her with her clothing. It wasn't long before she was gloriously bare and he could touch her. As much as he had tortured himself with images of Lupin touching her, he now caressed and tickled, licked and sucked at her skin.

She sighed and ran her fingertips through his hair, tugging his head to one place or another, and grasping it when he elicited a particularly passionate response. At one point she groaned and he lifted his face.

"Is something the matter?"

"More... please... more."

He pulled her close and took her hands into his. "Maybe you should do something for me."

She sat up and looked at him, her chest heaving in a way that caught his fascination. With a grunt of frustration, she moved on top of him and started touching him. She was a wild thing, stroking with her hands and tugging skin between her teeth. It didn't take long for Severus to push her to her back. Their passion was hard and fierce, both moving with abandon. A roaring sound grew within the room, growing louder until Severus finally felt release. As he caught his breath, he realized the noise had come from him.

A/N: Thank you to Kyria of Delphi and Owl bait for looking this over!

A Quantum of Overconfidence

Chapter 44 of 101

Septima has a delightful morning and a meeting with the Headmaster.

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"Severus?" It was a soft whisper into the night.

"Yes?"

"Do you think something is missing... in my mind?"

He pulled her tight and released her slightly. "No, you're whole, but I do think your memories were modified."

"What do you think is changed?"

"Something is modified during the six months after our breakup at the university."

Suddenly she was worried. Just the idea made her feel... anxious. "Is it really that important?"

After a moment, he sighed. "I suppose not. Let's not think about it right now."

Did they sleep? Did it matter if they did? She knew he could never resist her kisses, and that once she wriggled her knee around his hip, he lost any resolve he might have had. At some point later that night he tightened his arms around her. He kissed her head and whispered, "I love how determined you are to be with me."

She smiled. "Severus, you know I lo—"

He put his finger over her lips. "I do indeed, but you shouldn't say it when I can't answer."

"You just said..."

"I told you long ago that there are many things I love *about* you."

"Oh."

"I said at the time that it would take a lifetime to tell you all of those things. I've realized that I better get started."

They took their time in greeting the New Year. Septima's bed proved to be a festive spot, and they were reluctant to leave, yet they knew they had tasks to attend around the castle. Severus took a shower, put on the dressing gown that Septima kept for him, and went out to her sitting room.

When Septima came out of the shower, she put one towel around herself and then used another to dry her hair. She walked into her sitting room and straddled Severus's lap. "How about one more go-round before we check in with our students?" The towel around her fell open as she wriggled herself around, trying to interest him.

"Septima," he murmured. "We have company." He nodded at her easy chair.

She turned and saw her erstwhile date from the night before. She quickly wrapped the towel back around herself. Remus wouldn't be able to miss the implication, but she couldn't help that.

He was already glaring, but his face was even darker as he stood. "Septima, the Headmaster wants to see you as soon as possible this morning. If it was me, I wouldn't hesitate to find out what he wants. Severus, I must admit it's been illuminating." He stood up and looked at them both for a long minute. Then he left.

Septima looked at Severus. "What do you think?"

He patted her behind. "There's plenty of time for more of this. Why don't you go see what Dumbledore wants?"

"Headmaster, you wanted to see me?"

"You needn't sit down, Professor Vector." He didn't look up from some parchment he was writing. "I simply wanted to inform you that Hogwarts will be taking a different direction with Arithmancy next year, and after the spring term your services will no longer be needed."

"Sir?" She couldn't believe her ears.

"Your work this year has been a complete failure and a disappointment to me."

"I haven't done anything different than since the first year I was hired."

"I don't wish to discuss it, Professor. You haven't managed to fulfill the tasks I wished of you this year."

"You mean with Remus? I tried, honestly I did."

He finally looked up. "If you had really tried, you would have succeeded."

"I—"

"Are you willing to try again?"

She couldn't say anything, but her head involuntarily indicated the negative.

"I see. Well, that's that, then."

Septima was shaken to her core, but there was one small bit of brightness to it. "Yes... that's that." She smiled to herself.

Dumbledore was immediately suspicious. "What are you thinking?"

"I—" It was too dear, too precious to just tell him.

His gaze was demanding. "Tell me."

A light caught in his glasses and dazzled her. "It's just that... if you're going to fire me anyway... Severus and I can start a family. I can have his child." She finally tore her eyes from his glasses and looked at the floor. She waited for him to respond, but he didn't say anything for a few minutes.

The moment lengthened, and Dumbledore finally sighed. "All right then, you win. You will remain at Hogwarts, Professor Vector."

She looked up, scarcely able to believe him. He looked a little green in the face, and he was definitely furious. "Headmaster?"

"You will remain at Hogwarts, and there will be no more thought of a child between you and Severus. Is that clear?"

She hid her smile and nodded her head. "Yes, Headmaster."

He snapped his head at his door in a signal of dismissal. Septima turned and smiled as she left. She'd won. He wouldn't interfere in her life with Severus again.

A/N: Thank you to Owlbait for beta reading!

The Mechanics of Whiplash

Chapter 45 of 101

Severus recalls his history with Septima and then remembers a different part of his personal history.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Perhaps a night filled with Septima had added Severus's mind. Under normal circumstances, he would never have opened her door when he heard the knock. As it was, he cursed himself when the wizard who stood there pushed his way in.

"Lupin."

"Snape! I came to check on Septima. Where is she?"

"She's in the shower."

"What are you doing here?"

"Severus pulled the dressing gown closed and shrugged. "Isn't it obvious?"

"You bastard! She needs a man who will be gentle! She needs tenderness!"

Severus was tired enough to sit down on Septima's couch. "You speak as if you think me incapable of such attributes."

"You're a Death Eater."

"Whatever I may or may not have been *in the past*, Lupin, has nothing to do with the relationship Septima and I share. I can assure you that I was exactly what she needed last night."

Lupin sat down and hissed the next part. "She was an innocent! She knows nothing of love."

Severus thought for a moment, remembering. Then he smiled and nodded. "Yes, she was an innocent the night we first became involved, long ago at the university."

"You... and she... since... *then*?"

"Well, there were a few years when she wouldn't speak to me, but for the most part, yes."

Lupin thought for a moment, and Severus could see understanding work its way through his face. "Then when you goaded me about a lover... it was you?"

Severus shrugged.

"You mentioned a child."

Severus winced at the mention of Renée. "Lost," he whispered, "and I wouldn't mention it to Septima. No one knows."

"You almost look human now, Snape. Tell me, why aren't you married? Why play these games?"

"I had foolish ideas when we were young, and now that we both want to marry, Dumbledore won't let us."

At the mention of the Headmaster, Lupin's eyebrow raised. "I never dreamed that you would be interested in Septima. I asked Dumbledore when I saw how close the two of you were, and he gave me a very different impression about you."

"Oh?" This might be interesting. Severus watched the werewolf open his mouth, but Septima came in from the shower. Before she realized they had company, she propositioned him in a way that reminded him of the Septima he had known long before, who was comfortable with her sexuality and confident of him. He regretted the need to stop her.

* * * * *

An hour later, Severus was in his office grading essays when an elf brought him a message from the Headmaster. He carefully put the scrolls away and then went up to the tower where the Headmaster's office was kept. He hadn't seen Septima since her meeting with Dumbledore and didn't know what to expect.

The response to his knock was uninformative. "Enter."

"You asked to see me, Headmaster?"

"Yes. I was just looking through some old notes and thought you might be interested. Have a brandy and a seat." He conjured a comfortable chair and waved at a glass on his desk. It would be better to do what the old wizard asked in order to get it over with. When Severus sat down, Dumbledore handed him an open picture album. Severus caught a glimpse of the old wizard wiping his eyes before he had a chance to focus on what was before him.

It was Lily.

It must have been taken right before she and Potter went into hiding. There she was, smiling and nodding at something off frame. She was as beautiful as ever, beautiful enough to break a man's heart all over again. He traced her face for several moments, and his eyes blurred, making him feel almost as if she was smiling at him.

Severus didn't want to turn the page but found his fingers fumbling at the vellum. Now Lily's lifeless eyes looked directly at him. It was the official photo taken of her as she lay in death on the floor of her son's nursery. Her beautiful body was in perfect condition as she lay there, and the only indication that she was dead was the emptiness of those beautiful green eyes.

"Why did you want me to see this again?" he asked over the lump in his throat. He took the brandy that he was given and swallowed without thinking.

"It occurs to me that you've forgotten why you're here and what you need to work toward."

"I haven't forgotten," he said quietly. His soul felt stripped bare; his grief was suddenly as fresh as it had been thirteen years before. He ached to get away, to find some sort of comfort somewhere. He thought of Septima just as Dumbledore spoke again.

"That witch has distracted you. She's caused you to betray your true love." It was as though he'd been reading Severus's mind. He refilled the brandy, and Severus drank again without thinking.

"Yes."

"You know what you need to do."

"Yes." He said it absently. Something in his mind was fighting for a chance to be considered, but the brandy pushed it away. Lily was important and he had forgotten her. He'd betrayed her memory. How had he gone so far astray?

He barely noticed the hand on his shoulder or the other hand that took the picture book before he could turn any more pages. "There are other ways to assuage your grief than to bury it in some woman."

He must have meant revenge. Severus stood up. "I won't forget that, Headmaster." He placed the glass on Dumbledore's desk and wandered from the office, firm in his resolve to remember Lily and work toward the final victory over her killers.

A/N: Thank you, as always, for reading and reviewing! Thank you especially to Owlbait for beta reading.

The Mechanics of Heartbreak

Chapter 46 of 101

Septima realizes she hasn't won the battle after all.

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Septima couldn't remember the last time she'd been so happy. Certainly never since her pregnancy. At last, she and Severus could be together and no one would try to keep them apart. As long as she didn't get pregnant again, they could spend time together whenever they had no educational tasks to consider and he was free from his other duties.

She went to his lounge and sat on the sofa in a dress he particularly liked. She smiled softly and thought of what she would say when he finally came. She loved him so much that she knew she was flushed in anticipation.

He walked listlessly into the room and sat down in his favorite chair. He put his hand over his face and groaned. Then he looked up and saw her. He stared at her in surprise and then frowned. "What are you doing here?"

"I thought we'd spend some more time together. You said that when we had time later, we could..."

"You thought wrong."

"When I spoke with Dumbledore, I got him to say—"

"I don't care what he said to you. You need to leave."

She looked into his eyes. She didn't see the sort of emptiness she would find if he was hiding his feelings from her. His eyes were *flat*.

"Has something happened? I don't understand. After last night, I thought—"

"Obviously, you thought wrong. Get out, witch." Suddenly, Septima wondered if someone had tampered with him. Did she act this oddly at times? Was that what prompted him to say her memories had been modified?

"Severus, I love you, and you said—"

His face was now angry. "I said a lot of things when I wasn't thinking about what matters. You bewitch me, as any good prostitute could do, and I forget. Now leave."

"I don't understand. What have I done?"

"What's there to understand? I don't want you, witch. You think all you have to do is say you love me, and you befuddle me. I won't have it anymore. Now, for the last time, witch, *LEAVE!*"

Septima stared for a moment at the wand he pointed directly at her. He'd never threatened her before. Maybe he didn't mean it, but she stood up. "I didn't mean... I'm so sorry..." He waved his wand menacingly, and she ran for the door.

* * * * *

"Septima, are you in there?"

She couldn't face Remus, so she just stared at the door. Her eyes were still full of tears, although she'd stopped crying long before. If she let Remus into the room, she would have to live, and for now she wished she was dead.

"Go away, Remus."

"I know you're in there alone. Severus has been at meals, looking like a thundercloud. What happened?"

"I have no idea. Please, Remus, just go away."

"Septima, you still owe me an explanation for this past fall." The knocking started again.

She got up and went to her bedroom where she curled up, not caring if she was asleep or awake. Remus might still be out there, but she didn't care about that, either. None of it mattered. The tears would flow either way.

* * * * *

She blinked in the brightness of the Great Hall when she finally went to breakfast. Septima stared at her plate, unable to decide whether to eat. She didn't look at Dumbledore. She didn't want to see the twinkle in his eye when he gloated over her. Clearly the Headmaster had found a way to beat her at the game they were playing; it didn't matter how. All that mattered was that he had found a way to take Severus from her. She didn't pay much attention to the fact that someone was sitting next to her.

"He's at the other end of the table," said Remus.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Now that my eyes have been opened, I know whom you're not looking at."

"Please, Remus, leave it alone."

"My pleasure. Have I told you how lovely you look?"

Suddenly she couldn't help laughing. She knew her eyes were red and had dark circles under them. She hadn't eaten properly in a week and her robes hung from her in funny ways. If Remus thought she looked lovely, then he needed his eyes checked.

"Is poor eyesight part of your condition?" she asked. She looked up at him for the first time in their conversation. He was actually smiling at her.

"No, actually my eyesight is better than most people's, but I think you're always lovely, even when your sadness is something a person could practically touch." She looked down at her plate again. He squeezed her hand, making her look up. "Let me be a friend to you, Septima." He looked at her so kindly and in such a friendly way that it made her think almost of a dog.

"I could use a friend," she said. She looked at his kind smile and appreciated his warm hand covering her own. Then she realized how awfully she'd been treating him. "I wasn't trying to fool or betray you, all through the fall. Dumbledore told me to stay away from Sev—*him*, and then he told me that I should..."

"He was trying some matchmaking, and you were eager to please him. I understand, Septima."

"Do you?"

"Truth be told, the whole thing has been a bit rushed for me. It's just that Dumbledore thinks we should have a child."

"He's mentioned the same thing to me. I don't think I'm ready, Remus."

"He's got this idea that there would be a way to cure me. I got caught up in that."

Severus's suspicions were true then. She should have listened to him back when he was trying to protect her, when he seemed to care... She needed to stop thinking along that line. She bit her lip. "I understand."

He tilted his head and looked at her. "I don't think you understand at all. I am held prisoner by this condition. If there was some way to cure me, it would change my life."

"So you weren't that interested in me?"

"You're a pretty witch who's as smart as they come. Why wouldn't I be interested in you?" She suddenly felt the warm rush of his kindness and gave him a weak smile.

A/N: Thank you to Owlbait and Kyria of Delphi for beta reading!

A Quantum of Peaceful Life

Chapter 47 of 101

Severus is certain that he has things exactly the way he wants them, now.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Spring 1994

Severus spent his days growling at the students and his nights prowling the halls. There was still no way to tell how it was that Sirius Black was able to get into Hogwarts, seemingly at whim. He intended to find out and then take his revenge upon the traitor who had caused Lily's death.

It was in the midst of one of his late night searches through the castle that he came upon them. Septima was curled up in her usual window, looking down at the grounds. From the way her shoulders shook, it appeared she might be crying, yet again. Severus suppressed a growl of annoyance as he backed into a shadow. Didn't the witch know what that did to him?

Lupin was sitting next to her and patting her knee while whispering something to her. After a moment, Septima turned and smiled at him. She reached her hand over and held his for a moment. He said something else. Then she nodded her head and leaned her face against the window again.

Severus didn't understand why his stomach would clench at the sight in front of him. He had better things to do than dance attendance on some witch. He couldn't allow himself to get tangled in her hair. He didn't have time for her soft body or her warm eyes. He stayed away from that hallway as much as he could.

His meetings with Dumbledore were the cause of actual heartburn. The Headmaster spent far too much time gloating over his matchmaking skills. "Septima and Lupin will have a beautiful child, don't you think? They both have those soft brown eyes and gentle smiles. I had an idea last fall, and Erwin is working on some equations for me. It's a bit tricky, since Septima seems to be a sore subject for him these days, but I think he'll arrive at the correct timing."

"I'm not interested in any of that," said Severus with a low growl.

"Of course not. Have some more brandy. What have you learned from the shopkeepers in town that might tell us about Black's habits?"

On the night of the full moon in May, as he returned to his room after giving Lupin his potion, Septima slipped out of a dark corner. She was holding a wine bottle. "What do you want?" he growled at her.

"I want you to find what's wrong in my mind and restore it. I think it might be keeping me from moving on."

Perhaps it was the fact that he hadn't been in the Headmaster's office for a while, but curiosity overcame irritation. "What did you bring?"

She held up the bottle. "It's an elf-made wine. Perhaps your potion will work better with a magical base."

"I avoided that because it could be too strong."

"I really want to know, Severus. I need to move on, since—" She bit her lip tightly. Something within him smiled at the realization that she didn't want to cry in front of him.

He peered at her. "I won't do this if you're pregnant. I won't risk damaging a child."

She looked away. "That's not an issue at this time."

He couldn't account for how happy it made him. He found himself speaking softly to her, more gently than since New Years Day. "Go to your rooms then, and get out your glasses. I'll come with the potion."

She nodded and smiled hopefully. "I'll be there."

He watched her as she walked away. Her gait had that purposeful motion to it that he had noticed years before. It was still somewhat childlike but all woman. He willed his blood back to all the places it rightly belonged and went to his laboratory for the potion.

As promised, Septima was in her sitting room. To her credit, she hadn't changed her clothing or done anything that might be construed as alluring. She sat down in a manner that could be considered businesslike as he arranged everything on the coffee table. An instant later he was pouring the wine and showing her how much potion he would add. She nodded her head and took her glass.

"Is there something in particular that seems key to all of this? Maybe if I think of it as I drink the wine, it will help."

"I believe it all has to do with your pregnancy with our daughter," he answered. "Are you ready?"

In answer, she sipped the wine. "Thank you for doing this," she said.

"I had nothing else to do this evening," he answered.

"I appreciate it. I know it's nothing to you—"

"It's not nothing," he said lightly.

"I know *I'm* nothing to you."

"I never said that."

"You called me a whore."

"I didn't mean it that way. I—I wasn't in my right mind. Can you forgive me?" Suddenly he realized it was true. He hadn't been in his right mind. Had there been something in that brandy? Of course there had. Everything Dumbledore offered had a little something in it.

"Damn it," she whispered as she shifted her gaze to the table. "I always let you do this to me." He saw tears in her eyes and forced himself to look away.

After about half a glass, she looked up. "I'm starting to feel a little dizzy now. Should I finish the glass?"

He considered the possibilities. "Perhaps if you're a little more conscious, you can direct things a bit. Why don't we hold off until we've had a chance to see how it works?"

"You want me to think about Renée?"

He nodded. "Yes."

"All right then, I think I'm ready."

"Legilimens..."

A/N: Thank you to Owlbait and Kyria of Delphi for beta reading!

A Quantum of Memory

Chapter 48 of 101

Septima remembers several things, some of which seem pertinent. One thing is as clear as ever.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Septima couldn't understand why she was willing to let Severus point a wand at her after their last conversation. She just knew she needed this if she would ever be able to move on. For some reason, she trusted him on an intellectual level if not a personal one. If the potion worked, he might get a paper out of it.

She'd nearly had sex with Remus a few nights earlier. His kisses reminded her of Severus, and she'd welcomed the touch of a wizard as he had slowly undressed her. She had leaned back on the couch, pulling him against her. His hand had moved up her leg and she sighed with desire. "Oh, Severus..."

Nothing had happened for a moment. Then the wizard had sat up, and had started to get dressed. Septima had suddenly realized what happened. "I'm so sorry," she had whispered. "Please, I won't do it again, I promise."

Remus had smiled and kissed her softly. "You're almost ready, but not quite. It won't be long, Septima. I can wait."

Now, tonight, she needed Severus. She needed his potion to help her remember whatever it was that he thought was so bloody important. Without her memories, she would be unable to move on. He obviously wanted her to move on, and Lupin needed her to move on so that he could be cured. This evening could be the key to everything.

She knew a moment of trepidation as Severus pointed his wand, but his eyes were gentle, and she barely heard the spell. She felt him sift through various memories that came to the forefront of her mind as dreams. There were so many things; the potion couldn't be working properly. There was such an odd jumble of memories that she couldn't make anything of it. Perhaps Severus could. The first thing that was in her mind was a night when they were young.

She was basking in the glow of that Descartes print and the fact that Severus had put so much effort and thought into something for her. She wasn't fooled about the price. She knew that it hadn't cost much. That didn't matter. What mattered was the effort he must have put into thinking about it and finding it.

They spent almost an entire day in bed, and there were times when she thought she would die from the delight he brought to her. He seemed so content in those moments. She was sure he loved her. He must have loved her to spend so much time looking for that print.

Then she was in her classroom just before dinner. Gryffindor was having a Quidditch practice, if she recalled it properly, but Hermione Granger wanted to chat about things. Hermione stopped by perhaps once per week just to talk.

"I feel like I can tell you things I can't tell anyone else," she said. "You seem to understand better than anyone. The only other person I have like that is my mum, but she doesn't understand the magical parts."

Septima had to sit down at that. There was something in what the girl had said that she found a bit unsettling. Then again, although she loved her, there was usually something unsettling about Hermione. Sometimes she even felt dizzy around her. To regain her equilibrium, she looked up at the chalkboard. She had just written her conversion equation there before the girl had come to visit.

Hermione asked about the equation and what the intent was. Septima explained it, and the two stared at it for a while. Suddenly, Hermione asked about two terms. "Are they backwards?"

"Why yes, they are." Septima straightened them out with a wave of her wand.

"I don't know how, but I feel like I know this equation, not quite as though I've seen it before, but that it's somehow a part of me," said Hermione. "Isn't that odd?"

"Odd... yes..." said Septima as she fought to control nausea and the rushing sound in her ears...

"...Go to hell," she heard herself tell Severus.

Severus left, and an unbearable pain started in her lower back and then clamped down on her whole belly.

The matron ran over. "You need to relax, dearie."

"My baby is going to die."

"Hush, now. Nothing is certain yet. If you can stop fretting, we'll save this child for sure."

She realized the problem was Severus. Calculating about Severus, thinking about Severus, especially talking to Severus... all these things would have to stop. Suddenly, she knew what she needed to do about this baby.

"All right," she said. "Teach me those relaxation techniques."

Severus pulled her into his arms. He kissed the tears on her eyelids. She pulled away. "I'm sorry, I know you hate this."

"You should hate me for that last memory."

"You know I'll never hate you." There was an uncomfortable silence, and then she thought back upon the memories they'd dredged up. "What do you suppose the memories mean?"

He smiled. "I think it's entirely likely that the first memory was about the day we conceived our child."

She nodded. "It was the time that I most felt as though we loved each other. I know I was presuming upon you—"

He shook his head. "I certainly had feelings for you that I still don't understand, and I had just been crushed by a disappointment. Yet there you were, to comfort and care for me. You gave me confidence in myself as a person worthy of love."

"The second memory seems so disconnected and random."

Severus thought for several moments before speaking. "I've compared Miss Granger to Renée before. Perhaps you've linked them in your mind, too."

She could see in his eyes that it wasn't exactly what he was thinking, but she let it go. The third memory troubled her the most. "Do you think I ended the pregnancy on purpose, and that's why I needed memory modification?"

He pulled her close at that. "I have certain knowledge that you did not do that. I looked. Your records at St. Mungo's indicate that your pregnancy ended naturally. Besides, I don't think you could ever do that."

"If I did, it would explain why I needed memory modification..."

"It didn't happen, I know it didn't happen," he whispered emphatically.

"But—" she never finished the sentence because he kissed her. She thought to herself that she should check the potion he used for aphrodisiac properties, but then he had a tendency of kissing her when he wanted her to stop talking. Somehow they were lying on her bed and most of their clothes were off. This wizard knew exactly how to touch her, how to kiss her, and how to make love to her. This was the wizard she loved.

"Oh, Severus..."

There was a groan of pleasure in response, and she knew, as she lost track of conscious thought, that she'd gotten it right this time.

A/N: Thanks to Owlbait and Kyria of Delphi for helping me through this one with a minimum of confusion!

The Mechanics of Watching and Waiting

Chapter 49 of 101

Severus changes his dose of brandy and rediscovers some of his long-held opinions.

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Severus forced himself to get out of Septima's bed. Part of him wanted to stay with her and forget about everything else, but some vestige of that brandy potion reminded him that he had duties. She reached for him, and he gently set her hands away. "You know this doesn't change anything."

She opened her mouth to say something, but then nodded. "I didn't actually expect this. I truly just wanted to work on the memory modification." She looked at him entreatingly. "Please believe that."

"I do believe it." He sat on the bed and couldn't resist running his fingers through her hair.

"Did you find what we need?"

He shook his head. "We still don't know how your memories were modified." *And you still don't know about our daughter,* he thought. "When Lupin is ill in June, perhaps we can try again."

She looked out her window. "I may be pregnant by then. Dumbledore has someone working through equations for him to see when the best moment is. I'll have to swallow whatever it is that resists it and go through with it then. He says that if I have a child that's exposed to Remus's illness but healthy, he might be able to cure Remus."

Severus thought through the premise. It sounded a little like the vaccination technique that Muggles used. Dumbledore must be planning to use the umbilical cord. Yet if the child was a werewolf, she could be torn apart by it. "Are you willing to do that, Septima? Do you want to tie yourself to him for your life? Are you willing to risk your own health?"

She shrugged. "Why not? I've come to realize that Remus isn't interested in me for any long term purpose. Dumbledore tried to match us up, but mostly he wants this child for as long as it takes to cure Remus. I think Remus is interested in someone else but fears trying to make a life with her as he is. He and I are going to have our fling, then I'll have the baby, they'll get what they need, we'll part ways, and then I'll finally have someone to share my life with. I won't lose this baby. Dumbledore will take care of everything"

"Septima..." He felt overwhelming guilt and sadness. She was being treated as if she was disposable, and she was letting them do it. Had he, through his own selfishness and foolishness, taught her that?

She lifted her hand to the side of his face. "I've told you before that I love you. I'll always love you and nothing will change that. I know I can't hold you to me, so I'll let you go. This way I can have a small someone for me."

"How can I leave you like this?" he asked. "I feel as though I owe you something."

She turned away. "Dumbledore was right. He said you would feel obligated. Please don't. Circe knows you've done little enough to make me love you; it's not your responsibility to deal with it."

That stung, even if it was true. "All right then. This was a beautiful moment, Septima. I'm sorry it has to end."

She didn't answer him. She just nodded her head as she curled up on her bed. He gathered his clothes and potion vial and prepared to leave. Just as he walked into the hallway and shut the door behind himself he realized why she had been unable to say goodbye. He pressed his hand and ear to the door. He couldn't hear her, but he was sure he'd left her in tears.

* * * * *

He couldn't resist. That night he walked close enough to her window to see that she was there. Lupin was there, too, holding her and cradling her head against his chest. It was a tender scene, except that Septima's eyes were red and teary. Lupin was comforting her, then. Severus wondered if Lupin knew why she was upset.

He asked himself again how he could leave her to this terrible choice. The Muggles would call her a surrogate, but she was nothing to Dumbledore and Lupin but a vessel for a potions ingredient. Severus could only hope that the witch who was spared was worthy of Septima's sacrifice.

A few nights later, he happened to walk down that hallway and saw them again. A wireless was sitting on the window seat, but Septima and Lupin were in the middle of the hall. He was showing her the steps to some dance, and she was doing horribly. They were both laughing.

As Severus watched, Septima tripped, and Lupin pulled her into his arms to keep her from falling. Time stopped as they clung together and she regained her equilibrium. Lupin didn't let her go. He freed a hand and used it to tip her chin up.

It was all wrong. The look in Septima's eyes as she shut them in anticipation of the kiss was wrong. The arch in her back as she pressed up into the other man's body was wrong. The soft sigh that escaped her as that man clenched a fistful of her skirt was wrong. Septima kissing anyone but him was *wrong*. A low growl escaped Severus's throat, and she opened her eyes and saw him.

As he stepped back into the shadow, he saw the look she almost always had for him, followed by dismay. It had been wrong for him to watch, very, very wrong. Yet he couldn't suppress his elation. When he had come upon Septima and Lupin, they had been headed for the bedroom. That single glance between Septima and himself ruined it.

* * * * *

"Erwin has finally come through," gloated Dumbledore. "We now know the exact hour when Remus and Septima should conceive their child."

"Oh?" Severus feigned boredom. He pretended to nurse his glass while using a silent spell to make the brandy disappear. After three weeks of this practice, his head was much clearer. He thought of at least a dozen potions Dumbledore might have used to dose him. No doubt Dumbledore and Flammel came up with some others while they were working together. It might be anything.

Dumbledore looked carefully at him and waved a hand. "Never mind. You don't care about that."

Severus traced the rim of the glass. "Did you want me to make the potion for Lupin?"

There was quite a bit of peering over the half moon glasses. "I think not. There's a potion Nick and I worked on that will be suitable. Oh, and by the way, we shouldn't need the June Wolfsbane, either"

It was Severus's turn to wave a hand and then yawn. "Well then, I think I shall go. I was planning to look around Hogsmeade later."

* * * * *

A week later, he was stirring the June Wolfsbane potion. Dumbledore's plans or not, Severus was determined to have the potion on hand as long as there was a werewolf in the castle. He was just about finished when he became aware of her in his laboratory. "Septima?"

"I need your help." She sounded strangely flat.

A/N: This has been beta read by Owlbait and Kyria of Delphi. Thank you to both of them, and also to all the readers and reviewers!

A Quantum of Compulsion

Chapter 50 of 101

Septima knows she shouldn't, but she goes to Severus for help.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

She wandered down to the dungeon with an odd feeling in her head. It was almost as if she was floating above herself and watching the whole thing. She didn't know how she dared to go to him, but she didn't know how she could do what was asked of her if she didn't. She stood in the doorway and watched as he brewed his potion. As always, he was an artist. He had such grace and skill.

What she could feel of her heart flipped over as it always did. After today, he would be gone from her forever. She understood that much of whatever animosity was between him and Remus. Yet if she didn't go through with this there would be nothing for her. Dumbledore had made that clear as he poured her tea at breakfast and again

at lunch.

He looked at her, and she heard her voice say that she needed his help. She watched him set the burner on low and close the notebook he used. "What do you need?"

"I need you to cut my hair." She offered him the shears in her hand.

He frowned. "I'm no barber, witch."

She blinked several times. "I don't think I can go through with it if Remus touches my hair. I promised myself I would never cut it again... that it would only be cut if you did it."

"Go through with what?"

She mumbled, "Remus... baby..."

"You're a bit off, aren't you?" He stepped close to her and touched her forehead. "What have they done to you? They gave you some potion, didn't they?"

She tried to shrug. "The Headmaster said it would calm me and reduce my inhibitions..."

Realization was dawning on his face. "You're expected to have sex with him today? Have you—?"

She blinked a few more times. "Not yet. They said his sickness would be at maximum potency in a couple of hours, and the chance for the strongest defense would therefore result..."

Severus turned green. He looked at his cauldron and nodded. Then he took her hand and said, "Come to my rooms then. You need a good brush out first; your hair's as messy as our—" He stopped talking.

She was a bit fuzzy, but she had followed the conversation up until that point. "Messy as what?"

He shook his head. "As messy as I've ever seen it, I mean."

"All right, but please hurry. I came as soon as I was free today, but I need to go to Remus's office as soon as we're done here. Dumbledore says I can't be late."

He sat her down on his couch and stood behind her, running the brush through her hair. "So you're to... perform... and then go back to your rooms?"

She shook her head. "Dumbledore told me to be prepared to spend the night. He said something about the proof that it worked in the morning."

Severus stopped brushing for a moment. "You can't do this, Septima."

She turned her head. "I have to. After breakfast they came to my lounge and told me."

"Told you what?"

"The calculations are for tonight, after dinner but before full dark."

"That's why Dumbledore said he wouldn't need the potion tonight." He whispered it as if to himself. Then louder he said, "You can't do it, Septima. As much as I hate the idea of you having his child, you simply must not spend the night."

"What are you talking about? What harm could come to me from staying the night with a man who's sick?" She was feeling dizzy but also panicky despite the calming potion. Something was trying to make itself understood in her mind.

Severus knelt before her. "I love that you want to help, and I love that you came to me when you needed help, but Septima, please think about this."

"Are you trying to tell me something about Remus's condition?"

"Use that brilliant mind and think a moment. Why would they want you right before dark, right before the moon rises... the full moon? Septima, if he doesn't recognize you as his mate when he's... sick... he will tear you apart. When the moon sets you'll either be pregnant or dead."

From the back of her mind came the smell of aconite in his dungeon. She looked at Severus, and he nodded. "The potion you've been making... is Wolfsbane?" She sat further into the cushions and closed her eyes. She needed to be brave. Tomorrow, none of this would matter any more. She took several deep breaths until she felt almost asleep. Then she heard her voice say, "If you could cut it straight across, just about the height of my chin... I'll be able to fool myself into thinking it's still long, but he won't be able to touch it like you always do..."

"Septima, you can't. If he fancies another witch, he will know you're not his mate."

"I'll be the mother of his child. Besides, Remus would never hurt me."

"Never on purpose, Septima, I agree, but he won't be taking the Wolfsbane. The illness will be stronger without it, giving a greater chance for the cure Dumbledore hypothesizes. He won't be in his right mind."

"There's nothing else for me to do, Severus. I've waited so many years for a happy ending with you. You've made it clear that it's not coming. Will it really matter whether I'm dead or alive? Please, just cut my hair. I need to go to him soon."

A/N: Thank you, as always, to Owlbait and Kyria of Delphi for looking this over for me.

A Quantum Change

Chapter 51 of 101

Severus makes a decision.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Severus had not known such fear since the moment he realized the Dark Lord meant to kill Lily.

He would never love Septima in the same way, but suddenly he realized she was just as important to him. She was the witch who loved him unconditionally and the one who made his unbearable life easier in many ways. She was also the mother of his child, and he realized he still hoped that one day there would be others. It didn't take long to decide what he would do. He would be taking advantage of the four or more potions Dumbledore had no doubt dosed her with, but he didn't think Septima would mind when it was over.

"Come on, then, let's take care of you," he said. He took the shears from her hand and set them on a table.

She sighed in obvious relief. "Thank you, Severus. You've never failed me."

"Actually, I have," he said, "but I've never really wanted to hurt you." He lifted her to her feet, put an arm around her to steady her, and walked her into the bedroom.

"Have you scissors in here?" she asked.

"Everything we need is right here," he said soothingly. He sat her on her bed and started working at the fastenings of her clothes.

"I've never had this with a haircut," she observed as he undressed her. "It's been a while, of course, but they always put a sort of robe on top of whatever I'm wearing, to keep the hair from getting all over me."

"This is a very special moment," he said. He was undressed by then, too, and sat next to her on the bed. He ran a hand through her hair, and she purred like a cat. "Septima, I can't stand for you to go into danger. I won't let you be with another man. For whatever reason, we belong together. I can't make any promises about love or marriage, but I do promise that we won't be separated any more. I haven't stood up to Dumbledore the way I might have."

"He'll fire me."

He shook his head. "I don't think so, but there is another consideration. Can you think clearly for a moment?"

"Yes."

He wasn't so sure, but there was no time to wait. "Unless I'm mistaken, he probably put a fertility potion in that tea he gave you." There was a look on her face. He ran his hand through her hair again and settled it at her waist. "You won't be going to the werewolf's bed tonight. I'm going to keep you here with me the entire time. Septima, are you willing?"

He didn't need to hear her answer. It was written in her eyes. "Yes, Rowena help me, I'm always willing with you."

Severus gently pushed her into the pillows and started touching her. She sighed and immediately started arching up toward him, impatient for what was to come. She said there was a potion to lower her inhibitions in that tea. He was sure that it must have actually enhanced certain impulses when she pushed him to his back and started touching him. When she kissed him, he ceased to worry about whether she really wanted it. This was Septima as she'd always been, if a little bolder than usual.

He took his time. He wanted to remember everything about her as he made love to her that evening. He felt her bend her head into his chest and suddenly he couldn't stop himself. Nothing existed at that moment except the woman in his arms and the pleasure she gave him.

Now that he knew what she meant to him, his passion took on new emotion. He'd always had tender feelings for her, but now he knew a sense of belonging to her and she to him that he'd never allowed before. A feeling he couldn't name—perhaps it was joy—came over him as they finished and she fell dead asleep.

It was as though the potions were designed to do no more than get her through the act a single time. Perhaps Dumbledore felt enough kindness for Septima to wish her unconscious through the worst of the ordeal he had planned for her. If he hadn't included a substance for that, then one of his other potions had it as a side effect. She snored quietly in Severus's arms as he kissed her softly and told her how sweet she was.

As for himself, Severus felt rejuvenated. All the cobwebs caused by that brandy potion were finally cleared from his mind. He quietly got out of bed and put his robes on. He hastily penned a note and left it on his pillow. Then he went out to his laboratory, carefully locking Septima into his apartment. No one would be able to get in or out until he undid the spells or died. The Wolfsbane was absolutely perfect, so he poured a goblet of it and went up to Lupin's rooms. It would be an uncomfortable confrontation, but he was determined it would be the last.

* * * * *

Lupin didn't answer his knock. He thought back and remembered Septima's saying that she had been instructed to go to Lupin's office. He went around to that door, which was open. No one was in the room when he entered. Severus wanted to get back to Septima, so he thought to place the goblet on the desk and leave.

A scroll that had insulted him earlier in the school year was on the desk. Septima would probably sleep for a while, so he took a moment to look at it. Instead of rude comments, tonight it contained a map of Hogwarts. He looked closer and found the names of various people upon it near dots. The dots moved around, presumably as the students and teachers did. He scanned it, looking for Lupin. He found him, apparently running toward the Whomping Willow tree.

Severus looked out the window; it was dusk. A full-grown werewolf would be roaming the grounds of the school within an hour. He glanced at the scroll one last time, searching for his own rooms. Septima was still there, unmoving. She would be safe. Their daughter was another issue.

He didn't need to think any further about it. He simply ran, through the hallways of the school, down across the lawn toward the tree. By the fading evening light he sighted the knot on the side of the tree that Black had shown him all those years ago. He pushed it with a tree branch and threw himself into the tunnel there.

He slowly and carefully worked his way through the tunnel. Then he stood outside the doorway of the room and listened as Black and Lupin told their tale. The two were clearly working together. It was obvious from the way they stood together and finished each other's sentences. Dumbledore was an idiot. He was blinded by his irrational dislike for Septima. Severus backed away from that thought. There was something buried there, some frisson of an idea, but now was not the time to consider it.

He listened to the two talking. They discussed Animagi, werewolves, Lily's death, Peter Pettigrew, and then it got confusing. He wanted his own answers, so he decided it was time to enter the room. Surprise would be of the essence, but what was he facing? A tiring wizard about to turn into a werewolf, a half-starved convict with no wand, and three children in danger, one of whom was his daughter. He had faced worse odds back in the day.

A/N: Thank you for reading and in advance for reviewing!

Thank you also to Kyria of Delphi and Owlbait for looking this over!

A Quantum of the Past

Chapter 52 of 101

Septima learns about Severus's former rivalries and the witch he loves.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Septima awoke with a delicious feeling all through her body. Severus had told her that they would be together. He wanted her for himself enough to keep her from Remus. She recalled them sharing the sort of passion she felt when she simply knew Severus cared for her. Then she noticed the sound of something coming down the hall. She got up and pulled a robe around herself. The sound focused and became speech.

"You have to be in the infirmary! You have injuries."

"A few scrapes and scratches, no more."

"You were hit by a spell!"

"By the very people you have in your infirmary as we speak, Madam Pomfrey. Too much has happened. I won't be their laughing stock as you work me over."

It was Severus. She looked toward the bed and realized it was empty; how had he been injured? Septima glanced at a clock and realized that several hours had passed. She went to the door and turned the handle, but it wouldn't open. She was locked in.

"Severus, how are you to recover if I can't look at that wound?"

"All three hit me with the same harmless spell at the same time. How bad could it be?"

"Severus." Poppy was not taking no for an answer.

There was a mumble at the door and then the sound of unlocking. "You may look at it as I sit down on my own couch. I'm warning you though; I have company. You're not allowed to be shocked."

"I've known school boys long enough to not be shocked by anything—Septima!"

She pulled the robe tighter around herself as she saw the school's Matron. Then she saw Severus and smiled shyly. His face looked like a dark night but softened as he looked at her. "Did you rest well?" he asked.

She nodded. "I only just woke... but you're injured! Sit down and let Poppy look at you. I can go back into..." She pointed behind herself at the bedroom door.

"Sit next to me, please," he said. She did, and he sat quietly while Poppy poked and muttered to herself.

"I suppose they might have done worse to you," she said. "I'll send down an ointment for the bruises and scrapes." Then she tapped his forehead and whispered a spell. He clutched Septima's hand when it stung. The skin around his wound smoothed out and the angry red color of it disappeared.

A few minutes later, Severus and Septima were staring at each other while sitting on his couch. "I just woke up. I had no idea you were gone until I heard you coming down the hall."

"I don't know how to explain it all."

She watched various emotions play over his face. "Tell me, if you like." She looked down at her hands. "Or you don't have to if you don't want to. I don't mean to pry."

He pulled her close when she said that. "You're so easy on me, Septima, far easier than I deserve."

"I never know exactly how you want me to be," she said. "I want to know everything, but I know you like your privacy."

"My damn privacy has destroyed the family we could have had," he said. He took a deep breath and said, "You were sleeping so sweetly that I went to take Lupin his Wolfsbane. I was determined that he would understand that you are going to be with me from now on. Plus, there was a safety consideration."

She nodded. "We wouldn't want a full-strength werewolf wandering the halls of the school."

"Exactly. When I got to his office, I found a special map that showed me he was headed for the Shrieking Shack. I was nearly killed there by Lupin as a werewolf when we were students. I had to go."

A wave of worry went through her. "You went back to where you might have been killed!"

"When I got there it was even worse. Sirius Black and three students were there. Our—Miss Granger and her friends Potter and Weasley."

Septima suddenly felt a pang of worry. "With a convict and a werewolf? Are the students safe?"

"There was quite a bit of scuffle, but I was finally able to apprehend the man who—who..."

Septima knew what he meant. She had long since figured out that his special witch must have been one of those killed when Sirius Black had blasted that London street. "The wizard who killed the witch you love."

"Yes."

She folded her hands around herself. "So it's over now?"

"Not hardly."

A house-elf popped into the room and handed Septima a jar. "Mistress Matron says to puts on all cuts, scrapes, and bruises."

"Thank you," said Septima as the elf popped away. She turned her attention back to Severus. "More happened?"

"You know Miss Granger has that Time-turner?"

"Yes, and I understand she's been quite careful of it."

"I think she's used it inappropriately tonight, but she was brilliant. W—her parents should be proud of her. Dumbledore seemed quite pleased when he told me that Black

has escaped.”

“So a mad killer is still out on the loose?”

“No—yes! The killer is still out there, but it turns out the traitor to the Potters was never Black.”

She looked at the jar in her hands. Was he so tired that he was getting confused? “You’re going to have to explain that one to me.”

“We all thought that Black had blasted Peter Pettigrew and a street full of bystanders. Black’s story, tonight, was that Pettigrew had been the traitor, Pettigrew had killed all those people, and Pettigrew has been living all these years, often within this castle, in an Animagus form.”

She waved the jar in her hand and nearly dropped it. She had forgotten it was there. “Is any of that true?”

“Dumbledore believes Black.”

A/N: Thank you to Kyria of Delphi and Owlbait for the beta reading!

A Quantum of Tranquility

Chapter 53 of 101

Severus finishes telling his story and finds something he needed.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Severus stood under the spray of water in his shower and ached. During the fight in the Shrieking Shack, he’d been in and out of consciousness, but he was dimly aware of having seen a trussed-up Pettigrew just before the moon hit Lupin and everything had gone to hell.

He knew the Weasley family rat. He could have snuffed its life out dozens of times over the years. In another reality, he could have worked with Lupin and Black to find Lily’s killer. Damn Black and his foolishness! Why did he have to search for Pettigrew by himself when Severus and any number of other people would have searched with him?

He slung a towel around himself and thought of the lies he’d believed all these years. He stalked into the bedroom and looked with surprise at Septima. He’d almost forgotten that she was there.

She looked worried when he walked in. She was still holding the ointment jar, awkwardly. “I thought I could help you, but maybe you want to be alone. I should go upstairs to my own rooms, instead.”

“No,” he said, suddenly terrified of being alone. He grabbed her wrist. It was too reminiscent of their early days, so he slid down to her hand and grasped it. “I said you’re going to be with me from now on. I think I need you.”

“If it’s what you want.”

“I do.”

Septima held the jar up. “Shall I put it on for you?”

“Please.” He groaned as he lay down on his bed.

After setting the candles in the room to full luminosity, she sat down and bit her lip as she looked over his back. She traced a scar he received during a scuffle when he worked for the Dark Lord. “Did all of this happen after we parted at the university?”

“I was a Death Eater, love, with all the rights and privileges implied thereby.”

She applied the ointment to several bruises and then a scrape or two. The last made him jump a bit. “I’m sorry, I guess it stings, then?”

He rolled over, exposing the worst of the night’s damage. Black had let him bump into the ceiling of the cave as he led him through it. Perhaps it was intentional, or perhaps Black didn’t have very good control over Severus’s wand. Septima gasped and went to work.

She put ointment on his face and traced a tear she found. “You’re mourning her all over again, aren’t you?”

How could she have such compassion for him? He reached up and touched her hair. “You’re too easy on me. Far, far too easy.”

“How am I supposed to be? I love you. I want you to have what you need.”

“I love that you accept me and don’t try to change me. She could never just take me as I came.”

“She was beautiful, wasn’t she?” Septima stopped what she was doing to pull the robe more closely around herself.

“I’d never seen anything like her the first time I saw her. I’d never seen a person so alive.”

Septima tipped her head down and looked at his legs. She was very careful as she worked, and she was very careful as she asked her next question. “Surely you made love to her.”

He answered without thinking. “Once. It was a dream come true when she came around and offered herself. It was a nightmare when I realized it was all a lie. She used me to spite the boy who eventually became her husband, because they’d had some spat. She was the love of my life, but she didn’t want me. I swore there was no other woman for me.” He realized that what he was saying hurt Septima deeply. He couldn’t see her face, but he saw the set of her shoulders. “Yet I couldn’t stop wanting you, Septima. You gave me a pleasure I never found with her. There were days I hated you for it.”

“I’m sorry.”

He reached for her and pulled her up to lie close to him. "You have no reason to be sorry. It was my own inability to reason through my various conflicts that caused the damage. Then there were the Death Eaters. They were so kind to me, so eager to have me join. I blame myself for what happened to Renée and everything that's happened to you since then."

"I don't blame you. If I had been stronger, more capable in my own right..."

"I saw her that day, right after I saw you at St. Mungos. She was vicious, goading me about you and the baby. I sent her away, and you wouldn't take me back. All I had was that grainy ultrasound picture and the thought that maybe there might still be a chance to be with her. Then she was killed."

"Oh." Septima raised her hand and caressed his cheek. "I figured out that's why you came to me... that night."

"You put me back together, Septima. I don't think she could have done so under similar circumstances. I don't think she would have bothered. Still, one thing that's kept me going all these years was the thought of somehow getting revenge upon the people responsible. When I got the chance, I was going to blast the traitor, Sirius Black. Now I know that I had the opportunity to capture—or kill—the real traitor so many times, and I failed her."

She got up and went into the bathroom. Had he gone too far? Had he upset her just when he needed her? She was so skittish earlier; was she going to leave him?

He was almost embarrassed at how relieved he felt when she came back. She held a flannel in her hand, which she used to wipe his tears. "I'm so sorry," she said.

There were so many things he should do, including apologize to her for being an ungrateful git. Instead, he felt something give way inside him. He clung to her and wept for his losses as she held him, stroking his hair and his back. It felt good to let it out, and Septima made him feel comfortable and safe. She would keep his secrets, and she wouldn't think less of him. She would simply be there whenever he needed her.

The clock was starting to chime a morning hour when he lifted his head and said, "I need you, Septima... please?"

She slid down next to him and kissed him hard. "You never need to ask."

A/N: Thank you to Kyria of Delphi and Owl bait for the beta reading!

I want to say thanks to everyone who wrote, read, reviewed, and/or voted in the drabble competition this week. It was a lot of fun. Keep an eye out for the drabbles this week, too!

The Mechanics of Second Guesses

Chapter 54 of 101

Septima, having been down a similar road before, isn't sure what is happening.

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He was voracious. He sought the secret places of her body as though they might hold the reassurance he was looking for. She gave him all she could and hoped it was enough. She thought it might be when he fell asleep with his head between her breasts.

At some point he rolled away from her, exhausted by his long night. She was wakeful, however, and went to sit in his lounge. There were too many things to worry about. She feared Dumbledore's reaction once he realized she had disobeyed him, she feared Remus now that she knew what he was, and she feared Severus. His openness of the last night and reassurances notwithstanding, there was too much history to simply believe that he would accept her as part of his life now.

She made herself dizzy with all of the possibilities and dozed off. The numbers called to her, waking her and adding a new level of tension. She hated to use the numbers this way and feared what they would tell her. She tried to sleep again and found herself reaching for parchment and a quill.

As had long since become her custom, she first placed the rune for Renée on the parchment. According to the equations, the girl was safe, if not perfectly healthy. Septima grimaced at the assertion that her mythical child had received some minor injuries the night before. She tossed the parchment to the side. She had dozens with similar nonsense messages. It kept her humble, she supposed, that her art could be this flawed.

Next she tried working with Dumbledore and Remus. The results made her shrink away. Her next conversation with those two wizards was likely to be uncomfortable, to say the least. She squared her shoulders. She would never apologize for loving Severus. She would take the punishment for her actions if that happened.

She took one last parchment with a trembling hand. She felt as though she had to know about herself and Severus. She very carefully drew her runes and watched as the equations took shape. Then she slid it away before it finished. Suddenly, she didn't want to know. There were too many possibilities. It was likely that she was the last thing that could make Severus happy.

She heard a chuckle behind her and then his arms were around her. "I think that came out right."

"I can't—I shouldn't have checked it."

"Go ahead and look, love."

The answer showed Severus's rune and her own, with a third rune between. She shook her head and pointed at it. "I don't know that one."

"It looks rather like the one you made for Renée, doesn't it?"

"I don't understand."

"Don't you?" he sounded amused.

"You're making fun of me."

He chuckled. "Don't be so unsure of yourself. At any rate, it shows that I'll be happy with you."

"But with this other rune between us."

"Are you being deliberately obtuse, Septima?"

"I..." It couldn't mean anything. Even if it showed his happiness, it certainly didn't mean it was going to happen.

"Come back to bed, witch," he said.

She allowed herself to be led away. He tugged the sleeves of her robe and her arms over her head as he kissed her and simultaneously pulled the robe up her arms and off. "I like doing this," he said.

His own robe disintegrated in thin air. He pulled her close and pressed their bodies together. "Mm, this is quite pleasant."

His hands dug into her hair as he kissed her some more. "This is bliss," he whispered.

She kneaded his shoulders and back as he kissed her, stroking and caressing. "Oh, yes, love..." he whispered.

He slid between her knees and made her gasp. "Sev—Severus..."

"Just tell me you think I don't enjoy this." He grunted in pleasure and moved closer. Her hands grasped his bum and massaged it, holding him close as she tried to move closer. His hands slid up her ribcage, fondling and gently touching until she moaned and sighed. She clung to him as she came apart, sighing and crying his name.

He kissed her as she trembled in his arms. Then he groaned and started to shudder over her, making her sigh again. He held her tightly, moving closer and closer until with one last groan it was over. She clung to him, still in a state of hopeless pleasure, while he took her face in his hands and kissed her eyes and forehead.

He leaned up on his elbows and continued caressing her face. "You're beautiful right now."

"I'm not like—"

"You're wearing the face of a woman in love, a woman who loves *me*, a woman who's just found bliss in my arms. I've never seen anything to compare to it."

She looked up at him, unsure what to think.

He shifted to her side, but he continued running a hand through her hair. "I'm happy," he whispered. "It doesn't matter what happens outside the walls of this room; you have made me happy right here and now. You made that scroll come true."

"But the other rune..."

"Ah, my brilliant witch, can't you guess?"

A/N: Thank you to Owlbait and Kyria of Delphi for beta reading!

The Mechanics of Prevarication

Chapter 55 of 101

Dumbledore draws an incorrect conclusion.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

The other side of the bed was empty the next time Severus awoke. He couldn't remember the last time they had simply enjoyed being together, and he wanted to continue. "Septima, I need you here," he called to the bathroom.

There was no answer. He got up and walked through his apartment, slowly realizing that Septima had left. He glanced at the scrolls she had worked with a few hours earlier. The one on top was one describing an unhappy Lupin and a furious Dumbledore. Had she gone to face them by herself?

He dressed and quietly walked upstairs. As he approached the door to Septima's office, he heard Dumbledore's voice echo down the hall.

"A boy, Remus, good work. I thought with everything else that went on yesterday, you missed your chance. Yet you've managed to get the witch pregnant."

What was this? When had Lupin had the slightest chance? He peeked into the office and saw Septima. She looked from one wizard to the other, her mouth gaping. Remus chuckled with a kind smile on his face. "I'm sure it's all Septima's doing, Headmaster."

He couldn't hold still. "Septima's... doing?" They turned toward where he stood in the doorway.

"Congratulate Remus, Severus. The witch is with child."

"Indeed?" He looked at Lupin, who didn't look like an expectant father so much as a mischievous student.

"My scanning spell tells me she carries a boy."

Ah... the werewolf was taking undue credit. Severus looked at Septima and bowed toward her. "I prefer the custom of congratulating the mother," he said. "She is the one who will do all the work."

"I agree with Severus," said Remus. "Well done, Septima!" He slid an arm around her and kissed her cheek.

Severus likewise put an arm around her and kissed her other cheek. He whispered in her ear. "I don't know how this conversation started, but let's ride it out, shall we?" Aloud he said, "My... congratulations... to the parents of the child."

Lupin made a show of looking thoughtful. "You know, Headmaster, I'm going to have to leave Hogwarts. I'd feel a lot better if there was someone to look after Septima and the baby."

Dumbledore shrugged. "I'll be at all of her checkups to look out for your interests."

"But from day to day, she should have some sort of caretaker."

Dumbledore looked at Septima thoughtfully. "You're right, Remus; the witch does seem to get into trouble."

Septima, who was clearly having difficulty with the deception, huffed in protest. Severus nudged her leg with his knee. He thought he knew where Lupin was going with this.

"With all the things that could come up, it might be a good idea to have Severus look after Septima and the baby."

"You don't mind, Remus? With their history?"

"Not in the least. The child is the plan, after all. You know he will look after her properly, if only because he won't need to make Wolfsbane anymore if I'm cured."

"He's very busy with other things."

"Somehow, I think he'll find the time, won't you, Severus?"

Severus looked at Septima in assessment. "I suppose I could take it on. The witch would have to stay in my quarters, so that I could keep her out of trouble at night."

Dumbledore looked from one wizard to the other. "It's against my better judgment, Remus, but it's up to you to choose how to care for this child."

Septima huffed again, but Lupin tapped her arm. He looked with amusement from Dumbledore to Severus. "I'm sure that will work to everyone's satisfaction."

"Well, if that's to be the case, I would like to discuss this further in my office, Professor Vector. I'll leave you two gentlemen to make whatever arrangements you feel necessary between you."

The door was scarcely shut when Severus had his wand in Lupin's throat. "Is there any possibility that the child is yours?"

Lupin frowned as he recalled a previous night. "A month and a half ago, she was lying in my arms, pliant and ready. A small move would have made her mine, but she whispered your name."

Severus tried not to smile. He failed, badly.

"You think it's funny? I suppose it was. Many men would have simply shagged her under the circumstances. All we needed to do was conceive a child after all; did it really matter? I couldn't do it. She was horrified at what she said and promised it would be different, but I couldn't take that chance. And you were there a few weeks ago when we were dancing. She had started initiating our little intimacies, but as soon as she saw you in that corner, it was over."

"Is. The. Child. Yours?"

"I've never made love to her. Just now, Dumbledore came in, ready to fire her, but when he saw me here, he jumped to another conclusion. He scanned her for a child and discovered the result of what you no doubt did. He jumped to the wrong conclusion, and you saw the rest. I had no reason to enlighten him."

"I suppose you think it's quite amusing. As if it wasn't enough to help your friends take everything away from me, now you claim my son."

"I won't deny that it appeals to my enjoyment of a good scam, but I will not claim your child. My whole purpose was to protect Septima. When the time is right, I'm sure it will be obvious that you're the father."

Severus sighed. Gryffindor valor had carried the day, but Lupin wasn't done and his eyes now narrowed. "I should hate you for the whispers among your snakes that resulted in my having to leave Hogwarts, but I understand that, too." He took a breath and spoke very carefully. "A man whose daughter was nearly torn to death by a werewolf will do anything in his power to protect her if he can't control her reckless friends."

He was startled by that. "You had no way of knowing—"

"You told me your child was lost. A baby who's lost isn't necessarily dead. I figured that your child would have been between first and fourth year. I pieced the rest together. She's the image of her mother."

"Is it that obvious?"

"I think it would have to be pointed out. I found it because I was looking for it. You love your daughter, as is understandable, and a man who loves Septima as much as you do can be forgiven the rest."

Severus looked away. "I'm not in love with Septima."

Lupin shrugged. "You had me fooled, then."

He decided to let it go. "I suppose you want me to thank you for throwing this deception over everything."

"It serves its purpose. I know your efforts to protect Harry are increased by your efforts to protect your daughter. Just mind that you don't sacrifice him in your efforts to help her. I might suddenly remember that I never saw Septima last night."

A/N: Thank you to Owlbait and Kyria of Delphi for beta reading.

A Quantum of Shaky Ground

Chapter 56 of 101

Septima struggles to regain her footing in the midst of her changing world.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Septima didn't expect the greeting she would get in the Headmaster's office on this occasion. He guided her up the stairs, holding her elbow whenever a staircase moved. When they arrived, he conjured a soft, comfortable chair for her to sit on. "There you go, my dear. Are you interested in a little tea?"

She shook her head. "I'm fine, Headmaster."

"I wanted to apologize. I misjudged you, Septima."

She was too tired to do anything but burst into tears. "There, there," he said, handing her a handkerchief. He watched her kindly until it stopped.

"I wanted to reassure you that Hogwarts will look after you and your child until its birth."

"Thank you, headmaster."

"Severus's apartment backs up to an empty apartment. We'll be able to put a door in the wall and give you your own bedroom and bath."

"I appreciate that."

"I know you'll want your own space, and I'm fairly certain that Severus will have no time to dance attendance on witches if our plans for next year work out."

"I understand. I'll try to keep out of everyone's way."

"Excellent! If my calculations are correct, we have until next March before the child will be born. Plenty of time to decide about how the adoption will proceed."

"Ad—adoption?"

"There are no unmarried parents at Hogwarts, of course."

So this was what he brought her here for. He did it every time, feigning kindness and understanding. Then, whenever he told her the terrible thing he wanted her to hear, it sounded twice as bad.

"I suppose a great many things might happen by then," she said. "As you say, there is plenty of time to think about it. If that's all, Headmaster?"

"Yes, I believe so, my dear. Run along and do your packing."

She walked dispiritedly to her office and found the putative father of the child that was not yet in her womb, having just started its path through the necessary parts of her body.

"Septima!" Remus stepped forward and pulled her close, kissing her on the lips. Then he stepped back with a smirk.

"I should apologize for not coming to you when I should have, but I..." The whole story sounded dumb to her own ears. She was upset about her *hair*?

"I understand, Septima, you went to him, instead."

"I went to get my hair cut."

His hollow laugh rang out down the hallway. "That's ridiculous enough to be true."

"When I was unable to go through it before, it was because you touched my hair. Severus has always combed it and paid so much attention to it..."

"Severus lavishes attention... on your *hair*? You'll have to do better than that, Septima."

"He's always twitted me about how messy I let it get. He keeps his own much better than you would think. Then potions get into his hair, and..."

He sighed. "I suppose I'll believe you."

"I went to ask him to cut my hair, and he refused."

"So instead you spent the night with him."

"I wasn't going to, Remus. I had every intention of coming to you. I was sure Severus didn't want me, that he would never want me again. If I had your child, at least I'd have someone in my life."

"But after you told your story, Severus convinced you to stay with him."

"I guess it was Dumbledore's potions... It was all like a dream. When I explained that I would be spending the entire night with you, he got very upset and worried. I'm afraid he made me see the nature of your affliction."

"Septima, you weren't going to spend the night with me."

"Dumbledore insisted upon it. He said we'd find the proof in the morning."

Remus looked startled. "He really hates you, doesn't he?"

"He said he wanted to be sure."

"So he was willing to take the very great risk that I would tear you apart, or bite and infect you. What would that do for our child?"

"I'm sure he thought it was the best way."

"Septima, you know I had no thought of loving you, but I've always admired and respected you. I think we would have had an incredible time in bed together, and that we would have made wonderful parents to our child. Yet, I can't get between what you have with Severus. I see now that Dumbledore's plan could never have worked."

A/N: Thank you to Owlbait and Kyria of Delphi for beta reading.

The Mechanics of Protection

Chapter 57 of 101

Severus starts his new role of watching over Septima.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Severus turned to his desk, where the scroll lay. His happiness lay in being with Septima and their child. He traced the rune that he now knew belonged to his son.

There was a knock at the door. Severus waved it open, and Septima stood there. "Is it a bad time?"

Severus walked over to her and brought her to his couch. "It's never a bad time, love."

"I'm so sorry," she said. "Is all of this ok? Would you rather I stay in my own rooms?"

Why was she so skittish? "Septima, do you regret this?"

"Oh, no! Severus... This is what I want, more than anything."

"Then why are you acting this way?"

"I don't trust it."

He nodded. "You don't trust me, you mean. I haven't given you much reason to trust it, have I?"

"How much can you trust me after I spent so much time with Remus?"

"I pushed you. In a way, I pushed you into his arms. I realize now that I didn't really want to do it."

"No? Then why?" She looked confused.

He frowned. "I think it's time we decide here and now that we will not eat or drink anything offered to us by Dumbledore."

She thought for a moment. "There's always something in it."

"He put something into the brandy he shared with me in the evenings. Under its influence, I wanted nothing to do with you."

"So when you aimed your wand at me..."

"Please forgive me. It was as if someone else did it."

"Then you do want to be with me?"

"More than almost anything."

"Dumbledore said you wouldn't have time for me."

"I do have certain obligations, but I want to spend every free minute with you, love."

"But if the other witch were to come here..." Clearly this was something that worried her. He would have to deal with it somehow.

"Septima, if she stood before me now, next to you, I would have to choose the mother of my children."

"Oh."

The look in her face made him want to pound his head. Somehow that hadn't come out right. "I didn't mean it like that. Septima, I would choose you, even if there were no children."

"But you love *her*!"

"She never loved me, and she never made me feel as you make me feel."

"How do I make you feel?"

He didn't know how to answer that. "I don't know. I just know that you've always been there when I need you, and it's damned easy to be with you, when the rest of the world is far too complicated."

"So you want to be with me?"

"Constantly." He held her close. "Fortunately, we have months to be together, now."

"What will happen when Dumbledore finds out the truth?"

"We'll figure that out. I'm sure we have plenty of time to find you a place to hide... with little Nicolas."

He was finally rewarded with a smile. "Nicolas... Is he going to be a great Alchemist?"

He chuckled. "Were you planning for Renée to create whole branches of Mathematics?"

"I suppose Math and Alchemy have quite a bit in common..."

He started looking for buttons. "Just like we have quite a bit in common..."

He kissed and fondled her, enjoying the breathy sounds she was making until there was a knock at the door. Septima leaned back and quickly refastened her clothing as

he walked to the door and yanked it open, intending to scold whoever stood there. Instead he had to adjust his stance. "Headmaster!"

Dumbledore smiled benignly upon them. "I wanted to make sure our newest mother gets her dinner. It's been a long night and day, I'm sure." He walked through the lounge. "I believe the door to Septima's bedroom will be right about here." He knocked on the wall and received an answering knock. "Yes, that will work admirably." He turned to Septima. "May I escort you to the Great Hall, my dear? You'll be eating for two, now."

She could do nothing but look helplessly over her shoulder at Severus as she was led away. He followed close behind, hoping to overhear whatever was confided in Septima's ear. He was sure that Dumbledore didn't trust her or him. Fair enough; he had finally learned how little to trust Dumbledore.

A/N: Thank you to Kyria of Delphi and Owl bait for the beta read!

The Mechanics of Adjusting Plans

Chapter 58 of 101

Septima has a meeting with Poppy.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Septima couldn't help squirming. The whole experience was a bit embarrassing. Having Dumbledore in the room, even if he stood at a respectful distance, didn't help. He stood where he couldn't see anything, fortunately, but he was there, guiding the conversation and the process. "It's such a relief that she conceived when she did; otherwise I would have had to give her a potion and after that it's weeks of waiting again..."

Poppy sighed and frowned as she pressed on Septima's tummy. Septima fretted at that frown. Was something wrong?

She cleared her throat, and Poppy looked at her expectantly. "That ointment you gave Severus last month... There's a little left. Will it work on magical abrasions or just cuts and scrapes?"

"It might help magical abrasions or burns; it certainly won't hurt." Poppy thought for a moment. "With some, it's better to use essence of Murtlap. Of course, when you're looking at something like a Dark Mark... well, there's no way to heal that. You can only use soothing preparations and charms and hope for the best. That ointment may help, come to think of it, but I suppose we don't need to worry about that."

"I just wondered," Septima said. Severus didn't realize he was moaning in his sleep, but the soothing charm she was using on his arm wasn't working as well as it had the first few nights. Perhaps the ointment would help.

Dumbledore made an impatient sound. "She is with child, right? When I scanned a couple of weeks ago..."

"Yes, Albus, she's pregnant. Calm down. A person would think you were the father."

"Don't be ridiculous. I've explained it all..."

"Yes, several times. I'm to deliver the child here at Hogwarts so that you can get blood from the cord for a potion to help Remus Lupin. Your scanning spell was perfectly accurate. She's pregnant with a boy."

"And the child will be born in early March?"

Poppy pressed down again on Septima's belly, making her gasp. When Septima looked up, there was a definite warning in the Matron's eyes. "I think definitely by then."

"Excellent! I'll have to look over my stores and obtain the freshest ingredients. I haven't brewed anything so interesting in years. What a shame Nick Flammel can't be here to work with me..."

Poppy leaned back and lowered the sheet over Septima's legs. "My exam is done, Headmaster. If you have no more questions..." She helped Septima sit up.

"I'll be off to my office then. There are final reports for the school year to file and all that. When should she have a check up?"

Poppy looked at Septima. "A month should be sufficient. It's early, and there is no reason to worry about complications."

"All right then, Septima. I know you had plans for the summer, but you are to come here in a month as Madam Pomfrey says."

Septima clutched the sheet to herself and nodded. The Headmaster whistled cheerily as he walked out of the infirmary. To her the sound was like a death toll. What would he do when he learned what really happened?

"Well, young lady, you're in quite a situation. Does the father know when you really conceived this child?"

Septima's heart skipped a beat. "What do you mean?"

"When was your last cycle?"

She looked blankly at Poppy, who made an exasperated sound.

"When did you last bleed?"

"I knew what you meant," she explained while shaking her head, "I'm trying to remember."

"Don't you keep track of it?"

"I do, but so many other things are more interesting."

Poppy made her exasperated sound again. Septima closed her eyes and pulled at a recollection. It was always such a nuisance. What was she doing that week? "I think it was right after the end of the Easter Holidays."

"That was April, Septima, and now it's the first week of July. That's over two and a half months, not the six weeks the headmaster supposes. That also much better matches the exam. I was starting to question the scanning spell for telling me there was only one baby in there when he's already grown so large."

"So the baby will be born..."

"You may reach the first week of February. You won't go past it."

Septima went very still and thought about it. If the child wasn't conceived the night that Dumbledore had given her all that tea, then the only other possibility was the night she'd had the wine with Severus. Septima's mouth gaped as she looked up.

"Septima, who is the father of your child?"

She pulled the sheet tighter to her chest. "Dumbledore is so sure it's Remus's."

"You're my patient, Septima, not the Headmaster, and you may recall that I saw you in Severus's rooms a few weeks ago when you were supposedly conceiving this child with Remus. Is there more to his protection of you than you're letting on?"

She nodded and whispered, "It's his baby."

Poppy shrugged and sighed. "The Headmaster has some peculiar ideas about Severus, and he's overstepped a few times. Let's see how we can take care of you and this baby. Did you and Severus have sex in early May?"

"We didn't mean to..."

"But you did." Septima nodded, and Poppy continued, "And you weren't taking a potion?"

"I always have in the past, but I wasn't supposed to be with Severus. I was supposed to be getting pregnant with Remus, and it seemed counter-productive."

Poppy patted her knee. "It really isn't any of Albus's business, for all that he thinks he runs the world. Who you choose to sleep with and have children with is your affair, not his. My affair is to make sure you're both healthy, not to be a gossip about your business."

Septima heaved a sigh of relief.

Poppy smiled again. "Now, on to being a proper midwife for a moment. I take it you want to continue this pregnancy?"

"Oh, yes."

"Let's go over some directions for how to have a healthy pregnancy, then..."

A/N: Thank you to Owlbait and Kyria of Delphi.

Family Mechanics

Chapter 59 of 101

Septima makes a new acquaintance as Severus dodges a question.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Lucius couldn't do anything at the Ministry for Severus, but he identified someone who could. Yaxley was out of the question, Rookwood was too craven, and Runcorn worked in the wrong department. Pius came through. As Severus explained it to Septima, the paperwork would be properly filed but then lost until the right moment.

The fact that Septima was farther along in her pregnancy than expected was good news. The child would be born before the old man was looking for it, and there was an opportunity in that change of schedule. Severus wasn't entirely sure how he would exploit it yet, but he knew it would be quite useful.

The plan was coming together, slowly but surely. Another element was overcome when Severus took Septima to his childhood home. He was apprehensive about it, but at this point he had to follow through. Lily had always wrinkled her nose when she visited, following Petunia's lead. How would Septima respond to the place that had shaped so much of his character?

"It's not the fanciest neighborhood, is it?" asked Septima. He looked sharply at her. She wasn't mocking. Her eyes were full of eager interest.

"We don't have to come here," he said in a sudden fit of pique. "We could go to either of our flats near the university."

"I want to see the place where you grew up," she said with a shrug. "It is what it is, of course, but I always wondered..."

They stopped at the door and he tapped the knob with his wand. "Well, we're here," he said.

She leaned up to kiss his cheek reassuringly and put her hand trustingly in his. "Show me."

He slid his arm around her and they walked together into his house. Just off the small hallway was the library. "Oh, this is magnificent!" she said.

He looked critically at the room as she slowly turned and drank it in. He saw the shabby chairs and the table with the wood veneer chipping off. Based upon the way her face was tilted, she was admiring the bookshelves that had been worked into every vertical surface of the room.

"You don't mind, then?" he asked.

She shook her head absently, now walking toward one particular wall. She traced the leather of some covers and shivered sensuously. "Have you read them all?"

He was slightly miffed that she was more interested in his library than himself, but the way she looked at him now was adorable. "There are a few that were my mother's

that I never read, and I think some of hers were actually my grandparents'."

She turned to him and threw her arms around his neck. "I think I could live in this room."

He smiled indulgently. "You'd have to eat."

"I'd bring it in here."

"You need your rest."

"I'm sure with a little Transfiguration the couch could be quite restful."

He pulled her tight and kissed her deeply. "What about the rest of it?"

She started unfastening her robe. "I'm sure that could be quite enjoyable here, too."

He kissed her again, running his hands along her body as he did so. "We can't get carried away. She'll be here any minute."

It was like cold water. Septima stepped away and sat primly on the couch. "I still don't know why you didn't tell me about your mother years ago. You just sprang her on me today."

"I was wasn't ready for it."

She looked up in fear. "You're ashamed, aren't you? Is she going to hate me so much? If she's a midwife, wouldn't she have wanted to care for her own grandchild? Maybe if I'd been coming to see her all those years ago..."

He shook his head. "I was never ashamed of you."

"I saw the way your dodgy friends looked at me back at the university, Severus, and how they sniggered at me after talking to you."

"Don't be ridiculous. You're pureblood." It left his lips before he had a chance to think. Had she really spent all this time thinking that he was somehow ashamed of her? "I told them whatever would keep them away from you."

He saw understanding work through her face, but then cloud over again. "But you were ashamed of me when it came to your mother, or you would have introduced us years ago..."

A new voice spoke. "No, he was ashamed of me. He didn't like to bring his friends here because he didn't want them to see a pureblood witch brought low."

Septima stood up, fear in her face as she looked between the door and him. There was an accusation in the voice that came from the doorway. Severus winced and turned.

"Mother, I've never been ashamed of you." He took Septima's hand and tugged her to the door.

"Mother, this is Septima. Septima, Mother."

Eileen Prince leaned toward Septima and took her other hand. "I've waited a long time to meet you. Let's see about my grandson while Severus tells us what he is ashamed of."

A/N: Thank you for reading and reviewing! Thank you for beta reading from Kyria of Delphi and Owlbait!

A Quantum of Summertime

Chapter 60 of 101

Severus and Septima enjoy their summer.

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Being examined by Severus's mother wasn't as embarrassing as Septima expected it to be. It was certainly much nicer to have Severus's hand in hers when the poking got uncomfortable than to have Dumbledore chatting across the room. Eileen's hands were gentler, too, and her eyes softened as she pressed against the bulge just visible now in Septima's belly. Poppy hadn't been unkind or harsh, certainly; perhaps it was Eileen's attachment to the child that made the difference.

"He's up out of your pelvis, now. I wonder..." Eileen pointed at a drawer in a corner, which opened. A bell-shaped object came toward her. Septima saw that it had a flat disk on its top. Eileen breathed on the disk and placed it on Septima's belly. She leaned down with her ear to the bell side and slid the object around for a bit.

"There he is. *Sonorous!*" A rapid *thumpetty thump* noise came from the object. "He's got a good strong heartbeat."

Severus slid his free hand along Septima's tummy, stopping next to where his mother's hand still held the stethoscope. "So fast."

"It's about right for this stage of his life. It will slow down once he's born."

Eileen smiled and patted Septima on the knee before standing and waving her son out of the room with her.

"We'll just let you change back into your dress."

Some sort of conversation started in the hallway. Septima strained to hear what was said.

There was accusation in her voice. "...you do realize this is not her first..."

"...no, there was one..." Septima couldn't quite make out the murmuring.

"Severus Snape! Do you mean to tell me—"

"It's not like that, mother..." The murmurs continued and Septima couldn't hear any more.

Septima put on the white sundress she had worn that day, wondering if it had been a horrible idea. It sounded like Eileen had found evidence of Reneé and didn't want that sort of woman in her son's life. A horrible, queasy feeling formed in her stomach. There was no help for it; it was the only dress she had with her. Severus liked the way the dress looked on her, she reminded herself as she looked at her hair. That was still as perfect as it had been that morning at Hogwarts. Charity and about a gallon of Sleekeasy's Potion had seen to that.

There was a knock at the door. Septima sucked in her apprehension and her breakfast and said, "Yes?"

Eileen came in and smiled kindly. She cupped Septima's face in her hands and said, "You poor dear, don't worry about a thing. You're perfectly healthy and you won't lose this one."

Septima looked over her shoulder at Severus. His face had a soft smile on it, and her heart grew easier.

* * * * *

"Which apartment are we going to?" she asked.

"Yours. I fancy making love to you in the very first place we ever did, and where we very likely conceived Reneé."

Septima winced at the reminder. "Your mother must have thought..."

"She realized that you'd been pregnant before and asked me if I knew about it. Of course she was angry with me for not telling her back then. She seems to think that she could have cared for you better than the staff of St. Mungo's." He smiled as he took her arm and Apparated.

When they reached the apartment, Septima felt a bit dizzy. "I guess I don't Apparate as well when I'm pregnant," she observed as she clutched his arm ungracefully.

He picked her up in his arms and carried her in. He carried her to the bedroom and whispered into her hair. "I was going to spend the evening discussing interesting things with you, cooking a meal, perhaps dancing. Septima, I can't wait. Are you well enough?"

She nodded. "Suddenly I feel perfectly fine. Don't wait. Please make love to me."

He was so gentle as he undressed her, and so patient as she undressed him. Septima marveled at how natural he seemed in her bedroom, waiting for her to step out of her panties. He belonged in her life and behaved as though he had every intention of staying there.

He started at her belly, kissing the spot where his mother had found the baby's heartbeat. "I love that our baby is inside you," he said, "but I love the rest of your body, too."

Septima could only squeak in surprise as he started to caress and nibble, remarking upon every change that pregnancy had brought to her. He squeezed and fondled as she started to whimper. He batted her hands away as she tried to touch him and kissed her when she started to say it wasn't fair.

And then it was happening. They were together as never before. Septima didn't know if she was breathing or what she was saying. She simply existed and there was nothing else that existed but Severus. As he lost control of himself he breathed out her name and then a word that was sweeter than any she'd heard from his mouth before.

* * * * *

The summer continued with a bliss Septima had never hoped to know. Severus was considerate and almost loving. She allowed herself to enjoy it, yet a part of her still worried that something would happen to separate her from Severus forever.

One thing was becoming clearer as the summer progressed. Some nights, Severus slept fitfully, and she knew his left arm hurt him. She suspected that she knew what was on his arm, but she didn't know for sure. It was a mottled pattern of a rash that looked like hives until one night late in July.

Severus was thrashing around and moaning, "Please, Master..." It worried her to think of him so frightened of anything. She lit a candle and gently uncovered his arm. For the first time, she clearly saw what she always knew must be there but hoped never to see.

Fetching a scroll and quill, Septima perched on the side of the bed and drew the design on his arm. Just copying it made something within her recoil. She took a deep breath and wrote other runes describing the situation. Then she Summoned her wand and tapped the parchment.

She immediately wished she hadn't.

A/N: Thank you to Owlbait and Kyria of Delphi for beta review!

A Quantum of Warning

Chapter 61 of 101

The numbers provide a message, but what are they really saying?

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

The Dark Lord was torturing him. "Crucio! Why couldn't you get me all the information? Why couldn't you get the address of their house? Why are you Half-blood... Why are you a freak? Why can't you be normal? Why do you look at me that way?" As so often happened, the spells turned to slaps and he looked up, way up, to see his father tower over his eight-year-old-self.

Severus awoke to the sound of a squeaky cry followed by a thump on the floor. He sat bolt upright, bumping his shins into the portable writing desk he kept in his room. The desk slid off the bed, and he looked at the floor to see Septima laying there, very still.

"No," he whispered. Had he somehow injured her during his nightmare? Wait, it was his side of the bed, and ink was leaking everywhere. With a twist of his wand, he set the desk to rights and put it back on the table where it usually lay. He knelt down beside Septima and looked for any sign of injury.

"Septima?"

"Gathering..." she whispered. He pulled her into his arms, and she nestled there but spoke no more. He lifted her up and carried her to the other bedroom as he called for a house-elf.

The house-elf fetched Poppy, who came out of the fireplace tying a dressing gown on. "What is the matter?" she asked when she saw him.

"I'm not sure. I woke up, and she was lying on the floor."

"Let's look her over, then."

Poppy bent over her patient, and Severus had a chance to pull his own dressing gown on over his shorts. His arms had just about gotten through the sleeves when there was a knock at the door.

Dumbledore walked toward the room containing Septima. "The portraits said... Great Godric! Poppy, is the baby all right?"

"She's had an incredible amount of magic pass through her, but Septima *and* the baby are fine."

"What happened?"

Severus cleared his throat. "I heard a thump and found her on the floor. I brought her here."

"What was happening before that?"

"I don't know." Wait, what was the writing desk doing out? "There might be something."

Dumbledore was staring at him. Severus quickly averted his eyes. Had he betrayed anything in his worry? It didn't matter right now. What was important was to find out if something had happened that might have hurt Septima or the baby.

* * * * *

It didn't take long to find. When Septima had fainted, it had rolled up and under a corner of the bed. "*Accio* parchment."

He only glanced at it for a minute and then swore when he bumped into Dumbledore.

"I wondered whether you found anything."

"It was under the bed." He held out the scroll and started walking back through the lounge.

"Why would she be in here?" asked Dumbledore while unrolling the parchment.

Severus shrugged. "She gets up frequently at night to use the bathroom, and I was having some sort of nightmare. She must have heard me."

"This is her handwriting?"

"Absolutely. You can feel her magical touch upon it, too."

"Yes, but where would she see this symbol?"

Severus rolled up his sleeve. It was still there, almost as dark as it had been when he awoke. "She must have seen this."

"Have you been showing it to her?"

"No." It was clear that she had been looking, however.

"Severus... You two are in close quarters here. Have you been..." Dumbledore suddenly blushed. "I just wanted to point out that if you had any sort of an itch, there are ways..."

"Are you suggesting that I would poke my wand in the werewolf's incubator?"

Dumbledore chuckled as he handed the parchment back to Severus. "Of course not, but I know you were close in the past. If you should have feelings for her..."

Severus turned away. "I'm not developing feelings for the witch." He realized that the feelings were already there.

Poppy's voice found them. "She's awake."

Severus forced himself to walk carefully into the other bedroom behind the Headmaster.

"How's the mother?" asked Dumbledore.

"I'm feeling terribly embarrassed," she answered, looking from one to the other. "I shouldn't have attempted that calculation. It was like the other time when the magic charged through me without my control. Is the result in Parseltongue this time, too?"

"See for yourself," said Severus, holding out the scroll.

"*The Dark Lord rises to gather his own.*" Septima looked between the two wizards in the room. "What does it mean?"

"I can only guess," said Dumbledore, "but I think we'll all know before long." He cleared his throat and looked at Poppy. "Are you sure the baby is fine?"

"Yes, he's thriving. Whatever Severus has been doing to take care her is exactly what she and the baby need. He should do a great deal of it." Poppy gently guided the Headmaster out of the bedroom and through the lounge. "We should let these two get back to sleep." She winked at Severus, and an instant later the Matron and the Headmaster were gone.

A/N: Thanks, as always, to the wonderful Owlbait and Kyria of Delphi!

The Mechanics of a School Year

Chapter 62 of 101

The school year starts and is destined to be a special one.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Septima lay across Severus's chest. His right arm was around her, and his fingers idly played in her hair. She was staring at his left arm, tracing around the mark that was clearly visible on it.

He sucked in his breath. "Merlin, Septima, be careful. If you touch it the wrong way, you'll activate the mark."

"This is what you were doing the day I lost Renée."

"Septima..." He swallowed hard. "I can't tell you—"

There was a half-shake of her head. "No, it's not like that. We've gone over it so many times already... but I've never seen it. This is the first time... I've always imagined it, and here it is. I've hoped all this last month that it was just hives or something, but... What does it mean?"

"Only the Dark Lord himself could make it do this. Dumbledore will scold me tomorrow for hiding it from him."

"So He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named is back?"

"I don't believe that's quite true either. If he was, he would summon me properly."

She bit her lip, afraid to ask the question that filled her with fear.

"Septima, what is it?"

"I don't want you to be angry with me."

He swore under his breath. "You can ask me anything."

"You used to get so mad at me. I don't want to ruin this..."

"I'm not nineteen anymore, and I've learned that I love the way you care enough about me to ask questions." He tilted his head and whispered. "Ask me."

She licked her lips. "When you were asleep, you were talking. It sounded like he hurt you."

He sighed and shifted his position. She made to move away, but he held her more tightly. "Don't go away. I want you close to me. I just need—" He pulled her close, and they got comfortable again.

"I shouldn't have asked."

He tipped her chin so that he could see her eyes. "I want you to ask. I want to tell you."

Septima took a deep breath. "What was the dream about? Did he really hurt you?"

Severus nodded. "He hurt us all, when we displeased him."

"Did he hurt *you* often?"

"Often enough."

"Why did you stay with him, then?"

"There was nowhere to hide, love. Those who ran were tortured until they died."

"And it's happening again?"

"I don't know." He leaned up and kissed her, which signaled the end of the conversation.

* * * * *

In some ways, the remainder of the summer was uneventful. In other ways, it was a time of discovery. Septima learned how to live with the person who existed behind the idea she had so constantly thought of for years. She found that being very careful around him was a sure way to inspire some sort of annoyance. She couldn't help it; experience had taught her to move cautiously around him. Now he seemed to expect total trust and ease, but she didn't know how to do that yet. Little by little, she took greater liberties with him, and he responded in a positive manner.

They spent the summer working together as they had done in the past, reading and theorizing in Septima's apartment or at Eileen's house. When they needed to brew something to test a theory, they went to Hogwarts, where Poppy continued to nod and smile over the baby's progress. As had ever been the case, they celebrated their small victories on whatever flat surface was available, although the chalk boards were less convenient with a growing baby bump in the way.

Severus seemed to enjoy himself. Septima watched him as much as ever, and he seemed almost cheerful as he paged through reference manuals, chopped leaves, or ground dried ingredients with a mortar and pestle. He ignored Septima's appointments with Poppy, but was present for every one with his mother, often asking questions for which Septima had already told him the answers. "A son," he would whisper late at night when he didn't think she was awake. He put his hand on the bump and sometimes kissed it.

Parents of students offered them tickets to the World Cup, but they chose to stay in Septima's apartment and listen on the wireless. She was grateful for that decision late that night when Severus sat bolt upright in the bed and said, "No, Master! We only want to serve you!" It took her several minutes to wake him from his nightmare and soothe the angry red mark on his arm. It had prickled and stung off and on, but on this occasion it was angry and throbbing. They learned of the events at the World Cup campsite the next morning and wondered.

The school year began, and shortly afterward, the Triwizard Tournament started. Severus pointed out the obvious romance between Aurora and the Headmaster of Durmstrang. Septima thought him a bit over-intense for her taste, but she was too happy with her own wizard to think much about it. She taught her classes and welcomed the chance to discuss questions about Arithmancy with Durmstrang's Professor Zosimov in person. She would lie in Severus's arms late at night and think to herself that it would be a fruitful academic year—very fruitful, as she was often reminded by some motion from within her belly.

The prickle and sting of Severus's arm continued, and the way Professor Moody treated Severus was no help. For some reason, the man would make some dig about Death Eaters, and Severus would feel an intense pain from the mark. Septima began to resent the older wizard and to avoid him. Fortunately, with the extra professors and students around, it was easier than usual to avoid any one person. That included the Headmaster, whom she only saw during her appointments with Poppy.

The fact of Septima's pregnancy was more or less hidden from the other professors and the students. Severus had some sort of plan that would work better if the situation was not widely known. Dumbledore approved the deception, believing that Septima was going along with the plan to offer the baby for adoption. In fact, he mentioned that he had made a few inquiries on her behalf. Septima was content to let him spend his time that way if it kept him from looking too closely into her personal life. She adjusted her unusually loose robes and went about her business.

A/N: Thank you to Kyria of Delphi and Owlbait for beta reading!

A Quantum of Truth

Chapter 63 of 101

Severus stops avoiding one issue and quickly learns one reason that honesty is the best policy.

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There were compensations to giving up so much of one's privacy. Severus decided that waking in the morning and feeling the soft form of a witch within his arms was one of them. As the alarm went off, Septima would stretch and settle closer, invariably giving him a handful of sensitive flesh that he could fondle. It brought him fully and vibrantly awake in a way coffee never could, and he would start to move against her. She would hum and slide even closer until she suddenly squealed and ran to the loo. When she got back, she was completely his, and many early mornings were spent buried in her soft sweetness as she sighed and quivered in his arms.

Severus did bless Dumbledore on one point concerning the living arrangements. Having separate baths and bedrooms meant that they were able to shower and dress in the morning without bumping into each other. When they were both dressed, Septima would greet him in his lounge with a shy smile. That smile did him in every morning. How many times had he planned tell her that he wanted more space and ask her to move out? How often had he thought of suggesting that she sleep in the other room? Would there ever be a time when that smile didn't make something in his chest flip over and forget everything else?

They would walk together to the Great Hall for breakfast, although usually neither spoke. They parted as they walked to the teachers' table. Dumbledore usually wanted him close to discuss the Tournament or some question about the Dark Mark. He also wanted Severus close to Karkaroff to see what news the Bulgarian could provide. Septima was left to fend for herself among the other professors.

They acted as mere acquaintances and colleagues during the day. Severus tried to find pretexts to visit Septima's classroom, and she found reasons to wander into the dungeon, but the addition of staff and students from two schools made things a bit crowded from time to time. It was just as well; when they were alone the child made it difficult to shag the witch against chalkboards any more. Severus would snog her to a point of painful need and then stare at the smudge during his next class, thinking that it never looked quite the same.

Evenings were a bit of a let-down. Septima was usually too tired to do anything but grade essays and check calculations. When she was alert enough to spend some time on research projects, it often brought up something she wanted to ask him about his life as a Death Eater. He hated it when such questions came up.

It was inevitable that Septima would ask the question he had avoided since the day she met his mother. The three of them had been so entranced by the baby that Septima and Eileen had forgotten to ask. "You said you weren't ashamed of me," Septima said one evening, "but you never said why you wouldn't introduce me to your mother. There must have been something wrong with me."

"Never." He looked at his bookcase.

"There must have been some reason..." He glanced her way and saw that she was miserable.

He sighed heavily. He wanted her to understand these things, but he didn't want to tell her about them. Wasn't there some way that she could just *know* these things about him? There was so much that she somehow just figured out. Why couldn't she do that with things like this? "I couldn't make it fit."

"What?"

"The pieces of my life. The witch I loved... my mother... the Death Eaters... *you*... and then there was Renée... and our work... There were too many pieces, and I couldn't make them fit. I didn't even want to try. If I had introduced you to my mother, I would have had to start putting things together. I wasn't ready, and it wasn't the way I wanted it to go."

He turned and stared at his work table. The paper he was working on was on it. It was a first draft and he had already started to mark corrections on it. He could hear the clock ticking on the mantelpiece, but he couldn't face her. "It wasn't shame, not in the sense of your worthiness or my mother's. It was my own inability to face my life." What was she thinking, now that he had admitted his cowardliness?

He felt a hand on his shoulder. "We were so young," she whispered. She gently tugged, and he found himself following her, not to the room where they usually slept, but to the room designated as hers. She sat him on the bed and then knelt before him to remove his boots and socks.

"We were so young," she repeated as she climbed onto the bed and knelt behind him, "and it maybe it was just too much for us to have to deal with." She ran her fingers under his hair and through his scalp, which she began to rub and knead with her fingertips. "I wasn't quite eighteen when I first saw you in that room." Her voice was low and husky in his ear. "Sure I'd seen you around Hogwarts. I knew who you were, and I didn't care much about it back then. Even before I saw you that night, I shrugged to myself and thought maybe we could work together for a few weeks and that would be it."

The groan of pleasure he had stifled for several minutes suddenly broke out, and she took that as her cue to rub his neck. She unfastened his shirt and worked his

shoulders for a while. Then she continued her narrative. "When I saw you standing there, I couldn't breathe. You reminded me of René Descartes, all dark and brooding... and brilliant. I felt so young and stupid. I chattered, I know. I was so unsure of myself."

The shirt came up over his head and floated... somewhere... She was now working at his shoulder blades. "Then you started to speak in that coffee shop, and magic happened. Everything I wanted to work on was in my head. I thought...I expected...that you felt the same things I did."

He lay prone, grunting in pleasure as she worked at his legs. When had she had the chance to remove the rest of his clothes? Once or twice a week, Septima had enough energy for lovemaking in the evening, but *this* was something else entirely. It was...*magic*.

"After I became aware of your other witch, I realized you hadn't felt it the way I did. I was very confused, but I was sure you would work it out to the conclusion I'd reached. I didn't understand yet." Some of the rubbing became painful. "I slowly came to realize that people aren't math problems. Just because you were the solution for me doesn't mean that I was anything at all to you."

He rolled over. "Septima..."

"I've had to accept that you have other things in your life, other desires, other loves..." She leaned down and he held his breath as her lips came close. He let out a hiss of...something...as she kissed his forehead, his eyes, anything but his lips. Her hands started massaging his shoulders and chest. "I don't want to be in the way, but I do want to know and love you, if you'll let me. Severus, please let me love you."

He stopped thinking as her lips caressed his nipple. His fingers tangled in her hair as he gave himself over to the bliss of being loved...adored, even. All sensation seemed to flow in the same direction as her attention, which slowly centered itself... oh, *yes*...

* * * * *

It was barely over, and she was on top of him. The child was in the way, but they hadn't even pulled apart yet. The baby bump was pressed against his lower abdomen in a way he found pleasurable. There it was, that squiggly sensation that he had once felt below his hand years before. This was a magic night. "Is the baby moving?" he asked quietly.

"Oh! I'm sorry..." she tried to move away, but his hands were firmly on her hips.

"Don't you dare, love," he said. "I want to feel it." Nevertheless, he shifted them around so that they lay on their sides, still pressed together so that he could feel the baby's movement. As he fell asleep, he dared his arm to give him a nightmare tonight.

Perhaps he shouldn't have made that dare. The last thing he expected was for *Septima* to have a nightmare. When he roused enough to realize what was happening, she was sobbing uncontrollably and the sheets were soaking wet.

A/N: Thank you to Kyria of Delphi and Owl bait for all their help!

A Quantum of Recall

Chapter 64 of 101

Septima has a nightmare while Severus confirms a theory.

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Everything was gray and empty. Her arms were so... so... empty... Where was the baby? Where was Severus? The voices hurt her like knives. "It's for the best, dear. You have to do this." She shrank away from the voices. They sounded so calm, so kind, but they ripped a hole into her.

"Septima."

"No."

"It's a nightmare, Septima. Just wake up."

Arms tightened around her, but it was cold, and wet. "No. I want Severus."

"I'm right here, love."

She shook her head, but there was no use, she was pulled close and then lips were pressed to hers. Her world exploded into color as she opened her eyes and saw him. "You're here. Do you have Renée?"

He pulled her tight. "Not as such, no."

"But you can get her!"

"Septima, you're still half asleep."

She really looked at Severus. It wasn't the angry young man she'd known as a girl but the older, sadder one. The dream faded, and she buried her head in his chest. "They took her."

"Can you tell me about it?"

"I was in labor at your mother's house, and you were there. It hurt so much, but it was good too."

"I understand."

"And then he was born, and he was so beautiful!"

"Of course he was." Septima looked up and saw that he was smiling at her.

"After your mother cleared everything away, I was feeding him, and you got in the bed with us, and we were a family, all together."

He looked at her kindly. "We'll do it just like that."

Septima closed her eyes and settled into his arms. "Then it got gray and dark. I was in labor, but you weren't there. I begged for you, but they said you didn't want to come. Then she was born, and she was beautiful, too. I fed her and loved her, and it was wonderful, but then she was gone. I asked where she went and they said I didn't need her any more. I begged, but they wouldn't give her back."

Septima started crying again, and she suddenly felt all wet. She leaned away from Severus and said, "What's happened to the sheets?"

He smiled gently. "I turned on the lights to make sure you weren't bleeding. Septima, it's your milk. It must be from dreaming about breastfeeding the babies."

She looked down at herself and realized it was true. "Oh, no..."

Severus pulled the sheets away. "Why don't you run to the loo to do what you probably need to do, and I'll get this cleared up. Then I'd like to peek in your mind while this is still fresh."

As it happened, nature and a moving baby were making certain demands. Several minutes later, Severus tucked her into a dry bed and sat at her side. "Don't leave me," she said.

"Of course not. Are you ready?" At her nod, he held up his wand and whispered, "*Legilimens!*"

She could feel him looking at the beginning of her dream. His hand moved on her belly, and she felt the child move in response. Somehow she knew that Severus was pleased with what he saw. She felt warm and safe.

Then her mind went blank and colorless. Septima felt cold and scared. "Ah, love," she could hear him whisper, but there was nothing for her mind to hold. For several minutes her whole world was his hand on her body, which moved to touch and caress her while there was nothing in her head.

Suddenly it was over and the darkness became first just his black eyes and then the rest of his head. Now, he backed away, and Septima watched as his wand manipulated silvery-gray strands into a glass vial.

"I'm so sorry," he whispered, "if I had been there, it wouldn't have been like that."

She blinked up at him. There was something she suddenly couldn't remember. "Like what?"

He stoppered his vial. "This brings us much closer to finding out what happened." He held up the vial. "I'm sure this is part of your modified memory."

"Does it tell us anything?" He hesitated, so she persisted. "Please tell me, Severus."

He slid a hand along her face. "I've been sure for a long time that Renée didn't die but was taken from you. This confirms it."

Alive? "You must be wrong."

"Why else would someone modify your memories? Septima, you've been asking the numbers how she is for years, and you think they're somehow mocking you. Instead, they're telling you the exact truth."

"Then where is she?"

"You've never asked the numbers that question. Why?"

It was obvious, wasn't it? They told her that there was a spot near the hospital where they buried the babies that were lost. Someone—she could never remember who—had taken her to see a marker designating an impossibly tiny spot as Renée Vector. Septima knew exactly where her daughter was. Severus seemed to think that wasn't true. "I—I can't breathe."

He pulled her close. "Ask the numbers, Septima. Your body has told you what happened. You gave birth to her. You breastfed her. You mourned when she was taken from you. She was adopted and has been happy and well adjusted, but she doesn't know her mother. Ask the numbers where she is, Septima, and then ask them for her name."

A week passed, and then two. During a free period, Septima would take out a parchment and start to write her runes. Then she would start trembling and quickly siphoned off the ink. Her breasts would start to itch, and she would put her hand over her chest, willing the prickle to stop.

In the evenings, she listened to the sound of Severus's voice and the numbers would dance in her head. She would start to scribble them on a piece of paper in front of her, but when she realized what they were, she went cold with fear. Her milk leaked again, and she would groan in frustration. The noise would cause Severus to look up. He saw her source of annoyance and smiled. Putting down his glasses and book, he would say, "Our son is likely to be well fed," as he took the quill from her hand and lowered the lights in the lounge. Then he would take her to bed.

The first tournament task came and went. Severus fumed over Harry Potter and then went back to watching Moody and Karkaroff. Septima spent her free periods staring at a blank parchment, unable to put it away and yet unable to write the runes that would tell her exactly what she wanted to know. Severus knew, but he seemed unwilling or unable to tell her. She was beginning to think she was going mad. One afternoon, she had just about decided to uncork her ink when there was a loud hiccuping sob at the door.

"Professor Vector? I don't want to be a witch any more. Do you think you can help me go home?"

A/N: Thanks, as always, to Kyria of Delphi and Owl/bait for all their help in getting this ready!

The Mechanics of Facing Facts

Septima asks the question she's been avoiding.

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"What the fuck is the matter with you?"

Severus swore as he dropped the shrivelfig he was working with. He straightened up, ready to respond in kind until he saw the look of pure rage on Septima's face and the frightened expression on the face of their daughter.

"There's nothing the matter with me," he drawled, "but you seem particularly angry."

Her eyes narrowed and her lips barely moved as she said, "Do not condescend to me, Severus Snape! How could you handle the mess in your hallway the way you did today, and then to insult one of your students—a student who's considered you one of her favorite professors... until today..."

"I didn't insult anyone."

"Did you or did you not say, and I quote, 'I see no difference'?"

He felt his own eyebrows coming together. "I didn't see a difference."

Septima took a breath so deep that he feared she would turn purple. "*You told her you think she looks ugly all the time and you don't consider it an insult?!*"

"Ugly?" What was wrong with the witch? "Ugly is the last thing the girl is. She's clever, and smart, and she has a beautiful, brilliant mind. She's never ugly, and whether she has the teeth of a rodent or no teeth at all, she's a lovely girl to look at as well."

The girl had been edging behind Septima and now looked at him in surprise. "It was a compliment?"

"Of course," he responded, glad that *someone* finally understood. "No one with my nose pays much attention to that sort of thing."

"But it was misleading."

"I had expected *you* to understand."

"Oh." She looked from Septima's furious face to Severus's bland one and said, "I'm um—I'm late for History of Magic. May I be excused?"

Septima was still fuming and any minute would exude that spell that used to surround him with her fury. It was left to Severus to answer. "Please do, Miss Granger. You were working on a special project for Arithmancy and Potions if it's a problem."

"I will. Thank you, Professor Snape."

Severus counted twenty before Septima spoke again. "You can't convince me that you only see how smart she is. You must see what she looks like."

"Of course I do!" The witch was starting to exasperate him.

Septima took a step forward. "You must see *something*."

"I'm not blind. I know *exactly* what she looks like."

She was close enough to poke her finger in his chest, just above the top button of his waistcoat. "Then what does she look like; what do you see, *artbw could you say such a thing about your favorite student?*"

"I see someone who's very dear to me because when I look at her I see *you!*" he finally exploded.

Septima, whether she realized she had finally gone too far, or because of what he said, took a step back and fell silent. "I—"

"Since the moment she walked up to the Sorting Hat, all I've seen is you, Septima. *Your* walk, *your* eyes, *your* messy hair, *your* kissable lips... yes, she has some of my facial expressions, and when she nags her friends she looks just like my mother, but Septima, when I look at our daughter, all I want to do is find you and shag you senseless."

This time he counted to thirty while Septima stared at him, her mouth open in shock. Then she backed away. "You're teasing me."

"I'm not."

"You're making some joke."

"It's no joke."

"Then you're lying?"

"Is that what the numbers tell you?"

"I—" She started rubbing her chest. Any second now, leaking milk would show through her robe. "I don't need to ask the numbers; I've been to her grave."

"So have I. It contains an empty box."

She shook her head. "The Healers of St. Mungo's wouldn't do that..."

Having seen her memories and one person visible over the shoulder of the Healer who delivered their daughter, Severus knew exactly who would do that. "It wasn't the Healers," he agreed.

"I—"

He handed her a piece of chalk. "Just ask where she is."

Septima stared at the chalk in her hand and then at him. He nodded at the blackboard and she finally turned and started writing her runes. He stood behind her and settled his hands on her belly. The baby moved and kicked.

Septima tapped the board with her wand and turned into his arms. "I can't look."

The answer was exactly what he expected. "It won't hurt you." He nudged her around so she could see it.

Renée Vector is at the door of Professor Binns's classroom.

"One more question," he murmured.

"I can't."

"Just put the runes on the board," he said, nuzzling her ear.

He rubbed her shoulders as she wrote. He had worked up into her scalp by the time she said, "I can't. my hand won't go around my wand. It's as though something inside me is resisting."

"Think about our baby girl, love. Imagine holding her in your arms."

"It's all I think about lately, but I just can't."

He moved so that he could hug her from behind, one arm around her shoulders and the other at her waist. Speaking softly into her ear he said, "I know the numbers are dancing in your head. They won't stop until you do this, Septima."

She nodded, took a deep breath, and pointed her wand.

A/N: Thank you to all the readers who've followed this story, and thank you to Kyria of Delphi and Owlbait for all their help in alpha and beta reading.

A Quantum of Proof

Chapter 66 of 101

Now that the truth is out, Severus shows Septima the information he's gathered.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Hermione Granger is Renée Vector.

It seemed that Septima couldn't get that chalkboard out of her eyes. It had been erased, quickly but thoroughly, and Severus had pulled her into their lounge where there had been whispered accusations, followed by whispered counter-accusations, followed by yelling, more yelling in response, and tears. She knew he hated it when she cried, but she couldn't help herself.

He turned away, and Septima went cold with a fear that he was gone from her forever. "I'm—I just can't seem—I'm sorry..." She ran to the bedroom, the bedroom she was supposed to use, and started to flop on the bed until the baby got in her way and she wound up twisting ungracefully onto her back. Pillows flew from the bed and the covers got horribly mussed. After a minute, she could remember the spell to Summon a pillow. She covered her face and allowed herself to cry.

She felt him lean against the door. "You can't do that." His voice had that bossy tone he used when he was explaining something he thought she should already know. "You'll smother yourself."

He pulled the pillow away and then reached for her shoulder. "You can't lie on your back, either." He tugged until she rolled onto her side. "It could smother the baby."

It forced her to look into his face, and for a few minutes they just stared at each other.

"I didn't mean to ruin everything," she said. "I don't know why I lied to you, but I do remember wishing I could just get some space to work everything out."

"You cried for me the whole time you were in labor."

"I don't remember."

"No, the memory was hidden from your consciousness, so when I was able to find it that night I put it in a vial, and I've watched the whole thing. You asked them to find me during your labor and every day of the next two weeks while they kept you in the hospital and told you to sign the papers. They told you I didn't want you."

"Maybe it was just a dream after all. Maybe my unconscious made it up because I knew you *didn't* want me."

He winced. "Will you wait here a moment? I'll be right back."

She leaned back, into the pillows since she knew she shouldn't be flat on her back, and wondered if he really wanted her now. She closed her eyes and saw the chalkboard again. Hermione Granger is Renée Vector. Just the thought of it made her heart pound and her mind spin. A new tear rolled down her face.

She heard the outside door of their apartment shut, and she wiped at her face as he walked in. "I have proof. I was waiting for you to understand it on your own before I showed you. He spread a notebook and a bundle of scrolls on the bed as she looked. "I've had most of this since her first year."

She picked up one document with gilt edges. "This isn't a copy."

"No, it was supposed to be your original of her birth certificate—*our* original. I decided the office where it was filed didn't need it."

Septima trembled as she traced over her own name on the parchment next to "Mother." The space next to "Father" was marked "unknown." She looked up at Severus in question.

He shrugged. "I don't know for sure why it doesn't list me. I can only guess until we uncover more of your memories."

"I don't remember any of this, yet here is my thumbprint, right next to her footprint. If it had listed you, wouldn't they have had to get permission from you for the adoption?"

"Yes, and I never would have."

"But you say I begged for you constantly. How could they not know it was you?"

"Someone had reasons to keep us apart. They deliberately didn't put my name on the form, and if they had ever told me what you were doing, I would have dropped everything to come."

She snorted. "It's easy to say that now."

"Septima, look at me." She looked up and saw how serious he was. "The day I thought she was dead was one of the worst days of my life. I was handed everything I ever thought I wanted, and I threw it away when I suddenly realized my child was gone. If I had known that you tricked me, I would have found you and the child, and we would have formed that family we discussed."

Septima traced it one last time before setting the parchment down. "I cannot imagine the anger that would have gone into such a decision on my part. Maybe you're right to say I wrote her off like a vicious bint."

"I didn't really think that, Septima, even in the first hours after I realized you had lied to me. I knew there must have been some good reason."

She sifted through the other documents, which were notarized copies. There was her signature on the form relinquishing all rights as mother to Renée Vector, and a revised birth certificate for Hermione Granger. The notebook came last, and Septima realized it was a sketch book similar to the one he kept when they were students.

"What's this?" she asked, her heart beating faster. Was he finally going to show her the witch he had constantly sketched back then?

The first picture was of a little girl walking toward Minerva McGonagall. She had a look of perfect assurance on her face and the messiest hair Septima had ever seen.

"I knew she was ours the instant I saw her. I started this book that evening," he said quietly.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"How many times did I ask you about it?"

She turned away. *He had* asked, and used Legilimancy. He had done both several times over the past few years.

"I tried to find a way to get around to the subject, but you always got so upset and nervous. The times when you seemed to completely blank out worried me. I didn't feel I could show you any of this until I found a way to break the ice. It appears that your current pregnancy is somehow churning up memories of our daughter."

She sighed. "You say you have my memories, now?"

"Not all of them. I don't know how they finally got our daughter away from you nor how they modified your memory."

She paged through the notebook. "These pictures... they're beautiful."

"*She* is beautiful. I gave you so little of myself—one of the smallest cells in a human body. Beyond that, I gave you almost nothing, no love, no real hopes for a future or life together. Yet somehow you took what little I gave you and made this incredible young witch."

There was no way it could be true. She had never given birth before—and yet proof of that birth was on the bed. There was her thumbprint, right next to a tiny footprint... Suddenly it was too much, and it frightened her. She looked from the sketchbook to him. He seemed to understand. With a flick of his wand, the notebook and all the scrolls flew to a table. He lowered himself beside her and gently ran his hand along the side of her face. Then he pulled her close.

That message on the chalkboard, so quickly erased, was still in her eyes. *Hermione Granger is Renée Vector*. There had been accusations, yelling and tears. Now there was consolation, gentle murmurs, tender caresses, and ultimately passion. She lay in his arms when it was over, unable to stop thinking about all the lost chances she and Severus had. She couldn't stop a few tears, and when she felt his lips on her face, she looked up and saw some in his eyes, too.

A/N: Thank you, dear reader, for your patience with me. Thank you especially to Kyria of Delphi and Owlbait for beta reading!

The Mechanics of Fatherhood

Chapter 67 of 101

Severus watches his daughter's first date.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Severus Snape never expected that there would be some teary-eyed family reunion between Septima, their daughter, and himself. However, he never expected that Septima would simply go on as she always had. When he asked her about it, she had shrugged and said that it didn't seem right, when she didn't really remember. He would have pressed her on the subject, but she had that look in her eye. He really didn't want to hurt her emotional stability, not with the baby taking its toll upon her. Perhaps it was too soon. There was more to uncover in Septima's mind, after all.

Instead of whatever ideas of developing mother-daughter relationship he might have had, Severus was forced to watch the growing friendship between his daughter and Viktor Krum. This he did with frustration and annoyance. It was one of those puppyish romances, he was sure, but the boy was a student of Durmstrang, where blood purity was a requirement for all but the most qualified of students. Whenever they had been seen speaking together in the hallways, Igor had frowned and made threats. What did that mean, and why on earth would she attend the ball with that infernal boy?

On the night of the Yule Ball, he tugged the collar of his dress shirt into place with a snap. Why couldn't she have gone with Potter or Weasley? Either of them was at least a known quantity. Severus paced in his room as he put on his dress robes, fuming about his daughter's Yule Ball date. "The boy is too damn old for her," he growled through his doorway, into the lounge, and across to the other bedroom. That door was shut.

"She's fifteen and he's seventeen. It's just two years," came the annoyingly calm reply.

"It's *not* just two years and you know it. He's an adult. He has an adult position on a Quidditch team, and he's been out in the world doing who knows what, and now he's going to do it all with our daughter!"

"Whatever you think he's done, I hardly think he'll have the opportunity while dancing in a room full of their peers and ours."

Why couldn't Septima see the situation for what it was? Severus stood in his doorway, thrusting his shirt stud at its hole and fuming. "I don't think you care about this."

The other door was silent.

"Septima."

"What?"

"She's your daughter."

"So you and the numbers say."

"You don't feel any emotional attachment to this at all?"

The door was silent.

"Septima!"

The other door opened and a very white face looked out of it. "You think I'm a bad mother."

He snorted. "Don't be ridiculous."

"How should a mother feel?"

He stopped fuming and walked toward her. "How did you feel when you stormed into my office and swore at me?"

"I was angry. You had been so terribly cruel and hurt—her."

A familiar lost expression started to cross her face. He decided to pursue it. "Who did I hurt, Septima?"

"Her." Now her hand was over her chest.

"Who is she, Septima? What is Miss Granger to you?"

Her eyes finally met his. They were full of recognition. "My child. All I could think about was that you had hurt my child, and I needed to confront you with it."

He was close enough to touch her, now. "Septima, I've never seen you so angry with me before. Even all those years when we had that horrible misunderstanding, you were never so angry. If you were any good at defense I would have feared for my life that day."

"Right now, I don't know what I feel toward her. I love her as an excellent student, certainly."

"It's whatever happened to your memory. You know you're her mother, but you don't feel it, do you?"

She looked up at him, clearly unable to respond.

"We'll fix this. We're well on our way, now that we know for sure she's really ours."

"She has a mother. Rose Granger, according to the records. She doesn't need me."

"You will never be replaced by a Muggle dentist named Rose. Somehow she knows who you are. Who did she come to when she was so hurt she wanted to leave Hogwarts?"

"That's just because I was here."

"She might have gone to the head of her house or the school matron. She went to you because you're her mother and because she instinctively knows that bond exists. You instinctively protected her, too. Can you imagine another situation where you would let someone get between us?"

"Besides the obvious, you mean?" said Septima while smoothing pink crepe over her tummy. There were charms to hide the truth, and the dress was masterfully created, but they both knew what it hid.

"In both cases, it's our child, not just some student." Severus tugged her hand and brought her into the lounge. "Are you ready?"

"I think so. Do I look too enormous?"

He took a step back and admired her dress. "No, you look magnificent."

* * * * *

Severus found himself watching and learning many things that evening. It was a bit comical to see how awkward the son of his school enemy was. Whenever there was an occasion like this one during their own school days, James Potter usually handled himself well. Potter's son seemed to spend the evening trying not to dance, dancing horribly, or looking with worry between his two friends.

Severus's daughter seemed to be negotiating the event between her date and the Weasley she had befriended. He was mollified to see how gently she was led through the dances by Krum, who never put a hand wrong. He couldn't understand why, with such a considerate and thoughtful date, she kept looking over at Potter and Weasley, but he well understood the looks Weasley gave her.

He easily understood his own feelings at seeing Septima in the arms of Karkaroff, who likewise didn't put a hand out of place. He enjoyed his own opportunities to dance with Septima more. "It's exactly as I said it would be," he murmured into her ear. "Do you think all these people would mind if I have my way with you just now?" He pulled her far closer than the steps of the dance allowed.

"Severus!" she gasped. Her eyes betrayed her, though. She wanted him as much as he wanted her. There was only one thing to do.

They found a secluded spot in the rose garden and made out like teenagers, complete with heavy breathing and petting. "Why did we come here instead of going to the dungeons?" Septima asked.

"In just a few minutes, I need to return to my duties." He lowered his face to hers again and there was no interruption until Karkaroff found them.

“Severus, I beg to interrupt!”

With some disappointment, Severus sent Septima away with a promise for later. He turned his attention to his former comrade in the Death Eaters. Karkaroff wanted to continue his constant whining about the Dark Mark. Severus wasn't willing to commit to anything. He walked away and started looking for students in compromising positions.

“She's pregnant, Severus.”

That stopped him in his tracks. What had Karkaroff learned?

A/N: Thank you, as always, for reading and reviewing! Thank you also to Owlbait and Kyria of Delphi for beta reading!

The Mechanics of Motherhood

Chapter 68 of 101

Septima experiences the Yule Ball and the last weeks of pregnancy.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

The Yule ball was brilliant but exhausting. Septima danced with several Hogwarts professors. She discovered that dancing with Flitwick was not as odd as dancing with Moody. She knew Severus distrusted Moody and tried to stay away from him even as Moody sought Severus out. Tonight, Mad-Eye seemed a little over-interested in Septima.

“You are quite light on your feet, Professor Vector. I can't believe you aren't in greater demand among the wizards or even married... with children. Is there a wizard in particular you've pined for?”

There was something about his eyebrow—she'd seen another face do that, years ago. “I'm perfectly happy as I am, Professor.”

“I can teach you Defense Against the Dark Arts. I know things other wizards could never show you.”

The song wound down to an end. “I'll keep your offer in mind,” Septima said with a smile. She went back to her table, glad to have it over. It was just small talk after all. If his facial expression reminded her of someone she'd known as a student, perhaps they were related. All the pure-blood families were, if one looked more than three generations back, and most of the half-bloods only needed four generations.

After an all-too-brief interlude in the gardens with Severus, Septima worked her way down to the dungeon and the rooms she shared with him. She sat in the lounge and watched the fire for several minutes before deciding to prepare for bed. Surely Severus would wake her when he got in. She stared at the two bedroom doors before going toward Severus's room. She left her own door shut.

She had just doused the light when she heard the main door to the apartment open. She stretched luxuriously and considered calling to Severus, but she heard two voices in the lounge.

“It appears that the witch is asleep in her room, Severus, so we can finish our talk.”

“As you will, Headmaster. I've been hounded to death by one school's headmaster, who can't stop talking about his Dark Mark, and now I've been insulted by you telling me I don't belong to my own House.”

“I only meant that you could have been in Gryffindor.”

“By which you mean that Slytherin is somehow less desirable. It's an insult either way.”

“Be serious, Severus. You know as well as I do what the prickle in your arm means. You know what you will have to do.”

“You mean that I'll have to go back to him, that I'll have to apologize for not having all the information about the prophecy, for hiding behind your robe during the trials, and then living in your good graces for all these years, that I'll have to hope that he doesn't kill me, and then that I'll have to withstand whatever punishment he metes out?”

“We all have our role to play, and yours is based upon the sins of your early life. Thank Godric the child isn't yours. I need you, Severus, and you can't afford any hostages. Just in case anyone has figured out about Septima and thinks it's yours, I'm making arrangements to have the child removed from the situation so it won't be an issue.”

Septima shrank back in the bed. In the back of her mind she heard echoes of conversations about the children of Death Eaters. There had been one conversation in Dumbledore's office, but if she lay really still she could recall something much longer ago. It was just a snatch of a whisper. “Much safer for the child this way...”

She was brought back to awareness by something Dumbledore was saying. “It's going to be a cold night. I could have some brandy fetched down here and stay...”

“I think not, Headmaster. I need to keep my wits about me in case something happens. The witch's burden is getting cumbersome, and she may need assistance.”

Septima thought she could hear the old wizard shudder. “I'd best leave, then. Happy Christmas, Severus.”

“Happy Christmas, Albus.”

The main door shut and Septima heard Severus fix himself a drink before sitting down with a sigh. She pulled her dressing gown on and went into the lounge. “Is adoption a better option?”

He looked at her and smiled tiredly. He reached for her with his free hand, and she went to him as if summoned. “I don't think it will matter. He still hasn't told me how the Dark Lord will supposedly come back to life, but if it does happen, the fact of our children's existence will be easily found and exploited.”

He pulled her onto the couch next to himself and slid his hand down to her bottom. She wasn't ready. “Our children are in danger?”

“Renée has been in danger since she sorted, thanks to her deplorable choice of friends. If the Dark Lord returns and considers Potter an enemy, then our daughter will be

an enemy as well. I can only hope, if it comes to it, that I will have some sort of influence..." Severus's voice got thick. "Our son, however, will be viewed as a future Death Eater, just as any student in Slytherin. I think he will be fine. We simply must hope for the best."

Septima snuggled closer to Severus. "Is that all we have?"

He put his empty glass on the table and slid his hand around her belly. "It's all I've got to offer you, Septima. Do you regret casting your lot with me?"

"It's not as though my heart ever gave me a choice," she answered. "Somehow I think I'll be as well off at your side as I am anywhere else."

He plucked at the tie of her robe. "Did you know that Aurora is pregnant?"

"I don't think she's as far along as I am."

"So you knew?"

"I guessed. She's been so happy this year."

"He mentioned a witch being pregnant and I thought he meant you, but from what he said, he must have meant her."

Septima's skin started to feel very warm under his hand. "Are you really more interested in other witches than in me?"

After the holidays, time seemed to speed and drag at odd moments. Miss Granger had a quick visit with her parents and then spent the first few weeks of the term staring at Septima, which was disconcerting. Septima was strangely tongue-tied around the girl, now. She looked at her and knew she was the child she had carried, but there was no sense of connection. She wasn't sure if she should tell her or not. Since she didn't know what she would be offering if she did tell Miss Granger the truth, she shrank away from it.

Getting up and down the stairs between the Great Hall, the Arithmancy classroom, and the dungeons became more and more of a chore. As January wore on, Septima started having odd pains in her belly that made her sit down quickly from time to time. Poppy explained that they were small contractions that weren't actually part of labor but simply allowed the body to prepare. "It's just practice, dear. Get used to them now and practice the breathing patterns you've learned."

Septima longed for a day when she could have her body back to herself, and yet was completely surprised on a Friday at the end of January when Poppy told her to dress quickly and then handed her a Portkey. "I believe it's time for a visit off-campus," she said with a cheery smile. To Dumbledore she explained, "She doesn't have much longer before the child comes. She should get out and see the world for a bit before that happens."

"Will she be all right by herself?" asked Dumbledore.

"I think she'll be fine, and Severus's classes should be over soon. I'll send him after her, and he'll make sure she gets back."

"I trust you to know your business," growled Dumbledore.

"Look at how pale and worn she looks. I think a few hours away from Hogwarts could give her the energy she needs."

"Very well," said Dumbledore. He tapped the Portkey with his wand, and within seconds Septima felt the pull of magical travel.

A/N: Thank you to Kyria of Delphi and Owlbait for beta reading!

A Quantum of Reassurance

Chapter 69 of 101

Severus helps his witch prepare.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Poppy showed up at the door of the Potions classroom as class ended. She smiled serenely at Severus and said, "Some people expect you to collect Septima and bring her back to Hogwarts, but she's at your mother's house for the next several days at least."

"Is she in labor?" he asked quietly.

"Not quite, but her body is ready. I'm sure your mother will know how to move things along."

"Will you be coming?"

"I'll stop by to see how things are. Good luck, Severus."

"Thank you, Poppy."

He took advantage of the afternoon off to run an errand at the Ministry. Before long, however, he opened the door to his mother's house. She stood in the kitchen, looking out a back window.

"Where is she, Mother?"

She nodded at the window. "I've got her in the garden, allowing gravity to do its job."

"Is she in labor?" he asked again.

"No, she's far too tense. I think she's half afraid that whoever took your daughter will swoop in and steal this one, too."

That was not good news. They could hide Septima for a couple of days over the weekend, but the child needed to be born quickly for the plan to work. "What can we do?"

"You need to take her to bed."

"Mother!"

"It will help her body to relax, and her womb to open. Beyond that, I think she needs the reassurance. I've never seen a witch who craved her wizard more. It does my heart good to see you so well-loved."

"We're not in love. She's not—"

"The little snob from uphill? Did that witch ever give you anything but pain?"

"No." He couldn't help saying it bitterly.

"Go give Septima the love she needs. Remind her how the child got there. Show the child why he wants to come out."

After a little more chivvying, Severus found himself in the back garden.

"Septima."

Even facing away from him, he could see the joy in her frame as she realized he was there. It should have been pathetic, but instead he was drawn to it. She turned and moved toward him. "I can't seem to get started. I think your mother is working on a potion."

"She told me about something better than a potion."

"What could that be?"

"Us... doing what we do best."

"But—"

He tugged her close. "It's the midwife's directions, love." He kissed her and tasted uncertainty. He pulled away and caressed her face. He gently tugged her toward the bedroom they used at his mother's house.

They undressed and she sat on the bed, looking up at him uncertainly. "I was overlarge before, but today I'm a right cow."

He looked at her. Her belly had indeed changed shape such that it was by far the most noticeable thing about her, her oversized breasts sitting upon it. Her joints were swollen and she looked weary with pregnancy. Yet there was something beautiful about her.

"The mother goddess, I think, ready to burst with life."

"Really?" The tension in her frame softened a little.

He started to kiss and massage her. As she relaxed, his hands fondled her, and he leaned down to taste her. "Mmm," he said. "Our son will love everything about you."

He touched her gently, wanting to remember everything about her at this stage of her pregnancy. Suddenly he realized this would be the last time for several weeks and couldn't get enough of her. When it was time to join their bodies, he moved with greater and greater fervency. "Oh, witch, sweet..."

"Severus..."

He felt her shudder and couldn't help himself. He was overcome by her.

A moment or two later, her form melted into his, letting him know that she was much more relaxed. "I love you," she whispered. "You make me feel secure."

"Ah, witch, there's no one like you," he whispered. He shifted around and pressed his chest against her back. Even now he could feel a tightness in her belly as her body readied for the birth. It wasn't quite time yet, but it was getting closer. He would make love to her all weekend if that is what it took, he thought to himself as they fell asleep.

A/N: Thank you to Kyria of Delphi and Owlbait for beta reading!

A Quantum of Life

Chapter 70 of 101

It had to happen eventually.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Septima woke to the sensation of something squeezing her. She lay in Severus's arms, vaguely aware that it was now full dark. She had the lovely feeling of satiation within herself that always followed particularly good lovemaking. She rolled toward her back. Severus groaned and fondled her.

Pain brought her eyes and mouth wide open. She stared unseeingly into the bedroom as her mouth made a gasping sound indicative of being unable to breathe. Her arms started to flail.

"Ow!" said Severus as her hand caught him on the chin. He quickly sat up and found a light. "Are you all right?"

The pain faded, and Septima sucked in her breath in huge gulps. "Hurts!"

He stood up and looked around for his clothes. "Do you want me to get my mother?"

She looked blindly in his direction, unsure what she was seeing. "Hurts!"

"OK, love, just give me a minute."

He hadn't returned when the next one hit. Suddenly, Septima was all alone in a cold room. "Sev—er--us," she whispered without much hope.

"I'm right here, love."

And suddenly he was, and it was now a warm room.

Eileen was there, too. "There you are, dear; you're half-way gone. It won't be long before he's outside of you."

After that, the pains came and were as intense as before, but Septima didn't mind them as much with Severus beside her and Eileen to encourage her. Time lost its meaning as she clung to him. She had an unreasonable fear that if he left her side, she would never see him again.

A clock somewhere in the house was tolling midnight when Eileen finally said, "Lean up and hold your legs, now... and... push!"

Severus held her in place and whispered endearments into her ear. Eileen stood at the foot of the bed and said more encouraging things. Septima could only do as her body directed. She bore down upon the bundle that was working through her body.

After an interminable amount of time that Severus later averred was less than a full hour, something inside shifted. With a loud groan on Septima's part, the head came out into Eileen's hands. In less time than it took to say it, first one shoulder than the other worked out. Septima fell back into Severus's arms, exhausted, as Eileen studied her grandson.

The sweet words didn't stop. "I don't know what to say to you," he whispered. "He's a miracle. You're... a miracle."

Over at the other end of the room, Eileen Snape was crooning to the bundle in her arms and crying.

"Mother?" said Severus softly.

"I never thought I'd be so happy to see someone who looked so much like Tobias Snape. He's so beautiful." Eileen handed the wrapped-up baby to her own son and moved down to check on Septima's progress with the afterbirth.

There were more pains and some light pushing, but nothing like before. Eileen gave her directions with a smile and teary eyes.

"Septima..."

She looked up at Severus, and there were tears in his eyes as he looked at his son. "He's perfect. I can't understand... I already love him, and I love that you gave him to me."

* * * * *

An hour later, Septima held her son and looked in wonder as he stared back up at her from her breast. A moment later, a hand cupped the back of the tiny head as Severus sat next to her on the bed. "Will it hurt you if I join you here?"

"No, I've been hoping... Severus, is this really all right with you?"

"I don't think I've ever wanted anything more than I want what we have right here right now."

"But I'm not the witch you had in mind."

"You're the witch who put all the pieces together." An arm slid around her, supporting her and comforting her. She nestled into him with a small sigh of content.

"What about Dumbledore and You-Know-Who?"

"What about them?"

"What you and Dumbledore were talking about on Christmas... Is our child in danger?"

"I'm not worried about it any more than the parents of my Slytherin students are worried about it. The Dark Lord considers all such children to be his own."

The child pulled his head back and started rooting around, looking for the other breast. Septima switched him around, and he continued his feeding. "This is so easy. Somewhere inside me is the thought that it was supposed to be much harder."

He nuzzled her head with his own. "Your memories indicate that feeding our daughter didn't come that easily."

"Have you really watched that whole thing?"

"I'm not sure how you got to the hospital, but I've watched every labor pain and every minute you had with her before she suddenly disappeared. It was two full weeks. People came to your hospital room to tell you about it, but you didn't hear anything they said."

"And you sketched what you saw?"

"It was beautiful. I just wished I could have held her."

"I wish I could remember it."

"Some day you will."

A/N: Thank you to Owlbait and Kyria of Delphi for their beta reading work!

A Quantum of Awkwardness

This is not the most comfortable conversation of Severus Snape's life.

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It was necessary to put in an appearance at dinner. It wasn't hard to shrug and give the impression that the witch was too tired to come to the Great Hall to eat. After that, he went back to his quarters to put some things together to take back to his mother's house. While he was there, he poured himself a drink.

There was a knock on the door. Was it Dumbledore? Had the time come to pay the piper? It wouldn't be as much fun as he had planned, but it was almost the time he had planned to admit everything, anyhow. The old man couldn't do much damage now.

It wasn't Dumbledore. The person standing in the doorway was a somewhat subdued Hermione Granger. "Professor Snape! I was hoping to see Professor Vector. I thought..." she trailed off awkwardly.

"We share this lounge, Miss Granger, but Professor Vector is away today. Is there something you need?"

She looked up at him just as Septima did when she desperately wanted to know something but was afraid to ask.

"It's all right, Miss Granger. As it happens, I'm in a particularly ebullient mood today."

"I don't know how to ask this question of anyone else. Just how close are you and Professor Vector?"

"Close enough that we share far more secrets than there are secrets between us."

It took her a moment to digest what he said. Finally she said, "Well, may I come in and sit down?"

"Certainly." His arm swept wide and he stood back to allow her access. It was hard not to laugh as she first sat in his chair and then shook her head, instead choosing a spot on the sofa that Septima claimed was the most comfortable in the room.

She stared at her hands for several moments while Severus started to get nervous. What could be the problem? Had Krum—or anyone else—*tampered* with her? A flash of rage went through him.

"I had a short visit with my parents after the Yule Ball," she finally blurted out.

"That must have been pleasant," he said.

"It was, but it was also so very odd. They told me that they had been approached to adopt a baby boy who was magical."

It was hard to breathe with her so close to a question that occupied much of his thoughts. "And?" he asked quietly.

"They've signed all the paperwork. It's just waiting for the birth certificate and the mother's final signature after he's born in late February or early March."

Severus closed his eyes. Dumbledore had made fast work of stealing Septima's baby. He ironically thought to himself that it was almost as if he already knew the process. "You don't want a brother?"

"Oh, no, I'm happy enough, I guess, but the whole thing didn't sit well. I asked some questions, and it came out that was adopted. My parents—the Grangers, that is—were told that the baby is my half-brother."

He said nothing, but rather Summoned a glass and put some water in it. She took it, sipped from it a little, and then held it in both of her hands.

"I had no idea, and when I came back, I wanted to talk it over with Professor Vector, but she never seems to have time for that sort of thing these days. I miss talking to her."

"She's been under a great deal of strain lately. I'm sure she misses talking to you, too. She's just been very preoccupied lately and does very little outside of teaching you lot and grading your essays."

"It's all I've been thinking about for almost a month. It's as though I can pick a mum out of the whole magical world, and the person I want to talk it over with has been distant to me. Last week, Pansy made a crack in the hallway about how Professor Vector's been walking like a pregnant cow lately, and I wondered about it."

"Oh?" It echoed hollowly in his ears, but she was in her own train of thought.

"What if Professor Vector is pregnant? Is she hiding the pregnancy? What would she do with the baby? Would she put it up for adoption?"

Severus closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Hermione looked at him and asked, "If I could pick any witch I knew for my mum, it would be her, but then if she is, why would she get rid of me like that? She seems to like me as much as I like her, but if she gave me up, it changes everything."

He might have found some sophistry to mislead her, but in his own confusion, he answered the last question first. "You have to understand how it was," he said.

Hermione looked a little shocked. "Are you saying she is? How could she never tell me?"

He shook his head. "It's not like that; it was never like that. You were coerced or perhaps even stolen from her. Then she was put under a memory charm or potion and told that she had miscarried you. Any thought of you beyond a superficial one causes her great unease. Whenever she gets close to the truth, she becomes very nervous and upset."

"So she doesn't know?"

He stood up and fixed himself another drink. "She's aware of it, now."

When he turned to sit back down, he realized she was staring at him intently. "How *do* you know?"

"I was there at the beginning, and then I recognized you the moment I saw you."

"I don't understand how a mother could be forced to give up her child."

"She didn't have a lot of options after I abandoned her."

Suddenly he realized that Hermione had not yet considered that part of the equation. She looked at him and really saw him for the first time ever. "You?"

He nodded. "Yes."

"But you're—"

He nodded again. "That's exactly what I thought. I had other things going in my life and no time for Septima or her child."

"So you just left her?"

He sighed. "Settling down with your mother was just too pat. I wasn't ready for that scene, and there was another witch."

She looked slightly ill. "A few weeks ago, I had parents who love me. Now I have a father who abandoned my mother and a mother who doesn't even remember me."

"She does remember you."

"You just said that she doesn't."

"Wait just a minute." He got up and went into Septima's bedroom, where he got several scrolls. He put them on the coffee table in front of his daughter. "This is just a sample. She's been doing this since the day she left the hospital after having you, often several times a week, but never more than a month apart."

Hermione opened what appeared to be the oldest and read it. "What does this rune mean?" she asked.

"That's your name," he said. "She called you Renée."

She looked through the others in front of her. "They all say I'm doing well."

"She thought she was going mad, that her art was making fun of her. She never asked where you were or whether you might be alive."

"Why not?"

"She couldn't bear it... Until I forced her on the day you had that altercation with Malfoy and his friends."

"Why hasn't she said anything since then? Why has she been so distant to me?"

"She wasn't sure how to approach it, and although now she has an intellectual knowledge, she doesn't have the emotional attachment she wishes for. She's terrified of being a bad mother."

"But she's completely frozen me out!"

"She's been exhausted the last few weeks. It turns out that Miss Parkinson is right. Your mother gave birth to your younger brother early this morning."

A/N: Thank you so very much to Owl bait and Kyria of Delphi for beta reading!

The Mechanics of Resting

Chapter 72 of 101

Septima enjoys her new son and learns a thing or two.

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Septima felt empty when she awoke. Her body was slimmer than she was accustomed to feeling; the baby was gone. In a panic, she sat up and looked around. Then she relaxed. She was at Eileen's house. She could hear voices in the other room. She got out of bed and bumped into something that wasn't there before.

It was a bassinet that had been set just an arm's reach from the bed. Soft sucking noises came up from it. She leaned down and saw the baby chewing his fist. "Oh," she sighed in joy as he looked toward her. She picked him up and held him close. He started rooting around, so she sat back down on the bed and loosened her nightgown.

"...I've been keeping secrets from Albus Dumbledore since my first week at Hogwarts," said a voice Septima recognized as Poppy Pomfrey's.

"That long?" answered Eileen.

"I patched up some Slytherins and Gryffindors after an altercation, and he wanted to know what had happened and who started it. I refused to tell him and suggested that he ask the students if he really wanted to know. Otherwise he could just punish the students he assumed were guilty, just as he always did."

"That did get tiresome when I was a student."

"The next thing I knew, he was rifling through my thoughts."

"He didn't! That's a violation of the code of Healing professionals!"

"He did indeed. I turned away from him and started packing my bag. I was halfway to Hogsmeade Station when he caught up with me, full of apologies."

"How did you fix it?"

"I was angry enough to keep walking, and he walked right beside me, trying to justify his behavior. Finally, he was able to see that I meant it. I think he lost other Matrons in the same way. He's never understood why I insist upon privacy, but he respects it."

"So he hasn't tried Legilimency since then?"

"He can't. I made him swear an Unbreakable Vow then and there that he would never do it again. The station master was the bonder. Then I got rid of all the pictures and portraits."

The two witches laughed over it while Septima thought it over. How many times, during the last nine months, had she seen Dumbledore try to ask questions he had no

business asking and Poppy serenely bat those questions away?

"We'll peek in and see if she's awake," said Eileen's voice, coming down the hallway.

The door opened, and Septima cleared her throat. "Come on in."

Poppy came in and sat on the edge of the bed. "Eileen says you did very well."

Septima smiled in response. "She and Severus were wonderful."

"May I see him?"

Septima's arms tightened before she realized she was being foolish. "Of course," she said. Poppy took the baby and crooned to him. "Oh, you're a strong-willed one, aren't you? They'll know who your father is, for sure, with that black hair and those angry eyes." The little body in her arms curled up, and the small face twisted up in preparation to cry. "You're mad at me for taking you away from your feeding, aren't you?"

Poppy handed the baby back to his mother and smiled. "He's a healthy one."

"Don't you think he's perfect?" asked Septima.

"He's a child to be proud of," she agreed.

Septima brought the child to her breast and watched as he clamped his little jaws down. "He eats so eagerly."

"That's good, but I want to know how my patient is. Are you up to what's ahead of you?"

"You mean with Dumbledore?"

"He's going to be furious with the lot of us."

"He'll be the most angry with me. For some reason, I think he hates me."

"Can't you guess?" asked Poppy. "He hates that Severus loves you."

Septima smiled ruefully. "He's wasting his energy, then. Severus doesn't love me."

Poppy smiled indulgently. "Severus has gone to a lot of work to make sure you could be together while keeping your baby and your jobs. He wouldn't enter into all the secrets you share if he didn't care for you a great deal."

"It's all for his son." Septima looked down. The baby's hands were balled into fists that were pressed tightly against his cheeks as if to improve the feeding process somehow.

"I think a certain amount of it is for his son's mother," said Poppy. "I need to get back to the school. The Headmaster may ask me how you are doing. I'll tell him I've seen you, and you're exactly as you should be. When will you be coming back to the school?"

"I think we'll keep her here until they've adjusted to his two week growth spurt," said Eileen. "After that it will still be a struggle, but things will be well established by then. That's when they should start working at establishing the rhythm of their life at Hogwarts."

"I'll be ready for the inevitable questions," said Poppy. "When will it be in the paper?"

"They took the pictures today, and they said to look for it Monday morning. Severus plans to tell Dumbledore everything at breakfast that day."

"Is that wise?"

"He doesn't think the Headmaster will act rashly at breakfast and Severus says it's time that everything be out in the open."

"Perhaps he's right. There's certainly no hiding a baby or a witch who was pregnant and now is not."

A/N: Thank you, as always, to Kyria of Delphi and Owlbait for beta reading!

A Quantum of Additional Awkwardness

Chapter 73 of 101

Surely Snape realized there was more to discuss.

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The Mechanics of Overcoming Awkwardness

Chapter 74 of 101

Septima isn't exempt from difficult conversations.

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Septima had started to wonder whether it was too soon to hope for Severus's return when the door to the house opened and closed. Eileen gave a shout about something, and then there was a great deal of conversation that Septima couldn't quite make out. Finally, Septima heard Severus's approach to the bedroom.

He opened the door with an odd look on his face. "Are you up to some company?" he asked.

"Your mum has the baby. She's giving him a bath."

"Yes, we saw them."

"We? Who—" She stopped short as she saw who was standing right behind him. "Re—Miss Granger?"

Severus stood aside and gave his daughter a push.

Hermione stood just inside the door and folded her arms. "I figured some things out, and he said that—I know you're my mother."

"I named you after René Descartes."

Septima rolled her eyes. She wanted to slap herself. Was that really the first thing she ever wanted to tell her daughter? Hoping that it couldn't get any worse, she motioned the girl further into the room. She barely noticed that Severus had backed away and shut the door.

"How could you tell him I was dead? How can you pretend I never happened and go on with your life?"

"I've longed for you every day since it happened," Septima said in an attempt to explain herself. "I was in the Janus Thickey ward at St. Mungo's. They told me I'd had a miscarriage and showed me your grave. Then there was some sort of treatment, and I forgot most of it."

"Except you didn't forget. Professor—my father—showed me some of the Arithmancy you did about me."

"I've spent fifteen years thinking that I was going mad or that I was a terrible Arithmancer." Septima chanced motioning the girl closer, patting the bed for her to sit on. "Then I finally asked the numbers, and they told me about you. Severus says it's obvious, but I never saw it. I'm not much of a mother, am I?" She felt her eyes filling with tears.

The girl shrugged. "You came through for me when I really needed you, when I was so miserable that I wanted to leave Hogwarts."

Septima blushed. "I can't believe I spoke to Severus that way. There was a time when he would have shouted at me and disappeared for days, at the end of which I would have been like a crushed flower."

Hermione twisted a finger in the bedclothes. "Why do you stay with him?"

"I love him, and I can't be happy at all without him. I tried for years. I tried again last year, and almost brought disaster on a good many people."

"You really love him, then?"

"Yes."

"Was I really just some sort of accident?"

Septima shrugged. She put her hand over her daughter's hand. Hermione didn't resist when Septima squeezed. "You weren't planned as such, but I was happy when I learned I was pregnant. I had created a world in my mind where we would finish our work at the university, get married, and have children together. At the time you were conceived, I thought I had proof that he loved me too. You were just a bit sooner on the schedule than I would have put you."

"But he was in love with the other witch."

"I'll probably never know who she was, but I think she was one of the people killed when Sirius Black confronted Peter Pettigrew on that street corner right after You-Know-Who died. At any rate, I knew she existed, but things were going so well that I thought maybe she didn't matter. Then I told your father I was pregnant, and then I learned a few things."

There was a knock at the door and Severus poked his head around it. "Master Nicolas has had a bath, and now he is most insistent that you give him some time."

"And a feeding, I would guess," said Septima. She put out her arms and took the baby, who immediately began rooting around. It had already become a habit to simply open her nightgown and offer her breast to him.

Hermione made a face and stood up. "I shouldn't—I don't know why I came, but I should go."

Septima reached and took her daughter's hand. "No, you shouldn't go. You belong here. The whole situation is very complicated and some things are awkward, but you're my daughter. I'm not going to lose you again." She looked up. "Severus, why am I crying?"

He sat on her other side. "It's just that you had a baby yesterday. You're tired and you've been through something tremendous."

"I can't seem to get control of myself."

He smiled and soothed back her hair. "You'll feel better in a while."

Hermione sat back down. "I still have many questions." She looked between her parents. "Is there a place for me in this family?"

Septima tightened her hold of Hermione's hand while Severus reached for the other. "Absolutely," said Septima as Severus said, "You've always had one."

"The Grangers... they'll always be my mum and dad, you know."

"Of course," said Septima. "I hate that they adopted you when I wanted you so much myself, but they did nothing wrong. Actually, they did so very many things right."

The Mechanics of Announcements

Chapter 75 of 101

Some events require a little flamboyance.

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A Quantum of Surprise

Chapter 76 of 101

Septima imagines the scene at Hogwarts while she recalls some events from the previous summer.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling.

Note: As some of you no doubt noticed, Chapter 74 posted twice last week. I was unable to delete the second one, so I overwrote it with Chapter 75. If you haven't yet read actual Chapter 75, you should do so before continuing with this chapter. I'm sorry for the confusion.

On Monday morning, Septima gave Nicky his bath with Eileen guiding her. "It's clear you've done this before," she said.

"I feel like I just needed to be reminded, but I don't remember this at all."

They both cooed and smiled at the grimace on the baby's face as they washed his hair.

"My granddaughter is an incredible young witch."

Septima flushed in annoyance. "I shouldn't have let her go. I should have fought more."

Eileen laughed dryly. "Fought whom?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. Severus says I never once put her down. I must have known someone was going to take her from me. Yet at some point I must have put her down."

"You were probably exhausted."

"Maybe I should have fought Severus harder. I should have fought harder for Severus."

"The other witch has been under his skin his whole life."

Septima clutched her son to her chest and looked at Eileen. "All three of you have been far too easy on me. What if, after my memories come back, it turns out that I did it all exactly the way the paperwork shows it? What if I lied to Severus and then lied about Severus and signed her away without a backwards glance?"

Eileen looked at Septima kindly, but with tears in her own eyes. "You know very well that you've been looking backwards since you lost her. You didn't give her up willingly and you've tortured yourself with her loss ever since."

"I'm sure I could have done something."

"I could have done more for my baby, too. I got caught up in what seemed like a romance, but it soured quickly. My family abandoned me, and my husband turned out to be a low-life whose greatest love was the bottle. I spent so much of my time looking after myself that I had precious little time or energy to look after my son. He wore charity clothes that were too big, too small, or a combination of both. He had to use my books, or ones I bought second-hand. But somehow, he worked his way through and thrived. And somehow, he managed to get you into his life. Now look at everything you've given him."

"I love him. I tried to let him go. I don't know how many times I've tried, but I just can't."

"I'm glad you didn't succeed. He needs you." At the look in her mother-in-law's eye, Septima decided to let it go.

Eileen went with Septima to Severus's library. Now that she had left the bedroom for more than her own necessities, Septima wanted to be someplace different. Eileen helped her move furniture around to make herself comfortable, and then started a fire for her. It was just as cozy as Septima once imagined to curl up on the couch with her

baby and a book.

She didn't read much, however. The clock struck the hour, and she imagined Severus delivering his news. Poppy would laugh in her sleeve, Septima was sure, but she wondered how the rest of the faculty would take the news. She recalled being somewhat surprised about part of it, herself.

* * * * *

"We have to get married," Severus said. "That way Dumbledore can't fire you over the unmarried parents rule he claims exists."

"Won't he just have it annulled due to breach of whatever contract he has with you?"

"It's not explicitly stated in my contract. He'll use the clause that says, 'duties as the Headmaster determines' or some such to tie it up before the Wizengamot. It would never go through, but there would be a lot of scandal, and more stress than you should have." He patted her tummy at that. "Lucius has helped me out. Pius Thicknesse will formalize the documents and then keep them away from the public view until it's so late that any question of breach of contract will be null."

He started tugging on her hand. Suddenly she realized he meant to go to the Ministry right then.

"We can't go now! I'm not ready!"

"What do you need to do?"

"I'd like to at least wear something pretty," she looked down at herself. She was wearing faded blue jeans and didn't even have a bra underneath her tee shirt. She'd often gone without as a student, but now was forced to wear one most of the time due to gravity, age, and now pregnancy.

"You're fine as you are," he said. He pulled her close. "This is one of my favorite outfits."

"How can you say that?"

His left hand was cupping her bottom while his right hand was sliding up under the shirt. "Do you really have to ask?"

She broke free fairly easily. It turned out that he was only getting a quick grope. "I want to look nice for our—our wedding." Septima didn't have time to think about the event that they were discussing, that she'd only wished and dreamed hopelessly about for fifteen years, but it still gave her a little pause.

"We don't have time for flower girls and ushers and that sort of thing."

"But changing into a nice dress won't take more than a few minutes."

She saw in his eyes that he was teasing. "No, it won't." He let her go and sat down with his coffee in the lounge.

Oh, by the way," he called through the door as she rifled through her wardrobe for a particular dress, "I thought we'd stop at my mother's house after the ceremony."

She put her head out of the door. "Your—mother?"

"She's a midwife. I trust Poppy and all, but—" He stood up and walked toward her. "I do like that outfit better, but I'm not sure it's right for the Ministry."

Septima was standing in nothing but her panties, she had been so startled by this revelation. She held the dress over her chest. "Severus, your mother? Why am I hearing about your mother for the first time today?"

He shrugged. "It never came up."

"Your mother is a midwife, and it never came up when I was pregnant before?"

He was staring at her breasts in a way that suggested conversation was futile, so she backed into her room and pulled the white sundress over her head. She decided to think about it later, perhaps after she'd done something about her hair.

It was much later that she thought about it. It all worked out, and Eileen turned out to be perfectly lovely. After it was all over, Severus did more than casually grope her. He'd caressed and loved her in a way that thrilled her, especially when he'd been overcome by passion and had whispered into her ear, "Ah, love... witch... wife..." Something within her released, and she abandoned herself to him more freely than ever before.

Thank you so much to Kyria of Delphi and Owlbait for beta reading!

The Mechanics of Rug Pulling

Chapter 77 of 101

Severus knew there would be constant battles with some people.

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Two weeks at Hogwarts without Septima was horrible. Severus couldn't remember what he did before she slept in his arms at night. He couldn't understand why he should be so irritable without her in the mornings. The only thing he was sure of was that the prickle in his arm was worse than ever, and there was no one to rub soothing lotions into it or distract him with her ripening body.

There was a project or two to work on in Septima's absence. Hermione sent a letter to her parents asking if they could remember who their contact had been when she was adopted. Severus had considered going to their home and using Legillimancy. He decided that if Dumbledore were involved in an attempted adoption of Nicky, it would be

better if the Grangers never saw Severus. Someone would have to tell the Grangers soon that there was no baby boy to adopt, and he didn't want them to mention him.

Hermione wrote her letter and waited several days for a reply. She brought it to him with her Potions essay one afternoon. The Grangers remembered the kind lady who brought their baby girl to them very well. Her name was Alice Longbottom, and she was very helpful. As they went over the paperwork, she explained that Hermione would have some peculiarities, and that there would be a special school in her future. They had always wondered what had happened to Mrs. Longbottom, who mentioned that she and her husband were hoping to start a family soon. They had been under the impression that she would return to help them get Hermione ready for school and were disappointed that she didn't.

Severus read the letter in his office and swore. "Is that Neville's Mum?" asked Hermione.

"Yes, she's been—ill—since the Dark Lord fell, such that she wouldn't be able to tell us anything. She was an Auror, and a member of an organization that I suspect was marginally involved, but she probably did her part in good faith. In any case, we're at a dead end for now."

Severus scratched his arm. "Septima will be back tomorrow. I'm sure you'll want to visit with her then."

"Every day it seems like I think of new questions."

"No doubt she has, too." The clock chimed; a new class would be lining up outside the Potions dungeon. He walked her to the door and spoke more loudly. "It's off to the library for you, Miss Granger. Mind you write your next essay with slightly larger print. Making me blind will not give you a higher grade." He stood in the hallway and stared at the second-years queued up outside the classroom.

* * * * *

Septima was a bundle of nerves the next afternoon when he arrived at his mother's house. "Are you sure this is all going to work?"

"I told Dumbledore he can have us all or none of us. He chose all. Besides, where would he find an Arithmancy Professor with your credentials?"

She smiled and handed him the bag she had packed to take back to Hogwarts. They quietly made their way to a quiet corner of the neighborhood, Apparated to the gates of the school, and walked up the drive.

"Why am I so nervous?" she asked.

"There's no reason to be. Everything is ready in our apartment and we have all afternoon to get settled." Severus opened the door and held it for her.

"Ah, Professor Vector, I wonder if I might have a word?" Dumbledore was standing on the first landing of the great staircase, twinkling at the students going into the Great Hall for dinner.

"Certainly, Headmaster," she said. Under her breath she said, "Now I know why," as she handed Severus the baby and followed Dumbledore up the stairs.

Severus had no idea what the old man had planned this time, but he was not worried. He smiled to himself as he looked forward to an evening with his witch by his side. He arrived in his lounge and set the bag on the coffee table. He had no idea what was in it or where Septima wanted it put. The baby yawned and closed his eyes, so Severus decided to put him down for a nap. He walked over to what had been Septima's room and cursed for a full minute.

The door was gone. Bare wall stood in its place. Where had the crib for the baby gone? He looked around the lounge. It wasn't there. He walked to the doorway of the bedroom. It wasn't there, either. He looked around the entire apartment and realized that in the last two hours, every trace of Septima had been removed.

Still holding the baby, he took the stairs two at a time.

* * * * *

"Ah, come in, Severus!" said Dumbledore in response to his furious knock. The door opened.

Severus felt somewhat incongruous, storming into the office while cradling the baby against his chest. Septima saw the look in his eyes and quickly reached for the child. He didn't speak to her but instead handed Nicky to her. Her grasp of the child was gentle but firm. No force, Muggle or magical, would take her child away from her when she looked like that.

"Headmaster, this is not what we agreed to!"

"Professor Snape, I am speaking with Professor Vector just now." Severus could do nothing but fume and watch Dumbledore's scheme play out.

There was no chair for Septima to sit upon. She would be forced to stand like a pupil who had misbehaved. Dumbledore, however, seemed quite comfortable. He rearranged some of the devices on his desk and finally folded his hands on his blotter.

"I believe I made it clear that I did not want you to marry Professor Snape." He looked up at her, indicating that a response was required.

"You did, sir."

"Yet you did so, anyway?" He looked at her again.

"We did."

"I have the paperwork prepared and a family ready to adopt your son, but I've been told you refuse to have that done?"

"We do." Severus couldn't remain silent.

"Professor Vector, I'm asking you."

She straightened her shoulders. "I will raise my own child, Headmaster. I never agreed to any adoption, and it's the last thing I want."

Dumbledore sat back in his chair. "It was just a suggestion." Now he smiled that smile that he flashed at Septima just when he was about to hurt her. "Your living arrangements will have to be discussed. It was one thing to have you and Severus sharing quarters when he was looking after Remus Lupin's interests. I'm not pleased with your part in that deception, by the way. Now, however, we must look after Severus's interests. Something tells me that he's about to be very busy, and we need to keep him from being overtaxed. You will therefore return to the Arithmancy Professor's quarters."

Whatever the old man said, he was part of the conversation, now. "I need the witch, Headmaster."

"I don't believe you do, Severus. You did perfectly well before Voldemort's death, if it can be called such."

Severus snorted. "Not perfectly by any stretch of the imagination. Not well, either, if it comes to it. I need Septima in my apartment. She takes care of me."

"We have a well-trained Mediwitch and a fully stocked Hospital Wing for that, Professor Snape."

"You don't understand, Dumbledore! I need her near me. She comforts and soothes me."

"I've told you time and again that there are other means to your comfort."

"I want her."

"She's a distraction we can't afford, and her things have already been moved to the other apartment."

Septima looked exhausted and defeated, but she spoke with the dignity of a queen when she said, "I'll head there, now. Severus, if our special project students are looking for me, please tell them where I am."

Looking closely, he realized that their son was wriggling against her chest, looking for a meal. He looked at Dumbledore with a raised eyebrow. "It appears that motherhood has won your argument for you. This isn't over."

A/N: Thank you to Owlbait and Kyria of Delphi for beta reading!

A Quantum of Emotion

Chapter 78 of 101

The next few weeks prove illuminating for Septima

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

They sat in the lounge of Septima's apartment. A fire worked to dispel the gloom that disuse had left while soft cooing sounds came from their son as he nursed. Severus's arm around Septima was initially rock-hard around her, but softened as the tiny wizard worked a charm of wonder upon them both.

Severus grouched, "He's an interfering old—"

"He's not entirely wrong," said Septima. "We would be a distraction."

"I want you in my arms as I sleep."

"Nicky doesn't have a very good schedule yet. He's often up at night."

"I need you when the Mark aches."

She didn't have an answer for that. "I'll come to you whenever I can."

He buried his face in her neck and whispered, "I want to make love to you."

"I can't now, anyway. Your mum says I haven't healed enough yet."

He made a sound between a groan and a squeak. Then he whispered, "How long?"

"She checked right before you came to get us. She said probably two weeks, but not longer than a month. I need to see Poppy in a couple of weeks to check again."

He took a deep breath and let it out. "Have we gone longer than this?"

She smiled and put a hand along his face. "Yes, much longer."

"I don't believe it."

Septima awoke later in Severus's arms. He must have carried her in and put her in the bed. A quiet fuss in the corner suggested that he had put Nicky in his crib as well. Severus wouldn't be able to sleep with her overnight, but at the moment, they were a family.

She looked at the clock and saw that several hours had passed. No wonder the baby was fussing again. He was ravenous lately. She gently got up so as not to disturb Severus and went to change the baby's diaper. Then she brought him to the bed and snuggled close to her husband before feeding her son.

* * * * *

The next two weeks went by in a flurry of diapers and feedings. Septima gradually gained some control over Nicky's schedule and then started teaching her classes again. First she managed the seventh-year seminars, which required less of her direct attention than the lower classes. Then she slowly absorbed the younger classes until she was working with all the O.W.L. and N.E.W.T level students.

Severus stopped by her lounge every night and helped give the baby a bath, gradually taking over the process so that Septima could grade essays and problem sets. A homey sort of ritual developed, albeit a sad one when they kissed goodnight at the door and Severus left.

"This has to end soon," he grumbled.

"It won't last forever," she agreed. "I'll see Poppy soon."

"Not just that," he said. "I want to be together, again. I'm used to it now."

She would give him a sad smile and one last kiss goodnight. It wasn't until after he left that she let her anger at Dumbledore vent itself, in tears, in whispered curses, or in broken glassware. She wouldn't burden Severus with her frustrations, for that would prove Dumbledore right.

* * * * *

Visits with Hermione became one of the joys of Septima's life. Several days a week they got together to ask questions. Septima learned about the life her daughter had led

as a small child while describing the various members of her own family, people who were gone now and that Hermione would never meet. Severus occasionally entered into these discussions and asked his daughter about Viktor Krum. He was assured that the Durmstrang student was a perfect gentleman, but he remained unconvinced.

The second task of the Triwizard Tournament came, and when Septima heard what Hermione was expected to do, she nearly went spare.

"We can't allow it, Severus!" she said in his office the night before the task.

"You can't hate it any more than I do. Not only is she going to be part of this, but Krum is supposed to rescue her. Yet, my hands are tied. On what grounds can we complain?"

"You're her father! I'm her mother!"

"Septima, think for a minute. We can't afford to show that we know our relationship to her. I'm trying to find out what happened when she was born, but if we show that we know anything, we may lose our chance to find out the rest."

"I can't watch."

"You have to come as a member of the staff."

"I can't. I'll fall to pieces and it will be obvious that she's more than my student. Tell them the baby is sick or difficult. I can't go."

Severus pulled her into his arms with a smile. "And you were terrified of being a bad mother. You were convinced that you had no maternal feeling for her. Now we see the truth."

Hermione herself came to Septima's lounge after the task was over. "You didn't come! It was so exciting... oof..."

Septima crushed her daughter close. "I was too worried about you to go. I was sure everything would be out in the open if I had to watch you in danger, and Severus thinks we need to keep things secret at least a little longer."

The girl pushed far enough away to look up shyly. "I love you, too."

A/N: Thank you to Owlbait and Kyria of Delphi for beta reading!

The Mechanics of Married with Kids

Chapter 79 of 101

It doesn't always work like clockwork.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

There was something in Dumbledore's eyes as he had said, "And Hermione Granger for Viktor Krum." The Headmaster had looked in Septima's direction with a certain satisfaction. It was slight enough; no one else would have noticed, including Septima herself, apparently. She was doodling in a notebook, where her equations were askew.

She glanced up at him as the other teachers left the staff room. She tapped her notebook with her pencil. "It's complete bollocks, lately."

"You're a brilliant witch. It will come right if you keep at it."

She looked at him more seriously. "Did he really say what I heard?"

"Yes."

She took a deep breath and would have said more but he put a finger on her lips. "Not another word about it until we're sure we're alone."

Septima nodded.

Severus didn't exactly leave it at that. Soon after the meeting, he managed to corner the boy and perform some quick Legilimency. Of course the boy was thinking about little else just then, and he had an excellent spell in mind to complete the task. It was reassuring enough that Severus could reassure his wife later.

The way the second task had been arranged still rankled, but everyone came out safely enough, and it wasn't worth fretting about after it was over. Now there was only the third task of the tournament left, but that was weeks away. For now, time was best spent in looking over lecture notes and grading exams, since certain other pastimes were off limits.

Fortunately, the days passed more quickly than he had feared. Septima went to Severus's class room after a fourth year class one afternoon and locked the door. He was sitting at his desk, sorting through the essays he had just collected. He looked up at her when he heard the click of the lock. That clicking sound had always made his blood race.

"Is there something I can help you with, Professor?"

"Poppy says I've healed enough and that I'm ready."

"Ready?"

Septima walked over and sat on the corner of his desk. "For you, me...us."

Severus stood so quickly that she had to hop off the desk or risk falling. "Ready, Professor? For what?"

She was overwhelmed by his sudden intensity and took a step backwards. "For..."

"Yes?" He took a step toward her, and she stepped backward again.

"For..."

"For this?" he asked as he pushed her up against his chalk board.

"Yes," she whispered as he pressed his body against hers.

She was everything he remembered. It was magical, pressing against her and shagging her like a sex-starved eighteen year old. She made some sort of noise, and it made him more excited. She felt so, so good... Just like when he was a teenager, he couldn't control himself, and it was over far too soon.

"I missed this, witch," he said in his softest, sultriest voice.

She was pushing away from him, and grabbing for her knickers. Suddenly he realized something was wrong. "That was bad for you?" How could it be bad for her?

She shrugged. "I wasn't quite ready, I guess, and Nicky is going to want a feeding soon, so I'm a bit sore." She held her hand to her chest.

"I'm sorry, I'll pay better attention next time."

"I don't remember the chalk tray pressing such a cold line into my bum, or there being a catch between my shoulder blades. Then my head was pounding and rubbing against the board..."

Didn't she enjoy *any* of it? He lowered his head and kissed her. "We'll do it better, tonight."

"Will you be coming upstairs, or do you want me to come down?"

"Damn Dumbledore and his pronouncements. We'll be back in the same quarters as soon as I figure out how to arrange it. I had better come to you in case he decides to visit me."

Septima had just put the baby down when he arrived. She was wearing a dress he liked, and she had some wine set out for him. They sat on her couch and enjoyed relaxing for a few minutes.

"Should we try to explore my memories with your potions again after he's weaned?" Septima asked.

"We can do that, if you like. After the way so many came up in the last year, I suspect that they'll all surface at some point."

They discussed some students, but the conversation dwindled down to nothing. Septima looked at him nervously. He was reminded of the night they had become lovers, when everything had been awkward until she had kissed him.

He leaned over. "I've missed you, witch."

"I've missed you, too."

He kissed her gently. He deliberately kept it soft, and it relaxed her. When their lips parted, he ran his fingers under her chin. "I should have been doing more of this with you all along."

She reached down and took his other hand in hers as she lifted her lips up for another kiss. It wasn't hard after that, to relax on the couch as they kissed more. After a while, they had moved closer until they were pressed together.

"Are you ready to move to the bed?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," she answered.

He stood up and put a guiding arm around her. They walked toward the bedroom, stopping to kiss as they went. By the time she was standing next to the bed, Septima realized that her dress was unzipped and down one arm. She giggled and let it fall to the floor. Then she sat on the bed and started unfastening Severus's trousers. When he was as undressed as she, they lay back on the bed.

Now their kisses included touches. Severus ran his hands down Septima's body and then lowered his mouth to kiss everything he touched. Septima alternated between holding his head against her and trying to wriggle around to touch and explore him as well. Her knee moved around his and he chuckled. "I love when you do that," he said. He moved between her legs as his hands caressed her bum.

The baby cried out. They stopped moving except to turn their faces toward the crib.

Septima whispered. "Some nights he goes right back to sleep. Let's just wait a minute."

The baby cried again, and then started to wail. Septima pushed her way up and walked over to the alcove where the baby's crib stood. He was dripping wet. She changed his diaper. As she tried to put him down again, he started rooting at her chest. She had to bring him to the bed.

"I don't understand. I just fed him!"

Severus smiled. "I think I can understand his desire to breastfeed." He sat up against the headboard and pulled her up against him. After she settled the baby at one breast, Severus slid his hand up around the other. "I love your breasts, myself."

Septima settled into his side and fed their son as Severus looked on contentedly. The next thing they heard was the sound of the alarm. They had fallen asleep in that position.

He followed her to the child's crib. She laid the baby down, and he snuggled and sighed himself into deeper sleep. Severus wrapped his arms around his wife.

They backed up and then moved to the bed. He quickly moved over her and started nudging at her knees. Once again he felt as he had when he was young. He moved quickly and frantically within her. Fortunately or unfortunately, it was over quickly.

He rolled away with a big smile. "Good morning," he said with something akin to brightness in his voice. She was rolling away to the side of the bed and moving quickly toward the loo.

He sighed and ran his hands through his scalp. "Not again." He followed her and stood in the doorway of the bathroom. "What is the matter with you?"

"I don't know," she said quietly. "I just wasn't quite ready."

"Are you saying it's my fault?"

She shook her head. "I don't think so. You did what you've always done. I guess it's me."

A/N: Thank you to Kyria of Delphi and Owlbait for beta reading!

The Mechanics of Romance

Chapter 80 of 101

Severus works to get his witch into the mood.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Severus kept a physical distance for a couple of days, although he came and helped her with the baby in the evenings. They parted for the night with a soft kiss and a touch of their hands. Based upon the way Dumbledore's eyes twinkled when he greeted her at meals, Septima was sure he knew there was a problem between Severus and herself. She lay in her lonely bed and wondered if this would be her life for the foreseeable future.

Somehow what they had always done best was now what they did worst. Obviously the problem was Septima. She simply couldn't make love the way she had before. She knew Severus was attached to her, and now they were even married. Yet she couldn't fool herself. Sex had held them together all this time. How long would it be before he searched for what they had with another witch? Her worried eyes followed him at meals and around the corridors of the school. The Beauxbatons professors were so pretty. How could she not have noticed that before?

Severus followed her to her classroom after breakfast on Friday, shutting the door and locking it so that he could lean down and kiss her.

"I don't know why you bother. It seems hopeless," she said.

"It's not hopeless. We just need to change the way we do things." Severus kissed her again and ran his hands up and down her body. "Pack yourself and the baby a bag for the weekend. We'll figure something out."

That afternoon, Septima stood nervously near the front door. She remembered feeling like this on her first Hogsmeade Weekend, worried about whether her parents had properly filled out the permission slip and whether her name was on the list.

"I'm not sure I can spare two professors, Severus..."

"It's simply necessary, Headmaster. The situation is dire."

"Whatever is the matter?"

"The witch requires a well and thorough shagging."

Septima could feel herself blush, and a look of sick annoyance passed over Dumbledore's face. "There's no need to be crass, Severus. What are you really doing?"

"I'm taking my wife off for a weekend of romance. She's tired lately."

"How long will you be gone?"

Severus looked at Septima appraisingly. "We'll be back by our first classes on Monday. I couldn't say how soon before then. We might find that we enjoy each other's company."

Dumbledore simply sighed as they walked out the door. Septima huffed a little and finally asked, "Why did you have to make me sound like some sort of nymphomaniac?"

"Because sex between us seems to disgust him and get us away from him faster than any other discussion. Besides, it's true."

"I'm a Nymphomaniac?"

"No, but you do need to be properly loved, I think."

"You plan to do nothing but shag me all weekend?"

"I'm going to make love with you in every way that strikes our fancy this weekend."

"What are we doing with Nicky?"

They arrived at the front gate. "We're leaving him with my mother," said Severus. Before Septima could say another word, he put his arm around her and turned.

Septima nearly balked at the idea of leaving Nicolas with Eileen. Severus kissed her and insisted. "She's a midwife and knows what to do for him as well as you do. She's wanted to see him since you came back to Hogwarts. She's his gran, and she loves him."

"I know she'll do wonderfully... but his feedings!"

"I've got all the bottles you made before in this bag, and you can make more bottles and send them from time to time."

"Is there any sense in arguing?"

"None."

At least he picked a place to go that offered some measure of normalcy and comfort. After walking her through the process of kissing the baby goodbye and leaving in near tears, Severus brought Septima to her apartment near the university.

"I'm not sure I can do this," she said.

"Of course you can."

"But I'll miss him!"

"I'll try to fill your time," he said dryly.

He dropped their bags by the door and pulled her into his arms. She trembled with all the emotions going through her, and he simply held her. After a moment, their breathing started to keep time together and they seemed to be swaying. She couldn't be sure, but perhaps she could feel the beat of his heart matching hers.

He kissed her gently, and then started pushing her toward the bath room. "Let's start with a nice, hot bath."

She thought he would get in with her, but instead he conjured himself a low chair and sat next to her as she reclined in the tub and breathed in the combination of salts and oils he put into the water. They didn't say much. He read a journal, occasionally reading excerpts aloud. At some point, she gave a contented sigh, and he said, "Are you ready for what's next?"

"I think I'm done with the bath, anyway. Have you got this all planned out?"

He assessed her over the top of his journal. "Stand up, then."

As she stood, he got a bath sheet. When she stepped out of the bath, he wrapped it around her. Then he pulled her close and kissed her. "Are you feeling relaxed?"

"A little," she admitted.

He pulled her closer and kissed her again. She sighed and leaned up into his body as something stirred deep within her. He pulled back and touched her nose. "Not yet, love."

She let him guide her toward the bed. He turned down the sheets and positioned her, sitting, on the bed. He sat behind her and summoned a hair brush. "I've always loved your hair," he whispered as he started to draw the brush through it. "It's always been a bit forlorn and unappreciated, yet it gleams and shines when it gets the slightest bit of attention." He finished one side and smoothed it over her shoulder, making her skin tingle at his touch.

Severus acted a little too disinterested and worked on the rest of her hair. "It's like you, really," he said. "With the slightest bit of attention, you become alluring, beautiful, even." Her hair slid over her other shoulder. "I've forgotten, if I ever knew, that you deserve more attention than I give you."

"It's fine, really..."

He put a finger over her lips. "Lay down," he said as he pulled the towel away. Her body hit the bed, and he started kneading her shoulders. "You've been taking care of the baby and your students, and no one has taken care of you lately."

"I know Dumbledore has you busy."

"He's wasting my time. All the plans are made and there's nothing to do until the Dark Lord makes his move, if he actually does so."

He rubbed her shoulders, taking his time about it, but eventually moving down her hips to her legs and feet. There was a lovely smell in the room as he used some sort of lotion on her back. As he rubbed, he spoke, and Septima wasn't sure exactly what he said. It may have been the story of Babbitty Rabbitty for all she knew or cared. Marvelous things danced in her head. Runes and numbers worked together in a joyous scum that became a waltz and then a reel until they were in straight rows in her mind.

A/N: Thank you to beta readers Kyria of Delphi and Owlbait!

A Quantum of Passion

Chapter 81 of 101

Septima regains her rhythm.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling.

The witch was very relaxed. Severus saw the look in Septima's eye and reflected to himself that the sound of his voice had the same magic for her that it ever had. He would never admit it, but he had worried that she had finally lost interest in him. For the better part of the last week he had lived in fear that she would decide there were other wizards she could love after all. This weekend was his way of showing her that, whatever his feelings might be, he wanted her in his life forever. He undressed and lay next to her, watching her breathe deeply with a look of contentment on her face.

"Are you still awake?" he asked quietly.

She turned her head toward his voice and then rolled to face him.

"I feel marvelous. What was in that lotion?"

"Ah, that's my secret."

"Did you really just want me to relax?"

"I want much more than that, witch, but I think we need to face the fact that this is going to require more seduction than we've had before. We can't just go at it like we've always done."

"Is that all right?"

"We had to take the time to learn how to do this that very first night," he whispered as his lips came close to her. "I think, after all these years, that we can learn a little more." He kissed her forehead, her eyes, and her cheeks before her lips. After a minute or two, he leaned back. "Are you ready for me to rub the rest of you?"

"Th-the rest of me?"

He ran a fingertip down her throat and along her collar bone. "I've only done your back."

"Oh, well, it wouldn't be right to leave the job half done." There was a tremble in her voice.

"No, it wouldn't," he chuckled as he nudged her into the position he wanted her in.

He gently used his thumbs to soothe her jaw and get it to relax. Then his fingertips worked down along her neck, getting lower and causing her blood to jump. He reached her shoulders and worked laterally, first to one arm, massaging and relaxing it, and then to the other arm.

He massaged her breasts gently. "Do you need to fix a bottle for the baby?"

"I don't think for a little while. Oh, that feels good." She wriggled a little so that it would be easier for him.

He rubbed her tummy next, stopping to kiss it as he used to do when she was pregnant. "There no one there, now," she observed.

"But he was there," he answered. Her legs were next and he rubbed them again.

She looked at him as he finished. "You make me feel incredible," she said.

"I'm not done yet," he said, running a hand between her legs until they reached a spot that made her gasp.

"What are you doing?"

"I don't think you're quite ready, yet," he answered, "but you're much closer."

He slid his body up alongside hers. "I've missed this," she whispered. He held her, running his hand lightly along her back.

After a few minutes, Septima whispered, "I want to touch you, too." She ran her free hand along his arm, his back, his hip, and then she worked her way further. His response was instantaneous. For a few moments, they caressed each other, touching each other in ways that had been rousing before and learning what did and didn't still arouse them.

Septima leaned up to kiss him. "I want you."

"Are you sure you're ready?" He looked into her eyes.

"Yes," she said. She slid her arms around him as her body started moving against his. Her knee worked around his and a moment later, she received him. He felt her abandon herself to his lovemaking. He moved gently, recalling that he had hurt her before. When she moved faster and more intently, he did too. She started making breathy little sounds as he felt her start to tremble. "Oh, Severus!" she said, burrowing her head against his chest.

He had been holding back and now allowed himself to finish, shuddering over her with a renewed sense of wonder. There was something between them that he knew he would not find elsewhere. Somehow, even though it had been more work than before, he found a passion and contentment with Septima that he would always treasure.

They rolled apart and discovered that it had gotten very wet between them. Septima Summoned the bath sheet. "I guess I should have made a bottle for the baby after all," she said.

Severus chuckled. "You can work on that now. I need to get something for us to eat."

They worked companionably in the kitchen. Septima fixed the bottle and put it away while Severus made arrangements for take-in. He laid the meal on the table and they ate together. They'd shared meals at this table so many times before, and he watched Septima continue to relax in the ease of the familiar.

They washed dishes together and put them away. Severus couldn't help snuggling up behind Septima's back and putting his hands around her, caressing and then groping her body.

"Oh, Severus..."

"Is that good?" His hands slid the tie of her robe free and then found bare skin.

"Goo—od!" She moaned as his hands massaged and molded her.

He looked longingly at the table. They'd had quite a few memorable experiences upon it, perhaps including the moment they'd conceived their daughter. However, Septima's comfort was to be considered foremost today; it was likely that tomorrow or Sunday she would be ready to renew their more adventurous escapades.

He led her back to the bedroom. The kitchen would be something to anticipate.

A/N: Thank you to Owlbait and Kyria of Delphi for their beta reading and advice!

A Quantum of Confusion

Chapter 82 of 101

Septima has a lovely evening followed by a nightmare.

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Septima didn't know why it had been so hard to return to Severus's arms. This afternoon, in just a few short hours, she had regained the joy that they had always known

together. As they lay together in the afterglow of their passion, he had whispered that he loved that she was his wife. She had felt so content and safe that she whispered that she loved him.

He sighed and held her close. "I was worried. You've been somewhat distant, and with the way the sex was this week..."

She trembled in his arms. "I just couldn't find the rhythm. Then I feared that if I didn't, you would find a different witch."

"There's no other witch."

There was exactly one other witch, but Septima wouldn't bring up her rival at a time like this. "I do love you."

"I can't tell you how I depend upon that."

He turned her so that her back was to his chest and nestled her close. After pulling her bum tight against his groin, he slid his arm around her and slid his hand around her breast. It was a comforting position for them both, and it allowed him to whisper into her ear.

He recounted the story of Beedle the Bard's fountain as his thumb caressed her. She drowsed as she listened; it didn't matter what he said, numbers and formulae moved in her mind as he did. As the wanderers in the story reached their goal, Septima was aware of her husband becoming aroused. The hand that was around her breast started stroking it, and her own body became aroused as well.

Lips caressed her neck and nibbled as the knight won his witch, and Severus's hand slid lower, searching Septima's most sensitive spots, teasing her into full passion. After gently moving her into position, he was making love to her again. Septima felt as though there was no tether to hold her to earth.

His hands slid along her body, pushing her into a frenzy. She sighed and squealed until she suddenly lost sense of everything except the deepest part of her. She fell into a realm of ecstasy.

She was barely aware of Severus whispering, "Oh, yes, witch..." He was shuddering over her, around her, within her, and it added to her own bliss.

When their bodies had cooled, he didn't move. He simply put an arm around her and said, "Ah wife, there's no one like you." He'd said something like that before, but she was all too happy to have it repeated.

They were replete for the time being and fell asleep quickly. Severus moved his body close to hers and kissed her neck as he drifted off. Septima relaxed for the first time in weeks, feeling almost loved.

* * * * *

She was in a cold and dark place when suddenly she felt herself being shaken awake.

"What's the matter, love?"

"Someone has stolen the baby." She shook her head. It was a dream.

Severus pulled her tight. "No, he's fine. Mother won't let anyone near him, and I laid the protective spells myself. Dumbledore won't try anything."

"Severus, I need him." She'd missed an overnight feeding with the baby, and her chest was sore.

"Why don't you just make a bottle?"

"I need *him*." She couldn't quite shake the dream. "I'm sure that someone is stealing him!"

He kissed her forehead kindly. "All right. I'll go get him. You stay right here. It's a glorious day, and we're going to enjoy it to its fullest, even if we have an extra person to work around."

Severus got out of bed and dressed quickly. He found his wand and a cloak and kissed her again. A moment later, he was gone.

Septima decided to make some breakfast for him while she waited. She tied a robe around herself and went into the kitchen, finding the eggs, bread, and a few other things that Severus had gotten in preparation for this weekend. The stove had just gotten warm and the eggs were scrambling nicely when there was a knock on the door.

Septima smiled. The kitchen was under control, and she'd be able to give Nicky his meal as they ate. "Perfect timing!" she said as she opened the door.

She tried to shut it again, but the wizard who stood in the doorway pushed through. "Ah, my dear, I'm glad you've decided to be happy to see me."

"Professor Erwin, you can't come in."

"When will you start to call me Richard, dear? Why do you pretend you don't like me? We both know you want this."

"I don't want you. I've never wanted you, and Severus will be here in just a minute."

"Do we really have to go over all of that again?" Erwin sighed. "Severus is at Hogwarts, my dear, where he's been since he finished his degree last year."

Last year? "He's here with me this weekend. He just went to his mother's house to get our baby."

"Your baby died, don't you remember? Severus isn't coming. Now, suppose you take me to your bedroom, and when we're done there, we will go over what we discussed in group meeting yesterday. You were saying something fascinating about the effect of the solid state on some potions."

She vaguely remembered a discussion from her university days. "That was years ago. Severus will be back any minute."

"No, my dear. It was just yesterday; don't you remember? You must have had quite a dream last night." He stepped close to her and sniffed. "You smell of sex. Did you start without me, you naughty girl? That must have been some dream." He chortled and ran his hand along her trembling arm.

Was she wrong? Was it really just a dream? She backed away, but he kept advancing upon her. She put her hand in front of her to ward him off, and suddenly saw her wedding ring. Severus and Nicky *were* real. She wanted to sigh with relief, but for some reason Erwin was trying to use her mind against her. The best thing to do would be to play for time. "I-I have breakfast on the stove. I don't want it to burn."

"Perhaps you should see to it first. We don't want to be interrupted by those Muggle fire trucks."

A/N: Thank you to Owlbait and Kyria of Delphi for beta reading!

A Quantum of Retribution

Chapter 83 of 101

Severus finds an old foe in his wife's apartment.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Severus found his mother trying to soothe an inconsolable baby. "He woke up a couple of hours ago and refuses to take a bottle. I don't think anything but his mother will help him."

"I'll take him straight away," said Severus.

"Unfortunately, you can't Apparate with a child like this. He's likely to get himself splinched."

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose. Nothing was ever easy. "There's a place we can Floo that's near the apartment."

Fifteen minutes after arriving at his mother's house, he was walking across the university campus with a whimpering infant. It wasn't a long walk, but he'd already been gone longer than he had wished.

He could hear some sort of commotion inside the flat.

"Stop! I told you I don't want it!"

"You'll give me what I want, or you won't get your degree."

"I already have my degree!"

"You've been dreaming, my dear. Now just give me what I want."

Severus opened the door and entered the apartment to see Septima struggling with Richard Erwin. What would he need to do to get rid of this pest for good?

Septima's robe had been ripped open. Erwin pressed his arm across Septima's chest, pinning her against the wall while he fumbled with the fastening of his trousers. Septima squirmed and struggled, but she couldn't push him away. As soon as she heard her son's cries, however, she turned her head.

"They're here. Let me go!"

Severus spoke quietly but firmly. "Take your hands off my wife."

"Not until I get what I came for," said Erwin without turning around.

This time it was too much. Severus shifted Nicky into one arm while pointing his wand at the other man's back. "Sectumsempera!"

Thin lines appeared in the wizard's robe, and then thin streams of blood began to show. Severus now had Erwin's attention. "What did you do to me?" he asked while trying to look over his shoulder. The pain made him wince.

"It won't be permanent if you get to St. Mungo's on time."

"What did you do?"

"Step away from my wife. The wounds are shallow, but I assure you I can use that spell to remove your head, or," Severus's wand dipped down, "other parts..."

Erwin looked down to his crotch and considered the pain in his back. He let go of Septima and stepped away from her. She had no balance and slid down the wall. Erwin glared at Severus. "After they fix my back, I'll have you arrested."

Septima rubbed at her chest for a second and then put out her arms for the baby. Severus was only too glad to hand him over. "Take him into the bedroom, love. He's as eager to see you as you are to see him."

They barely heard the click of the door over the sound of the fussing baby. After a moment, even the whimpering subsided. When quiet was restored, Severus looked at Erwin and spoke in an undertone. "I thought we went over this, *Dick*. You were supposed to leave the witch alone."

"Dumbledore said..."

"Dumbledore doesn't speak for me or for Septima."

"He said I could have the witch."

"He's wrong. The witch loves me and she's mine."

"She's—Dumbledore said I could have her."

What exactly did Dumbledore say? A little Legilimency was in order. *He'll leave the apartment at some time, and then you'll have her. Her mind's a bit fragile these days; you should be able to convince her that it's still 1980 and that everything since then was only a dream...*

Severus felt sick. Why did Dumbledore hate Septima so much? At the moment, it didn't matter as much as getting rid of Erwin, hopefully for good. He reached into a pocket and took out a card and a pencil. After scribbling a note on it, he stood a pasty-looking Erwin on his feet.

"You'd better hurry to the hospital, *Dick*, you're not looking so well."

"What did you do to me?"

"It would take too long to explain. Just give this card to the Healers, and they'll know what to do."

"I'm going to press charges."

"I'm sure it will be a fascinating trial, since Septima would be well within her rights to press charges against you for attacking her. I have merely done what any husband would do, protecting my wife and home."

"I'll-I'll..."

"Hurry along, *Dick*, or you won't be doing anything. Those cuts are shallow, but you will continue to bleed until they're properly healed."

The other wizard finally left, and Severus surveyed the apartment for damage. Breakfast was a bit cold, but otherwise in good shape. There were some things to clear up after the struggle, but it wouldn't take long.

Septima was sitting cross-legged on the bed. The baby was nursing contentedly, and she seemed contented to hold him close and hum to him. Severus felt something odd within himself. It had been one thing to see Septima with their child in her memory; the reality drew him close to the bed.

"I don't think I've ever seen you this happy."

"I should have worried, I suppose, but I knew you would handle him. Somehow I can't be anything but happy when I'm feeding Nicky."

Severus sat close to her and lowered his face to that spot in her neck that belonged to him. "Did he do anything to you?"

"He tried to get me to think he'd been over just the other day, that everything you and I have done together was just a dream."

He kissed her earlobe. "You didn't believe him; good girl."

"I didn't want to believe him, but he just laughed at me and kept saying it. Then I saw my wedding ring, and I knew for sure."

He put his arms around her, careful not to disturb his son. "That's yet another reason I'm pleased about our marriage."

A/N: Thanks as always to Kyria of Delphi and Owlbait!

The Mechanics of Returning to Normal

Chapter 84 of 101

Life settles into a sort of routine.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

The addition of a baby made Severus's plans a bit more complicated, but it might have been just as well. The most difficult consideration was finding a place for the baby to sleep. Septima had a large, empty dresser drawer that was suitable for a baby of Nicky's age. It wouldn't be a long term solution; by the time the school term ended, they would need something else. However, having the baby served a purpose. They learned to work around the baby's schedule and to consider each other's needs and abilities.

For Severus, the crowning achievement of the weekend was after breakfast on Sunday. They had finished clearing up and the baby was asleep when Septima started plucking at her husband's shirt, pulling him toward the table. "I can't wait even to get to the bedroom," she whispered. He was only too happy to comply with her wishes.

Nothing is ever as easy as that, and although the Snape-Vector family returned to Hogwarts without fanfare Sunday night, they did not go on with life as they wished to live it. Severus left his wife and son in her apartment and made a theatrical production out of kissing her goodnight.

"I don't think I can stand to be away from you," he whispered.

"You'll just be downstairs, and we don't want to unnecessarily anger Dumbledore. You're the one who said that the less we have him poking into our affairs, the better."

He sighed and pulled her closer. "Yes, but I don't know how I'll manage without ready access to you in bed."

She laughed. "After this weekend? You should be sore. I certainly am."

"Hm... I have a potion for that, and it's been so long, love ."

They found a moment later in the week to be together. The baby went to sleep early and they both finished their grading for the night early as well. Severus gave his wife a look, and Septima was only too eager to follow him to the bedroom.

They had learned to undress quickly but then slowly caress and touch each other. They didn't want to go too quickly, and they wanted to enjoy the whole experience as much as possible. Severus was gently moving Septima's knee around his hip when a voice called from the lounge.

"Professor Vector!"

It was Dumbledore's voice. They both froze. Then Septima sighed and slid out from under Severus. She silently Summoned her robe and pulled it around herself, vowing in her mind to contact the Ministry for this unwarranted intrusion into her space. She went into the lounge and found not the whole Dumbledore, but his head in the fireplace.

"May I help you, Headmaster?"

"I believe you're—ah—*entertaining* our Potions master? Would you mind sending him up to my quarters?"

Severus, who hadn't bothered to get his robe, stood behind her with his arms folded. "I'm busy, Headmaster. I'll make it up there within an hour or so."

"No, that won't do at all. This is quite urgent. Can't you come straight through, now? I'll wait."

Severus looked at Septima and sighed. He went back into the bedroom, pulled on his clothes, and left. Septima sat on her couch and stared at the fire.

By the time Severus came back, mumbling that it was just to go over—yet again—certain safety precautions for the third task, Nicolas had waked up for a nighttime feeding. “So it’s all off for tonight?” Severus grumbled, although his hand caressed the back of his son’s head.

“I suppose so,” answered Septima. “Score to *Albus Interruptus*.”

A day or two later, she was counting essays after her last class when she heard her door shut and the lock click in the way only Severus did it.

She looked up to see not just her husband but also their daughter. “Have you seen the Skeeter witch’s latest?” he demanded. She shook her head and he held up a copy of *Witch Weekly* he’d just confiscated. He cleared his throat and started to read aloud. “*Krum, who is openly smitten with the devious Miss Granger, has already invited her to visit him in Blugaria over the summer holidays, and insists that he has,*” here Severus’s voice switched to a falsetto, “*never felt this way about any other girl.*”

“It sounds stupid when you read it like that,” said Hermione in frustration. She turned to Septima. “It wasn’t really like that at all.” Her face had a pleading look. “Victor had just rescued me, and he was sweet. I think he really likes me.”

“You’re not going,” said Severus definitively. “If you go as Hermione Granger, who’s the daughter of Muggles, your life will be in danger.”

“Viktor says they’re not all like Headmaster Karkaroff.”

“It’s not to be considered.”

“I haven’t decided yet.”

“You haven’t decided? Without even asking your parents for leave?”

Hermione stiffened her back. “I’ve written to my parents. They trust me to make a good decision.”

Septima leaned forward at the feeling it gave her stomach to hear that. Looking at Severus, she saw that he felt something similar. It appeared that the conversation was at an end for now. “All right, Hermione, go ahead to dinner. We’ll talk later.” Septima couldn’t summon the will to look at her.

When they were alone, Severus walked around her desk and put his hand on her shoulder. “Can you believe it?”

Septima shrugged. “What part of it?” She stood, and then carefully stayed out of Severus’s grasp. “That she doesn’t think of us as her parents? Yes, it hurts, but we’ve only had our true relationship known for a few weeks. That a boy who likes her has invited her to meet his parents? Yes, it’s the proper thing to do. That he’s never felt that way about other girls?”

Now she looked directly into his face, placing her trembling hand along side it. “Yes, I can all too easily believe that. After all, you make it clear, whenever it comes up, that there’s a witch who owns your heart. I know all too well that you’ll never feel for me what you feel for her.” She stood on tiptoe to kiss his other cheek. There, she’d done it without bursting into tears or otherwise falling to pieces. Then she left her office and went toward her lounge. She knew there was one small person who depended upon her alone, waiting under the watchful gaze of a House-elf.

A/N: Thank you to Kyria of Delphi and Owl bait for their advice and help!

A Quantum of Plain Speaking

Chapter 85 of 101

Septima insists on facing the future by facing facts.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

All witches were mad, Severus decided as he flung himself into his office and his own desk chair. Hermione was mad not to see that Krum only wanted to have his way with her, after which she could very well be left at the mercy of pureblood supremacists who didn’t know her true heritage. And Septima was even crazier. How insane must she be to be able to say what she said?

Self-knowledge cleared its throat and pointed out that Septima’s true madness lay in staying with him, knowing that he didn’t love her. He got up and went back upstairs to her rooms. She was sitting in her lounge, looking at the play yard and its occupant ruefully.

“He’s sleeping soundly. I don’t think he wants me right now.”

“I want you,” he said.

Her face brightened. “Do you?”

He sat on the couch and pulled her onto his lap. “I just realized that I love your madness.”

“Madness?”

“You must be insane to put up with everything about me and still love me.” He was carefully rearranging their positions and several layers of clothing.

“I do love you,” she whispered against his lips. She sighed as his hands found the bare skin of her hips and pulled her close.

“Ah, wife...”

It was hard to go slowly, to let her set the pace. He was rewarded when she was soon moving frantically with him, gasping for breath and sighing his name. Then she buried her head under his chin and went still except for the part of her that was quaking around him. She sighed his name, and he let himself go, sure that they’d both found pleasure.

He held her tenderly and whispered his delight into her ear. This was something of their old passion come back to life, and it was all the more precious because it was rarer than it had been in the past.

* * * * *

An article in the next morning's Daily Prophet was much more satisfying.

Ministry employee Dolores Umbridge has asked the Department of Magical Law Enforcement to investigate the circumstances of what she claims was an intruder and attack within her home. According to the affidavits, Madam Umbridge awoke on Tuesday morning and discovered that Professor Richard Erwin was in her bed. She states that she has no memory whatsoever of inviting anyone to her house, certainly not to her bed.

According to testimony records, Professor Erwin claims that he had drinks in the Leaky Caldron with a different witch. Since the witch he named was known to be at her place of employment the entire time, her name has been withheld. Professor Erwin is being held at the Ministry pending further investigation.

Madam Umbridge alleges that Professor Erwin must have put a potion in her tea while he was speaking with her. She does not remember leaving the inn, nor anything until she awoke this morning. Professor Erwin alleges that Madam Umbridge took Polyjuice, if potions were involved...

Septima looked at her husband. "Just who was the 'unnamed witch'? Did this have to do with the hairbrush you took back to your own rooms with you on Monday morning?"

"I haven't made any Polyjuice in a year or more."

"No, it must have been something different if it made her forget what happened."

"She's lying about that. She's been secretly panting after Erwin for years, but he was so furious to wake up in her apartment that he infuriated her. She's got that spiteful side, you know."

Septima was looking at him suspiciously, so he pretended to blandly read the sports section, but he knew that she could tell he was terribly pleased. He hadn't exactly caused this situation, but he had known some people at the Ministry who could do it, and he may have offered some small bits of assistance. It had been Umbridge who had gotten all those smoking rules put in place. Severus was just spiteful enough to have wanted to humiliate the witch in return. He was certainly enough of a Slytherin to bide his time until the perfect moment presented itself.

* * * * *

A pattern was established that continued for the next several weeks. Severus and Septima found stolen moments to be together, except when interrupted by their son or employer. Severus wasn't sure whether he hated it more when he had to leave his wife in a state of desire or when he ended up sitting and watching as she tended their son. He finally decided that Dumbledore was worse, because while in his office, veiled hints were constantly made about Dumbledore's desire for a closer relationship.

Septima took advantage of every opportunity to put cream on Severus's arm and to whisper soothing spells. It helped a little bit, but it was becoming clearer by the day that nothing would help for long. She had gotten good at noticing that talking to Karkaroff made his arm hurt more. She also came to him soon after he'd been touched or stopped for conversation by Moody. For some reason, that hurt the most.

There was a running family conversation about Krum's plan for Hermione to visit Bulgaria. Severus was completely against it, but Septima wasn't as sure. Hermione was trying to keep an open mind. After the third or fourth round of arguments, Severus realized that her desire to go seemed to be proportional to his vehemence against it.

"She's a stubborn witch," he remarked to Septima one evening after dinner.

"Oh?"

"I almost wonder what she would do if I told her she *should* go."

Septima smiled, or perhaps it was part of the game she was playing with the baby. "I think that would be playing into her hands. Don't you think so, Nicky?" The child gurgled, and Septima pulled him close and rubbed her head into his belly.

"Septima, are you taking this seriously?"

She cuddled the child close and looked up. "How many times do we have to go over this? There are a few good reasons to go, and you've clearly outlined the reasons against it. I think we can trust her and the Grangers together to make the right decision. She's as smart as both of us put together, after all."

"I wasn't at her age."

"You weren't what?"

"I made a horrible mistake at sixteen, and it cost me everything I really wanted."

"Oh." That sounded—he didn't know, exactly—but it made him look at her. She was holding the baby close to her, so that her face was hidden from his view.

"Septima, I didn't mean..."

"I think I know exactly what you meant, and I'm sorry for your pain." She took a deep breath and stood up without looking him in the face. "I believe this young man needs a new diaper, so I'll head upstairs now."

A/N: Thanks to Kyria of Delphi and Owlbait for beta reading!

A Quantum of Terror

Chapter 86 of 101

On the night everyone's worst fears were realized, some could do nothing but wait.

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It was hard not to be angry at Harry Potter, even though it wasn't the boy's fault. It was He-who-must-not-be-named who had come back, after all. It was Barty Crouch who had arranged the Hogwarts end of the disaster that had just struck. And of course it was Severus who had taken that damned mark upon his arm on the day Septima's life had been changed irrevocably.

Yet it was Harry Potter who seemed to be sliding through it all, ignorant of the pain caused. Oh, he may have been aware, in his corner of the Hospital Wing, that Professor Snape had to go do something involving incredible danger. Septima had overheard enough to know that. But he couldn't know that Septima's heart was gone with Severus. He couldn't be aware that his friend could very well lose her father tonight.

The hand clasping hers tightened again, and the body in the bed whimpered. Aurora was feeling another pain. Septima added more heartbreak to tonight's list. Aurora's husband, Igor Karkaroff, had run as soon as he heard that You-know-who had returned, leaving a heavily pregnant wife. Aurora's body simply couldn't handle the stress, and she went into labor.

Severus had insisted that Septima take Nicky to Eileen's house, but after returning to the school she had nothing else to do than help the laboring witch through her pains. Poppy said it would be a long night for Aurora. Therefore, Septima sat with her as her labor progressed. "He's going to be killed," Aurora said ruefully between pains. "My baby will be an orphan."

"I'm sure that's not so," said Septima reassuringly. "A Slytherin such as yourself must have made plans."

"I don't know if they'll be good enough—Ahh..." Another pain hit.

"Try not to fret. That's just the labor pains making you hurt so much," said Septima.

She tried not to watch the clock, but she couldn't help worrying about Severus. Dumbledore came upstairs and discovered Aurora's condition. He took Septima into a hallway and scolded her.

"This is your fault and your bad example. Have you explained to your colleague that she can't remain at Hogwarts as an unmarried mother?"

"She's been married to Igor Karkaroff since just before she took her position here, Headmaster. They've been hoping to have a little one ever since. She and the child will be refugees, now. Surely you can show them some compassion." Septima turned away after she said her bit. She didn't want to show the bitterness she felt, because she knew he would give Aurora far more help than Septima would ever get from him.

When she looked back, she knew she was right. Dumbledore was suddenly effusive in his plans, thinking of ways to accommodate a little one in the Astronomy Tower. He went down the corridor seeming less worried, while Septima returned to the task of comforting and encouraging the expectant mother.

Poppy was by the bed. "Is there any word of Severus?"

Septima shook her head. "None."

"It's just as well. Aurora is just about ready, Septima. I need you to help her push."

"All right." Septima moved to the position Poppy directed.

A couple hours later, Septima walked to her own apartment. Watching Aurora with her baby girl made her own chest prickle, and she realized she needed to fix bottles for Nicky. She had done so and was relaxing for a moment, contemplating a shower when Poppy's head popped into her fireplace.

"Septima, you need to come to the dungeon."

"Is Severus back?"

Poppy may have nodded her head, but it was hard to tell without a body connected to it. "Come quickly."

"I'll come right through." Poppy was already gone.

Septima tossed Floo powder into her fire, but when she stated her destination, the fireplace wall stayed solid, and she bumped back into her own lounge, falling to the floor. She put out the small flame on her robe and rubbed her now-bruised shoulder. After brushing herself off, she walked to her door and yanked it open. If her husband was back from danger, she was going to him, welcome or not.

She heard voices as she walked through the dungeon. "She needs to be here."

"She would be a useless bother. She has no idea what she'd be facing here."

"She'll learn. Now that they're married, she's the best thing for him."

"Just start curing his various injuries, Poppy. He'll shake off the rest. He always did, before."

"Headmaster, he needs his wife. Haven't you ever asked yourself why the Death Eaters seem so healthy?"

"Septima..." It was Severus, himself, sounding so weak and lost that tears sprang to her eyes. No force on Earth would keep her from his side when he sounded like that.

She went into his lounge and found the Headmaster and Matron continuing their argument. She walked past, but Dumbledore reached for her arm. "Oh, no you don't. You'll just be a bother, and you'll get in the way."

"Septima..."

She was aware of the Headmaster, but couldn't make herself pay attention to him. Severus needed her, so she simply brushed past his outstretched arm.

Dumbledore blustered, but he was behind her now. She had eyes only for the wizard in the bed. He was so pale, and he seemed so alone. "I'm sorry it took me so long to get to you."

"You're here. Septima, I need you."

"Anything, Severus, I'll do whatever you need."

Poppy came in and Septima looked at her in a silent question. What was she supposed to do? The Mediwitch smiled and said, "Somehow, I think you'll know. Do the same things I've shown you since last summer."

They were alone then, or if others were in the room, it didn't matter. Septima kissed Severus's head. "My love, what did they do to you?"

He licked his lips as if it took a great effort. "Wife, I hurt."

She looked at his face and realized that she did know what to do.

A/N: Thank you, as always, to Kyria of Delphi and Owlbait!

The Mechanics of Recovery

Chapter 87 of 101

Septima cares for her husband.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

He'd been tortured for two hours, the length of time he'd been late. After that, the Dark Lord had quizzed him on various aspects of life at Hogwarts. When something wasn't to his liking, he'd tortured Severus again. Why had he treated Quirrell with so little respect? Why had he allowed the diary to fall into Dumbledore's hands? Why had he rested in comfort while others had been jailed? Then he'd asked Severus about Septima, likewise using torture when he didn't like something. Finally, the Dark Lord had seated himself and leaned back, looking at him.

"There was little enough you could have done about any of those things. You've done well for yourself and for me. Congratulations, Severus, keep up the good work."

He got up and left after that, leaving Severus to make his way back to Hogwarts as well as he could.

Dumbledore had tried to lay hands on him, but it had stung and he had yelled in pain. Poppy had proper Healer hands, and she could help the worst injuries, but it wasn't what he needed. Somehow, he knew he needed Septima. Why wouldn't she come?

Dumbledore tried to imply that she didn't want to come. It was like something he'd been told before, but it hurt too much to remember. Wasn't there anything that could take the pain away?

"I need Septima."

Then she was there. Something was trying to hold her back, but she suddenly seemed to glow and then she was past the barrier. She kissed him, and his head felt a bit better. "My love, what have they done to you?"

"I hurt."

Then she was gone again. Dumbledore came forward to torture him again with eagerness and want. Didn't the old man know he had nothing to give?

"Septima..."

"I'm right here," she said. And she was. She set several things down on the table and sat carefully by his side.

He reached for her. "Don't leave me."

"I won't." She was using a damp flannel to dab at his face.

"Ever. Don't ever leave me."

She kissed the spot she had just cleaned and then looked in his eyes. "You know I never will."

The pain eased, and he nodded. "You never will."

She worked at his wounds, washing, dabbing with potion or ointment, and always kissing as she whispered the charms that would help. She told him about Nicky's face when she had left him at Eileen's house and of the birth of Sinistra's baby girl. She rolled him over and lifted a candle to better look at his back. "It's not so bad, here." She went to work.

"No, he wanted to watch my eyes as he hurt me this time, to see if something new would surface that I might have forgotten or been hiding."

Septima finished her work and went to put everything away. She came back and stood by the bed, uncertainly. What would she do next?

"You'll stay, won't you?"

She smiled, as if she'd been waiting for him to ask. "If you want me."

"I need you." His body felt better, but there was still an ache in his heart.

"I'm right here."

"Septima," he said as he tugged her down close to him, "I'm so cold." He was shivering again.

After pressing her lips to his forehead to gauge his temperature, she undressed without comment or wasted movement. She unfastened her robe and let it fall to the floor. Then she took off her undergarments and stood for just a moment where he could see her. An instant later she was in the bed, holding him in her arms.

"Ah, love," he whispered. His hands groped her, seeking comfort.

"Yes," she answered. "If you want me, I'm yours."

Suddenly he was unsure. He felt so empty. "I don't know if I can."

"We'll just do what we can, then, won't we?" She kissed him deeply, promising with her lips and tongue what her body would give him soon. In the back of his mind, he remembered the Dark Lord's wand twitching and spells flying toward him, but now those spells had no effect. He was surrounded by some sort of glow that came from

Septima's lips pressed against his own.

He lay within her embrace, accepting and taking everything she gave him. After a while, her hands worked down his chest, smoothing the hairs and stroking his sides. Her lips followed, and then her head dipped down under the covers and her mouth started doing the most exquisite things to him.

Suddenly, he could. He had shivered with cold terror on this night. He had quaked and trembled and quivered. Such had been the fear and the pain he had felt. When he had come back to Hogwarts, he'd been in agony and chilled to the bone. Now a hot flame went through him. Septima's hands and lips and tongue set him on fire. He shuddered in relief as the worst of this night was released.

A/N: Thank you to Kyria of Delphi and Owl bait for their advice and support!

A Quantum of Determination

Chapter 88 of 101

The night's events are discussed and plans are made.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Warning: There's some potential voyeurism here.

"Ah, wife, I couldn't do this without you," Severus whispered into Septima's ear. "I'm selfish enough to love that you're here when I need you."

He sounded much more himself. "Are you—is this better?"

"Much." He snuggled close. "Now I understand why the Death Eaters always encourage each other to get married." He yawned.

"Why is that?"

"Ah... witch... swee..." he mumbled, ending in a sound that was more a snore than anything else. She sighed with a smile. Perhaps he would tell her tomorrow.

A throat cleared near the doorway. Septima gasped and jumped. "I believe he no longer has need of your services, Professor Vector. Why don't you run along to your own rooms?"

She sat up, pulling the sheet over her chest, but the arms around her tightened. She realized that although he was asleep, Severus was aware that she had moved. He definitely wanted her here. "He said for me to stay."

"He meant until you had healed his hurts. It appears you've done an adequate job."

Her voice became husky as she repeated it. "He said for me to stay. I said that I would. I'm not going to leave him. What if some hidden injury resurfaces? What if he needs me for some other reason? I'm his wife, and I belong at his side here, in *our* rooms."

"You're risking everything for some silly whim."

"I don't believe it's a whim on either my or Severus's part, and I don't believe it's that much of a risk."

"He doesn't love you."

Did that always have to be rubbed into her face? "I know," she said around the lump that was suddenly in her throat, "but it didn't matter tonight, and he may still need me. I'm his wife, and this is *my* privilege and duty. I belong by his side, and you won't separate us any more."

"You're his wife, but you'll never be his love."

There was no answer to that. By being silent she would hold her ground.

"What do you know about his true love? Did you know her?"

Septima looked up at that. There was still nothing she could say.

"I knew her. She was far more beautiful than you. I could tell you about her."

Septima was tempted. She would know what she lacked. If she knew, then maybe—

Maybe nothing. If she knew, it would be between them that she had gone behind his back. It would separate them more surely than any living arrangement could. Severus had said that the other witch was dead. He had said that even if she were alive, he would probably stay with Septima. It was the smallest of crumbs, but she clung to it and to her pride. He'd told her bits and pieces over the last year or two. He would tell her the rest in his own time.

She very deliberately straightened the sheet over her breasts. "I prefer to know what Severus chooses to tell me. I won't solicit gossip, Headmaster."

She slid back down into the bed as Dumbledore left the room. Had he just come in from the lounge, or had he stood there and watched the whole time? What had he hoped to gain? Was he really waiting for Severus to shout some Death Eater secret in the throes of passion? She hoped he wasn't simply some sort of voyeur.

Septima slid down and pulled her husband close, petting and stroking his hair. He groaned contentedly and nestled within her arms.

She awoke to the sensation of being fondled. She was half uncovered and half within her husband's arms. She was well aware of his intentions as she rolled more fully into his embrace.

"I want to make love with you right now."

There was no baby to interfere. "What a very good idea," she whispered with a smile.

"Don't you two ever do anything else?"

They turned and saw the Headmaster standing just inside the doorway.

"What are you doing here?" Severus asked with a glare as Septima pulled the sheet around herself. "Have you been here all night?"

"No, I returned a little while ago to see if there was anything you can tell me."

"There's a thing or two that I'll tell you, after I've had a chance to wake up and collect my thoughts."

"I fear you'll get distracted and forget something..."

Severus sighed and sat up, careful to keep Septima covered. "I'll tell you something I learned last night."

Dumbledore leaned in. "Yes?" he said eagerly.

"I finally understand that when Death Eaters perform acts of Dark Magic, the darkness enters their souls, but when dark spells are cast upon them, they only feel the effects of the curses, not the darkness."

"I don't understand your point."

"Those who have committed to their partners, through marriage or other means, share their lives and great emotion and beauty between them. When the witch made love to me earlier, she dispelled the effects of the Cruciatus. I should have realized all this term when she alone could make my arm sting less."

"You don't share love with this witch."

Severus looked at Septima a long moment as though he were assessing something. "Perhaps not, but we've shared our work for years, much of our lives, and our child—child. We share great beauty, and she made the effects of the Cruciatus go away—most of them anyhow. I've never felt so much better so quickly."

Dumbledore sighed. "What am I to do with this information?"

"Return the witch's things to these quarters and let us live as husband and wife. I will continue to do your dirty work, and she will look after me."

"Severus, I really don't think you should base something like that on a single toss in bed."

"She's my wife, and she looks after my interests. She will enable me to do the tasks you have set for me. That's all we need care about, Headmaster."

"Severus, there are plenty of others who would share your life with you, if you would just let them in."

"I've made my choice, or fate has made it for me."

Dumbledore looked years older as his shoulders slumped. "I still think..."

"I'm not entirely ready to make my report. I need more time with my wife before I'll be ready to speak at any length. I'll come to your office before lunch," Severus said firmly.

A/N: Thank you to Kyria of Delphi and Owlbait, as always!

A Quantum of Compromise

Chapter 89 of 101

Severus asserts his will, and for once Dumbledore agrees.

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Severus had learned to tell when the witch was nervous or upset. He knew she was making an effort for him, but her attention was clearly divided. For that matter, he had the unsettling feeling that they'd had an audience in the middle of the night, and he wanted to be sure that there wasn't one now. He reached for his wand.

"Homenum revelio!"

Nothing appeared, and with a twitch of his wand, the bedroom door shut. Septima slid out of the bed and went to the bathroom. She was back soon and smiled shyly. "Does it really work that way?"

He knew what she meant. "I can't imagine what else could have returned me to health so quickly. Your love and all the things we share may just keep me from going mad."

She sat gingerly on the edge of the bed. "I should go fetch our son."

"He's perfectly happy with his gran."

"Then I should go upstairs to pack."

"Dumbledore will have the elves handle everything. Since there are no finals this year, there's not much to do for our students. There's not a single thing for you to do right now other than lay within my arms and be my wife."

He tugged at her elbow, and she laid down next to him. "Is there somewhere you'd rather be, love?"

She snuggled close and shook her head. "No, it's just that I keep remembering so many things to do."

"They'll all wait a few minutes... or hours."

She slid her hand along his face, and he closed his eyes and breathed deeply. "Septima, if you hadn't been here last night, I would be up in the Hospital Wing, barely able to move."

"That can't be true. Poppy is so good at her job."

"Do you know what became of Frank and Alice Longbottom?"

She nodded.

"I think I was hovering near madness myself, last night. All I could think of was you, and you didn't come."

"I came as soon as I could." He hugged her tighter and she winced. He sat up and found a bruise on her shoulder.

"What's this?"

"I wasn't able to use the Floo. Poppy summoned me, and I tried, but it didn't work."

"He blocked it." He swore under his breath.

"So I ran down the stairs as quickly as I could. I didn't think I could breathe until I saw that you were safe."

"I should be ashamed for taking such advantage, but instead I love that you worry so much about me that you would run through the halls of Hogwarts."

She had softened in his arms, so he sensed she would be receptive to him. He leaned over to kiss her, reasserting his place as the one who usually set the pace of their lovemaking. His hands touched her body, remembering the parts of her he'd always loved and paying special homage to the parts that had changed due to the children she had borne him.

"I love that you're here for me," he whispered. "I love that your body is always a gift to me, and I love the children that you've given me."

"You gave them to me, first," she whispered with a sigh. She did that maddening thing with her knee again, and as so often happened, he lost track of conscious thought, only sure that through what they shared, the last residual terror, chill, and pain of the night before were pushed far away from him.

It was harder work than it should have been to climb up into the Headmaster's tower, but he made it. He made mental notes of all the hurts Septima would need to attend when they were next together. Nicky would complicate things, but he was sleeping longer and longer overnight. With the witch less than an arm's reach away, Severus knew they would find a moment.

"Come in, Severus," said Dumbledore pleasantly, as though there had not been any contentious discussion downstairs. "You said you've learned some things?"

"He was particularly angry about the prophecy. At first, he thought I had deliberately left something out or repeated it incorrectly. Then he decided that I must have withheld something. Finally, he brutalized my mind. I allowed him to see everything I saw and heard in the Hog's Head that night, but he's unconvinced."

Dumbledore ran his fingers through his beard for a moment. Then he took off his glasses and cleaned them. After very deliberately setting them back upon his face, he finally said, "He wants to see and hear the prophecy for himself. We'll need to protect the Seer more than ever, and the record in the Hall of Mysteries."

"Is there more to it? Does it matter?"

Dumbledore shrugged. "I'm not sure hearing the entire prophecy could do either Voldemort or the boy any good, now that events have been set in motion. But Voldemort thinks it matters, and perhaps we can save lives by letting him think there's something important that he's missing. He'll waste time on the issue, and we can make our plans. Since Fudge is being so difficult, this will give us just the slightest advantage."

"If that's all, then..."

"That's not all. I'd like to address your living arrangements, or more accurately, your sleeping arrangements."

"The witch is moving back to my rooms, whether or not you return the door to the other bedroom. I need her near me, even if it means being crowded with the baby."

"You don't really need *her*."

It was time to use an excuse he'd been saving for years. Severus half turned and looked out one of the windows. "The morning after our first time—her first time ever—I tried to make sense of the fact that I couldn't seem to leave her bed that night. I thought to myself that perhaps she's one of those witches that a wizard just has to shag at every opportunity until he tires of her."

"In all these years, you haven't?"

"Something came up, I took the Dark Mark, and we separated." He turned back toward the Headmaster's desk. "You've separated us every time since then."

Was that a flash of satisfaction that he saw on Dumbledore's face? "So you think if you were to have constant, ready access to her, then you might finally lose interest?"

"It's possible."

Dumbledore sighed. "I need your full attention, Severus. Let's do whatever it takes."

Thank you, as always, to Kyria of Delphi and Owlbait!

A Quantum of Order

Septima becomes acquainted with a new group of people.

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Septima followed Severus blindly. He had magically sealed her eyes shut at his mother's house so that she wouldn't see where he took her. "This is the only way you can be brought into the house," he said. "After you're there, Dumbledore will give you the actual address."

She bumped into his back, and then he whispered, "Be absolutely silent as we go in. If you make the slightest noise, there will be hell to pay." There was a sound of a door opening, and then they were inside.

"You're supposed to meet privately with the Headmaster in the kitchen," whispered a voice that sounded like Remus Lupin. "I'll take Septima to the study for now."

"*Finite Incantatem!*" said Severus in an undertone. He squeezed Septima's hand and said, "I'm sure it won't be long." She watched him leave, and her face must have looked wistful.

Remus showed her into a room that was dark but at least had a cheerful fire in the grate. "Sit down, Septima. Please, be comfortable."

She looked around. There was a straight-backed chair in front of a desk or table that was covered with texts. Nearby was a wing-back that didn't look too dusty. "All right," she whispered, choosing that chair.

Remus cast a spell at another wing-back. A puff of dust flew into the air and dissipated. He cast another spell and half a dozen Doxies flew out screaming and swarmed toward the drapes. Nothing happened with his third or fourth spells, so he gingerly sat down.

"How have you been, dear?" Remus looked at her as warmly as ever.

"I don't know where to start," she answered. "How have you been?"

"Sirius has been staying at my apartment; somehow he's able to access his bank account even though he dares not show his face in public, and we've done all right for ourselves. We just moved here when Dumbledore said he needed a meeting house for the Order."

"You mentioned a witch you fancied. How is she?"

He shook his head. "I don't know what to do about her. We fancy each other, but how can I expose her to my other nature?"

"If she loves you—"

"Septima, I can't expose her. And what about her family?"

"Her parents are living?"

"Her father wouldn't mind, but her mother... I can't ask her mother to give up dreams of a normal son-in-law."

Septima looked at her hands and considered her own choices. "Remus, take the chance, if you'll take advice from a witch who's muffed so much of her own life. I love a wizard to whom I'll always be the second choice. If I had ever thought he loved me too, I would have married him when we were still kids and let the rest of it settle itself."

Remus seemed happier discussing Septima's life. "He doesn't deserve you."

"It doesn't matter. I can't be apart from him."

"Does he treat you all right?"

"I feel treasured and cherished when I'm with him, and he needs me. The night Voldemort came back he was in such pain—tortured near to madness—and I was the one who could help him."

"You're sure, then?"

Septima smiled and nodded.

"All right." He patted her hand. "How is the baby we didn't conceive?"

"Just amazing," Septima smiled. "It's so much work, and I never get to sleep, but I love him to pieces."

Remus sat back, resulting in a squeal from a Doxy that hadn't been flushed out yet. He stood up and repeated the one spell that had removed the others. When that Doxy and two others had moved to the drapes, he sat down again. He looked at her in satisfaction. "You seem happy, as though you've found your place."

"I've loved Severus and taught at Hogwarts too long to think it will last forever, but for now..." Septima shrugged.

"I suppose, now that You-know-who is back, that's all any of us can plan upon. We have whatever we have for now."

Septima leaned forward. "Which is why, if you have a chance for happiness, you should take it."

Remus shrugged and was going to say something, when a voice at the door said, "And whom do we have here?"

Remus stood. "Sirius! I'd like to introduce you to Septima Vector."

Septima stood, too. It was the first time she'd ever really met this famous wizard, and the first time she'd seen him since he was a student at Hogwarts. "Good evening, Mr. Black."

He took her hand and somehow managed to gently maneuver her closer as he looked her up and down. "She's certainly a pretty one, Moony." He lifted her hand to his lips and Septima had a vision of this man taking her somewhere—bedroom, salon, seraglio—and knew she wouldn't emerge the same woman who went in. It was as frightening as it was stimulating.

"Septima Vector... Now that's a name that would look good next to mine on a gravestone."

Septima tried to pull her hand away, but he held it fast. "I think Septima Black would look even better."

She gaped and looked over at Remus, who shrugged ruefully. "Please excuse my friend's macabre humor. He's developed some dark thoughts since his time at Azkaban."

Septima didn't know how to respond. She opened and shut her mouth several times, hoping something would come to her. Familiar hands slid around her hips, and she felt Severus step behind her. "It's a pity Black didn't make this odd proposal prior to your becoming Septima Snape, wife. You might have become mistress of all this."

Severus's elegant hand indicated the Doxy-infested drapes, the dusty furniture, and the dark corners in the room.

"Now, Snape, I was just having a bit of fun with her..."

"Indeed. I came to let her know that Dumbledore wishes to speak with her."

"Alone?" Meeting Sirius Black had made her feel cold and frightened for some reason, as though some vestige of the Dementors who once guarded him still clung to him. She cursed herself; this sudden display of neediness would haunt her at three in the morning for the next several nights.

However, Severus smiled, clearly pleased. "I think we can both meet with him, together."

A/N: Thank you, as always, to Kyria of Delphi, for her constant support and help!

The Mechanics of Espionage

Chapter 91 of 101

Septima takes on a new job.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Severus walked his wife into the kitchen and held her hand as they stood in front of an interesting triumvirate: Dumbledore, Mad-Eye Moody, and Nymphadora Tonks. Dumbledore looked at Septima with his normal bland hostility, and Mad-Eye looked curiously between Septima and Severus. Nymphadora looked curious as well, but with a womanly gleam he thought he'd never see in the eye of Miss Tonks. He decided to sort all of those looks out later.

"You may wait in the hallway, Severus," said Dumbledore, with a voice that allowed for no options. He would have argued, but realized it would hurt Septima's case. He composed his face as he squeezed his wife's hand. Then he went into the hallway as asked.

He paced back and forth for several minutes. Why was he so worried? They wouldn't hurt her. Dumbledore just wanted to ask a few questions to be sure that she wouldn't give away Order secrets. Little as the old man liked her, Severus knew Dumbledore would be fair.

There was a cry from the kitchen, which Severus recognized as coming from his wife. He turned the knob on the kitchen door. It didn't give, so he blasted it open.

Dumbledore was speaking. "Furthermore, I think you would benefit from some advanced training in Defense Against the Dark Arts. I'm sure there's someone in the Order with time on his hands."

"I can teach her." Severus tried to catch his wife's eye, but she was turned to the floor. Her hair, which had come out of a hasty ponytail, was draped around her face.

Moody guffawed. "You've had years, Snape, and so far you can't even teach her to keep her clothes on, from what I hear."

"Is there something wrong with a husband and wife enjoying each other's company?"

The old Auror answered with another guffaw. "Of course not, but if that's an example of your teaching skill, it's surprising your students aren't all dead of Potions accidents."

Septima's head snapped up at that. "He's a wonderful teacher. His students are some of the best-trained Potioners in the world." She caught Severus's eye and lowered her face again, but it was too late. He had seen what she was hiding.

"What have they done to you, wife?" he murmured as he tipped her chin up. He traced a scratch with his fingertip and then with his wand, healing the wound. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Tonks smirk with satisfaction.

"I can never decide what to use," Septima answered. "Protect, disarm, or counter-attack?"

He put his wand away and cupped her face with both hands, tracing a tear-streak with his thumb. "Perhaps you do need some practice."

The three at the table were watching carefully.

"I've decided that she can indeed work for us," said Dumbledore.

"You can't send her out there! You say yourself that she needs help with Defense. She'll be slaughtered!"

"It was my plan for her to accept the summer fellowship she's been offered at the University."

Septima looked up at him, her eyes filled with some sort of eagerness as she bit her lip. "It's not dangerous," she whispered. "I can be helpful just by noticing who's on which side. That's all they want me to do."

"For now," he answered, "but what if that job does turn dangerous?"

"I want to help."

* * * * *

They stayed at Septima's university apartment, where a door leading to a small nursery had appeared in the hallway. A Hogwarts house-elf with old ties to Septima's family had been granted to them over the summer. Zinnia watched Nicky during the times when his parents couldn't be at home and smoothed over the household duties of two professionals who worked long hours.

After the initial rash of tortures, handed out for various infractions during the past fourteen years, the Dark Lord's temper cooled. His greatest interest lay in discovering the truth of the prophecy about himself and Harry Potter. He asked Severus what he could tell about the seer, and Severus knew very little.

"I don't even know whether it was a witch or a wizard," he said. "I only know that Dumbledore is keeping the person well protected."

"That leaves the Hall of Mysteries at the Ministry, unless you think you could catch Dumbledore out and discover something that way."

"I'd have to be as good a Legilimens as you, My Lord."

Lord Voldemort nodded. "Yes, we'll have to concentrate on the Hall of Mysteries."

* * * * *

As the summer progressed, several people started moving into the Order of the Phoenix headquarters. After a stormy conversation with one of the new occupants, Severus went to the university and found his wife.

"You didn't tell me our daughter is back!" he spat at her from the doorway.

Septima, who was in the process of writing a complicated equation on her chalkboard, jumped. "Salazar's pants, Severus! Did you billow all the way over from that part of London?"

He shut the door, sealing it and casting a muffling spell. "She wouldn't tell me what happened. What did he do to her?"

"She obviously doesn't want to talk to you about it," came over Septima's shoulder. She added several more terms to the chalkboard.

"I'm her father! I have a right to know!" He walked up behind her.

Septima shook her head, rubbing out one rune with her fingertips and re-writing it. "I'm not sure we do have a right," she whispered with a shrug.

"Septima!"

Several things happened at once. Septima tapped the board, setting the terms in motion. Then she turned around and looked at him. Severus suddenly felt her nearness. There was something urgent he wanted to discuss, but his hands were full of her: her hair, her breasts, her derriere. Her knee moved around his, and he lost himself to the sensation of her. He couldn't stop. Her breathy moans and the quaking of her body intensified. He realized that the numbers surrounding them on the board were dancing in his head, just as she'd always said they danced in hers. They urged him on as he held her, moving and seeking the release that her body promised.

When sanity returned, she was smiling up at him. "We haven't done that in a while," he said.

"It was time."

"Are you trying to distract me?"

She shook her head and reached for the knickers in his hand. How had they gotten there? For that matter, when did they actually undress, even the bit necessary for a quick shag? "No. I've just been thinking about you all day." She looked at the chalkboard, where the terms had sorted themselves out. "The bit of magic released by both of us together didn't hurt here, either. I'll be forever figuring out what this means, but I think it's good."

"Septima..." He wanted information, and it was important that he get it.

She cleared her throat. "Nothing that you're worried about happened to her. When she got to Bulgaria, she went to the hotel where they had planned to meet. He was there in the restaurant with both arms around girls, another on his lap, and others feeding him food and wine. Hermione was so shocked by it all that she told the Grangers she wanted to come home."

Nothing happened. A wave of relief worked through him. "That's good. So it's over with him, then?"

Septima looked at Severus as he looked at the stupidest of his dunderheads. "How can you ask that? She feels completely humiliated and rejected. I thought you of all people would understand, since you've been on both the receiving and giving end of it."

Given the subject of several little spats of late, he knew exactly what she meant. Why must she always harp on Lily? "You wouldn't understand."

"No?" She picked her notebook up off the desk and turned to her equations. "Perhaps I wouldn't." She shrugged. "I need to copy all of this. Do you mind looking after Nicky by yourself for an hour or two?"

He was dismissed, and it felt odd. He stood by the door and watched her for a moment, copying the terms that had arranged themselves around the Septima-shaped smudge.

A/N: Thank you, as always to Kyria of Delphi for beta reading!

A Quantum of Preparation

Chapter 92 of 101

The summer passes and the school year draws near.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Preparing for the new school year was the same as ever and yet very different. Dumbledore kept many things closely guarded, and the Hogwarts professors were expected to act as they always did. Dumbledore encouraged all the members of the Order of the Phoenix to prepare for battle, and for Septima, that meant training in Defense.

Sirius Black was a surprisingly good teacher, and seemingly eager to risk inevitable damage to his mother's dining room, where training and practice duels were staged. He first assessed her abilities and then devised strategies she should follow if she found herself in battle. When actually teaching the spells and practicing them, he concentrated on her diction or her form. However, as soon as he decided the session was over, he started pushing the bounds of propriety.

"So tell me, Professor Vector, why do you hang around with Severus?"

"He's my husband."

"I don't suppose it's an open marriage?"

Septima would roll her eyes and go into the study Remus had shown her on her first visit to Grimmauld Place. There she would wait until Severus came for her. Once or twice he was done conversing with Dumbledore before she finished her lesson, and he waited for her in the same room.

One evening, Septima sat on a couch and dozed a little. She woke to discover a large, shaggy dog sitting next to her. "Where did you come from?" she asked as she scratched his head. The dog whimpered and moved closer to her. Within moments, its head was pressed up against her chest and its forelegs were worked between her thighs.

"It's a good thing you're just a dog," she mused. The animal pulled back and made a sound as it shook its head. If she didn't know better, she would think it was laughing.

She relaxed again and must have fallen asleep, because the next thing she knew was Severus saying, "Black, get your mangy hide away from my wife!"

Septima was fully awake, now. The dog stood on the couch and shook itself. Then it jumped lightly on the floor, and there was a flash of light. In less time than it would take to say it, she was staring into the gray eyes of her host.

"Sirius!"

"You didn't know I was an Animagus, dear Septima? Severus, you're making it much too easy for me."

If Severus was distracted, he had what he considered good cause. He was on pins and needles over the Defense Against the Dark Arts position. Usually Dumbledore had some options lined up before the end of the previous school year, but several Order meetings had been devoted to choosing the fake Moody's successor. "He's got to pick me now," Severus would mumble as they walked home. "All these years he's known that I'm by far the best teacher and the best-trained in Defense. There's no excuse."

Septima was sure he was right. In various sparring matches staged in the dining room of Grimmauld Place, Severus usually came out victorious. There'd been a couple of stalemates, but so far he'd never been beaten.

The summer ended, and Septima packed her family's belongings in preparation to return to Hogwarts. It was surprising just how much she had accumulated in her office in three short months, but she had used quite a few reference books, and there were other texts she always kept near by, even if she wasn't sure she needed them.

Severus stormed into her office as she finished boxing her books and slammed the door. Septima looked up quietly. "What has our daughter done, now?"

"It's Dumbledore."

This was more serious. She stood up and brought him over to a small couch, where she could hold his hands and give him her full attention. "What's he done?" Had the Headmaster put them in separate apartments, again?

"He's letting the Ministry choose the Defense professor. I specifically reminded him that he's promised me the job for years, now, but he said he needs to allow the Ministry to feel as though they were properly meddling in the school's affairs."

It made no difference whatsoever to Septima, but she knew it was very important to Severus. "Do you think this is because of me?" If Severus believed that Septima was the problem, she would stay at the university, although it would cut her heart out. Surely Zinnia would be allowed to stay too, and Sirius had taught her a nifty spell that forced Richard Erwin to stay a full six feet away from her. She and Severus would find moments to be together, sometimes.

Severus cupped her face in a hand and shook his head. With a small smile he said, "No, love, and I know what you're thinking. You're not to consider making that sort of sacrifice. It wouldn't do any of us good if I had to go without your assistance after I've been summoned to the Dark Lord."

Several times that summer, Septima had found herself using spells and healing ointments or lotions to help her husband recover from various tortures and other injuries. She'd learned a great deal about the healing arts as well as her husband himself. His occasional helplessness had made her feel strong and needed. It had reminded her of their son, and if she had needed a reason to fall in love all over again, it was there.

"What shall we do, then?" Septima asked.

Severus sighed and leaned back. "I guess we do what we've always done. We play along with Dumbledore until he pushes too hard or too far. Then we push back." His arm was draped along the back of the couch, and now he played with a strand of her hair. "I never dreamed it would be so good just to have someone to talk things over with."

They had to kick some of the boxes out of the way, but there was time for one last moment against the chalkboard. Afterward, Severus helped cast the charms that sent the boxes back to Septima's office at Hogwarts, but he kept grinning at the board.

"What are you on about, now?" she asked.

"We're leaving one last Septima-shaped smudge," he said. He took her hand and walked her out of the now-empty office. "We'll let our dear friend *Dick*, stew about that."

A/N: Thank you to Kyria of Delphi for her alpha/beta review and support!

The Mechanics of Value

Chapter 93 of 101

Severus realizes that he might be underestimating the worth of his witch.

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It was Saturday before the start of the School year, and the Snapes were enjoying a pleasant lie-in. Severus felt a familiar burn just above his wrist that started to work up and around his forearm. He willed it to subside as Septima held him tighter and made breathy gasps. Her legs around his hips tightened, and tugged her hips closer to his own as his passion took over.

He held her, trying to make the moment last a little longer, but he knew it was no use. She stroked the side of his face with her knuckles. "You have to go, don't you?"

"He'll want to give me instructions for the school year."

She kissed his wrist, just below the mark. "I'll go to Headquarters and wait for you, then. There was one last spell Sirius thought would be useful."

"What about Nicky?"

"He'll be fine. I'll ask Zinnia to look after him for a few hours. He needs to get used to living here again."

The burn intensified, and he couldn't avoid it. What followed his arrival was a lesson in tedium. It turned out that the Dark Lord wanted to go over the same plans he had established long before, just to make sure Snape hadn't forgotten them. Severus mentally pinched the bridge of his nose. Lord Voldemort may have hated Dumbledore. He may have feared him while making jokes about the older wizard's supposed foolishness, but in the ability to waste other people's time, his tactics were eerily similar.

At last Severus was able to leave. He slipped into the kitchen of the house at Grimmauld Place and quickly wrote a report that he left in the usual spot. His wife wasn't in the study, so he went down to the dining room.

"No, Septima, let me show you. You hold your wand in this position, and you will feel the spell from low in your tummy."

Severus peeked into the room to see his wife spin out of Black's arms. He backed up and stood behind the door. What were they really doing during these lessons?

"What's the matter, kitten?"

"I don't like it when you touch me so intimately."

"Is it something else?"

"What could you mean?"

"Another witch I tried to teach that spell couldn't learn it because she was pregnant, and it affected her stomach muscles."

"How inconvenient."

"Well?"

Septima's voice sounded tired. "Well, what?"

"Are you?"

"Am I what?"

"Pregnant. Is that the real reason you don't want my hand on your stomach?"

"That's none of your business," she snapped.

"If I were Snape, I'd keep you pregnant as often as you'd let me." Did Black sound the slightest bit wistful?

"Again, none of your business."

"If I'd known you back when we were all younger, I would have married you as quickly as possible and hoped to start a family on our wedding night."

"Really."

"Today we might have been going to Diagon Alley. Our oldest two would be returning students, and the third would buy her wand. I would have the little one in a pushchair while you held hands of the two who aren't quite old enough for Hogwarts, and your belly would be ripe with our youngest. We would overrun this house as surely as the Weasleys overrun their Burrow."

Silence, then, "I think I can get that last spell. Shall I try again?"

Severus backed away to the study. Two things stuck in his mind. One was a riddle for now until he could discuss it with his wife, but the other was something to consider. Other wizards found Septima attractive. Severus had only valued her in relation to Lily and Septima would never be as desirable. Yet he had been comfortable in the assurance that she was wholly his. Now he had to acknowledge that the latter assumption might not be accurate, and clearly other wizards valued her. He had to consider that Septima was something he could lose. It wasn't a pleasant idea.

She was clearly tired when she found him a few minutes later. Was Black's guess accurate? "I did it," she said. To demonstrate, she stood next to him and cast a protective spell that surrounded them like a sphere.

"It's not exactly circular."

"No, it's like Buckminsterfullerene." She was positively radiant—another symptom? "I had to explain dodecahedrons to Sirius, but he says it's probably some trick of the way I view things."

He stood and put his arms around her. "I love the odd quirks that only you have, Septima."

They returned to Hogwarts hand in hand, where they spent the afternoon putting their offices to rights and then worked on the library in their lounge after dinner. Nicky crawled from one to the other, dragging various toys with him. Severus watched Septima the whole time. Was she or wasn't she?

He gave the baby his bath and then brought him to his wife. They sat on the couch where he drew her close to his side. She nursed the drowsing baby as he looked on. Was he at risk to lose this, or was it going to increase?

"Love..." he didn't know how to ask it. He wasn't sure exactly what he wanted to know.

"Mmm... yes?"

"I must admit that I overheard you and Black talking earlier today."

"Oh?"

His hand over her heart could detect no increase of pulse, no excitement or fear at his admission.

"Are you?"

"Am I what?"

"Pregnant. Are you pregnant?"

"No."

"Did you want to—" he stopped when she put a fingertip over his lips.

"Both your mother and Poppy explained how to watch for symptoms of fertility. There haven't been any, yet."

"Oh." Now he felt stupid. He knew some of the signs.

"We can discuss it again when I do see signs. Your mum says it will probably be after Nicky's eating enough solid food to drop a couple of feedings."

"I wouldn't mind another child."

"Should we do it with all that's going on?"

"It's possible that we won't have any other time. Are you saying you don't want any other children? You seemed transfixed by Black's idea of a family."

"I think we can manage to do something that suits the two of us. Since you ask, Sirius put his story into a noble Gryffindor package full of marriage and an ordinary family, but all he wants is to get under my skirt. As soon as I agreed to any of it, he would have dropped the nobility and his shorts in seconds." Her voice got quiet and less certain. "Actually, I think he'd like to get under *any* skirt. All the witches he sees are married or relatives."

"He seemed so earnest."

"I really wasn't paying much attention. That's just how the conversation tends to go. Right then, I was thinking over the spell and how I was supposed to cast it."

A/N: Thank you to Kyria of Delphi for beta reading!

A Quantum of Something

Chapter 94 of 101

Septima ponders the dissatisfaction in her life.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Septima didn't know why it was, but she was irritated. It was something she'd tried to avoid telling herself and something that broke her heart when she finally couldn't avoid it. Severus, her husband, the man she'd loved since she was practically a child, irritated her.

He was cold and brusque. She'd known that all along and had chosen to accept it. He kept secrets from her. There were fewer than there used to be, so that was actually a sign of improvement. What bothered her was his constant saying what it was he loved about her. Given the context of their lives together, it was a reminder that he would never simply love her. She'd given him children, she'd comforted him when he was injured, and he always said he'd never had better sex. What did she have to do?

The days grew shorter, but the work became much more involved and took longer. Having Umbridge on staff was an irritation for Severus, who blamed her for all the no-smoking decrees that made his life difficult. For all the teachers, it meant an inordinate number of forms to fill out and checklists to follow. It was harder and harder to find time to devote to proper intellectual pursuits. Late one afternoon, Septima was re-copying some text she'd written. *The improbability of the spell or potion to work is, of course, its greatest strength. As soon as the activation energy is overcome, tremendous power is released, allowing that magic to progress and potentially spilling over into other forms. Great care must therefore be taken...*

"Professor Vector, can you help me with this problem?"

"Love, I need you to look over these calculations for my new potion."

The comments were made almost simultaneously, but Septima looked in disbelief at her husband and daughter. Her irritation bubbled over to actual anger. She was exhausted of everything.

"I've been trying to get this article published since last spring."

"Yes, I recall, on the improbability factor?" Severus had the look of someone who was relieved to remember the barest minimum of a subject that was very important to her.

"Today, I finally got a letter stating that if I can make certain corrections to my text, they'll be able to publish it. I have to send it off tonight."

"I see. But when do you think you'll—" He held up his notebook, but she put her hands up and shook her head.

"If I can have ten minutes without students or staff interrupting me, I may just be able to complete this. Then I might get to have the satisfaction of actually finishing something around here, and after comments come back, I might—just might—get a sense of satisfaction from knowing *that at least my peers think I'm worth something!*"

There was a red haze around everything as Hermione looked at her with a wide open mouth and Severus looked deeply into her eyes. Finally he nodded and turned around.

"Come, Miss Granger. Let's see if we can work on your Potions essay while we wait."

Septima watched them leave and shut her door. Then her head dropped onto the desk for a moment. She was sure that somehow she would be punished for that outburst. Severus had been much kinder of late, but he wouldn't accept that sort of thing without reprisal. She thought about it. Severus had been much kinder. What did that portend?

She shook it off. Getting this paper sent off was the job of the moment, and other projects would have to wait until that task was done. Severus must have put some magical spell to ward off any further questions from students or faculty. Septima had her ten minutes and then some. She finished copying her paper, checked once again that the

edits were made, and said the spell to dry her ink.

She was returning from the Owlry when she remembered the look on Severus's face. It had been unreadable, but she'd always seen something or other in his expression, usually based upon her own worries. Would he be in his office, fuming that she hadn't dropped everything to help him? Would he take her to task for not assisting a student, especially since the student was their daughter? She had almost talked herself into thinking that her own aspirations were unimportant and should have been set aside when she reached the stairway that ended at the doors to the Great Hall.

Headmaster Dumbledore was leaving dinner with Professor Umbridge at his heels. "Headmaster, I have something else to discuss!" she trilled as she sped as fast as she could on too-short legs under a too-snug skirt.

The latent irritation she'd been feeling came back to the fore, although it was dulled and weak. She did have a right to her own work, and she had not been entirely wrong in chasing Severus and Hermione out of her office. Perhaps she could have been nicer. Yes, she did owe them an apology about that. Yet there was something more out there for her. She shouldn't have to give up what she had with Severus and their children to have it, should she?

She heard murmurings as she passed through Severus's office that became conversation. "You may ask your mother, but I believe you're applying the function improperly to these two terms. The distributive property needs to consider things like negative and positive factors."

"Oh, I see! Yes, that's what she said in class, but I guess I didn't quite see it in this sort of case."

Then Septima heard something completely new. Over the past several months, her son had delighted her with gurgles and soft laughter. She'd gotten used to whole conversations with him in which he had only said one or two syllables over and over and over. Tonight was completely different.

"My-mee!"

"He's giving you the rattle," said Severus quietly.

Septima looked through the door into the lounge and saw her daughter put her pencil down and pick up not just the toy but Nicky himself.

"Is that my name?" she asked. She rubbed his belly with her head and giggled.

"My-mee-ee!" he answered with giggles of his own. Fortunately the rattle was soft, because he beat it against her head in his joy.

Septima felt a frisson of envy. Why couldn't it have been "mama?" She brushed it off. It didn't matter. That would come soon. What was important was that her children had found each other and were bound together in ways that she couldn't quantify. This wasn't the something more she had wanted as she came down the stairs, but it was *something*.

A/N: Thank you to Kyria of Delphi for her support with this!

The Mechanics of Dealing with Women

Chapter 95 of 101

Severus tries to cope with the women in his life.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

The witches were in league against him.

He wasn't sure he believed that, but it was a working hypothesis. For some reason, they snapped, fussed, or sniffed at him. It had started on the first day of classes, and as Christmas approached, it didn't appear that it would change significantly.

Hermione hadn't waited very long after her first Potions class to come to his office and tell him that he was treating Potter shamefully. "Shamefully!" was her exact word.

"You have no reason to treat him that way," she raged at him.

He flashed to a moment of his childhood, when he had yelled at his mother for some reason. Eileen had worn the same look on her face, but he recognized the voice as his own. He knew he was right in both cases, of course.

"You have no idea what lies between Potter and myself," he answered.

"Harry tells me everything," she said, with her chin set just so.

"Are you sure?" he couldn't resist needling her. Where Potter was concerned, the sooner the girl ended the friendship, the better for everyone. She looked at him and ran off in anger.

The next time he saw her, she was complaining about another Professor. This was dangerous ground for him. Quite often he'd wanted to take her part when he didn't think other professors were treating her fairly, but he needed to maintain order in the school.

"Umbridge won't—"

"Professor Umbridge, Miss Granger."

"Professor Umbridge then. She won't teach us anything. We won't be prepared for our O.W.L.s!"

This was something different. He didn't like Dolores for other reasons, and perhaps he could use it to his advantage. At least he could help his daughter. She, at least, would do brilliantly in all of her exams.

"Why don't you teach yourself?" he asked. "A copy of every text ever used for the subject is in the library."

"I wouldn't have a chance to practice and improve, but..." she trailed off as a look crossed her face. "I know what to do!"

She looked to see no one was watching, then hugged him quickly and ran from the room. She was gone before he had a chance to stop her. Somehow he suspected the High Inquisitor was not going to like Hermione's plan.

* * * * *

The High Inquisitor was the biggest thorn in his side. First she'd gotten the job that was rightfully his, and now she felt it was her job to poke into everyone's business. She enjoyed asking students about him during class, and more than once she had caused a student to put the wrong ingredient into his cauldron.

Going to Dumbledore was no help with the menace. "Oh, I'm afraid my hands are tied, Severus," he would affably say. "You've seen the Educational Decrees, yourself." He would bestow that damned benign smile upon him and then say, "Tell me about Septima. Are you getting tired of her yet? Don't you find that sleeping with a witch is annoying?"

He would stomp out of Dumbledore's office, but he knew the Headmaster wasn't entirely wrong. There was *something* tiresome about Septima, lately. It was as if she'd suddenly found that she couldn't stand certain things about their relationship. She rarely came out and said what troubled her, but she wore it like a cloak.

Upon occasion, he would make the slightest comment about being disappointed in love, and she would turn on him. It was never for more than a moment or two. She would make some bitter comment about his lost love and how it somehow shamed her. It always made him feel uncomfortable, as though there was something lacking in *him*.

More than once, as she bit her lip and walked away, he had wanted to tell her all about it. As far as he knew, she didn't even know Lily's name. Yet, for some reason, he couldn't give that to her. Once he did, something would be breached and Septima would own him more surely than she did now—not that she was in any sort of possession of him, he corrected himself. That was just a figure of speech.

Instead, he would follow Septima to whatever corner or office she had hidden herself. He would gently whisper into her ear or run his finger along the inside of her elbow. Whatever he did, she would whimper and turn into his arms, eager for his kisses. He would slide his hands under her robe, and soon she would be whispering his name in ever greater bursts of passion. They would find a bed, table, couch, or chalkboard, and he never failed to remind her as well as himself that they belonged together.

Later in the nights, he held her close and pondered how perfectly she fit within his arms. He resolved to find out what it was he needed to do to keep her happy so that he could do it. Then the day began, filled with glares from his daughter over his treatment of Potter, cheerfully impossible demands from Dolores, and the occasional cold shoulder from his wife.

In early December there was a day that was reasonably good for him. He'd not had the fifth year students in his class, and there had been no visits from the Grand Inquisitor. It seemed that Septima had borne the brunt of Dolores's cheerful stings today. She sat on the corner of their bed, all shrunk into herself, as if she was trying to reduce the amount of space she took up in the universe.

He summoned the hairbrush and knelt behind her. "What did she do to disrupt your class?"

"She told me that I should be able to use my art to find criminals such as Sirius Black. She said that I should be able to predict the future. She said that I'm little better than the Divination professor and that she's going to recommend that we combine the programs. So I tossed an equation up there about Dolores herself, just to shut her up. The answer came back horses! The entire N.E.W.T. class laughed, and Dolores wrote heaven knows what on that clipboard of hers."

"Dolores has some dread fate that involves horses, then?"

"Well, something horseish. It wasn't the proper rune for horses. Centaurs, maybe?"

"No wonder Dick wasn't enough for her."

Septima's breath came out in a spurt of laughter. "Severus, be good."

"I'm trying," he answered as his free hand slipped around her middle. He backed her onto the bed and started touching her.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"After all of these years and two children, I expected you to know," he said with a smirk.

"Oh!" she gasped as his searching fingers found a delicate spot. "I think it's coming back to me."

A/N: Thank you for reading and reviewing! Please, if you have a minute, spare a kind thought for Kyria of Delphi, who's been sick.

A Quantum of Enlightenment

Chapter 96 of 101

Septima inadvertently eavesdrops and learns more than she really wanted to know.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Kreacher wouldn't tell Septima where anyone was, so she simply went to the study to wait for Severus. There was a window seat where she could wait for her husband. She shrank behind the drapes and watched stars over a formerly grand residential street.

"Septima?" a voice quietly echoed into the room. She stirred, half asleep and tried to get out of the window, but she couldn't find the edge of the drapes.

"Is she in there, Moony?"

"I don't see her, Padfoot."

"It's probably just as well. I'd just try to chat her up. She's quite shag-able." Septima went still. It made her feel attractive and naughty at the same time.

"So you keep saying."

"Ha, Moony, you could have a witch of your own if you only said the word. I will observe she's a very attractive one, even if I'm her relative."

"We'll have to find someone for you, Sirius."

"And in the meanwhile, I'll picture what Septima would be like, sighing under my hands and lips."

"Better not let Snape catch you doing that, he'll hex your family jewels away."

"For all they're worth at this point."

Septima pondered making herself known. She wasn't sure how. It was just like defense; she never knew which tack to take. Should she cough, clear her throat, or find the edge of the curtains and simply slip out?

"What's she like? I've tried to get a quick grope now and then, but she's very skittish."

"She's extremely loyal to Severus."

"From what I can tell, she has great hips. Tell me, Moony, what is she like in bed? I bet those hips don't quit."

"We never quite got that far. There was one night that she lay in my arms, naked and pliant, but then she said Snape's name, and I couldn't."

"She compared you to Snape?"

"It took a lot to get her to that point. She's really completely gone over him, and very skittish around anyone else. I never quite figured out how I managed to get that far with her."

There was silence for a minute, and then, "So you've seen her naked. What's she like?"

There was a sigh and then, "Just what a man is looking for."

"You're not telling me anything. How does she compare to Lily?"

"Oh, you know; no one is Lily. I don't think Septima is as pretty, but she's got something else."

"Come on, Moony."

There was another sigh. "Well, for example, Septima's breasts are smaller, but when I touched them, she actually responded. When I kissed her, she kissed back. Then, when I ran my hand between her legs, sliding them apart, she arched up at me. Then she whispered his name, and I had to stop."

"I would have shagged her, anyway."

"Not if you really understood how it is between them. Not if the Dementors left you any sort of heart. I couldn't do it. Not to her."

"We all had Lily."

"That was *her* choice. It wouldn't have been that way with Septima."

"Maybe Lily wasn't really there, either."

"Padfoot..."

"You remember. You agreed that all she did was lie there. She's the only witch I fully remember shagging, because it was completely devoid of anything resembling sex. The Dementors didn't want that memory." Sirius let out a deep sigh, and there was a sound of someone shifting his seat on the leather.

Remus chuckled. "She came back and announced that Severus Snape had shown her how it was done. Then she pulled James into the bedroom and they stayed there for a week."

"When was that, again?"

"After Valentines... it was Valentines when she and James had that disastrous first try, and she came to me a few days later. It must have been late February, early March of that year. 1979?"

Septima gasped. She didn't think she could breathe. All of a sudden, everything made sense. Sudden dizziness made her lean back against the cool window.

"Severus must be pretty good at what he does, and for him to stay with Septima, she must be amazing."

"I suppose. Of course, Septima is actually a woman. Lily was still really a girl back then."

"Septima? Are you here?" It was a third voice, a voice that made her heart beat faster. Only tonight she wasn't feeling any sort of anticipation, just dread. She worked her way out of the drapes and stared at the floor the whole time she walked to her husband's side.

A/N: Thank you all for your support!

The Mechanics of Disclosure

Chapter 97 of 101

Severus gives Septima his dearest secret and secret disappointments.

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A Quantum of Discord

Chapter 98 of 101

Septima tries to come to terms with what she's learned.

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A Quantum of True Intimacy

Chapter 99 of 101

Everything important is out in the open, mostly.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Septima was hurt, and Severus didn't know how to react. After tonight, he thought he might understand. He was the cause of her pain. His wife was a gifted, lovely witch, and somehow she didn't realize how important she was to him. He had a passing moment of irritation. Wasn't she listening to their wedding vows? How could she not know?

He realized that the Headmaster was part of the problem. Dumbledore had been whispering into her ears, telling her to never presume upon Severus's attachment or loyalty. He had encouraged her insecurity and played upon her fear. He had made Septima believe that she could never rely upon Severus, and Severus had done little to combat that thought.

He considered how it had been as he'd walked away from her. When he got to the turn in the hallway, he had looked back. She'd been all curled up upon herself, and he could tell there were tears. He could also tell that she was lonely. He'd just given her the most precious thing he had—his memories of Lily. Somehow baring his soul had made the woman with the most rightful claim on him feel lonely.

He got in bed, but sleep eluded him. At best, he dozed off for a few minutes at a time. A very cold body joined Severus in bed during the wee hours of the night.

"Ah, love," he sighed. He pulled her close and kissed her temple. He ran his hands up and down her back and tangled his legs with hers, trying to warm her.

"I'm sorry, I can't stay away from you."

"This is where you belong." There was something vital that he needed to tell her. "Septima, I'm not indifferent. I've never been indifferent toward you."

"Don't—" He could feel her suck in a deep breath. "I don't want to cry in front of you. I know you hate it."

"Sometimes I know you need the tears. It's all right, I suppose. You need to know this. You mean more to me than any woman living—than any other person alive. You're my wife."

"I'll just never be Lily."

"Septima, I've always intended this to be a real marriage."

There was no answer.

"I may not feel the sort of love that they write about, but we work well together. We understand each other. I feel safe when we're together, and I don't think I'll ever get enough of your body."

She shrugged.

"I made vows to you, Septima. I promised to care and protect you, even unto my last breath. I take those vows seriously."

"It's just an accident of fate that you made them to me." Her voice lowered so that he could barely hear her. "I'm sorry that it's me and not her."

"I'm not the least bit sorry. I don't believe fate makes accidents, and she did well to bring us together."

Septima's head tilted up. It was too dark to actually see, but he knew he had her eyes upon his face. "How can you say that, when you've devoted your life to another woman?"

"Because you and I..." How could he explain it? "It's as you said. You've been my partner in almost everything I've done for so many years. You've always welcomed me, and she rejected me at almost every opportunity."

She shrugged.

"It's not just that, love. We fit. When we're together I can be comfortable, and I have a place in the world. I can't imagine being like this with anyone else." He couldn't resist pulling her close and pressing his face into her hair. "You're the witch who loves me, whom I look for when I'm hurt, and in whose arms I can rest. You're part of me, Septima."

"It's not like a real marriage, though."

"With all the affection, respect, and cooperation we have? It really is. It's far more than my parents had."

After a while, the trembling stopped. Her body relaxed and warmed. "Circe help me, I want you," she whispered.

"Are you sure?" If she felt uncomfortable chancing a pregnancy, he would wait for a day or two even if it killed him.

"Oh, yes," she breathed. Her lips set fire to his chest and neck.

He should go slowly, but he couldn't seem to stop touching her, sliding his hands along her body. Her breathy moans incited him to lean down and use his mouth, kissing, licking, gently nibbling at her most sensitive spots until she was begging him.

"Severus, please, I need..." He touched her again, and whatever she was going to say disappeared in a sort of shriek.

He pulled her body close and lost himself within her. "Oh, Septima, wife..."

"Yes."

He could feel her, lost in her emotions and passion. He held her, keeping her safe to feel the intensity of her bliss.

"I love you," she said at last. He cradled her close, not wanting to hurt her, but he couldn't stop himself. His body demanded release. As so often happened, Septima shuddered and clung to him harder yet, and he let himself go.

A/N: Thanks so much to Kyria of Delphi for her continued review and support!

A Quantum of Family for the Holiday

Chapter 100 of 101

Hermione spends some time with her newfound family.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Hermione discovered that she had a knack for walking quietly. She wouldn't describe it as sneaking. To some extent, Harry and Ron could do it as well; the invisibility cloak would have been useless if they made noise. She simply walked carefully and was able to see things without others realizing she was there.

She used this ability when patrolling as a prefect. She didn't really need an invisibility cloak to be unseen. It was amazing how self-centered kids could be, to the extent that they didn't realize other people were near them. She therefore saw many things that George and Fred were doing. It helped her to prevent disaster from happening to several unwary first and second years.

Early in the school year, she discovered that Septima spent a certain amount of time looking out the window of one of the hallways. It was at the end of the hallway containing the Arithmancy classroom and Septima's office. Hermione would watch her, looking for and finding herself sometimes. Septima occasionally worked in her notebooks, but usually she just sat or stood there sadly.

Both parents had admitted that their own romance had been complicated. There was some question about how her father actually felt toward her mother. So Hermione watched them, to see what she could learn herself. Some nights Septima appeared to be tense, as though she was watching for something. After a while, she would heave a deep breath and run down the stairs. Hermione followed and watched as her father came back to the school from Salazar-knew-where, limping into her mother's arms. She watched them walk toward the stairway to the dungeons, with Septima supporting Severus.

Her favorite thing to watch was the way they interacted when Severus joined Septima in the hallway. Usually Septima was there first. After a while, Severus came up behind her. She seemed to know when he approached. Her whole body would change somehow. Even though she might not move at all, Hermione could tell that she was aware and eager to be near him. Her father's step would quicken as it approached her mother, and then she could see what it was like for a romance to play out before her.

When they were together as a family, Severus and Septima were a little warmer than teachers. They showed her affection, and Nicky was usually delightful, but it was a bit stilted at moments. No matter how much they might wish it otherwise, they hadn't been a family all along. When she spied on them...and she could admit this is what she was doing...she saw them as they really were with each other.

There were rarely any kisses in the hallway. More often, Hermione watched them talk animatedly. She didn't know what they had to talk about. Surely they already knew everything about each other, yet spoke together often. Kisses were few and far between, and often fairly innocent. Yet they left the watcher breathless. Somehow she knew they were indicative of a strong attachment between them.

She saw them argue, she saw them simply together, and once or twice, she saw real affection between them. This is how she knew what their feelings really were. She

could see that they might not always agree, or that sometimes they just needed to talk about things, but by the time they walked back down the hallway, they almost always did so hand in hand, or with Severus's arm around Septima. Her parents' relationship might be complicated according to them, but to Hermione it looked like love.

* * * * *

It probably wasn't right to lie to Harry and Ron, nor to the Grangers, but Hermione wanted more time with her own family. Unfortunately, something happened to Mr. Weasley the night before the holiday was to begin. Professor MacGonagall whispered what she could of the story to Hermione before breakfast. When Hermione had a hurried conversation with Professor Vector, the family's plan for the holiday was amended.

Eileen met Hermione at Kings Cross, and they traveled together to the house where Severus had taken her almost a year before. They sipped hot chocolate in the library while they waited for the others to arrive. Eileen asked questions about school. She occasionally made a comment about a teacher or the parents of other students that made Hermione giggle. She realized that her grandmother's sly wit was the source of her father's sarcasm, and at least some of her own intelligence.

Suddenly there was a racket at the door. Severus and Septima arrived with a tearful Nicky. "He's been fussy all day," said Septima apologetically.

"Is he teething again?" asked Eileen.

"Yes," said Severus, who looked at Septima and then said, "at least that's what Septima thought."

The two made eye contact and then looked awkwardly away from each other. It reminded Hermione of seeing them several nights ago. There was some sort of argument. Hermione had to go back to her dorm before they finished, but ever since, the two were together as often as normally but not as comfortable as usual. What was wrong?

Septima quickly unfastened the many layers of baby outergarments so that Nicky could be free. "He probably will feel at least a little better when he can move around again," she said.

Eileen took the unwrapped baby and held him close. "He's not the slightest bit cold. You take wonderful care of him, Septima, and I have just the thing for achy baby teeth."

Eileen and Nicky were already in the kitchen, so only Hermione saw that awkward look between her parents again before Septima said, "Thank you, Eileen."

Hermione watched Septima act just the slightest bit skittish the whole time they prepared tea and ate. She was warm with Hermione and Eileen, but more formal than usual with Severus. Fortunately, Nicky sat at the table in his high chair, providing employment when silences between the elder folk got too long. Septima put one or two foods on his tray that might be good for him to eat, but for the most part he just chewed his spoon and chanted vowel sounds.

Afterwards, the family sat in the library and exchanged Christmas gifts. Severus and Septima each gave Hermione books from their own disciplines. "No pressure there," observed Eileen, "except that you had better choose one of their subjects for your concentration." Everyone laughed at that.

There were toys for Nicky, little odds and ends for Eileen to use around the house or in her practice, and books and stationery for Severus and Septima. Perhaps the most special gift was a small box that Severus took from his pocket and handed to Septima. She opened it and all the females in the room gasped at the lovely engagement ring inside.

"Severus, I don't understand."

"I'm sorry I didn't get one sooner."

"I didn't expect...I mean, I know you never..."

"I want you to know that I choose you, Septima."

"But..."

"I choose you to be my lover, my wife, the mother of my children..." he slid his hand around her waist in a way Hermione hadn't seen in over a week. "I chose you before. Maybe I didn't understand it, and maybe I acted badly, but I chose you, and I still choose you, now."

Septima gasped and took several deep breaths. "Damn, you always do this to me," she said. Hermione saw that her eyelashes were damp. "Severus, you know I love you."

Hermione couldn't be sure, but she thought he quietly said, "Still?" while using the hand around her waist to slide her closer.

"I'll never stop," she whispered, tilting her head just so.

Hermione glanced at Eileen, who watched them with a soft look in her eye. "I don't suppose the two of you have something to tell us?" asked the older witch.

Severus and Septima broke off their kiss and looked at each other. The soft blush on Septima's face was nothing like the awkwardness of before. "Not yet, but perhaps soon," said Severus quietly. Then he said "Ouch!"

Everyone looked down and saw that Nicky had crawled across the room while holding a wooden train. Now he was using it to beat on his father's shin. Everyone laughed, and it was time to clear up all the wrappings. In just a few minutes, Hermione would need to leave. She had stolen a moment for a Christmas with the family she'd just found, but she didn't want to be away from Harry and the Weasleys when Arthur was in danger.

A/N: Thank you to Kyria of Delphi for all of her help!

A Quantum of Holiday

Chapter 101 of 101

Even the Christmas Holiday is not immune from the Dark Lord.

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Hermione was just about ready to leave when the summons came. Septima saw the look in her husband's eye and knew what had happened. "How can you go now?" she whispered.

"I can't not go. You know that."

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She didn't want to upset Hermione's last moments with them. "I'll be waiting for you."

He kissed her cheek as he walked toward the door. "I'm counting on that."

Likewise, Septima forced herself to be calm as she walked Hermione to a quiet spot near by. "I hope Arthur is all right," Septima said.

"I'm worried about Harry, if he's the one who raised the alarm. He has these episodes..." Hermione seemed reluctant to say any more.

Septima held her wand and raised her arm. The Knight Bus would arrive in just a few seconds. "It's better if they don't see me. Here's what you need for the fare. Maybe we'll see each other, certainly when classes start again..."

There was a loud banging noise, and the bus hove into view. Septima took a step backwards and pulled her hood over her head to hide her face. She waved goodbye as another banging sound took the bus and her daughter away from her.

Septima took Nicky to the apartment and spent the afternoon worrying about her two missing family members. Around six-thirty, she received a note *Arrived safely; no one is in danger any more, although things are still tense. HG.* She could be relieved at least that much, then. There was no note from wherever Severus had been summoned.

Nicky had his dinner but Septima couldn't eat a bite. She didn't know why she was so nervous over Severus, but if Arthur Weasley could be attacked, she feared what others might suffer. Nicky was surprisingly sweet to bathe. Septima gave him his bedtime nursing, the only one he still took every day, and put him in his cot. He looked like Severus and yet sweet and innocent as well. She delighted in him even as she fretted over his father.

There was no point in trying to sleep. She sat in the lounge and watched the clock tick. At close to nine, something heavy slumped against the door. She ran and pulled it open. Severus fell over the threshold and muttered. "Never open the door without checking..."

She knelt beside him. "Don't be an idiot. Can you walk if I hold you?"

He grunted in assent, so she brought him to their bedroom and started working at the fastenings of his clothes.

"What did they do?" she asked, although she could see the markings made by various spells all over him. Fortunately they were all ones she recognized. She feared the day when the small skills taught to her by Poppy would not suffice, but so far the Dark Lord was not particularly inventive. She helped him as well as she could and then lay down next to him in the bed. She held him in her arms and said, "I don't understand why he would hurt you so much, when he needs you."

"He was furious to discover that there's a connection between himself and Potter. It would have helped him if Arthur had been discovered by the Ministry instead of rescued by the Order. Somehow, the boy knew what was happening, and sounded an alarm."

Severus was shivering too hard to talk about it, so Septima simply did what she had learned to do. Using her hands and mouth, and eventually her body, she loved and warmed him, until he sighed in something like contentment. "Ah, wife, only you can truly help me."

"I'm still not sure I understand why."

"I'm still trying to understand it, myself. I know that somehow you have a part of me within you and that there's a part of you in me. The Cruciatus makes me lose or forget my soul somehow, but by coming to you, I can find myself."

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The Christmas Holidays continued with less drama. The attack at the Ministry was discussed by Order members, and there was still concern over the Healers' inability to heal Arthur's wounds. Severus spent long afternoons discussing the connection between Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort.

He came back to the apartment just as Septima was packing to return to Hogwarts for the spring term, his face clouded with annoyance. "I'm supposed to teach the prat Occlumency, now."

"Why doesn't he do it, himself?"

"There's a risk that Harry, and the Dark Lord through Harry, could see the inner workings of Dumbledore's mind."

"Doesn't that same risk exist if you do it?"

"Apparently the workings of my mind are less important to the Order."

"I'm not sure I follow that logic."

"Yet there it is. I'm supposed to go to headquarters and set it up now."

"Shall I come with you?"

His response was to hold out his hand.

After an uncomfortable but short discussion with Sirius, Septima was sent up to the study while Severus went to the kitchen. A few minutes later, Hermione came down. "I had wondered if you might be here when Mrs. Weasley said Professor Snape was in the kitchen to speak with Harry."

Hermione looked expectantly at Septima, but it wasn't her story to tell. "How was your holiday?"

"There've been good parts, and bad parts. I think coming here was the right thing to do."

"So it's going well?" She saw a couple of scrolls in Hermione's hand. "What do you have there?"

The girl sat down and handed them over. "I don't know what to think."

Septima glanced over what were obviously letters from Viktor Krum. She did not read them, preferring to get the story from her daughter. "What did he say?"

"He talks of the coming war, and of his ideas that everyone should be free to learn the magic they carry, but I don't know. Ron points out that he's a student of Durmstrang."

"You know Viktor better."

"I thought I did. That's what I told Ron, to shut him up..."

"But?"

"I can't get what I saw out of my mind. His hand was right on the one girl's bum!"

Septima smiled and shook her head. "You said he had each arm around a girl and a third in his lap. How could one of his hands be on her bum?"

The girl looked flustered then. "Maybe not, but he was still with all those girls!"

"What did he say about that?"

"I—I couldn't ask." Hermione turned bright red and looked away.

Septima gave her a quick hug, no more than a concerned professor might, and said, "Perhaps it's best to ignore all that. Perhaps you should separate the two things from your mind."

"Do you think he means what he says, that should there be a war, he will help?"

"How did he behave when he was here? How did he treat you, thinking that you're a Muggle-born?"

"He didn't say much about it at all. He just told me that he thought I was one of the smartest witches he ever met."

"And? What does that tell you?"

Hermione frowned. "You're turning it into a maths problem."

"I'm a maths teacher." Hermione looked up, and both witches suddenly laughed.

Ron poked his head in the door. "Dad's here! I saw him out the window with Bill and Charlie! He must be healed, Hermione!" Hermione glanced quickly at Septima, who nodded her head toward the door. Hermione joined Ron and he walked down the hall.

Septima followed the procession that formed and went toward the kitchen, but at a slower pace. If the Weasleys were reunited, there would be a celebration, and she and Severus wouldn't be wanted, at least not for long. Sure enough, Severus swept through the kitchen door and only stopped when it shut behind him. He stopped, snapped his robe into place, and took her hand, squeezing it a little too tightly. The ring he had just given her dug into her finger.

"The boy is encouraged in his ingratitude by that mangy—" He stopped himself and kissed the hand he held. "Let's retrieve our own son from his grandmother and enjoy our last evening to ourselves, shall we?"

Septima smiled. "Let's."

A/N: Thank you, as always, to Kyria of Delphi. Your support is irreplaceable, and your ideas are always helpful!