

To Be a Woman

by Savva

Two men, one woman – a story as old as the world itself. A twist – two powerful wizards will clash over one brilliant witch. Love. Friendship. Rivalry. Deceit. Severus Snape/Lucius Malfoy/Hermione Granger. AU. OOC. DH partly ignored.

Prologue

Chapter 1 of 11

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To be a woman is a great adventure;

To drive men mad is a heroic thing. B. Pasternak

Prologue Kaleidoscope

Kaleidoscope life is a kaleidoscope, mused Hermione Granger, sitting at her London flat on a quiet April evening. You do, I hope, know Hermione Granger, my friends – a brilliant witch, or as Remus Lupin once said, the brightest witch of her age, the war hero, the brains of the Golden Trio, the best friend of the legendary Harry Potter (Merlin let him rest in peace). Yes, yes, and yes, my darlings; this was she – the one and only Hermione Granger.

So, as I was saying, this legendary person, Hermione Granger, sat in the living room of her London flat, with a nice glass of rather tasty Portuguese Malbec in her hand, musing about the eight years that had passed after the war.

The analogy she drew between life and the image we would be able to see in a simple kaleidoscope, easily acquired in any Muggle toy store, was quite logical and obvious. We all know how this interesting device works – all you need to do is point it towards a source of light and turn it while looking into it. Colourful pieces of glass, beads and who knows what else mix, scatter and then magically (in this case, the magic provided by tiny mirrors) create a geometrically harmonious and beautiful artwork.

The life of the whole Wizarding society in general, and of Hermione Granger in particular, had also been turned and twisted in different directions more than once during these years. Similarly, it was also comprised of tiny pieces births, deaths, marriages, divorces, small personal triumphs and huge, public fiascos. Much like a silly children's toy, these pieces never failed to weave themselves into a vivid, motley picture a picture of life.

In eight years, there had been a lot of little pieces in this life's kaleidoscope, and quite a few unexpected twists and turns contributed to the current scene.

Now, my dear readers, I would like to unveil what had happened during these past years in the lives of a few people relevant to this particular story.

By the third anniversary of the victory over Voldemort, Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley the famous Golden Trio that saved us all had been happily rebuilding their lives.

Harry and Ron had both pursued careers in the Magical Law Enforcement, while Potter had successfully dated the witch of his dreams, also known as Ginny Weasley. Talk of their upcoming wedding already had become official.

Ron as well had dated the witch of his dreams. He, however, hadn't been as successful as Harry in his quest for love. Hermione and he had dated on and off for three years, and by this point both had been convinced that they were, unfortunately, not soul mates and would probably do much better as friends. His career, on the other hand, had been going quite well.

Hermione Granger had been one of a few enthusiasts who had returned to Hogwarts after the war. She had attained her N.E.W.T.s with the highest scores possible, of course. After Hogwarts, Hermione had continued her education. Despite a somewhat disappointing, but certainly endearing, failure in her love life, she had felt confident, looked forward to working in the Ministry of Magic, and couldn't wait to put her ideas into practice there.

Severus Snape had not been allowed to die. He had been saved by one extremely stubborn and persistent witch (yup, Hermione Granger again). The former professor and Death Eater had been fully rehabilitated, and all his actions which took place during the long and torturous years of spying had been pardoned. His loyalty to Albus Dumbledore and the Order of Phoenix, his years of living on a knife's edge, his willingness to sacrifice himself for the light side, and his enormous contribution to the victory over Voldemort had all finally been recognized. Severus Snape had been regarded and respected as a hero. Had he been happy about it? Of course not, or at least that was what he had said to Rita Skeeter, right before he had almost hexed her arse into...well, you know where.

The Malfoys had been mostly rehabilitated as well, although Lucius had needed to appear before the Wizengamot and answer highly unpleasant, annoying questions. Unsurprisingly, our ever sly and veritable Slytherin had managed once again to come out clean and dry almost clean, that is. The smooth surface of Lord Malfoy's private life, however, had suffered something of a crack. His wife, Narcissa Malfoy, had left him. In her eyes, quite rightfully so: Lucius had brought devastation upon the family, and worst of all, he had put the life of their only child in mortal danger. Lady Malfoy simply hadn't been able to forgive him, so she had divorced the wizard and moved into a villa on the French Riviera.

Draco Malfoy had become a changed boy after the war. His faith in his father had been shattered and all his lifelong beliefs had been undermined. The need for education, though, hadn't changed, so Draco, along with Hermione, had returned to Hogwarts. Then, after attaining his N.E.W.T.s, he had continued his education somewhere in France, near his mother.

The magical world had been recovering and healing. It had been a joy to be able to love, to work, to catch up with friends in the Leaky Cauldron without death constantly stepping on one's tail. All had seemed well, even better than well older and younger generations alike had been happy and optimistic, and the future had looked brighter than ever.

Alas, however, all it took was one ill-willed twist of life's kaleidoscope, a stupid coincidence, and everything, everything, had broken into a thousand pieces again.

It happened four years ago.

The story had been disgustingly simple for the last time Harry had managed to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Some pathetic Muggle thief had shot him during an attempted robbery at a Muggle food shop. Harry had never even seen it coming. All he had done was open the door of the store, when a stray bullet had found its way into his head and there was no Harry Potter anymore. What exactly he had wanted in the shop was never discovered.

There is no need, my dear readers, to explain the extent to which this tragedy had affected the magical world. For everyone, it had been too darn hard to grasp, to comprehend and to accept. All the pieces were scattered and the Wizarding community was in mourning again. Naturally, those closest to Harry had suffered the most.

The whole future had changed with one mad turn on the road of life. Ginny, poor, innocent Ginny, who had already had lost her brother in the war, had now lost her beloved, soon to be husband. She was devastated, as they all were. Ron, Hermione, and all the remaining Weasleys had been crushed by cruelty of fate.

Still, the ability of human nature to bounce back and survive is remarkable. Eventually, everybody had adjusted and had moved on with their lives. Now, four years later, the image in the kaleidoscope had been harmonious and beautiful again, with only one little difference there was no Harry in it.

Ginny had found herself in professional Quidditch, saying that the prospect of traditional family life was not her cup of tea anymore. Later, Ron had also joined her. Frankly, since Harry's death, the work in Magical Law Enforcement had lost all its appeal for him. Sadly, first romance and then the friendship between Hermione and him slowly had come to an end. Somehow, without Harry, the relationship between Ron and Hermione hadn't worked well.

Surprisingly, Draco Malfoy had been strongly affected by Harry Potter's death. Inexplicably, the death of his former rival and saviour had been the turning point in the poor boy's life after which something had snapped in him. Draco had left his mother, cut off all communications with his father, and had disappeared.

There had been rumours that he was living in Paris with an unknown witch, a divorcee who was older than he. You can probably guess the level of distress the news had instilled in Lucius Malfoy. He had considered it a disaster first he had lost his wife, and now he had lost his only son and heir. It had been an unimaginable catastrophe.

On the other hand, Lucius' friendship with Severus had developed to a new level. They had become close friends, meeting regularly for a glass of Firewhisky, a chess game or a round of poker. Harry Potter's death and the considerable amount of time since the war had allowed Malfoy to re-establish his standing at the Ministry and among the wizards once again. He had not been quite back to his full strength yet, but had been well on the way.

Severus hadn't returned to Hogwarts, but instead had left his teaching career for good. He had bought a small villa in the south of England, had set up a small potions laboratory there and had been happily brewing potions for a small group of customers.

Hermione had been working at the Ministry of Magic, striving to achieve everything that Harry and she had dreamt about. She had felt compelled to do so. Sometimes she had felt all alone, but it wasn't strictly true. She had friends, nice co-workers; it was just they hadn't been Harry and Ron. Despite these occasional traitorous feelings, she had felt rather contented. She had become a rising star at the Ministry and in the Wizarding political arena as well. Hermione had felt herself to be on the right track to reaching her and Harry's dreams.

It was the evening of April 2006, just a few weeks before the eighth anniversary of the victory over Voldemort, which may have been the reason for Hermione's philosophical musing.

Although, when more than half of the wine had disappeared from the witch's glass, her thoughts moved swiftly to a topic more connected with reality the Victory Ball at the Ministry. There were undoubtedly a lot of things to consider and a few problems to solve the dress, the shoes, the hair, and a beau, the most crucial issue of all!

Chapter One

Chapter 2 of 11

Two men, one woman – a story as old as the world itself. A twist – two powerful wizards will clash over one brilliant witch. Love. Friendship. Rivalry. Deceit. Severus Snape/Lucius Malfoy/Hermione Granger. AU. OOC. DH partly ignored.

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Chapter One

Blue shoes, Blue Knickers, or Where Did My Confidence Go?

They were perfect just right. The moment she saw them in a shoe boutique two weeks ago (oh, come on girls, we all know the feeling), she knew that they were exactly what she had been looking for, exactly what she needed.

They were the most exquisite sandals she had ever owned cobalt blue, made out of organza with silk satin lacing and with the magic words 'Manolo Blahnik' floating above them, right in the air. The style was the sinful fusion of two worlds Victorian sensuality and modern technology. Of course, they were a perfect match for the strapless dress that Madam Malkin had ordered and altered exclusively for Hermione.

Oh, how happy our golden girl was the moment they belonged to her. Pleasant warmth filled her heart when she finally was able to feel the weight of the bag hanging from her arm. It was intoxicating the sensation akin to love. Hermione was convinced that now, nothing could corrupt, diminish or deprive her of her confidence nothing, never, not with these gems on her feet.

This perfect pair of Manolos was the finishing argument in the month-long excruciating battle that Hermione Granger had conducted with the most difficult opponent possible herself. The progressive, self-assured and independent part of our famous witch's personality was engaged in an ongoing fight against, and already almost winning over, the other shy, insecure and quite conservative part of herself.

Obviously, with these silk, cobalt blue babies in the closet, Hermione's strong side had conquered her weaker half and was soaring above in delight with the victory. It was decided the witch was going to the ball alone. There was no need for an escort. She could do this, and she most surely didn't need someone carefully holding her under an elbow as if she didn't have enough power of her own. No! No need for a strong, broad shoulder near her, and an arm around her waist. Nope, not at all with this new feeling of wilful independence.

Last year, she wouldn't have had the nerve to go alone, because she was still healing after Ron's departure. Neville sweetly had offered to accompany her, and they had gone together. It was actually quite a lucky night for him Hannah Abbot was there. They reconnected rather quickly and tightly, and now they were going to the ball as a happy couple.

This year was altogether different for Hermione. She could feel it in her lungs the air of self-confidence. The rising star of the Ministry was utterly ready to walk to the ball unescorted.

Yup. She was ready... or she had been, right until this morning, that is.

Did you ever wonder, my dear friends, where does the confidence go? No matter how long you worked on it, how fastidiously you gathered it up crumb by little crumb, no matter how sure you were that you had it right there in your fist one wrong breath, one misspoken word and all of the confidence is suddenly 'poof' unexplainably gone.

That was exactly what had happened to Hermione. She should have stayed home today, but of course, she couldn't. It all started when her administrative assistant and acquaintance, Lora, burst into her office with the morning papers and the news. Her hands were full of files for Hermione, but all her thoughts were entirely focused on another subject the Victory Ball.

"Good morning," she sang with glee, "I cannot believe it's today." When Hermione looked up at her from the documents she was working on, the girl continued, "The ball. I have everything ready. Zachary will pick me up at seven. Did you decide who is taking you?" But the moment Lora noticed the slight frown on Hermione's face, she backpedaled immediately.

"Oh, oh, right, I forgot. I am very proud of you, by the way. It is the twenty-first century, after all," she muttered unconvincingly, and the next second she swiftly dropped the papers on Hermione's desk, flashed her boss an awkward smile and disappeared through the door quite hectically.

That was it the worm of doubt was awoken. All of what followed only made it grow fatter and stronger. It stirred and twitched in Hermione's heart, causing her to endure an entire range of nauseating emotions and thoughts.

Sure enough, around twelve o'clock, Hermione received an owl from Neville, asking if she would like to join him and Hannah. At 2:30, George stepped by to ask if our witch would like to go with Angelina and him.

The apotheosis, the grand summit, however, was when Kingsley Shacklebolt, the Minister himself, called her to his office and aha, right offered to take a poor, lonely witch to the function, as he, quite convincingly, put it, "As a friend, and just for your dignity sake, dear. No strings attached." You can imagine how terribly the tips of Hermione's fingers were itching, lightly touching her wand in her pocket. Oh, well a proper upbringing and respect for the older wizard narrowly prevailed this time.

To be fair to Kingsley, he did officially ask her permission to accompany her to the Victory Ball a month ago, which Hermione politely didn't grant. The momentary disappointment that flashed in the Minister's eyes had gotten Hermione thinking. Although, after a few unsuccessful dates with wizards her own age during the previous two years, Hermione had firmly decided that she needed an older, mature wizard. Kingsley Shacklebolt wasn't on her list of possible candidates for romance. To be honest, she didn't even have a list yet, but if she did, he wouldn't make it, of that she was sure. She just didn't see him in that light. Besides, Hermione wouldn't mind becoming his right hand at the Ministry some day, and you know what they say yes, exactly *do not mix business with pleasure*.

By the time our brave Gryffindor got home and took her beautiful sandals out of the closet, her earlier defeated, shy, timid and conservative side was back and in complete control, having entirely banished her confidence. She stood in her bedroom, wearing her cobalt blue sandals and matching cobalt blue knickers, futilely trying to find the missing bravado and feeling only dread and mortification.

Ah, and about the cobalt blue knickers it was just a coincidence, a spontaneous decision. They had caught her attention the day after she bought the shoes, in the lingerie shop window. The knickers were extremely lacy and the exact same shade as the sandals. Of course, she bought them. How could she not?

Now, around six o'clock in the evening on Friday, about two hours before the Victory Ball in the Ministry of Magic, Hermione Granger stood in her bedroom in front of her mirror, wearing stunning blue sandals and blue knickers, with her pale violet, strapless dress lying ready on the bed. She ineffectively tried to gain back her lost courage to

go to the Ball alone. A heavy sigh and soft murmur, "I don't have it," confirmed that the confident side of Hermione Granger was losing the battle to the onslaught of her insecurities.

All right, my dear ones, let's leave our beloved lioness to wage her battle and venture to the villa of a certain Potions master.

Two Friends Two Hussars

On the same Friday, at 6:03 in the evening, Severus Snape, dressed casually in black trousers and a black waistcoat over properly heavily starched white shirt, stood in his laboratory, carefully checking his supplies and making occasional notes in a parchment. It was this time of the month again time to replenish materials and ingredients in the storage room. He looked good, our Potions master. Well, as good as possible considering that his main features were the same black, slightly greasy hair, enormous, hooked nose, teeth... um, still the same. However, Snape's whole demeanour was different calm, almost at ease.

Despite the seeming absorption in his unquestionably extremely beneficial task, a careful observer would have noticed that Severus wasn't as focused as usual. Since an old clock had chimed six times, something was undoubtedly bothering him. Three minutes after the clock had chimed, Severus heard a commotion in another part of the house. He had only managed to frown and mutter, "Merlin, help me," before an unusually agitated elf named Casimir barged into the laboratory and announced, "Mister Lucius is looking for master. Very worried Mister Lucius wants master now!" And then, without further ado, the elf had disappeared with a rather discontented pop.

Seconds later, the familiar drawl preceded the voice's owner. "Severus, you are late. It is already 6:04 and you are still home. You were supposed to be at the Manor at six o'clock. Could you, please, be so kind and explain to me why are you still home?" At this, finally, the one and only Lucius Malfoy made his appearance at the threshold in all his glory.

Severus observed his friend with trained attention and a crooked smirk touched his thin lips. Lucius was already formally dressed in full parade. A white batiste shirt, green silk cravat, green organza waistcoat, black cashmere robes, and a distinctive snake-headed cane completed his attire. He gave Severus a quick, appraising glance, and continued, "As I was saying. Why are you still here and why are you not even dressed yet?" His light grey eyes were locked on his opponents' with arrogant expectancy. His impeccably trimmed, blond eyebrows were aristocratically arched, his chest pushed out in a haughty stance. Oh, yes, Lucius Malfoy the one and only, indeed.

Severus didn't even bat an eye at all this charade. He had obviously been expecting his friend to arrive. "I don't believe I was supposed to be anywhere near the Manor today, Lucius. You were going to visit that dreadful Ministry function, and I was going to stay home."

"We had an agreement, Severus. You said we would go together. You agreed. It was after a few glasses of Firewhisky and a cigar at the Manor," Lucius began his song again.

"I did no such thing, Lucius. Do not try your sly tricks with me. You know quite well; they will not work."

"But, Severus -"

"I said no, Lucius. Please stop this fruitless harassment. I will not go. Period." Severus' deep baritone began to show signs of annoyance. "I said no yesterday, and the day before, and the previous week, and at the beginning of the month. And, against my better judgment and only because I call you my friend, I will tell you again I am not going to this horrible, public function, Lucius," reiterated Severus, emphasizing each word. "Last year was the final time for me." For anyone other than Lucius, this would have been the end of it. However, we know quite well that Lucius Malfoy was sorted into Slytherin for a reason.

In the blink of an eye, his demeanour changed dramatically. All the pomposity and arrogance was gone. Anyone could read the weariness and defeat in a slump of his shoulders. His eyes glistened slightly with depression, and our crafty, blond wizard whispered quietly, "I understood you perfectly, Severus." He uttered a soft grunt. "I will go home then, as I need to disrobe immediately. I feel old, lonely and dismissed by everybody. This is an ultimate truth, painful, yet real."

Lucius began to turn ever so slowly, as if he was leaving, muttering softly, "It was foolish of me to hope that you would change your decision. It's just-"

With an annoyed huff and a loud growl, Severus exclaimed, "Merlin, whoever is responsible for this torture, I hope he is laughing now. Shit! I need to hex your lying arse, Lucius. Old, smarmy git! I've gone unspeakably soft. All those years with those nitwits have finally gotten to me. They turned me into a twit!" And then, after an exasperated sigh, "Bollocks. I'll go with you for the last time, Lucius. I'll be at the Manor in half an hour."

"No need, no need, Severus. I will wait for you right here."

No one fooled anyone; you can be sure of that, my friends. Both wizards knew perfectly well what they were doing. It was their game, their special, perhaps slightly perverted, hussars' way of entertaining themselves.

Chapter Two

Chapter 3 of 11

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Chapter Two

Two Hussars Two Friends?

There was a specific reason for Severus' quick capitulation, a certain brown-eyed, curly-haired reason, I would say. That reason had been torturing him for about eight years now.

There is nothing to figure out, my friends. Yes, it was she Hermione Granger. She saved him, pulling him from death with her ever knowing-all attitude. She was the one who put the Stasis charm on his wound before leaving to deal with Voldemort (freaking brave Gryffindor). She was the one who came back and took him to Poppy Pomfrey.

Miss Granger was the one who sat near him for weeks, changing the dressings on his wound, giving him potions by the hour, stroking his hair from his sweaty forehead. It was she, and only she, who, armoured with her unique stubbornness, managed to pull it off. Against all odds, this little witch made it happen she saved him; she brought

him to life again.

Then, with a quick peck on his cheek, she just had disappeared from his life, leaving behind a huge, gaping hole in his heart. The question that had tortured Severus all these years was how could she, Hermione Granger, be so kind and so cruel at the same time? How did she dare to save him, tame him, to give him the gift of life and hope again only to cruelly leave him alive, healed, but lonely and bereft, floating in the big ocean of emptiness?

How could this slip of a girl have gotten him, a stone-cold man, used to the soft touches of the tips of her fingers, to her warm palm on his forehead, to her feminine murmurs that she uttered while she nursed him back to life? Foolish girl, she made him long and yearn for all that, every morning and every afternoon, since the moment she left. She had showed him how it felt to be cared for, and then, she had taken it all away.

To stay true to the facts, she didn't actually leave him. No. Severus had simply reached the point where he felt well enough to go home, and Hermione needed to stay at Hogwarts. She needed to finish her education, and he needed to start his life anew. And yet, the hole in his heart ached, and ached quite badly. It did not know any better it just hurt. Throughout the years, the pain had dulled somewhat, and then it slowly metamorphosed into the light stirring that Severus felt every time he saw the young witch. Luckily, or unluckily, (damn, who knows which one of the two?) our Potions master didn't see much of her. To be precise, he saw her only once a year at the Victory Ball. Nevertheless, he needed these once-a-year rendezvous. They somehow had become an essential part of the wizard's life.

Thus, this evening there were exactly four minutes filled with undiluted agony for Severus. It started from the moment an old clock chimed six times and continued to the second of Casimir's hectic announcement of Lucius' arrival. Our stone-cold wizard simply wouldn't know how to act if his arrogant friend hadn't made an appearance. Oddly enough, Lucius, with his undiminished passion for public functions, was a blessing for Severus. It was a real boon, which effectively had eliminated the necessity for self-justification. Year after year, ball after ball, Malfoy pursued him almost to death, making him go. And that was it so simple there was no need to overanalyse.

This year, though, there was one significant new development. Frankly, the absence of Ron Weasley from the side of Miss Granger last year had made the stirring in Severus' heart stronger and hotter. Thus, the need to see her was squeezing and pressing his heart with prominent urgency. However, the heart's owner didn't pay any attention to it, not in the slightest, of course.

With these musings, memories and thoughts swirling wildly in his mind, Severus finished his toilette. With precise movements, the wizard fixed the collar of his crisp, white shirt, which was peeking out of the heavy, black, formal robes and, with a last glance over his appearance, our former professor set off to meet his blond friend, who had been patiently awaiting him in the library.

Meanwhile, in the library, Lucius poured himself a generous helping of Firewhisky and waited. His keen, grey eyes gazed thoughtfully over the vast number of books' spines. He knew that Severus would not be long. The man was a former spy, for Merlin's sake. He was always ready for whatever fate might decide to throw at him, be it a dangerous mission, or an urgent need for a potion or a matter of life and death, or, as in this particular case, a mere Ministry function.

Their little charade of 'going or not going' amused Lucius quite a bit. Nevertheless, it was still quite a mystery to our Lord Malfoy why Severus obliged him every year. What did he find appealing at these soirees? Lucius was not a fool. There was no doubt in his mind that no one among those living on Earth had the power to change Severus' mind should he choose not to go. There was something that interested Severus at these balls, that much was obvious, but what? Lucius clicked his tongue thinking that his alleged friend was certainly an inscrutable character. Oh well, Lucius himself wasn't exactly an open book either. They were perfect companions, those two. They called each other friends, but, at the same time, neither ever truly trusted this friendship. Slytherins ...

At least, Malfoy knew exactly why he was venturing to this year's Victory Ball. It had taken him a few years to recover from Narcissa's deceit and Draco's disappearance. But, eventually, Lucius bounced back. Now, he needed to re-establish his connections, repair his reputation, and find a new witch, a new Lady Malfoy. And perhaps, it was not even too late for a new heir. Who knows, fortune may decide to be kind to him, and he might just get lucky? One more chance, why the hell not? In other words, Lucius needed to mingle.

Brisk footsteps announced Severus' arrival. "Ready?" asked Lucius, standing up from the settee.

"As ready as I can ever be for such torture," muttered his black-haired friend.

"There are times in every wizard's life, my friend, when true friendship demands a sacrifice," uttered the blonde wizard with mockingly solemn look.

"Lucius do shut your mouth, please. You know quite well that my share of sacrifices would be enough to cover a few lifetimes at the very least." Two seconds later, our wizards stepped into the green flames of the Floo.

The Ladies Cried "Hooray!" and Threw Their Bonnets in the Air

Hermione stepped out of the Ministry's west wing fireplace. She was late, angry and felt horribly dishevelled. Where did she find the courage to come at all? Let's see, my friends, she had not found it. However, she did find something other than her missing courage, bravado and confidence. She replaced all three of them with something quite powerful in its own right annoyance with a capital 'A'. And frankly, this rather unpleasant emotion was as strong as her positive ones, if not even stronger.

Who was that daring, fearless, or maybe just idiotic, person who had dared to annoy someone as volatile in her anger as this witch? It was Kingsley Shacklebolt, the Minister. Perhaps there was something seriously wrong with him these days. When, at around half past six, after long and rather violent debates with herself, our lioness had decided that she, indeed, was not going anywhere, her fireplace had lit up and the familiar, authoritative voice of the Minister had sounded.

"Hermione, dear, you do understand that not going is not an option? You're needed at the function as an official representative. I hope you are ready. Would you like me to escort you there?"

And that was it a tipping point. Hermione was boiling, ready to explode in a second. Who needs that bloody confidence when you are superlatively annoyed? Huh? Our fiery witch's response was short and clear.

"With all due respect, Minister, and for the last time I... do... not... need... an... escort. Thank you very much, and see you in a bit. Goodbye now."

A flustered wizard bid his farewell and the angry green flames of Hermione's Floo consumed the contours of his face.

Therefore, here she was utterly furious, darting through the Ministry corridors in her exquisite outfit and her chocolate curls all wild around her face. Five minutes later, still quite agitated and with rapid breathing from all that running on four-inch heels, Hermione was standing in front of the entrance to the hall. Thank God, she was still angry enough to make this last, tiny step and enter the venue.

The moment she crossed the threshold, all her doubts were gone there were so many familiar faces: Molly and Arthur, George with Angelina, Professor McGonagall, Neville with Hannah, Luna. After half an hour, a deep sense of gratitude towards the Minister filled Hermione's heart. She truly appreciated his efforts and persuasion and genuinely enjoyed herself. The official ceremony, which followed the cocktail party, brought tears to Hermione's eyes as usual. She was the one who stood up and proposed the minute's silence in honour of the dead. It was a sorrowful but beautiful moment when all had risen. All the wizards and witches stood silently, remembering and honouring all the loved ones they had lost during those horrible years.

There were a few speeches, and then there was dancing. By this point in the evening, our witch had already had a few drinks, spoken to almost everyone she wanted to and was essentially ready to leave. On her way out, however, she noticed a certain wizard, customarily clothed all in black, for whom she had unconsciously kept an eye out the entire evening. Furthermore, this particular wizard had been visiting Hermione's thoughts and dreams quite frequently lately, maybe even more frequently than was appropriate. But who cared? certainly not our Gryffindor princess.

Thus, when Severus Snape suddenly appeared to our golden girl, she couldn't stop herself. The drinks she had consumed along with those bloody dreams were pushing her. A genuine smile lit up her face as she determinedly walked towards her former professor.

She had missed him, simply and honestly missed him. She remembered that summer after the war bright and clear. Everything. How at first all her efforts at saving him seemed to be hopeless and futile. How ghostly and weak Severus had looked. How, after many, many sleepless nights, she finally noticed the tiny signs of improvement in her only patient. And, when the worst was passed, how beautifully calm and peaceful this fascinating man looked in his sleep. Yes, she remembered everything the heat of his forehead when he was burning with fever and, later, the warmth of his feverish skin under her fingertips.

During these past eight years, Hermione hadn't had many opportunities to stop, sit and remember. Life was quite demanding, time consuming and heart filling. Only recently, with University finished, and after Harry's tragic death and her parting with Ron, she quite often found herself alone on evenings and weekends. Thinking about that summer and her former professor had become her new favourite hobby after reading, that is.

The brave and daring witch swiftly covered the distance between Severus Snape and herself, and breathed out in greeting, "Professor Snape, how are you?"

One Wrong Move, Prelude

Severus Snape couldn't comprehend what was happening. How the hell it had come to this, and what kind of terrible outcome and dire consequences this would bring into his life? About the latter, by the way, he was positively certain. I must reassure you, my darlings, that this came as a complete surprise for everybody, including me. You are asking what 'this' refers to. All right, my dear ones; just remember, you asked for it.

So, Severus Snape, to his complete surprise, found himself firmly attached to Miss Granger's pulse point, the one located on the deliciously sensitive area of the neck, right under the jaw line. A bit to the left yes, right there. To his further mortification, our Potions master was not only attached to Miss Granger there, but he was also sucking and nibbling the area, occasionally uttering an embarrassingly appreciative, humming sound. Moreover, his hard and muscled body was quite forcefully pinning Hermione's warm and pliant form to the wall conveniently located directly behind them. And as if this were not shocking enough, his hands were behaving utterly inappropriately. Oh Merlin, how deft were those fingers!

"Ahhh." That would be Miss Granger.

"Mmm." And that would be our Potions master.

How exactly the evening at the formal Ministry function spiralled down, or up as our former professor's body suggested, to this, we would gather in the next chapter. Adieu.

Chapter Three

Chapter 4 of 11

Two men, one woman – a story as old as the world itself. A twist – two powerful wizards will clash over one brilliant witch. Love. Friendship. Rivalry. Deceit. Severus Snape/Lucius Malfoy/Hermione Granger. AU. OOC. DH partly ignored.

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Chapter Three

One Wrong Move, Prelude's Continuation

It was Friday night, somewhere around eleven. The dancing at the Victory Ball was still in full swing. However, for two familiar participants, the evening had propelled to the... hmm, shall we say... next level?

Severus Snape was rather insistently kissing Hermione Granger, and she was quite enthusiastically reciprocating. To say that Severus was surprised that the evening had come to this would be a massive understatement. Careful analysis of events, however, identified two decisive moments and one wrong move that had determined the outcome of the entire night. Here, my dear friends; see for yourselves.

It all started when Severus noticed that a certain curly-haired young witch was briskly walking toward him. A bright smile played on her plump, rosy lips while sparks of stubborn determination flickered in her eyes. For a minute, our Potions master was completely lost. You see, there was one problem. Even though the sole purpose of being at these soirees every year was to see this particular young woman, her former professor had been decidedly avoiding any interactions with the young witch. He simply did not see a point to them. There was no hope for him here, so why waste the heart?

Hence, Severus had always observed Hermione from a distance. During the first four years, this was easy enough to achieve. Then, after Harry Potter's death, it became slightly trickier, and with the lack of Ronald Weasley by Miss Granger's side, the previous year had proved to be the most challenging to date. Noticeably, her whisky-coloured eyes had appeared to scan the crowd more frequently in these recent years. It was almost as if she, Hermione Granger, looked for him. Sure enough, Severus did not allow himself to believe in this utter nonsense even for a minute. It was not possible she would not, not ever, not after all these years.

Thus, when our black-haired wizard recognized the danger of Miss Granger's entrance, an alarm went off in Severus' mind. He was ready to turn on his heel and make a quick exit. It would've been the right thing to do, don't you think? To wipe that smile from the witch's face would have been cruel, mean, and abundantly in character, exactly what everyone would expect from him. Yes, that undoubtedly should have been the way to do it. Only, that damned smile and those sparkles in Miss Granger's eyes, along with the pale violet silk that shamelessly, sinfully hugged her every quite enticing curve made Severus' eyes linger. Yup, they lingered just a little bit too long and, as a result, Severus Snape hesitated. Can you imagine? He hesitated! Damn!

Suddenly, the motley, talking, laughing, dancing crowd that surrounded them became colourless and voiceless there was only she, Hermione. Her smile, her eyes, her feminine curves, which were wrapped so nicely in silk, and her thin, delicate ankles with cobalt blue satin laced so alluringly around them. The image was quite striking, and our professor was essentially done for.

And that was it the fateful moment, after which everything went straight down to the pits. This one little hesitation one wrong move, if you will had ultimately decided not only the destiny of the evening but the direction of the whole story as well. Severus did not leave the ball when he had a chance. He missed a window of opportunity, and by doing so, he had sealed his fate.

When, at last, our former professor was able to tear his eyes from Miss Granger. When the crowd, and the music that surrounded them, returned to existence, it was already too late for a retreat. Hermione stood right in front of him, and her breathy, "Professor Snape, how are you?" caught him and pinned him to the floor.

Shit!

Indeed. All that followed was a complete train wreck.

One Wrong Move, Interlude

Professor Snape only managed a curt nod, and when his thin lips opened to retort something appropriately sharp and menacing, he was superseded by the honeyed drawl of his platinum-haired friend.

"Miss Granger, what a pleasant surprise. We are fine; we are fine. Severus is fine. How are you, darling? How is your new initiative going? I presume you have Minister Shackbolt as your supporter?"

To a casual observer, it might have looked like a perfectly innocent, little exchange at the official function. However, with one side-glance at Lucius, Severus could see that his supposed friend was up to something. All Malfoy's features resembled the poise of a powerful feline on a hunt—muscles taut, body posed in a predatory stance—ready to pounce. His sharp grey eyes were unblinkingly focused on his prey, Hermione Granger. Subconsciously Severus tensed as well, while Lord Malfoy continued with his perfectly orchestrated friendliness, "Would you like to dance, Miss Granger?"

"I am quite fine, Mister Malfoy, thank you. I am not really up to dancing," began Hermione, but Lucius didn't give her an opportunity to decline.

"Oh, please, it would be a perfect opportunity to discuss the Ministry news. I have a few ideas about the new law I would like to share. Dance with me, Miss Granger."

And with that, not allowing anyone to hinder or oppose, Lucius took Hermione by the elbow and unequivocally led her to the dance floor. The young witch threw Severus a frustrated glare and allowed herself to be guided, leaving her former professor seething. Apparently, Lucius Malfoy found Miss Granger engrossing, and Severus did not like it, not even one bit. Our Potions master's mood was getting darker by the minute. A whole range of surprisingly outrageous feelings filled the professor's hardened heart.

Severus watched the dancing couple thoughtfully. The deep black and green colours of Lucius' outfit accentuated the rich chocolate of Hermione's untamed curls and the pale violet silk of her dress perfectly. Lucius' arm encircled the young witch's waist a bit too possessively. Moreover, when Hermione and Lucius were dancing the second dance, Severus was sure that he saw a slight smile playing on the witch's lips.

"Damn you, Lucius!" Swearing under his breath, our black-haired wizard nearly turned to leave. However, a new development on the dance floor made him hesitate again. It was the second time in one bloody evening when Hermione Granger had been the reason for his hesitation. This time, Kingsley Shackbolt caused the commotion. The Minister interjected and stole Hermione from Lucius. Malfoy huffed but stepped aside. Hermione looked flustered. Evidently, she didn't want to be passed around like a goblet, not in the slightest.

By this point, our poor Potions master was aflame. Somehow, it was rather difficult to watch Miss Granger twirling in the other wizards' arms. Over the years, Severus had become used to the sight of Ron Weasley by Hermione's side. But, when young Weasley disappeared from the picture, a veritable dragon of jealousy, along with an intensive ardour to possess the stubborn witch for his own, had been awakened. And now, this flame-breathing dragon was methodically burning his insides.

Boiling and melting inside, but with undisturbed outer demeanour, Severus waited for Lucius to join him once again. When Lord Malfoy—whose face, by the way, was equally inscrutable—came close enough, Severus muttered, "This seems a quite suddenly acquired interest in Miss Granger, Lucius. I would say it was rather odd." His black eyes carefully watched his friend's reaction, while a number of different suspicious jostled in his mind.

Lucius shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly and murmured, "Well, Severus, you know that blood matters no longer concern me. Miss Granger has become a quite beautiful witch. She is brilliant, famous, well connected and available. I am available as well at the moment, and I, therefore, cannot see anything odd in my interest in her." Next, the older wizard gave Severus a penetrating gaze; his grey eyes were unsuccessfully attempting to dig into the Potions master's mind. "Why, my friend, are you interested in the witch yourself?"

In response, Severus pointed towards Hermione, now dancing with Shackbolt, and snidely said, "I was rather surprised that you let Kingsley steal the prey right from your jaws, Lucius. What was it, old friend? Did you lose your famous deadly grip? I do hope it is just a lack of practice and not your age, finally, catching up with you."

There was nothing friendly in those black eyes. A blow had been delivered with the precision of which only the Potions master was capable. A slight hitch in Lucius' breath and a spark, which lit up the blond's grey eyes just for a second before it was masterfully disguised, were the only indications that Severus had hit the target.

Naturally, in the next moment the former professor received an answering blow. "No, not at all, my friend. I decided to let him play. It is not that difficult to gain the witch's attention, or even friendship, Severus. You know that as well as I. The true mastery, however, lies in making the girl yours and not letting her marry another man. Not every wizard can achieve that, you know."

Lucius' friendly, soft drawl did nothing to mitigate the impact. It hit Severus hard, just as it was intended to. Nobody knew where this little clash between our two friends would have led if the very witch in question hadn't stolen their attention. There was a momentary break in music, and Hermione used it to escape the Minister. But, apparently, Kingsley Shackbolt was determined not to let the young witch slip between his fingers.

An understanding of the situation dawned on our two wizards the moment they heard Hermione's voice, "Thank you very much, Minister, but I am perfectly capable of getting home myself. Truly, there is absolutely no need to escort me."

"But, Hermione, it is a traditional sign of chivalry to escort the lady home. Why do you feel such a strong desire to fight the traditions?"

Lucius reacted immediately. "With all due respect, Minister, I believe that if anyone should accompany our dear Miss Granger home it should be—"

"Me," interjected Severus, and that, my friends, was the second pivotal moment in this evening. What pushed him to interfere like this, you may ask? Why, the fire-breathing dragon of jealousy of course. The heat inside wizard's heart had reached the dangerous, steel-melting temperature. And even though our former spy was used to tortures and pain, matters of the heart frankly have remarkable power over people, power that can force even the most self-controlled and steely person to act altogether uncharacteristically. Apparently, that was the case in this situation.

Just as this one short syllable escaped our professor's mouth, a genuine, bright smile, which, by the way, had started all this madness in the first place, had returned to Miss Granger's pretty lips. "Professor, how nice of you. Thank you," said Hermione, as she enthusiastically walked towards Severus and quickly, as if she was quite used to it, intertwined her slender, bare arm with his. After that, there was no way back, and Severus, with Hermione attached to him, began a journey to the nearest Ministry's Floo.

Two pairs of eyes, one dark brown and one grey followed the departing couple. If Severus had enough common sense to turn round and look at Lucius, he would most indubitably not like the view. A trained, arrogant smile played on Lucius' lips. His eyes, on the other hand, were cold and calculating. A rivalry was on. "To the victor belong the spoils. Let the games begin..." murmured Malfoy under his breath.

Meanwhile, our unsuspecting couple was moving quite briskly through the Ministry's corridors, all because of Severus long legs, of course. The rapid pace of their walk, however, didn't prevent or perhaps even provoked Hermione to nestle comfortably on her escort's strong arm. This way, with most of her weight laid across his arm and shoulder, she could easily keep up with his wide strides.

At the same time, Miss Granger's bare shoulder was firmly pressed into Snape's, and he could swear that he felt the warmth of her skin even through his heavy robes. Severus, of course, found it highly disconcerting.

"So, how are you, Professor? It has been years since we talked. I am not even certain how long ago. Do you remember?"

"I am quite well, Miss Granger, and it is exactly seven years, nine months and fifteen days since we last talked."

The exactness of this account rendered Hermione speechless, and hence, they covered the rest of the way in silence. For Severus, it was a perfect opportunity to berate himself for his irrational behaviour. He was outraged by himself; it was so unlike him. He had behaved like an idiot, an asinine fool. There was positively no hope for him with Miss Granger. Her interest in him was inexplicable. She had probably just had too much to drink.

When the witch finally found her voice again, they were already standing in front of the Ministry's west wing fireplace. Fully absorbed in his inner self-chiding, Severus failed to notice that Hermione did not hurry to disentangle herself from him. However, when she turned her face to him and asked, "How is your wound? Does it still hurt?" And then daringly caressed the skin right above the edge of the professor's crisp, white shirt, the previously seen determination began to shine in her eyes again. The young witch had successfully gained his attention. His undivided attention, I would say. He should not have touched her hand. He should have turned around right at that moment and left.

But instead, his lonely soul made him lean to her, as if to give her more opportunities to caress him, and his long hand covered hers, pressing it closer to him. "No, no," he groaned, his voice suddenly terribly hoarse, "it doesn't hurt anymore, Miss Granger." She was caressing him with the slightest touches of the tips of her fingers, the same whispery touches for which Severus had been yearning and longing for almost eight years.

Bollocks! Why is this happening? Even though there was no doubt in Severus' mind that whatever happened, he would get hurt at the end, in the next instant, he, the stone-cold man, came totally undone. All the surreal events of this evening – scheming Lucius with his annoying interference, the idiotic Minister with his wandering hands, and Hermione's beguiling smile – had all conspired to make it happen. He could not have stopped himself even if he wanted to.

Severus growled and forcefully pinned Hermione to the wall, attacking her plump, sweet lips with ferocity. Hermione's response was immediate – she breathed out a delighted sigh and opened her mouth for him.

Here, my friends. The circle is complete. We have returned to the moment from which we had started our journey. Now we know exactly how the evening at the official Ministry gathering propelled to this rather intense kiss between our beloved Potions master and the Gryffindor Princess.

The only thing left to learn is how this kiss ended.

One Wrong Move, Postlude

Hermione and Severus had been kissing for about twenty minutes now. They occupied the wall of the nice, dimly lit niche located near the Ministry's west wing fireplace. At this point in time, the masterful hands of our Potions master found their way to Miss Granger's heart-shaped backside and were happily and unabashedly exploring its perfection. Moreover, one of his hands ventured even further, deftly gathering up the pale violet silk of the witch's dress in order to be able to trace the outline of her well-sculpted thigh. Hermione's nimble fingers, on the other hand, became tangled in Severus' hair, due to the absence of other easily accessible places on our properly clothed Potions master.

As more time passed, it became clear that they needed to relocate urgently. Not only because Hermione's dress was in unspeakable condition – a crinkled mess gathered somewhere around her waist – but also because the Potions master's robes and shirt were quite ruffled, unbuttoned and maybe even torn in some places. See, there is a danger in engaging in this kind of passionate activity with a lioness, after all. The last thing Severus Snape wanted was for somebody to see him in such a horrible state of dishevelment. Moreover, he surely would never allow anybody to see that much of Miss Granger's bare flesh.

Therefore, as both of them were convinced that stopping was not an option, Severus groaned hoarsely, "Where to, Miss Granger?"

Hermione's response was as hoarse as Severus' inquiry. "My flat, and stop calling me Miss Granger, Severus. You have your fingers in my knickers, for Merlin's sake."

"Point taken, Hermione. Please, be so kind and lead the way." This phrase sounded more like a prayer than a request. Hermione hugged him tightly, and the next instant our almost-lovers disappeared. Seconds later, they reappeared in Hermione's bedroom, intertwined and tangled in each other rather marvellously. The rhythm of their movements increased dramatically when, after a few softly spoken spells, they were totally nude. And when the naked and eager body of our Potions master covered the nude, soft and delicious form of our Gryffindor princess, the love dance began.

There was not much talking between our lovers during the evening, so, understandably, there was even less of it during lovemaking. The only sensible words were: *Hermione, Severus, witch, so wet, so tight, shit, fuck and yes.* Pardon me, my darlings, but I have to stay true to the facts. Of course, there were lots of *oahhs, mms* and other single and double syllables, as well as outright incomprehensible groans, moans and such.

You might have guessed that their lovemaking most certainly did not stop after the first mutual climax. No, of course not. Neither Severus nor Hermione were going to stop quite so soon. Our lovers had found an unexpected bliss, and both of them were going to put it to a good use. Only when the first sunrays found their way into Hermione's bedroom did the lovers find their ultimate contentment and fall into exhausted slumber.

Chapter Four

Chapter 5 of 11

Two men, one woman – a story as old as the world itself. A twist – two powerful wizards will clash over one brilliant witch. Love. Friendship. Rivalry. Deceit. Severus Snape/Lucius Malfoy/Hermione Granger. AU. OOC. DH partly ignored.

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Chapter Four

***Just You Wait, Henry Higgins, Just You Wait!* (My Fair Lady)**

The sun? Why the sun? Who turned it on? Turn it off...

A sunny Saturday morning found Hermione Granger in her bed. Well, strictly speaking, it wasn't morning at all. It was already well into early afternoon when our girl finally managed to pry open first one eye and then, with difficulty, the other. It was all the sun's fault – it was uncomfortably, cruelly bright.

Hermione shifted on her back and drew a shallow sigh. Her movements were slow and lazy. There wasn't any need to check the other side of the bed – she knew that Severus was already gone. Subconsciously, in her slumber, she felt the moment when his warmth and weight disappeared, leaving only the cold void behind.

Did you expect anything else from your former professor? Hermione asked herself. This straightforward question demanded a straightforward answer. Our young witch, however, was torn between two rather opposite responses. Her mind's reasonable answer would have been, *Of course not*. At the same time, her silly, young witch's heart was quite sure that Severus would stay.

Hermione huffed. She could almost hear her former professor's derisive voice asking, "What did you hope for, foolish girl breakfast in bed?"

Ahh, breakfast in bed would be nice, but perhaps just a bit too nice to be even remotely possible.

Immediately, an intriguing image of Professor Snape standing in her kitchen with a flirty little apron tied coquettishly around his preferably bare hips appeared in Hermione's mind. As you can probably guess, this mental picture had made our witch giggle uncontrollably.

When, after a while, Hermione finally managed to suppress her highly inappropriate giggling, she stretched and sat up. For a minute or two, she thoughtfully studied her body's condition. A slight and quite pleasant all-over soreness, along with certain contented tiredness, flowed languidly through her bones and limbs, creating a delightful sensation of mellowness in her core.

Please understand, my friends: our golden girl wasn't new to this. This wasn't the first time that Hermione had been shagged right up to the point of light, pleasant soreness, in other words *properly*. Yet, knowing that it was her former professor *nah, it was Severus now* who had driven her body to this state, was somehow extremely satisfying and exciting. The only dark cloud on the azure sky of Hermione's contentment was, of course, the absence of the alleged lover.

As a veritable girl and against all dictates of logic, common sense, and who knows what else was missing by her sex-muddled brain, that morning she wished for him to be there, in her bed. The night before Severus had been nothing short of magnificent. This supposedly cold, unapproachable wizard with his dark and adverse past was everything Hermione expected him to be, and then some more.

Much more, actually, she thought with growing longing. He had been intense, passionate, demanding, and then gentle, attentive and considerate. He made love to her wildly, and then tenderly held her in his arms, softly caressing her overheated skin. The night with him was perfect. Even a single recollection of hot Severus' open-mouth kisses against her skin disrupted Hermione's breathing. Oh, how exquisitely fully stretched and filled his presence inside of her had made her feel! How skilfully his fingers had emphasized his hips' powerful thrusts and strokes. And now, her Potions master was gone.

Hermione drew another deep sigh and swung her feet off the bed. She needed to determine what to do now how to act, how to live, and, most importantly, how to ensure that the previous night would not turn out to be her only night with Severus Snape. With these thoughts flooding her still, more than slightly hazed mind, Hermione drifted to the loo.

About forty-five minutes later, our freshly bathed, combed and clothed heroine sat in her kitchen. There, over tea and toast, she continued her deliberations about Severus. As of that day, it was apparent to the young witch that the Potions master harboured some sort of amorous feelings towards her.

He must, surely. What do you say, my dear readers? Why else did Severus know how long they had not talked to one another with such precise recollection? Why else did he rescue her from those two hawks, Malfoy and Shackbolt? Mm?

At this point, when Lucius Malfoy entered her thoughts, Hermione had gotten just a little bit distracted. She remembered that frankly, Malfoy's dancing techniques were quite charming. He had led her through the dance floor so gallantly, so masterfully twirling her in his arms she couldn't help but let her eyelids flutter and close involuntarily as she imagined herself being a fairytale princess at the enchanted ball.

A dreamy smile summoned by the recollection had only just managed to reach the corners of the witch's lips when she abruptly stopped herself. Oh, what an absolutely and utterly absurd notion. The wizard was a Death Eater! Even though he claimed to have been completely and utterly reformed, Lucius Malfoy most obviously was not a wizard to be trusted, and certainly no Prince Charming.

Tsk, fairytale princess... nonsense! Hermione chided herself, and her thoughts returned to Severus. Sure enough, the rest of Saturday was spent in constant musing, talking to herself aloud and, of course, analysing and overanalysing. The second endless task was waiting, but waiting for what? Oh, well, who knows for what? For something, anything from him a letter, a flower, a note, a shout out through the Floo, which was the least realistic possibility. She waited while she ate and while she read and while she cooked.

When the mortifying, grave silence continued into Sunday, Hermione began to doubt her earlier assessment of the Potions master's feelings towards her. The delicious sensation of tingling and mellowness in the pit of her stomach had somewhat diminished, clearing the way for a rather unpleasant, dull ache of suspense. By Sunday night, Hermione was at her wit's end. Doubts metamorphosed into anger. Hence, just before going to bed on Sunday, Hermione had firmly decided to give the damn wizard at most one or two more days. And if, by Tuesday night, he had not surfaced, she would confront him all traditions and other shitty proprieties be damned.

Hermione Granger was not the witch that any wizard in his right mind would use for a one-night stand, and it seemed that Severus Snape was destined to learn this first hand. Our lioness' fury simmered slowly, brewing a perfect explosive within her.

Therefore, my friends, when, after a sensational, passion-filled Friday night and a torturous, exhausting and anxiety filled weekend, on Monday morning our witch walked into her office and her brown eyes fell on the most beautiful bouquet of pale violet freesias she had ever seen, Hermione Granger's heart officially broke through its confines and left her body. Her heart simply flew out of her, made a few highly dangerous somersaults in the air, victoriously circled a few times around the said bouquet and only then reluctantly returned to its owner's chest.

Only then, with her heart safely back in her chest, was the young witch able to check the little green card sticking out of the bouquet. It was decorated with elegantly written silvery initials *L.M.*

Damn it!

Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy (Queen)

There was one other person who was also somewhat disappointed with our beloved Severus Snape: Mister Lucius Malfoy.

It was early on Monday morning, and Lucius was still pouting. He sat in his library and fumed while a glass of Firewhisky stood in front of him. Sure, it was a bit early for a Firewhisky, but desperate times always call for desperate measures, and these were, indeed, desperate times. His black-haired friend had snatched the witch from under his aristocratic nose. Lucius wanted the witch and the Potions master had taken her, and therefore, Severus Snape had been one rotten, wicked wizard.

Ridiculous! How dared he, this insolent boy? All right, he was not a boy anymore. However, what was Severus' non-existent experience with witches compared to Lucius' quite impressive résumé? Severus had truly wanted only one witch before Malfoy knew that much. So what the hell had happened now?

That fateful Friday, at the Victory Ball, Lucius had experienced an epiphany. The moment he saw the young Gryffindor walking their way, it struck him. Here she was, his new chance, his ticket to a new era. Suddenly, it all had become clear to our Lord Malfoy. His marriage to Hermione Granger would be a fresh start for the Malfoys. She would bring everything influence, prosperity, power and perhaps even an heir.

In a matter of minutes all had been decided. Along with this plan, the destiny of a young lioness was clearly defined in Lucius' mind, and he began the implementation immediately. Seriously, why the hell wait?

The dancing went sublimely...

Now, sitting in his library, our blond wizard hummed and smiled at the recollection of the dance he had shared with the young witch. There was something decidedly tempting and alluring in holding the young, pliant body in his arms. She was so wonderfully responsive. It took Lucius only one dance to get the girl to relax and even smile. A few more dances and she would have been his.

Alas, you know quite well, my friends, it was not destined to happen. First, the idiotic Minister interfered and then this insolent, traitorous, so-called friend had shamelessly stolen Lucius' almost-future-wife from him. Moreover, as if Snape's abominable behaviour at the ball wasn't enough, when Lucius checked on Severus on Saturday morning precisely at half past six, the latest Lucius could wait in order not to look to desperate, Snape's elf Casimir gloatingly informed Lucius that his Master had not yet returned from the ball. What an impudent creature he was, as impudent as his deceiving master.

You can probably imagine what this news did to Lucius Malfoy. In his mind, he was almost engaged to the golden girl, and now this *Shit!* At that thought, the grey eyes of our Lord Malfoy began to burn with fury. Lucius slammed the glass of Firewisky on his desk rather loudly and huffed with disdain.

Well, at least now he knew precisely what had interested Severus at the Victory Balls all these years. His black-haired friend had been pining for Miss Granger. How intriguing. Oh well, he, Lucius Malfoy, had always liked venturesome games. By his actions, Severus had carelessly thrown a glove into Lucius' face. Of course, Lucius had accepted the challenge gladly, and with pleasure. Quite obviously, it would be the end of their friendship. They would be rivals now and with that notion in mind, Lucius abruptly stood up and walked briskly from the library.

When he returned two hours later, a satisfied smile played on his lips. The morning went pretty well and was quite productive. Our crafty blond wizard had begun to spin his meticulously diaphanous silk web around his chosen future lady. So, let me tell you, what exactly had been done during that Monday's morning.

Lucius had gone to the Ministry, where he became acquainted with Miss Granger's administrative assistant, Lora. The girl was quite talkative, so now Lucius knew Hermione's schedule, along with other quite useful information such as what time and where Hermione usually had her lunch, where she went for her occasional after hours drinks. That place, of course, was the Leaky Cauldron. Lucius had visited the Leaky Cauldron, and after a round sum of galleons had been paid, the wizard was bound to be the first to know each time Hermione went there.

The only thing remaining now was to wait. Lucius was absolutely, undoubtedly certain that Severus would eventually make a mistake, and the young witch would come to the Leaky Cauldron to drown her sorrows. In addition, Lucius managed to send a small present to his precious soon-to-be fiancé. He started with something simple yet sweet, with something that showed his sensitive side freesias to match the lilac dress she had worn at the ball.

Try to top that, Severus!

Here, my darlings, it seems to me that our unsuspecting Potions master is in enormous trouble. Dark clouds are gathering before the oncoming storm.

Chapter Five

Chapter 6 of 11

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Chapter Five

Decisions, Decisions or Blue Knickers and Their Secret Powers

"Hmm, all right," said Severus as he drew the heaviest sigh he had in his arsenal and began to write.

Dear Miss Grang...

A sharp point of a quill froze halfway through Hermione's last name. "Aggrrrh," growled the wizard and, in one irate movement, crumpled an innocent piece of paper, throwing it unto a rapidly accumulating pile of crumpled papers that had formed in a far corner of his study. There flew one second, my darlings, let me check Severus' thirteenth attempt to compose a note to Hermione.

"It's an absurdity, clear-cut lunacy," muttered our extremely disgruntled Potions master. Severus Snape felt like an ultimate fool. It was Tuesday evening. For two hours... oops, I stand corrected, for three hours, our black cloud of a wizard had been trying to write the damned letter.

You see, after the ball, on that Saturday morning, he had carefully disentangled himself from sleeping Hermione and, with cowardice, had left. Yes, Severus Snape had been that truthful with himself. After all, he hadn't been considering any further developments. Our sleepless Potions master had reached this radical conclusion during the wee hours as he had observed the fiery red dawn sunrays playing tag on a wall in Hermione's bedroom.

There, still lying in the witch's bed, still holding the witch in his embrace and listening to the soothing sounds of her breathing, he had managed to convince himself that this night was a glitch, an onetime deal a drunken mistake, so to speak.

Miss Granger had had just too much to drink, and he, on the other hand, simply hadn't been able to stop himself from taking what had been offered. Our insecure wizard had made himself believe in this faulty logic. It had been the only reasoning which our Potions master's mind could accept. His head, at that moment, hadn't been able and willing to entertain any other possibilities.

Yes, my friends, Severus Snape had remembered the determination that had shone in Hermione's eyes when she first had approached him, and then, later, had daringly caressed him. Yes, he certainly had noticed how willingly and joyfully she had accepted his advances. Yes, yes and yes, he most undoubtedly would never be able to forget the contented sighs, moans, and cries the young witch emitted during their passionate encounter. And, lastly, Hermione's hoarse whisper, 'Severus', at the moment of climax would be stored in the deepest and most sacred parts of his heart forever.

Alas, as a man whom almost everyone had rejected for most of his life, Severus had chosen to ignore all these signs of affection. It had been a matter of self-condemnation. He had made a mistake and it would never happen again. Our wizard had decided that the sooner he would forget all about it the better. And he had been quite ready to act upon his decision.

Only this particular time his firm resolve had been relatively short lived. To be exact, it had survived until Sunday evening, when fate had intervened in the form of Severus' house-elf.

It had been around seven o'clock on Sunday when Casimir, with a rather enthusiastic crack, had popped up in the laboratory where Severus had been peacefully brewing a fresh batch of Wolfsbane Potion. A smug smile had been plastered on the creature's face. In one hand, he had held Severus' formal black robes the ones he had been wearing on Friday yep, *that* Friday. In the elf's other hand had been something bright blue and vaguely familiar.

"Me fixes Master's robes and finds this," the elf had reported and had uttered a joyful sound, which was a peculiar mixture of a snort and a sob. "Master must keep this. These good things. Knickers good for Master." With this, snorting and sobbing in delight, Casimir had forcefully inserted a little lacy garment into Severus' hand and had disappeared with a loud contented pop, leaving his master to ponder why and how exactly were *'knickers goods for him'*.

Severus had squeezed the offensive item in his fist, trying to decide what to do. All kind of erratic thoughts had been bolting through his mind. The damn knickers had been almost literally burning a hole in Severus' hand. He had wanted to feel, to smell their scent, to bury his nose in their sinful softness. In mere seconds, the first and foremost battle had been lost. The knickers had won quite effortlessly, and a defeated Severus had opened his fist and inhaled deeply.

Hermione's delectable, tantalizingly intimate scent had filled his nostrils as desire and longing had flooded his mind and overwhelmed his senses. Severus eyelids had fluttered and closed. *Mmm...* He had practically been able to feel her silky, pulsating warmth closing around his rigid length.

And that had been the end of our former professor's supposed resolution and peace. Who could have guessed that a skimpy, frail piece of silk and lace, even if it was flamboyantly blue, could be that powerful?

Of course, we can be sure that Severus Snape had not succumbed to the powers of the blue knickers immediately. No, he always had been a pretty tough and strong wizard. He vigorously had fought against their baneful influence. For example, our stoic Potions master hadn't allowed himself to take them to bed with him. He purposely had left the garment on the desk in his study. The fact that he hadn't been able to sleep and, at three in the morning, had been still sitting at the same desk with his enormous nose rather close to the blue bandits had been purely coincidental.

Monday had been spent in long and excruciating battles with himself and the knickers. Oh, how exhaustively he had tried to ignore the call of his heart and his body, how fastidiously Severus had tried to wipe the memory of the night with Hermione Granger, which the bloody piece of lingerie had kept bringing into his mind again and again. It had reopened that door and Severus hadn't been able to shut it.

Now he had become too weak to throw the memory of that night away. The knickers had bewitched our poor Potions master. In a matter of hours, their presence had transformed the stone-cold man into a crumbling fool, whose nose had been constantly attached to a blue scrap of fabric.

Being a reasonable person, by Monday evening, Severus Snape had capitulated and conceded to the need for a new resolution and a new plan. His previous initiative, during which our former professor had catalogued everything that had transpired between Hermione and him as a drunken mistake, had been utterly destroyed, burned and buried by those victorious, cobalt blue warriors.

A new plan had been born quickly and easily when the wizard had decided to write Hermione a letter and to invite her to his villa, simply in order to return the offensive undergarment to her in person. Dinner with her might ensue, of course.

And really, don't you think it would have been too crude, even for Severus Snape, just to send the damned thing to the witch. Right? Then again, Severus wouldn't have known what to write in an accompanying note. Because something like,

Dear Miss Granger,

Enclosed please find your knickers.

Sincerely yours,

Severus Snape

PS. This blasted thing I went bloody ballistic take them back immediately!

could have been simply deadly you can see quite clearly, my dearies, that this kind of letter would have been an exceptionally bad idea. Hermione Granger was not the right witch for such correspondence.

Thus, Tuesday evening found our Potions master writing an invitation. For three hours. In vain.

Finally, after the pile of crumpled papers in the far corner of his study tripled in size, the letter was finished.

Miss Granger,

Accidentally, during our Victory Ball night's encounter, I attained possession of a piece of your clothing.

I believe I should return it to you in a timely manner and am thus inviting you to visit me at my villa on Friday night. I would be pleased if you would stay for dinner.

Please inform me about your decision and the time that would most suit you, should you choose to accept this invitation.

Severus Snape.

The letter was sealed and sent with an owl. To Severus' surprise, less than an hour later, he received a response, written on his own letter in a rather impatient, but still fine hand,

Very well, Mister Snape.

I shall accept. Seven o'clock on Friday night would be most agreeable.

Hermione Granger.

Something in the tone of this reply made Severus frown. However, when nothing came to mind immediately, our wizard dismissed the nagging feeling that something was not quite right as tiredness and nerves. There were much to do he had a dinner to organize and host.

Casimir was in ecstasy, "Me tells Master knickers good," he sobbed with glee, whilst running through the villa with different books of culinary content and torturing Severus with questions about which cuisine *'Master's Missy prefers'*.

Severus himself felt much better. The thought of having Hermione there warmed his hardened heart. A genuine smile played on his thin lips all throughout the rest of the week of course, only when he was alone in his laboratory, brewing the potions. The blue knickers migrated from his pocket to a quiet place. They were safely put into a neat little box, which was seated on Severus' desk. Somehow, the knowledge that their owner herself would soon be there broke the spell the knickers held over our Potions master. Apparently, he was actually looking forward to seeing Hermione.

Now, when everything was decided, Severus couldn't fathom why he hesitated for so long. Why hadn't he written to Hermione immediately? And why the hell had he left that Saturday morning? He had behaved like a git, but luckily, the blue knickers had interfered and fixed everything.

The only dark cloud on this blue sky was Lucius. For almost six years now, Friday night had been their poker night. So when, on Thursday, Severus sent Lucius a cancellation notice, his friend sent him a haughty reply which stated that he, Lucius, was accustomed to Severus' ever-changing mood, attitudes and alliances.

Our Potions master knew that Lucius was probably still angry with him about their little argument over Hermione at the ball. Severus didn't like the situation and felt he needed to remedy it as soon as possible. Lucius Malfoy had been his only friend for many years now, and even if Severus wasn't particularly open in their friendship, he was still not ready to dash it all that easily. Our black-haired wizard made a mental note to visit his blond friend the following Saturday.

On Friday, sometime after five o'clock in the evening, Casimir's euphoria reached its apotheosis. The poor creature burst into his master's laboratory with an utterly mad facial expression and began to list the dishes he prepared. The menu was full of all sorts of French cuisine such as Foie Gras, Bouillabaisse, Cassoulet, and Clafouti. By the end of the elf's recitation, Severus started to feel the tell-tale signs of a migraine. Therefore, our Potions master rashly approved of every single dish.

Phew. Severe indigestion would be a sure result.

Around half past six, Severus was ready and slightly nervous himself. Merlin only knows why, right at that moment, standing in front of his fireplace, he remembered the peculiarly hostile tone of Hermione's answering note. After fifteen minutes of intense contemplation, an understanding dawned on our wizard. The witch was displeased by his behaviour. He had left her alone on Saturday morning without so much as a note, he hadn't contacted the witch until Tuesday evening, and even then he sent her a cold, formal invitation, again without so much as a word of apology.

Fuck! (Oh, yes, precisely!)

Suddenly, the prospect of meeting and dining with a highly annoyed Hermione Granger didn't seem as appealing to Severus anymore. He drew a deep, calming breath and braced himself for the worst. The young witch was highly temperamental, as the wizard knew only too well.

This was the exact state of mind in which our Potions master met our lioness, when, at the stroke of seven, she stepped out of his fireplace.

How their dinner and evening eventually played out, we, my dear ones, will find out in the next chapter. I will, however, give you one clue twenty minutes to eight on that same Friday, the recently perpetually pouting Mister Malfoy received an owl from the Leaky Cauldron informing him that one Hermione Granger was there and already on her second helping of Firewhisky.

Enough said. Au revoir for now.

Chapter Six

Chapter 7 of 11

Two men, one woman – a story as old as the world itself. A twist – two powerful wizards will clash over one brilliant witch. Love. Friendship. Rivalry. Deceit. Severus Snape/Lucius Malfoy/Hermione Granger. AU. OOC. DH partly ignored.

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Chapter Six

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Hey there, my darlings, here we go again. Where were we? Oh, yes...

It was Friday night, exactly a week after our lovers' first passionate encounter. Severus Snape, who had just been struck by the unexpected, sickening and utterly ill-timed realization that he actually had been behaving like a git for the past few days, stood in front of his fireplace, waiting for Hermione to arrive.

By the seventh stroke of the old clock, a sour lump of apprehension was firmly lodged in our Potions master's throat. Believe me, my dear readers, I am not trying to diminish our beloved wizard's shortcomings; I would honestly never do that. Well, all right, maybe I do just a tiny bit. But I swear that it was this particular condition, namely, the *hard lump* in Severus' throat and the *dreadful chill* in the pit of his stomach, which was responsible for all that followed.

The instant Hermione Granger set her little foot onto the floor of Severus' lounge and a slightly colder *"Welcome"* than Severus had initially intended to utter left his lips, the destiny of the evening was set. The icily added *"Miss Granger"* only ratified the quick and dramatic conclusion of what was meant to be a pleasant dinner date.

Knowing that Hermione wasn't in the best mood to begin with, we can easily imagine how fierce and prominent her fiery response was. "Oh, is it really back to *Miss Granger*' again? How nauseatingly unsurprising, Severus." I simply refuse to recite in considerable details everything that transpired between our beloved Gryffindor Princess and her former professor next. Let's just say that their first official rendezvous did not go well.

It took only twenty-five minutes for the conversation to escalate to the boiling point. All the wrong and hurtful words were mentioned, including *'drunken mistake'*, *'one-night stand'*, *'lunatic'*, *'git'*, along with a few other equally offensive and unnecessary ones. The last straw was Severus saying, "I may assure you, Miss Granger, that you are highly delusional! I would even go so far as to state that the level of your cluelessness almost borders on imbecility!"

At this point, Hermione's gasp and the sudden appearance of a peculiar gleam in her brown eyes told Severus that he had perhaps gone too far *What the hell am I doing?*

Bingo! Bravo Professor Snape brilliant guess most certainly too far.

"Yes, Severus, I was delusional, and I probably am a lunatic, thinking that you could care about me. However, it is now crystal clear to me that you are the biggest, vilest arse I ever met!" Hermione nearly turned away, her chocolate tresses curling furiously around her face; but paused and breathed out, "Oh, and an unfeeling, uncaring fuckwit as well!"

And that was the end of it. Our deeply wounded lioness huffed, turned on her heel and, in one striking swirl of chiffon, not hearing how her former professor regretfully moaned "Hermione," she disappeared in the miserably green flames of the Floo.

Severus' belated attempt to stop her proved futile, and he was thus left standing in front of his fireplace with the black cloud of soot flying all around him, and the image of Hermione in the crimson dress she was wearing swirling in his head. "Shit!" groaned our Potions master. This senseless battle was over, and two casualties retreated to nurse their wounds.

However, my friends, if you think that this night ended there for Severus, you are profoundly mistaken: it was only the beginning. For several minutes, Severus tried to calm himself down by running his fingers through his hair, by now covered with soot, and harshly rubbing his face. When that didn't help, our black-haired wizard went for the best calming remedy he knew Firewhisky.

Alas, by the time our hapless lover was in his study, reaching for a glass and a bottle, an extremely loud and angry pop announced Casimir's arrival. Sensing the upcoming troubles, Severus hastily tried to grab the bottle with the Firewhisky. The elf, however, was much quicker. One snap of the creature's fingers and the bottle and the glass were in his hands.

Severus grunted with exasperation, walked to his desk, sat down and wearily said, "Casimir, stop being tiresome and give me the bottle."

The elf's stern facial expression did not forebode a quick capitulation. "Me thinks of Master. Me finds knickers. Me cooks the French dinner," creaked the elf, obviously extremely disappointed in his master. "And Master? Made Missy runs away. Why? No drinks! Master goes and brings Missy back to eat French dinner. Master goes now and brings Missy back." And the little elf stamped his little foot to emphasize his point. "No drinks without Missy back!"

This time Severus growled much louder as his annoyance began to engulf him entirely. "Casimir, stop that racket this instant. Give me the bottle and go away." Severus' livid, black eyes were throwing daggers at his servant. Naturally, the elf's lower lip began to tremble, and our wizard cursed under his breath.

The disgruntled elf uttered a loud sob and took two steps towards his master's desk. Next, he loudly and quite theatrically slammed the glass on the desk and poured the amber liquid in it.

"Here! Master can drink now. Master drinks alone, stays alone and dies alone." The elf narrowed his eyes and continued, "And Missy eats Wrinkly's bad cooking and lives with Mister Lucius. Mister Lucius wants Missy. Mister Lucius keeps Missy, and Missy gives him babies. Master drinks now. Drink, Master!"

After that dramatically delivered monologue, an already sobbing in full-blown hysterics Casimir disappeared with a heartwrenchingly sad pop.

"*Mister Lucius... Missy...babies...*" A menacing echo reverberated throughout the room. A second later Severus rose abruptly, growled something which sounded vaguely like, "Oh no, Lucius, not this time," and vanished from the room.

That's one witty little elf our Potions master has, don't you think? Not to mention, an excellent cook too.

'Tis a Lesson You Should Heed, Try, Try Again

If at First You Don't Succeed, Try, Try Again

Lucius Malfoy appeared at the back door of the Leaky Cauldron only seven and a half minutes after he had received their owl. It was a good thing that this particular Friday evening he was fully dressed and ready. His springy, predatory movements spelt out his intentions clearly Lord Malfoy was on a hunt. Naturally...

Ah, you can imagine, my friends, the sort of thoughts that were swirling in Lucius' mind *Has Severus screwed up already? It has been... what? A week.*

Not that Lucius was surprised, no, not at all. Sure, Severus' inability to keep a witch was very well known, but a week? This was extreme even for someone as infamous in this respect as the Potions master. Lucius was curious as to what exactly his so-called friend had done.

Of course, my darlings, it would be safe to say that the joy that little, skittish-looking owl had brought into Lucius' heart was nothing short of immeasurable. He had been miserable for the most part of the week, without even mentioning how significantly darker his mood had become after receiving Severus' poker night cancellation. Oh, what horrible scenes had dashed through the poor mind of our Lord Malfoy! Only imagine Hermione and Severus dining, Hermione and Severus kissing, and so on.

Some of them were simply unbearable she was almost his bride, for Merlin's sake! Lucius chose her her fate was already predetermined in his crafty, Slytherin mind. The fact that the witch herself didn't have a clue about his plans did not trouble our blond in the slightest. The little lioness would surely come along. Why on earth would she not?

What about matters of blood purity, you ask, my darlings? Oh, come on. After the man had been declared an unfit husband and father, abandoned by his wife and his only son and heir, after his family's centuries' old dignities had become undone, there was no space for concern about bloodlines. The very survival of the Malfoys was at stake. Hermione Granger, as an angel and saviour, had fit the bill perfectly.

There weren't any doubts in Lucius' mind about his ability to impress the young Gryffindor. The only slight hiccup in his plan was her apparent obsession with Severus. Inexplicable, really. What did she see in him? No, decided Lucius. Nothing to think about the young witch simply had a peculiar taste in wizards. Extremely peculiar, that was.

Dispelling all these thoughts, Lucius Malfoy opened the door of the Leaky Cauldron and entered. With a quick glance, the target was identified. There she was, by the bar, perched on a bar stool in a vivid crimson chiffon dress. Our blond approached quietly, watching the young witch carefully and wanting to test the waters first. Hermione didn't look drunk. A barely touched glass of Firewhisky stood in front of her. Evidently, the two helpings of Firewhisky reported in the note were a slight exaggeration. That was even better, though; Lucius didn't want the witch to be drunk.

Silently, Lucius inserted himself between the nearest bar stool and the girl. You understand, of course, that Lucius Malfoy would rather die than perch his aristocratic self on a high bar stool! In awe, he observed the picture before him; she looked delectable. The curls, the forms, the red chiffon clinging to her in all the right places were irresistible and utterly mouth watering. The only exception was the pinkish hue of the witch's eyes. Apparently, she had been crying before she arrived.

Severus, Severus, what had you done? Oh well, your loss is my gain.

"Miss Granger, what a nice surprise. Good evening, darling," murmured Lucius to Hermione's ear, tilting his head towards her slightly.

She jumped a little, startled by his proximity. Soon, however, she checked her initial reaction and replied, "Mister Malfoy, what are you doing here?" Her eyebrows arched in disbelief.

"I came here for a drink, like everybody else," replied Lucius as he shrugged his shoulders "Why, Miss Granger, aren't I allowed to have a drink?" he mockingly continued, allowing a light and mischievous smile to appear on his lips.

Hermione blushed, and a lovely rose colour covered her cheeks. "No, I mean, yes, of course you are allowed. Thank you for the beautiful flowers, by the way. Sorry for not sending a thank you card earlier." And with that, the most delicious, bashful smile graced the young witch's plump lips.

Lucius' body reacted immediately. *Shit, it's been too long.*

Lucius shifted and groaned inwardly. His trousers suddenly became just a little too tight. "No worries, darling, no worries. And you are indeed most welcome," he answered

the girl with his own dazzling smile. Simultaneously, he gestured to a barman to bring him a drink.

Once the drink was in his possession, Lucius tilted his head to her once again and murmured seductively, "Have a drink with me, Miss Granger," his lips lightly brushing Hermione's ear.

The witch's breath hitched, and she shivered almost imperceptibly. "Sure," she breathed out. "What are we drinking to, Mister Malfoy?"

Lucius gave her question momentary consideration. "I propose that we drink to the beginning of our relationship." Noticing Hermione's quizzical arched brows, Lucius corrected, "To our acquaintance, so to speak. After this drink, you will call me Lucius and I, in turn, will call you Hermione. How about that, Miss Granger?"

The challenging smile on the blond wizard's lips and the teasing sparkles in his grey eyes reached their goal. No true Gryffindor could possibly ignore this challenge. Hermione giggled and said, "Very well, Lucius, to you then."

"Indeed, Hermione, indeed, and to you as well. Cheers." Of course, Lucius Malfoy simply couldn't stop there. He felt rather greedy and decided to push his luck even further. The moment they finished their drinks, he gently put his long, well-groomed, aristocratic hand on the witch's soft, rounded knee and whispered, "How about a little friendly kiss, Hermione, just to confirm our newly acquired friendship. Mm?"

Our Gryffindor princess froze in indecision, her amber eyes darting to Lucius' smiling lips. Slowly, very, very slowly, so he wouldn't frighten his prey, our blond shortened the distance between them. His grey eyes held her amber ones prisoners, not giving the witch an opportunity to break his control over the situation. Closer and closer, Lucius could already feel her sweet and slightly feverish breath caressing his skin. One more inch and...

Unexpectedly, a deep and extremely annoyed baritone broke the spell between them. "Miss Granger."

Hermione emitted an urgent sigh and turned towards the voice.

"Severus, what are you doing here?"

"May I have a word, Miss Granger?" muttered Severus. Our Potions master looked dishevelled, lost and extremely angry all at the same time. He glanced at Lucius for just a second and gave him a curt half nod.

Lucius' grey gaze became icy and menacing. Without any hesitation, Lord Malfoy decided to interfere, "Severus, as you probably..."

However, both Hermione and Severus raised their hands toward Lucius, gesturing to him to be quiet. Our blond hissed "shit," under his breath and then fell into silence.

"Why, Severus, I thought you had told me everything. What is there left to talk about?"

Severus ran his fingers through his hair in a nervous gesture and after a moment of hesitation said, "Hermione, please, we need to talk," and with that he extended his hand to her. "Please, come with me."

The combination of '*Hermione*', '*please*' and the intensity of feelings in Severus' black eyes made it entirely impossible for our girl to reject him. With a long, deep sigh, she jumped off the stool, put her little hand in our Potions master's manly grasp, and together they left, leaving one blond wizard to seethe and simmer in a silent fury.

Please don't worry, my friends. Let me remind you that persuasion and persistence are among the Malfoys' strongest traits.

Chapter Seven

Chapter 8 of 11

Two men, one woman – a story as old as the world itself. A twist – two powerful wizards will clash over one brilliant witch. Love. Friendship. Rivalry. Deceit. Severus Snape/Lucius Malfoy/Hermione Granger. AU. OOC. DH partly ignored.

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Chapter Seven

Black Eyes

It was dark and dreadfully hot. The air was suffocatingly stuffy. The sharp, uneven edges of the century-old stone wall were digging into Hermione's back, making her uncomfortable. For the last three minutes, our young witch had been trapped between the old wall and the unyielding body of our Potions master. Nervous silence hung in the air, making it even harder to breathe. The level of Hermione's ire was rising by the minute, filling her with the acidity of unfulfilled expectations. They were supposed to talk. She was expecting, and quite ready to hear an apology.

Let's see, my dear friends, how our princess had gotten herself into that narrow spot, between the unsurprisingly reticent wall and the equally reticent Potions master, shall we?

The instant the door of the Leaky Cauldron had been shut closed after them, Hermione had been turned, twisted and pushed rather unceremoniously against the hard surface. Severus' breath had raged somewhere near her left ear while his nose had been seemingly poking into her hair. It had been pretty difficult for Hermione to be certain about their exact position, due to the fact that the wizard's body had been pressed tightly and heavily against hers. His weight had effectively and fully immobilized the witch, and she couldn't move at all. Heck, she could hardly breathe, as her face had been tucked into Severus' scratchy robes.

You and I know, of course, that any other day, Hermione Granger would love to be pressed against the wall by Severus Snape, especially in the dark corner. Any day, any time. And, in actual fact, she had enjoyed it only the previous Friday, and she had fantasized about a moment like this more than once. Dark and brooding Severus Snape and she in her crimson chiffon dress, his hot breath on her skin, his fingers between her thighs... *Mmm... Oh, Merlin!*

Yet, frankly, this particular moment was not the right moment at all. After everything that had transpired between them over the past week, it was apparent that today was not the right day and now was most certainly not the right time. What they needed to do was talk, calmly and politely, as a civilized witch and a wizard.

To be true to the facts, for the first two minutes our sensible witch kept her hopes high, thinking that the wizard needed a minute or two to gather his composure and, perhaps, to find the words, and she thus had waited patiently. However, the period of silence dragged on, and the only sound Hermione could detect was Severus' ragged breathing. Our young Gryffindor's patience ran thin and then disappeared entirely. There was perhaps one more minute of contemplation until Hermione decided to act.

What is wrong with this wizard? She thought with vexation.

"Severus," rasped Hermione, her voice muted by his robes, as she pushed her fists not too gently at the wizard's chest.

After that nudge, our Potions master finally sprang to life. Only Merlin knew what he had been waiting for. Men! He shifted slightly, lifting his weight from the witch and giving her an opportunity to breathe and move again. Then, after a brief, awkward hesitation, Severus' black eyes focused on Hermione, and he uttered, "My behaviour was wrong and inappropriate, Hermione. I had assumed things I should not have and for that, I apologize. It is I who was delusional." Then again, silence fell between them.

However, this silence was remarkably different. Oh, how easily the sound of the wizard's deep baritone destroyed all Hermione's rebukes! How irrevocably the passionate fire in his eyes burned all her doubts and how quickly one word of an apology made nonexistent all her uncertainties, at the same time melting her heart and inflaming her body.

All she could see now was his anguish. His tormented gaze brought tears to her amber eyes. Of course, our gentle-hearted girl couldn't watch her former professor stumbling over each and every word. It was just too much to bear for her.

So, naturally, after a brisk pause and a deep sigh, Severus continued, "It is hard to let yourself believe in the possibility of happiness, Hermione. I... do not know how... "

"Shh," she said, and a warm, little hand was pressed to the thin lips of our Potions master. "Shh, I know. I understand and I am sorry. I was too quick to judge." And just like that, our young Gryffindor took everything on her frail shoulders, as usual.

How could she not, my dear friends? Just think about it. She knew all too well how much he had suffered, how hard his life had been and how bleak his future had looked at times. Then again, at that moment in time, Hermione Granger probably declared herself in love with Severus Snape. So how could she possibly let him suffer for even a millisecond longer? It was impossible.

The soft, warm, and so mightily enticing little hand, which was pressed so daringly to our Potions master's lips, served as a sure sign for him that he was forgiven, and our wizard was unable to keep himself in check any longer. The next instant, Severus pressed an open-mouth kiss against Hermione's palm, and his hands sneaked around her waist.

She, of course, reacted immediately by rising on her toes and pressing her lips to his without any hesitation. Ironically, but oh so predictably, it now felt so right, and so breathtakingly sensual, to be trapped between such a marvellous, century-old stone wall and a so wonderfully hard and muscled body. The dark corner was just perfect, and the moment was simply precious.

With their first encounter having been as impulsive and hectic as it had, this time both of them felt the need to take things slowly. And if Severus' roughly whispered, "Brace yourself, witch," followed by their disappearance into thin air was anything to judge by, this time they preferred privacy, as well.

Passionate Eyes

The moment our lovers landed in Severus' bedroom, their lips moulded into a searing kiss again. Severus' hands roamed freely over Hermione's curves, mapping, exploring, learning, memorizing. His lips were incessant and demanding, not leaving her any space for wavering.

When a break for air was deemed necessary, the black-haired wizard murmured, leisurely nibbling at the sensitive skin behind the witch's ear, "Would you like to have dinner first? We have French cuisine today."

While waiting for Hermione's response, he traced the outline of her earlobe with the tip of his tongue. That made her gasp, and she muttered hastily, "Scratch the dinner, Severus. Let it be French breakfast tomorrow."

He let out a hoarse chuckle and said, "As you wish, witch."

Abruptly, Hermione was once again turned and shifted until Severus had her back against him, with his rigid length pressing insistently into her bum. The wizard's hot mouth descended on her the next second, taking the witch by surprise. Hungrily, he kissed and nipped at the exposed skin of her neck, forcing her to shiver and whimper.

The air was soon filled with husky moans, weak whines, jagged breathing and muffled gasps. Severus kept the upper hand in their movements, overpowering Hermione with his controlling attitude. The growls and groans he was emitting, along with occasional light swearing, vibrated against Hermione's skin, arousing her even more, and nearly burning her alive.

Firmly holding her in place, Severus busied himself with the delicate task of unzipping the young witch's crimson dress. His dexterous fingers were opening the dress inch by little inch, giving his hungry, greedy mouth more territory to kiss, to nibble and to lick. More than once during that torturously slow exploration of her body, Hermione tried to turn and face Severus. Each time, however, with a low mutter of, "Stay still, witch," he prevented her from doing so. Not her moans, not her cries, not even her sweet, "Severus, please," had worked. He was unwavering. And so, our girl moaned and panted and gasped for air, leaving him to ravish her just the way he liked it.

By the time the wizard's hands had found their way to her sensitized breasts, fondling their softness and teasing her nipples, which were begging for attention, Hermione was at her wits' end. Weakened by the outrageously long foreplay, she reached for Severus and got a hold of his neck, arching her back ecstatically as she did so. At this point, when the witch's mewls and moans appeared dangerously desperate, our strict and controlling wizard decided that the time had come to manoeuvre them to bed.

After their first dual steps, the crimson dress, fully opened by now, slid to the floor, creating a strikingly bright crimson puddle and leaving Hermione in only her knickers. The sodden, flesh-coloured knickers caught the wizard's attention, and a deep and guttural moan lodged in his throat. The next instant, the little witch was swept into his arms and, in one swift movement, they both were on the bed, with Hermione laying on her stomach.

In mere seconds, the wizard was on his knees, his hands immediately moving to claim the witch's pert bum. With an appreciative humming sound, our Potions master was licking and kissing Hermione's perfectly rounded bottom, paying equal attention to each plump and ripe cheek and making the silk of her knickers even wetter with his tongue.

Apparently, Severus Snape was a bum lover. Who could have imagined that, huh?

Only when Severus was satisfied with the attention he had paid to her bottom was Hermione able to turn and face the wizard. Once again, their lips met in a smouldering kiss.

Gradually ending the kiss, Severus redirected his attention to her overheated body, now glistening with perspiration. His lips and tongue possessively traced all her contours and curves, nibbled gently at her taut, pink peaks, licked her belly button and then, with resolution, moved southward.

In one impatient movement, the wizard pushed Hermione's knees up, growled, "Open," and buried his enormous nose between her thighs. She had only managed to exhale, "Severus, oh God!" before her knickers were discarded and she was nearly consumed by her ravenously hungry lover.

When the young witch was again able to perceive reality around her, and a quick glance revealed that her lover was still fully clothed, it was Hermione's turn to torment him with the slow peeling of his many layers of clothing, kissing, biting, and sucking at every newly opened patch of skin.

And, oh Merlin, did she let him suffer this time. Hermione used everything she had in her arsenal lips, teeth, tongue, fingers, nails everything. She was fondling and probing, kissing and biting, caressing and coaxing, until Severus' skin was tingling and tickling all over, and he was groaning, moaning and twisting with abandon.

By the end of this torture, our black-haired wizard found himself totally nude, painfully aroused and in need of immediate friction. Hermione, with her hair curling wildly around her flushed face, pushed him on his back and hovered over him dangerously as a wicked smile played on her swollen lips.

She even tried to tease him further, descending tortuously slowly onto his eager and leaking in anticipation length. But the wizard, now enraged and desperate for release, impaled her on himself in one frenzied motion, forcing them both to gasp and groan from the overwhelming sensation.

Now, there was only one thing left for them to ride this erotic madness to its glorious end. Sure enough, the over-controlling Potions master didn't give Hermione an opportunity to be on the top for too long. He shifted them soon enough and kept driving into the hot, wet, tight and oh-so-welcoming heat of his witch in ecstasy, marvelling in breathtakingly pleasant sensations and listening to her decadent mewls.

Eventually, with his powerful and masterfully angled thrusts, along with his deft fingers that squeezed and teased the right button at the right moments, Severus pushed Hermione over the edge, following her into an abyss with a low growl and a few last jerks.

Chapter Eight

Chapter 9 of 11

Two men, one woman – a story as old as the world itself. A twist – two powerful wizards will clash over one brilliant witch. Love. Friendship. Rivalry. Deceit. Severus Snape/Lucius Malfoy/Hermione Granger. AU. OOC. DH partly ignored.

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Chapter Eight

Sunny Morning

Soft popping sounds, muffled voices and the tinkling of porcelain china being moved had awakened Hermione. Slowly, she opened her eyes, lifted herself onto her elbows and looked around with interest.

Quite understandably, our young witch wasn't terribly observant yesterday. You do remember that the previous night our heroine was rather intensely preoccupied otherwise. All of her attention had been centered on only on one part of the room, one piece of furniture to be precise...the bed. She had noticed nothing else in the room.

Of course, Severus Snape undertook noteworthy efforts to ensure that during the night, our witch had come to know his bed quite closely and intimately. It would be fair to say that by dawn, this bed was almost more familiar to her than her own.

Thus, with the morning sun shining enthusiastically through the glass of the old window, Hermione was curious. Her warm, amber gaze slid slowly over the ascetic interior of the Potions master's bedroom. Everything there was simple, yet practical...crisp white walls with wood finishes, rich walnut furniture. Heavy green draperies made her smile at this tribute to Slytherin House colours. Books and accessories were organized and placed with surgical precision so that nothing looked out of place. Well, except for one vivid, crimson piece of chiffon on the floor... Also, there was something beige, crumpled and vaguely familiar lying in the far corner. *Hmm.*

A gently opened door abruptly interrupted the witch's perusal of the bedroom. Through the narrow opening, Hermione could hear a familiar baritone hiss, "Casimir, no!" The next second, a wrinkled face peeked inside, and then promptly disappeared. The door, however, was left ajar.

"See, Master, Missy not sleeps, Missy Hermione awakes," sounded a triumphant elf's squeaky voice, followed by Severus' exasperated sigh and something almost inaudible, ending with a 'k'.

"Breakfast is ready, Master. Me keeps breakfast warm all morning. Missy Hermione eats French breakfast in bed." The elf continued his happy chirping, obviously trying to convince his master of the necessity of taking the morning meal in bed.

The highly irritated voice of one Potions master muttered, "Give me that, Casimir. You can leave now, and don't pop up here until I'll call you," indicating that his master was indeed defeated. A full minute later, the door was finally opened entirely. A peeved, dishevelled and not quite fully dressed Severus Snape, with the breakfast tray in his hands, appeared on the threshold.

Here, my friends, let us pause and visualize. I want you to savour this moment, because the picture here is truly worth a thousand words. Just imagine...our Potions master stood there topless! His hair was for once all over the place, undoubtedly due to the wild tumbling in bed the previous night. His extremely sour facial expression was entirely out of tune with the lively breakfast display he held in his hands a tray full of goodies in glossy white china. There even was a small red rose on the side. Is it not a hilarious image?

It wasn't exactly the picture Hermione had imagined a week ago, with Severus in an apron, but it was close enough. She bit her lower lip in order to suppress hysterical giggles, which rose in her throat and threaten to escape.

The moment our sour-faced wizard shut the door and his onyx eyes focused on the young lioness, she rose to a seated position, thereby allowing the white sheet to slide down and offering him a front-row view of her nude bosoms. This change seemed to significantly improve the Potions master's mood.

The shade of a faint smile touched the corners of Severus' lips. His face lost its sourness, and he uttered, "Good morning." The heated gaze of the wizard's black eyes caressed the young witch's curves as he covered the distance between them. And then, after he sat down on the bed and carefully manoeuvred the tray to her lap with a husky whisper of "breakfast", Severus, not waiting for an answer, launched himself on the dusty pink, bare nipple, his hungry mouth closing on it.

Here my friends, I am happy to report that breakfast proved to be a rather lengthy, intense and messy affair, which satisfied both of their appetites. Casimir fortunately refrained from popping up uninvited.

Foggy Afternoon

Quite surprisingly for our golden girl, she had spent the rest of Saturday and most of Sunday at Severus' house. Even though Severus hadn't actually voiced his desire for

the witch to stay, he did reveal his wishes quite boldly by ending Hermione's every attempt to leave with a passionate encounter, after which they both were unable to move for a while.

At some point, our young lioness had been reacquainted with her blue knickers. She was also presented with a white shirt and soft lounge trousers that were fitted for her with one swift move of the Potion master's hand. She wore them for the rest of her stay.

Despite the impression I may have given that our lovers only spent their time in intimate games, they did actually talk quite a lot during this weekend. Well, ahem, let's say...Hermione talked and Severus listened, offering his comments here and there. Our chatty little lioness quickly covered the entire eight years during which they had not interacted, possibly giving Severus more information about the Wizarding community that he ever wanted to be given. But that was a small price for having the young witch around, and Severus thus paid it willingly.

Of course, before long, our bookworm had found, in her opinion, the gem of the villa...the library. I am, however, fairly certain, that in Severus' opinion, the crown jewel of the villa was his potion laboratory, which he also presented to the young witch. The lab favourably impressed Hermione, exceedingly so, yet the size and the content of the library struck her much, much more forcefully.

That is where our black-haired wizard found her on Sunday afternoon after he had finished brewing a small batch of potions, which were due on Monday. She was curled comfortably facing the door on the tufted velvet settee, with her legs tucked close to her chest and her bum clad in Severus' lounge trousers. It was a view our bum-loving Potions master most certainly couldn't miss, and so he acted accordingly.

There were only three seconds before Severus' hands claimed the witch. He quickly turned her to him and sealed her mouth with a searing kiss, snatching her surprised exclamation "Severus!" right from her plump lips. The book was sent to the shelf with a wandless spell, and pretty soon they were both nude, with our Potions master nestled deeply inside his witch. They moved and groaned in unison, his hot mouth on her skin, and her soft lips on his. They kissed and bit, licked and sucked, and bit again. The tempo was increasing by the minute, and they both reached the pinnacle quite quickly.

With a satisfied groan, Severus slid onto the rug as the settee was simply too short for his long limbs. Hermione crept over to his chest, covering his hard body with her soft, pliant form. His hands sneaked around her waist and held her tightly, and they lay there silently, savouring that perfect moment in full.

Alas, my darlings, everything perfect and beautiful always eventually has to give way to something that is not so perfect. And that was precisely what had happened during a nice and, thanks to Casimir's tremendous efforts, almost romantic dinner. Our lovers were engaged in a lovely conversation when suddenly Hermione remembered that she hadn't told Severus the most momentous news. "Oh, my, I forgot to tell you, Severus. This Thursday I'll be giving the first presentation of my 'Magical Creatures' Rights' initiative. I'll have only three presentations before the Ministry heads will officially vote." A lovely blush appeared on the young witch's cheeks. "I am so nervous and inspired at the same time. If my initiative should pass, it will be the start of a new era."

If our Potions master had paid more attention, he would have noticed the intense scrutiny she was paying him. Her amber eyes were focused on him, taking in his absentminded nods and mutters of "hmm, hmm, yes, yes," while he was consuming his dinner. A faint, dark spark flared up briefly in Hermione's eyes, and she asked, "Would you like to come to the presentation, Severus?"

"Me? Why?" he answered, finally looking at her. "No, thank you. Believe me, Hermione. I barely have enough patience for the one social event a year. And this year's quota was already exceeded by my presence at the Victory Ball." His black, unfathomable eyes watched his lover for a few more minutes and then, with a slight nod, he continued with his dinner, looking perfectly unperturbed.

Our golden girl drew a long sigh. The excited blush on her face faded, and with a softly spoken, "Oh, right," she too, continued with her dinner. An uncomfortable silence settled in the air.

Since Casimir knew his master too well, he luckily was adequately prepared. The little creature masterfully drew attention to the pivotal moment of the dinner, the grand finale so to speak...the elf's magnificent *crème brûlée*. A delicious dessert and a delightful aperitif, which Severus himself had fished from his bar, did indeed slightly ease the tension between our lovers. The soft peals of the witch's laughter had returned, mellow chatter filled the dining room once again, and the evening regained its previous peacefulness. All seemed just fine...

An hour later when Hermione stood in front of Severus' fireplace, already wearing her crimson dress and ready to leave, Severus did not hesitate and drew her to him. He pressed his lips to her closed eyes and whispered, "Will I see you again, witch? Come over on Friday. after work, will you?" With that, the ever-stoic Potions master gave his lover one last, chaste kiss and let go of her. Our girl opened her glistening eyes and exhaled, "till Friday, Severus."

The Floo's green flames swallowed her in the next second.

Strategies and Tactics, or a Comeback...The Malfoy Style

This early Monday morning proved to be surprising for Hermione's administrative assistant Lora. She was running a bit late and was rushing through the Ministry corridors, not paying much attention to the normal craziness around her at the start of the workweek.

In her hands, she was holding the massive stack of invitations to the presentations of her boss' law initiative. Lora had been working on them during the weekend and was quite proud of her efforts and happy with the results. The invitations were superbly produced...bright and informative in a spare, sophisticated style. She would have to drop them at the mailroom before she went to her office because Hermione insisted that it was crucial for all Ministry officials to receive the invitations first thing in the morning.

Breathless after the brisk walk, Lora was already close to the mailroom when she heard footsteps behind her and a pleasantly sounded drawl, "Miss, Miss," stopped the girl in her tracks. Intrigued, Lora abruptly turned around and collided with the firm and quite broad chest of our one and only Lord Malfoy. The impact caused all her weekend's efforts to fly from her hands.

Oh, no! The thoughts began to swirl in Lora's head, her eyes full of horror *No!* The disaster, however, was not destined to happen. One elegant movement of the quickly drawn wand froze everything in mid-flight, and a moment later the neatly folded pile of papers were in Lucius' hands. He was studying their content with genuine interest.

"Mister Malfoy," whispered a flustered girl, "thank you so much, thank you," and Lora attempted to take the flyers from the blond wizard's hands. He, however, was not in a hurry to return them to her. In the millisecond of a pause, Lucius seemed to consider something.

"Lora, if I am not mistaken, right? Good morning, darling, how are you?" Lucius began a polite chat. "I am sorry, Lora, I was so clumsy, Monday morning, you know," the wizard's deep chuckle and his dashing smile made the young girl lower her eyes and lightly blush. Clearly the clumsier of the two, the girl was desperately trying to find the courage to say something daring and witty. *Agh*, she had seen her boss Hermione doing so many times before, but alas, Lora's brain and tongue refused to work. The wizard was too intimidating.

"What are those, dear? Ah, they are invitations to Miss Granger's presentations. How delightfully interesting. Very nicely done, Lora. Very, very nice." Lucius continued his masterful game with the goal already in his mind. Poor, unsuspecting Lora blushed a bright red colour. Never before had a wizard of Lucius Malfoy's scale and appeal complimented her so profoundly.

"Lora, darling, I meant to ask you before our collision. Could you please do me a favour and put this rose on Miss Granger's desk. I would appreciate it immensely." Lucius put a single, proudly yellow rose in the dazed girl hand. By now, Hermione's administrative assistant could only nod. The ability to utter words had left her a few minutes ago.

"Thank you, darling. I owe you now, my dear," and with that, the last accurate and decisive manoeuvre was made. "Do you need to send these, Lora?" Lucius asked, pointing at the flyers, which were still in his hands. "Yes? Oh, let me do it for you, darling. It's the least I can do for you after my unspeakable clumsiness and you kindly agreeing to do me a favour. I will put them into today's post right away, darling. Thank you again for your help. Bye. On your way now." Lord Malfoy's palm actually gave a

little slap to the girl's bottom just to bring her back to reality.

Lora, still dazed and flushed, muttered, "Thank you, Mister Malfoy," and disappeared in the morning's crowd. Lucius Malfoy was left standing with his trophy in his hands. He was extremely pleased with himself, with the morning, with Lora. The huge pile of brightly coloured invitations in his hands was nothing less than the shortest way to the heart of his soon-to-be bride. As you can probably guess, my dear readers, our blond had already developed an ingenious plan and was going to implement it immediately. Only minutes later, the beautiful and slightly modified flyers had been sent to all Ministries' officials.

Lucius left the Ministry in an excellent mood. For the first time in the last two and half days, he was back on his horse. Presented with the lucky opportunity, he had made his move brilliantly and now all the players would be forced to play his game by his rules. *Oh, yes!* That was the game at which he was remarkably proficient...the manipulator to the core. A successful Monday morning, indeed.

Chapter Nine

Chapter 10 of 11

Two men, one woman – a story as old as the world itself. A twist – two powerful wizards will clash over one brilliant witch. Love. Friendship. Rivalry. Deceit. Severus Snape/Lucius Malfoy/Hermione Granger. AU. OOC. DH partly ignored.

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Chapter Nine

About the Danger of Dashing Smiles, Blond Locks and Yellow Roses

A little later, on that same Monday morning, our Gryffindor lioness stepped into her office only to find there a flushed, glassy-eyed and not entirely coherent Lora. The poor administrative assistant was still more than slightly dazed after her morning encounter with Lucius Malfoy.

In bewilderment, Hermione watched how, with trembling fingers, the poor girl was reverently arranging a single, long-stemmed, yellow rose on Hermione's desk.

The moment Lora noticed her boss at the entrance, she began babbling uncontrollably. "Oh, my goodness, Hermione, you would never guess what had happened to me today. Lucius Malfoy..." At this moment, Lora's blue eyes became even glassier than they had been before, and a trifle of concern for her employee's well-being made its way to Hermione's heart.

Fortunately, after a long and dreamy sigh, Lora gathered her thoughts again and continued. "Yes, just imagine, Hermione, I had a collision with Lucius Malfoy. Mmm," the girl said as she let out a breathy moan, "he is so bloody handsome. You know, his chest... it's just...there's miles of it, miles. And those shimmering, silver eyes. Oh, oh, and his smile." A somewhat hysterical giggle escaped from Lora's mouth. "I couldn't talk, seriously, I literally lost my voice. I could only nod. Can you imagine?"

To be honest, it was quite hard for our young boss to believe that. You see, Lora loved to talk, and she could actually do it for hours. Thus, Hermione took a preventive measure and interrupted this passionate ode to Lucius Malfoy.

"What did Malfoy want from you, Lora?"

"Oh, he asked me to put this rose on your desk. Isn't it pretty? So yellow. Oh, and his voice." The girl slipped into reverential mode again. "Soft, velvety, with a hint of darkness. I have spoken to him before, but today he was simply breathtaking." A breathy, wistful moan reverberated throughout the office again. Thoughtfully watching the girl's hazed eyes, Hermione guessed that Lora's imagination had taken her to a place where Lucius Malfoy could be found. A minute later, and looking even more flushed, the administrative assistant snapped out of her reverie, leaned toward her boss' ear and whispered, "You know, the moment he said 'Lora' and smiled...I fell apart completely. Seriously. I think my knickers are still totally soaked."

Arrggghh, God, Lora!

Now it was Hermione's turn to blush.

I'm sure you can tell, my dearies, that at that point, our heroine had heard quite enough. Hermione liked her administrative assistant. She honestly did. However, sometimes the girl truly gave her much more information than she cared to know.

The witch rolled her amber eyes at her assistant's nonsense. "Lora, please, can we get to work now? I really have tons of pressing matters...a presentation on Thursday, et cetera, et cetera. By the way, did you send out the invitations?"

Lora, thankfully, got the message and walked to the door. There, she turned for the last time. "Yes, of course I did. They all went out." With an enthusiastic smile she added, "Thank Merlin, I have a lunch with Zachary today. I am really not sure if I could get through the day after such an intense morning. You have to admit, boss...Lucius Malfoy is one hot wizard." And with that, she finally walked from the office and closed the door.

Phew! At last, Hermione was alone. Surprisingly, all these sighs and moans about Malfoy made her rather uncomfortably warm somewhere in the pit of her stomach...*How odd.* Her amber eyes focused on the yellow rose. *Hmm, what a strange choice of colour,* she thought, making the mental note to ask Neville about yellow roses. The rose, by the way, was truly beautiful...perfect, proud, almost flamboyantly bright.

Impulsively, she stretched her fingers to touch and gently caress the rose's dark green stem. It was thick, hard and smooth to the touch. Inexplicably, this action made the heat in Hermione's stomach creep down. She whimpered weakly and bit her lower lip. *Damn, Lora!* Luckily, a little note attached to the rose caught Hermione's eyes. Glad to redirect her attention and curiosity, Hermione reached for it, and the next instant an extremely sharp thorn punctured her finger. Immediately a bright, crimson drop appeared on her fingertip.

"Shit," cursed the young witch as she instinctively put her wounded finger in her mouth. Then, carefully minding the thorns, she took the note and read:

Hermione, my dear,

Please accept this rose as a tribute to the beginning of our relations. I hope they will be long, pleasant and fruitful for both of us.

Yours,

Lucius Malfoy

Our lioness frowned. Sure enough, with her quite...ahem...*active* weekend, Hermione had managed to forget entirely about her encounter with Lucius in the Leaky Cauldron last Friday. The note reminded her about Lucius' proposition of friendship, their drink, his palm on her knee and even the almost kiss.

Oh, how easily he made her give in to his charms... Hermione shook her head. Troubled thoughts filled our witch's head. To some extent, Lora was right...Lucius Malfoy was, in fact, one handsome wizard...smooth, elegant, evidently exceptionally skilled and experienced. With typical Gryffindor truthfulness and a sigh, she acknowledged these qualities. However, he was highly dangerous...this Slytherin snake. His smoothness was as deceiving as the stem of the yellow rose. Both were hiding their sharp thorns under a lush and elegant appearance. She knew perfectly well that Malfoy was not the wizard with whom she wanted to play games. Nope. He was too damn good at them.

On the other hand, grinned Hermione...*he was too damn good period. And that charming, dazzling smile. Why does Severus never smile like that? Ahhh, what an asinine idea,* she scolded herself.

Our little witch didn't like the direction her thoughts were going. She was with Severus now, or at least, she thought she was with him. The black-haired wizard's position on this matter was a mystery. And let's face it, my friends, there was a decent chance that it would remain a mystery for a long, long, long time. Still, to be having these thoughts turning her on about the blond locks, grey eyes and full lips of our Lord Malfoy weren't right.

Oh, yes, extremely dangerous wizard, indeed. Armed with that helpful conclusion, Hermione returned to her Monday morning routine. She truly had piles of preparations to do before her presentation.

Ah, my darlings, and here is just a little piece of information for you...Lora did not return to work from her lunch with Zachary. Evidently, one young wizard got seriously lucky that Monday, and all thanks are due to our Lord Malfoy, by the way. That's right, Lucius. Why not share happiness with the world?

A Mere Girl

With all the preparations and last minute revisions, the week went by in a blur. Finally, Thursday afternoon was upon our golden girl, and she was ready. Exactly twenty-five minutes before she was due for her presentation, Hermione stood up, took a deep, calming breath and fixed her fitted lavender robes. The hazel eyes of our young politician focused on the photo where the green-eyed and extremely dishevelled young man was laughing light-heartedly.

In one brief move, the witch kissed her fingers and pressed them to the photo. "Wish me luck, Harry. This one is for you," she whispered and walked out of her office.

Five minutes later, after the brisk walk through the Ministry's corridors, Hermione was at the door of room number seven. There, she briefly paused and then bravely stepped inside.

To say that the room looked gloomy would be an understatement, my friends. Aghast, our witch gazed at the grey walls that badly needed painting. The outdated, boring, dimly lit interior consisted of a narrow stage, dreary wooden chairs, an unhealthy looking plant and a table in the corner. There, on the table, stood a pitcher and a glass. Both looked as they were thoroughly used by flies as a mating field for the last century... or maybe even longer.

However, it wasn't the downright terrible condition of the room that shocked Hermione the most, but the realization that the room was empty. Nobody was there. Hermione frowned and checked the room number again. Yup, number seven. And a sign on the door clearly stated: *Hermione Granger, Magical Creatures Rights Law Initiative Presentation, 4 pm.*

Obviously, she wasn't ready for such an outcome. Never, even for a second, had our girl considered a complete lack of interest in her initiative. "Hmm, all right," muttered the young witch and began to organize the room for the presentation. If nothing else, Hermione Granger was an optimist to the core. There were still eighteen minutes before the start, and the Gryffindor in her hoped for the best.

At five minutes to four, when the poor witch was ready to give up, the doors were finally thrown open and Kingsley Shacklebolt, the Minister, full of authority and self-importance, walked across the threshold. After him, a few wizards and witches surfaced as well. A sigh of relief escaped from Hermione's mouth.

Alas, her relief was short-lived. All in all, at four o'clock there were eight people present, which included Lora, who had arrived at the last second, five heads of different secondary Ministry departments, the Minister and... Lucius Malfoy, who, to Hermione's surprise, walked in and sat in the first row with a haughty expression, as if he completely owned the whole freaking place.

Of course, my darlings, you and I know that the invitations *were*, in fact, tampered with...

Perhaps, our crafty Lord Malfoy had the answer. Mm? I am sure that the information about who in fact had sent the invitations to the Ministry officials would've been much more crucial for Hermione than the condition of Lora's knickers. Lora, utterly swept off her feet by Lucius' charms, had failed to mention that particular circumstance of her Monday morning encounter with the wizard to her boss. Oh, well, no surprise there. Our Lord Malfoy knew precisely what he was doing...skilful and experienced Slytherin snake, indeed. Our unsuspecting heroine was left to deal with the consequences, not having a clue that she was being played like a pawn.

The presentation went smoothly and rather quickly. Only the Minister asked a couple of questions. The others, probably baffled by the low attendance, kept quiet and made a quick exit the second Hermione finished. Lora, smiling awkwardly, breathed out, "That was excellent," and disappeared as quickly as the others disappear.

Our Princess felt like a complete loser, of course, and a thought about Apparating home and crying in the bathroom was quite tempting. She had desperately wanted her initiative to get off to a better start. Slowly, she stepped down from the little stage and sank onto the first chair she stumbled to on her way. The heavy steps, low grunt and a creak of a chair next to her announced the Minister's presence.

"Why didn't they come?" whispered our amateur and utterly discouraged politician.

A big, warm palm patted her fragile shoulder, and she heard Kingsley's bass near her ear, "In the Wizarding society, Hermione, we are extremely fond of our traditions. I told you this before, but you didn't listen in your youthful ignorance. You need a strong wizard by your side, my dear. Even though you are a truly brilliant witch, and a war hero, most of the heads don't take you seriously enough. You are just a mere girl for them...no family yet, not even a significant other by your side. Think about it, Hermione." With that, the Minister lightly smoothed her wild, chocolate curls, stood up and left.

The Minister's words swirled in her head. The burning urge to stamp her feet, or yell, or swear loudly was pulsing wildly inside her. "A mere girl!" she muttered through her clenched teeth, and a single, hot tear made its way down her cheek.

"A mere girl your arse!"

Please Quiet! Seduction in Session!

"Tsk, ts, ts. I never thought I would see the Gryffindor princess, the better part of the golden trio, so to say, in such a tearful state after only one minor bump along the way. Tsk, ts, Hermione, Hermione, you are disappointing me." A familiar, pleasant drawl forced our witch to look up.

There, right in front of her stood Lord Malfoy in all his elegant glory. With one springy step, he moved closer to the witch, now melancholically slumped in the old chair, so that his knees, clad in black cashmere, were almost touching hers, and offered the girl his white, lacy handkerchief. "Here, my darling, wipe those tears immediately, before

somebody notices." A soft, charming smile played on his lips, and his grey eyes were focused on her with a considerable amount of compassion in them.

"Mister M...", began Hermione, but noticing a questioningly arched single, blond eyebrow, she corrected herself. "Lucius, why are you here? I have never imagined that *Magical Creatures Rights Law* could interest you."

Lucius chuckled, "I am interested in politics, my dear Hermione, so *Magical Creatures Rights* is quite interesting for me." His smooth, mellow baritone was stirring something warm and fuzzy in Hermione's belly.

"I heard, by the way, the nonsense our beloved Minister was feeding to you." A hint of annoyance surfaced in the aristocratic drawl. "Don't mind him, Hermione. Even though I do agree that a strong wizard by your side could, in fact, help to boost your image. Yet, I firmly believe that today's low attendance was only due to the lack of the proper advertisement. You need to market your initiative more. You have to gather interest, create a trend, darling."

Listening to this, our lioness suddenly felt a surge of hope fill her heart. She didn't trust Lucius, not even for a second. However, her keen mind recognized a grain of reason in his words. The wizard had a point, a bloody good one. Almost against her will, a hopeful smile made its way to her bright-rose lips, and her caramel eyes focused on the blond man.

Sensing that he had gained the girl's undivided attention, the master manipulator leaned toward her ear while his arms came to rest on both sides of her chair, imprisoning the witch between them. In a deep, velvety baritone, he continued, "I could help you with that, Hermione. I have played politics long enough to become quite proficient in it."

Lucius' breath teased the sensitive skin on Hermione's neck, causing her breath to become laboured. The young woman's irregular air intake obviously didn't go unnoticed, and the blond wizard closed the last inches between them with one little tilt. Now, their knees were undoubtedly touching.

"Let me help you with it, Hermione. You'll see the difference immediately," murmured Malfoy and pushed even further toward her, discreetly trying to insert his left knee between Hermione's legs. A little 'ah' escaped from Hermione's mouth. The wizard's boldness brought her mind back to reality. She firmly pushed her knees back together and tried her best to suppress a peculiar heat that began to spread from the pit of her stomach to certain regions located slightly lower.

"Why?" she managed to utter, common sense and caution kicking in at last. "What is there in it for you, Lucius?" The young lioness narrowed her eyes. Knowing quite well the dark past of this particular wizard, along with his general cunning tendencies, she was seriously doubting his motives and thus was watching his reactions to her questions very carefully.

A low huff and a chuckle was accompanied by, this time, a two-hundred-watt brilliant smile that almost dissolved Hermione's suspicions. "You are such vigilant creature, Hermione. Doubting my sincerity, my dear, well, well, well, you are right, of course. You are just too clever. Surely I have an interest in this."

Lucius paused, as if seeking the right words, and gently traced Hermione's jaw line.

"You see, my darling Hermione, the Malfoys are not yet at the level we held before the war. It's my fault, and it is my responsibility to remedy that. It would do me good to be seen helping such a progressive and well-known witch. What do you say, Hermione? Would you accept my help, would you be willing to let me work with you on the project? I will show you how to gain their interest, how to influence their minds, and you will show them how entirely I have reformed."

During this speech, the wizard did not move his silver eyes from the witch's brown ones not even for a second, and Hermione felt her heart begin literally to melt under his intense, shimmering gaze.

What can I say, my darlings? Hermione Granger wasn't made of stone, you know. She liked men and appreciated a good-looking bloke. Then again, he stood so near her that she could sense the distinctive, tantalizing scent of his outrageously expensive cologne, which wasn't helping at all.

She had to run. Now! But alas, the blond wizard hovered over her, not giving her any opportunity to flee, and Severus wasn't there to rescue her from the prison of these grey eyes. Hence, she was left to deal with her ill-timed arousal and its hot waves, which were by now unabashedly surging through the lower part of her body.

His eyes were focused on her face intently, and the back of his hand softly caressed her cheek. Their noses were almost touching, and his blond locks were tickling her face. Desperate to break the heart-melting and body-burning eye contact, the poor witch tore her eyes from Lucius', only to land on Lucius' rather sensual lips.

Shit, shit, shit, was pulsating in her mind.

"Yes," breathed out the young Gryffindor, hoping earnestly that she would not regret this momentary lapse of judgment in the future.

"Wise decision, my darling, we will be the most powerful pair the British wizards ever knew, believe me," Lucius said as a triumphant smile lit up his handsome face. He took the witch's little hand and placed a long and altogether inappropriate kiss on her palm.

"When will we start? What about today, after a dinner perhaps?" The blond wizard was all over the young witch.

"No, Lucius, I am sorry, but I am tired," whispered Hermione, gathering the last shreds of her strength. "We will start on Monday, all right? Will lunch work for you?"

If Lord Malfoy was disappointed by this tiny rebuff, he didn't show it at all. The next instant, he finally straightened up and stepped back, giving Hermione the opportunity to rise from the chair. She practically jumped up, excited that she could finally escape Lucius' lust-evoking hands and eyes.

Evidently, the blond wizard was quite satisfied with the outcome and himself. After placing a light kiss on Hermione's hand, and murmuring, "See you Monday, my dear partner," he left, humming a refrain from Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries". Bedazzled and breathless Hermione, on the other hand, was left to peruse her thoughts.

The Slytherin snake, you say? Precisely, my dear readers.

Chapter Ten

Chapter 11 of 11

Two men, one woman – a story as old as the world itself. A twist – two powerful wizards will clash over one brilliant witch. Love. Friendship. Rivalry. Deceit. Severus Snape/Lucius Malfoy/Hermione Granger. AU. OOC. DH partly ignored.

I do not own Harry Potter or any of its characters; J. K. Rowling does. In addition, I do not make any profit from this fanfiction. Huge thank you goes to my beta...Glorieux.

Chapter Ten

Thursday's Broodings

On Thursday evening, Severus Snape was brewing potions in his laboratory, as usual. He stood there in his stark black work-robos, hovering over the cauldron and counting the clockwise stirs of a spatula. The Potions master's movements were precise and accurate each manoeuvre had its distinctive purpose. Nothing, not even the slightest motion of his long, deft fingers, was wasted. He was brilliant at this, exceptionally, remarkably so.

Despite the focused and composed demeanour, our Potions master's thoughts ventured far beyond his laboratory. Severus had of course remembered Hermione's presentation; he was not *that* thick and unperceptive after all. He had noticed the witch's reaction to his indifference. He knew his lack of interest saddened and maybe even angered her. The witch was not pleased with him.

Did it bother him? Was Severus Snape displeased with himself for causing sadness to his rather unexpectedly acquired lover? Our Potions master had mulled over that exact issue for nearly a week now and couldn't find the answer.

Bollocks!

Well, let us now take a closer look at our black-haired wizard's dilemma, shall we? We know quite well, my dear ones, that Severus, by fate's cruel will, had spent the majority of his years as a lonely soul. His heart had hardened after many years of loneliness and misery. Hence, he became a lone wolf oops, let me rephrase this a lone Potions master. At least, he perceived himself this way. That was Severus' firm opinion on the matter, and thus he'd carried on with his life accordingly until, goaded by a momentary impulse induced by jealousy and Lucius, he had invited a tornado named *Hermione Granger* into his life.

Severus Snape did not count on this to happen it was a contingency. It brought consequences he did not anticipate. He was not ready for them, not prepared to deal with them, and to be honest, I am not even confident that he needed them all that much.

But the Potions master longed for Hermione Granger, you'll say. He desired her, he thought about her. Yes, yes and yes, he did. From afar. For eight years. And do you remember? He saw her once a year at the ball and felt content in his woe for the remaining twelve months.

However, now when he suddenly had her, everything began to change around him. It was hard. He wasn't complaining it was just that Severus Snape was not used to having someone in his life. The thought of an obligation to participate actively in the witch's life, and (oh, horror!) letting her participate in his, was a foreign concept to him and, to be frank, scared the hell out of him. Yup, my darlings, you heard me correctly our wizard was scared of the change, extremely so. He wasn't the first man with this particular predicament, and he most certainly would not be the last.

He could easily comply with and enjoy the passion, lust and desire of their sexual life, but showing compassion, expressing feelings, planning for the future, making public appearances on the other hand, were extremely challenging for our Potions master.

This witch brought a complete and utter chaos to his home, strewing knickers and dresses on his bedroom floor. After only two weeks, Severus managed to lose his only friend over her. Moreover, his house-elf went nuts, forcing Severus to serve breakfasts in bed "*because missy Hermione likes it*".

The loss of control over his own bloody mind was infuriating and difficult for Severus to endure. His thoughts constantly circled around Hermione, her full rose-coloured lips, her nicely sized breasts, her perfectly rounded bottom and her hot, wet *Argh, damn it!* The Potions master nearly lost count. He shook his head and continued his brooding.

Where had his quiet and comfortable misery gone? It had disappeared, irrevocably destroyed by a fiery, talkative and, oh well, let's face it, quite passionate Gryffindor lioness. She made him think about trivial matters. Thoughts such as *Will the witch come? When she will come? How long will she stay?*, now were constantly swirling in his head. Besides, he still couldn't decide if he should've paid more attention to the little witch's political endeavours.

The thought, *his little witch* bolted through the wizard's mind and he swore under his breath. Possessiveness had struck again. Our Potions master huffed in dismay and began to stir the potion counter clockwise, counting the stirs again.

By the time the potion was done, Severus had reached a conclusion he would try to live up to Hermione's expectations. He would ask her about the presentation.

There, not a lame start, huh?

Friday

Overture

Tick-tock, tick-tock.

The witch was going to arrive at the villa pretty soon. Severus sat in his library reading. Or, to be precise, he was trying to read. The fact that he was actually waiting for the witch could not be admitted even to himself.

He, Severus Snape, would never succumb to such weakness. He was a formidable wizard for Merlin's sake, and he would not sit and wait like some adolescent nitwit for a mere witch to make it there. And, with that, our Potions master reread the same line in the book for the third time. Or was it fifth time?

Evidently, the reading was not going well. Thus, after a few more futile attempts and with a quietly uttered, "Bugger," he closed the book, carefully put it on the side table, stood up and walked out of the library.

Act One Love

The clock chimed eight times. Our Potions master now sat in the armchair in his living room, across from the fireplace, and waited. Half an hour before, Severus had finally settled in this location, right after he sent Casimir away with the strict order not to pop up anywhere near the rooms until he was called.

And yes, he, the formidable wizard, waited for the *witch* to surface, all pretences be damned. Our Potions master had been yearning to have the slight witch in his arms since the early morning. And since early morning he had tried to deny this control-consuming yearning.

However, for the last few hours the desire for the witch had been so overwhelming that it overruled everything in its way and forced our wizard to submit. Severus was so eager to feel Hermione quivering in ecstasy beneath him that there was no room in his mind for any other thoughts. He had dreamt about it for the whole bloody week, for Merlin's sake.

In other words, he needed the witch, and he needed her now! The talks about her political moves and other proprieties would have to wait!

Naturally, the moment Severus heard the roar of the Floo and saw her soft womanly silhouette in the green flames, he urgently rose and in one wide stride covered the distance between him and the fireplace. The next instant he had his arms full of one warm, curvy and oh-so-responsive Hermione Granger. Not wasting any time on preambles, greetings and other nonsense, our wizard, desperately hungry for the witch, found her lips and possessed them fully and irrevocably. The young lioness, pleasantly surprised by her lover's eagerness, reciprocated with the same vigour.

Very soon they both were breathless, and Severus' lips moved onto the sensitive skin behind Hermione's ear, growling into her hair, "I missed you, witch. I need you, now! Are you ready for me? We need to get you ready for me..." The hoarse murmur caused the young witch to shudder in anticipation. The quick and nimble fingers of her lover already had begun to open her robes, with his warm mouth closely following the path created by them.

What about the bedroom, you ask, my friends. Not this time. Severus didn't even consider moving anywhere. No, he intended to take her right there on the rug, in front of the fireplace, and Hermione, overpowered by his passion as well as her own, allowed him to do so.

The moan lodged in the wizard's throat when the witch's robes slid down, leaving her only in whisper-pink lingerie. Reluctantly, the wizard willed himself to step back and disrobe, his onyx eyes smouldering and burning her skin with fervent heat in them.

Then, a millisecond later, he was all over his witch again. Knickers and bra were gone in one flick of his fingers. The wizard needed skin on skin contact immediately, with no lingerie in the way.

Of course, my darlings, the lioness, the passionate, fiery witch didn't stand and wait. She was all over her wizard as well kissing, biting, probing and stroking. Their mutual desire was all consuming and unstoppable. There were no borders for their mouths and tongues. Hot, greedy caresses, jerky movements, ragged breathing, throaty cries and groans paved their road to consummation and release.

When the wizard's long fingers found their way to the young witch's welcoming, moist heat and he concluded that she was indeed quite ready for him, he gently lowered her onto the rug. The witch's creamy thighs fell open, allowing him to see her luscious core.

"Mmm," groaned Severus at the sight, and the next instant he was inside of her. Hermione arched her back in ecstasy, and the witch's rapturous mewl showed approval of her lover's actions better than any words. Hermione's long legs wrapped themselves around his waist, urging him to move. He began his thrusts and strokes, already feeling a tingling of his impending climax and fiercely fighting it.

I won't be quick. No. No!

Alas, moans and cries of the eager witch beneath him forced him to go deeper, faster, stronger. "Too much, witch!" Severus moaned between his rapid breaths, trying to hold his orgasm and to wait for her. But, the witch felt just too exquisite, too tight, too hot around him the wizard had no strength left to hold his release any longer. He pleaded, "Please, witch, come, come for me!" His fingers found and fondled her tender flesh between them desperately.

"Fuck! Come! Now!"

She did. Thank God. Good girl.

Act Two Jealousy

Ten minutes later, they were still on the rug and still breathless. The witch was resting on his chest, and the fully sated Potions master decided that the time was right to show his caring for her. Thus, lazily smoothing Hermione's springy curls, Severus murmured, "How was your week? How did your presentation go?"

Caught off guard by his question, Hermione rose on her elbow, and her amber eyes gazed into Severus' black ones with amazement and even a hint of doubt. For a few seconds, she studied the wizard's facial expression, looking for any signs of sneering or mocking.

Eventually, she relaxed, put her curly head on Severus' chest again and replied, "It was a disaster."

Now, it was Severus' turn for wondering. "Why, Hermione?" he asked.

The Gryffindor princess shifted, turned her face to him, put her chin sweetly on her arm and continued, "Nobody came, almost nobody. I can't understand it. Why? I worked so hard and hoped for a better reception, for more interest. It is a good initiative. Truly. Harry and I, we were planning and thinking ... Now, he is gone and I am such a loser. It was an epic failure, Severus, horrible." And the curly-haired witch proceeded to tell the story about the room number seven, the only eight attendees, the Minister and Lucius Malfoy in detail.

At first, Severus listened calmly. However, when the story came to Kingsley's comment and Hermione stopped to draw a heavy sigh, he looked into her eyes and noticed that they had a glint in them that Severus didn't particularly like the witch was on the verge of tears. Our wizard tensed; he did not like crying witches he had no idea what to do with them. *Shit.*

Moreover, his own reaction began to stir inside him and tried to emerge. What the heck was Shackbolt aiming for with his ridiculous statement? Severus' arms unconsciously tightened around the witch's soft curves. Our Potions master remembered all too well how the Minister had circled around her at the ball.

"Fool," muttered Severus, recognising a bitter, acid taste of suspicion in his mouth.

Hermione looked at him thoughtfully and said, "I don't know, Severus. I hope so. I need to know more about politics. I have the second presentation in two weeks, and I have to be prepared. Maybe Lucius really can help me," she whispered.

Sure enough, the moment Lucius' name escaped from Hermione' lips, even in the whisper, Severus' insides began to burn.

"Lucius? What has Lucius to do with your presentation?" he growled.

I know, my dear ones, you can already predict what happened next. The fire-breathing dragon of jealousy that brought our lovers together in the first place was awakened once more. This time, however, its fire could easily ruin the fragile understanding between our lovers. And we, my friends, may only hope for the best.

With a chill in his voice, Severus demanded a detailed explanation of what exactly Lucius had proposed. He also insisted on knowing why he was there and why Hermione agreed to the blond wizard's proposal. In a matter of minutes, the caring and soothing moments between two lovers metamorphosed into a full-blown interrogation.

Severus was barking his questions at Hermione, and she was trying her best to answer calmly. They were not on the rug anymore, of course, and both lovers were hectically putting their clothes back on while still talking. With true Gryffindor stubbornness she explained to him that Lucius had come to her presentation as a politician, and that the blond wizard was the only one who offered assistance, giving her at least some hope of success.

Severus, of course, didn't believe it even for a second. He saw Lucius' reactions to Hermione. He now recalled the compromising position he had found them in at the Leaky Cauldron the week before. He was trying, truly trying to be civil, but Hermione's replies only fed his fire further.

"If you remember, Severus, I told you about my plans last Sunday. You weren't interested at that time. Well, at least Lucius is interested enough to help me."

At this point, Severus stopped, his jaws clenched, his eyes focused on the witch. He knew he must not let his anger get the better of him. He knew he did not have the right to be jealous, and yet he couldn't stop himself. The raging, tempestuous fury was suffocating him. He couldn't breathe. His need to throw it all at her was as forceful as his need to be inside of her a short while ago.

"So, what is this all about the spotlight, popularity? Tell me, Hermione, is that why you didn't marry Weasley? Was it too boring for you to dedicate your time to the family, to one man? You looked quite cosy with Lucius in the Leaky Cauldron last Friday. Did it start there? Did you agree to his proposal then?" This was a total bluff, and Severus recognised it the moment he said it. Nevertheless, it seemed fitting for the situation.

"I never suspected that you were vain, Hermione. Are you really so hungry for fame? Or maybe you just like to have another man on a back burner. Tell me, witch, do you?"

Do you sleep with him as well? And he helps you with your little project in return. How nice. Am I your weekend lover and he's there for your weekdays?"

Dreadful silence hung between them. He had gone too far again, and he knew it. They were both fully clothed by now and standing in front of each other. Hermione's breath dangerously hitched, and the fire in her eyes forced Severus to instinctively reach for his wand. The next moment she slapped him. Hard.

"You, Severus Snape, have no right to treat me like that. I will not put up with this. You can shove your stupid jealousy right up your arse. I do not care. I will not put a hold on my career because of you and your moronic behaviour. You know where to find me if you have something to say for yourself."

And before Severus could utter his answering roar, Hermione was gone.

So much for expressing feelings, I would say.

Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock.