

Liquid Love

by phoenix

SexGod!Snape Challenge response. Severus fails to perform and decides to turn to potions to restore his virility. How does his unwitting victim respond?

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 4

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A/N: Here is my answer to the SexGod!Snape Challenge. I'm not a SS/HG shipper at all, but this idea was just too rich to pass up. Thanks to Southern_Witch_69 and PlaidPooka for issuing this one. Now, just don't expect me to write much more SS/HG. Many thanks to Giton and nota for reading through this giving me encouragement and beta reading.

Chapter 1

Severus walked home, upset at his failure to perform, again. He had even requested a different woman, in case he was tiring of Eve. That had not been the problem. He had still been unable to perform. Noticing a dustbin set out for collection, he gave it a swift kick and immediately regretted that decision due to the sharp stab of pain in his foot.

Limping down the street to an area from which he could Apparate, he tried to determine why he was having such difficulty. He was only in his mid-forties and should be in the prime of his life. Perhaps job stress was affecting his performance. After all, he had only recently taken over as Head of Potions Research for the Ministry, and his predecessor had been incredibly inefficient. The other researchers were having a hard time adjusting to his standards, and some of them were being quite vocal about their dislike of the new policies.

By the time he arrived home, the pain in his foot was beginning to dissipate. Somewhere in his vast library, he had to have a solution. Unfortunately, he had never paid much attention to aphrodisiac potions other than the few his Death Eater friends had requested. He knew that none of those would suit his purposes. Pulling a few likely candidates off the shelf, he poured a generous serving of Firewhisky and sat in his chair by the fire.

In the third book, he found a likely candidate. This was no mere potion to increase erection longevity; this was a potion that would enhance male virility. After all, if one could not achieve an erection, there was no longevity to extend. Unfortunately, the exact effects of the potion were not well described. It mentioned increasing attractiveness to women and sexual performance, but no specifics on what exactly that meant. Even so, there was something about it that intrigued him. It would take several days to brew this rather complex potion. He resolved to start on the potion the following day. It would take most of the day for the base to be ready, but once that was done, he would be able to complete the potion after normal work hours.

Thursday night, he finished the potion and examined the small phial that remained after the distilling process. It didn't look like much. It was a rather lurid shade of pink, but he would not let that dissuade him. He had put far too much work into this potion not to take it.

Staring at the small phial, he tried to determine what to do with it. He could return to his usual brothel, but why risk further embarrassment with the girls? And if the potion worked, why waste something so special on someone so ordinary? No, he needed to go somewhere else. Be with someone else. Someone who would not speak of their encounter.

Grinning lasciviously, he had the perfect candidate. Someone who he knew was secretly infatuated with him, but would never admit her crush to anyone.

As he changed for bed, he placed the phial in his pocket, ensuring he would remember to take it to work with him.

It was late. Very late. He knew that the laboratory should be deserted except for one. Few people were willing to work late on a Friday. He was one.

Leaving his office, he walked down the hall, hoping to find the light coming from her lab. From the cracked door, he could indeed see a sliver of light. As he had expected, she was working late. Pulling the phial from his pocket, he downed the contents. Belatedly, he realized he should have returned to his office to take the potion, as he was unsure of what effects it would have.

Thankfully, all he felt was a minor tingling. There was no dizziness or loss of consciousness. He quickly patted himself down, making sure that nothing was amiss. He felt...not quite normal, but well enough. Slowly, he approached her door.

Just as she did most nights, Hermione was working late. It was easy for her to get lost in her research. It was all so very interesting and the facilities were amazing. The Ministry had spared no expense.

She was so engrossed in her work that she jumped when she heard a seductive voice whisper, "Hermione."

She turned and was completely shocked to see Severus flashing her a charming grin and leaning casually against the worktable. Though he looked somehow different. His nose was not quite as pronounced, hair looking soft and silky, teeth less yellow, somehow manlier. "Severus, you startled me."

He reached for her hair. "That was not my intent."

She could feel her pulse racing at his touch. "Wh-what are you still doing here?"

He took the bottle out of her hand and set it on the table. "Like you, I was working late. Though it is far too late to continue working. Join me for a drink." It was a command, not a request.

She backed up as he moved closer to her. There was definitely something different about him, something irresistible. "All right. One drink." She tried to sound as commanding as he had, but she knew she had failed.

He took her to a club that not only served drinks, but also provided music and a dance floor. She never got that drink because he took her straight to where several other couples were already moving in time to the beat. This type of music didn't seem to suit him, but he appeared perfectly comfortable dancing to it. At first, they started off at arms length, but she rather quickly found herself in his arms and enjoying the seductive dance. A small voice in the back of her mind told her this was wrong, but since it couldn't provide her a reason why, she was inclined to ignore it.

He was so incredibly sexy that she found she couldn't keep her hands off of him. As he pressed against her, there was no mistaking the way he felt about her. This was a dream come true. As he rubbed against her, she could feel the throbbing between her legs. She wanted him, needed him. Deciding to let him know how she felt, she wrapped her leg around him and rubbed her inner thigh against his. At the same time, she rubbed the front of his robes, stroking his erection, feeling it throb at her touch.

She didn't even realize that they were near the edge of the dance floor until she found herself pressed against a wall, hidden in shadow. He captured her mouth in his, probing deeply. At the same time he slid his hand into her robe and under her knickers.

When he finally broke contact, he whispered huskily, "You want that, too, don't you?"

She could see the lust in his eyes and imagined it was mirrored in her own. She had never wanted anything so badly. "Yes," she whispered back.

He pulled his hand from under her robe and seductively sucked on his fingers. "You taste...sweet."

The man was so sexy; she thought she would go mad if he didn't take her. She unfastened the front of his robe and stroked his throbbing manhood. It was so big and powerful, and she longed to feel it filling her. Pulling up her robe, she jumped into his arms, wrapping her legs around him. "Fuck me!" As he pushed her further against the wall and adjusted her so that he could thrust into her, she dug her fingers into his back encouraging him to continue. As he thrust into her, she cried out in surprise at how completely he filled her. He started to pull away at her cry, but she clung tight. "Don't stop."

Holding her against the wall, he continued his thrusting. He captured her mouth in his as she started to moan.

Hermione could feel her climax coming. Never before had she come so quickly, but he filled her so completely, and the position was very stimulating, the setting so exciting. Using her legs, she tried to pull him deeper inside, reveling in the fullness. When the climax washed over her, she had to break away from his kiss in order to come up for air. As it was, she was already feeling lightheaded. When the shuddering stopped, she slumped against him, panting heavily.

"Would you like to go somewhere more private?" he asked.

Hoping that she could experience more of the same, she replied, "Yes." He escorted her from the club and back to his flat, having long since moved out of Spinner's End.

Once they were inside, they began tearing each other's clothes off. He led her to the bedroom, eager to experiment with her and see how long the potion would last. Normally he was drained after climaxing, but this time it had only served to energize him.

Placing her on the bed, he decided he needed yet another taste of her. She needed to be pleased by a real man. Nibbling his way down from her lips, he stopped to tease her nipples, eliciting moans of desire that only aroused him further. This was even better than he had imagined. He had anticipated her being more reserved vocally.

Using his fingers he parted her folds and teased her nub. She bucked against his touch, fingers grasping the sheets tightly. "Oh, Severus," she moaned.

That was a sound he thought he could get used to. Yes, Little Miss Know-It-All was proving to be quite the entertaining lover. He had always liked them loud.

Deciding he could not wait any longer, he moved further down her body, situating himself so that he could taste her very essence. At first he gave a few quick, teasing flicks of his tongue, judging her reaction. Pleased, he licked the outside of her clit before parting the folds with his tongue and sucking deeply.

She continued to moan and writhe at his ministrations, completely at his mercy.

"Oh, Severus," she moaned again, lacing her fingers in his hair. She tried to pull him up. "I'm so close. Take me."

Her cries became more pleading, begging him to take her, but he wanted her to climax at his command, and in the manner he wished. He wanted to taste her more fully first. When her climax was imminent, she raised her hips to give him better access. Slipping two fingers inside her, he could hear her breathing turning to loud panting.

"Yes, yes. Deeper. Severus. Oh, Severus!" she cried out. She stiffened for a few seconds and then collapsed to the bed.

He slid next to her. "How was that?"

Still panting, she murmured, "Marvelous. But I still want to feel you inside me, filling me. Take me again, oh please!"

He grinned at her. That potion was definitely a success. "As you wish." Positioning himself over her, he swiftly plunged deeply into her and then withdrew slowly. From the look on her face, he knew that she was enjoying this.

"Deeper," she urged.

She was still very tight, and it felt wonderful. He could almost have sworn she was a virgin. As he repeatedly thrust into her, he could feel her inner muscles clenching him, trying to draw him further and further inside. Slipping a pillow under her hips, he positioned her so that he might fulfill her desires. Wanting to prolong the encounter, he slowed his pace, adding a circular movement of his hips.

She moaned even more loudly and grabbed his ass, trying to pull him deeper still. This was turning into the best evening ever. Deciding he had teased her enough, he began thrusting deeply and vigorously, spurred on by her tight grip and encouraging cries until he finally felt his release.

"By Merlin, you're insatiable," she exclaimed

Brushing her sweat soaked hair out of her face, he replied in a husky voice, "You have no idea." So far, he was quite pleased with the potion's performance. It was far beyond his expectations. Normally, he would have been exhausted long before this, but now he felt as though he could keep going all night long. Leaning down, he suckled on her nipple once more, eager to see if her stamina could match his.

The following morning, Severus woke feeling groggy and somewhat hungover. As he stirred, he realized that his arm was wrapped around someone. Let it be a woman. Shifting slightly in an attempt to extricate himself, he caused her to roll over and wrap her arm around him. Seeing that it was Hermione, his memories came back to him. "Hermione," he whispered softly.

She replied with a questioning hum.

"I think you should get up."

"A few more minutes, this feels so nice."

"Hermione, you shouldn't be here." He hadn't anticipated that she would stay the entire night. He had planned on a quick shag, and then he would send her on her way. Instead, he had brought her back to his place, and they had gone on until late into the night. When she had finally collapsed from exhaustion, he had let her nap for an hour before waking her for yet another round. He wasn't even sure what time it was now, but it was definitely past time for her to go.

She finally opened her eyes and realized where she was. "Severus?" She pulled back in shock and wrapped the sheet around her, leaving him fully exposed. Quickly, she turned her back on him and began looking for her clothes. "What the bloody hell happened?"

Deciding that she would probably not like the truth, he lied. "I don't know. It must have been the stress."

Realizing her clothes weren't in the bedroom, she went searching for them. "Oh, gods, this is all wrong, all wrong. What's Ron going to say? What am I going to tell him? I can't believe we did this."

He followed her into the living room, not bothering to cover himself. "I think it would be best if he didn't know."

"Of course it would be best, but I can't lie to my husband."

"Why not?"

"Because you just don't do that in a marriage, that's why not." Having picked up her clothes, she turned to face him and was startled to see him naked. "Would you put some clothes on?" She then hurried to the bath, where she promptly locked the door to shower.

Once she was dressed, she reemerged from the bathroom. She was dismayed to find him lounging on the bed, still nude. Unable to meet his gaze, she focused on the mirror and ensuring her hair was tamed. "We can never speak of this again. Last night never happened." She still wasn't sure how she had let it happen.

He moved behind her and caressed her arm. "That's rather harsh, isn't it? You really seemed to enjoy yourself last night. I never knew you harbored such fantasies about me."

She did, but she had always hoped she had kept that hidden. Over the years, she had become quite intrigued by what was hidden underneath his billowing black robes, though it was something she knew she would never act on. Her fascination had developed as a student, watching him work with potions in his meticulous manner, his long, graceful fingers performing magic over the brews. But as a student, she knew it was just a childish fascination. Five years ago, when he had come to work at the Ministry, that fascination had been rekindled, but by then she was married to Ron, and again, it was something she could not act on. Something had brought those fantasies bubbling back to the surface last night. "That's beside the point. Fine. It happened, but it's not going to happen again.

"Do you really believe that? You would not have been so eager just a few hours ago if your marriage wasn't missing something," he purred seductively as he nuzzled her neck.

Spinning around to look into his eyes, she had a hard time believing this was the same man who had routinely belittled her as a student and then resolutely ignored her as a coworker. Last night in her lab, she had thought that he somehow looked different, and she had been right. Gone were the greasy hair and yellow teeth. And he oozed sexual confidence; though, given his performance last night, she wasn't surprised. He still wasn't handsome, but she nevertheless felt herself inexorably drawn to him.

Pulling her body against his, he asked, "How long have you felt this way?"

"Since fifth year."

"That long? Then why Weasley?"

"You... We thought... I didn't know." She found there was no good way to discuss his presumed betrayal.

"And now?"

"By the time I knew, it was too late." She couldn't keep the disappointment out of her voice. If only she had waited. But everyone had been so caught up in surviving the war. It had seemed only natural to marry Ron.

"It's not too late."

"But I'm married," she protested, though not as forcefully as she had before.

He chuckled softly. "Come now. Does that really matter? Would you really give up what we shared last night for something so trivial?"

Not wanting to think about her transgression any longer or listen to him trying to convince her to make this a more permanent arrangement, she blurted out, "I really have to go." Already, she was trying to think of what she would tell Ron as she rushed out the door.

He couldn't suppress the self-satisfied grin. She was one of the few witches out there who was his intellectual equal, and he had always found that alluring. It didn't hurt that she wasn't bad looking. She might not have been a classic beauty, but then again, neither was he. This could be quite the beneficial arrangement; she just didn't realize it yet.

After taking a shower, he pulled the book back off the shelf, wanting to see if he had missed anything about the effects of the potion. Her reaction had been so much more than he had anticipated. Not that he was going to complain. Recalling the way she had looked at him before she left, he wondered how long it lasted. Even though she wanted to leave, he could tell that if he had pushed a little harder, he could have got her to return to the bed. Grinning deviously, he thought it could make Monday morning that much more interesting. He would have to test his theory that the potion lasted longer than a few hours.

Even thumbing through the entire book, he could find no other reference to the potion and what its particular effects might be. While it had been a difficult potion to brew, in his mind, the results were well worth the effort. The only question was when he would brew it again.

Hermione wasn't sure how she was going to handle going back to work. When she had arrived home Saturday morning, she had met Ron at the door just as he was on his way to pre-game practice for Quidditch, and he had seemed to find her explanation that she had been working through the night on a project completely plausible. Then, after being hit by a Bludger, he spent that night at St. Mungo's, which gave her one more day to come to terms with what had happened, and how best to handle it.

Even after she brought him home, he was still suffering the effects of his concussion and didn't even seem to notice that she was acting at the least bit strangely. He was actually more preoccupied with the loss his team had suffered due to his injury. She was thankful for this small miracle. Normally, she hated listening to him rail about Quidditch, but this was better than him asking her further questions about her late night.

Now she was faced with having to go to work, having to see Snape again. He held staff meetings every Monday morning, and since she was the acting head of her research division, she would have to attend that bloody meeting. She had no idea how she could face him after what they had done.

Realizing she would be late if she didn't leave soon, she pulled on her cloak and gave Ron a peck on the cheek. "I'll try to be home on time."

"See you this evening," he said between mouthfuls.

When she arrived at work, she went to her desk and collected her notes and the weekly reports. It took her most of the hour before the weekly meeting to organize everything. This was not like her. Normally, it would have taken her less than half that time, but she had a hard time concentrating on her task, distracted by thoughts of how she would handle being in the same room with Severus.

She was the last one to enter the room, which exiled her to the chair closest to his, something she had not prepared herself for. Deciding to focus her attention on taking notes, she refused to look up when he entered the room.

As soon he started speaking, she began to feel her pulse racing. It had been a long time since his rich baritone had done that to her. Every time he spoke she found herself listening to the voice and not the words. It took all her self control not to look up at him. Thankfully, most of the meeting was spent taking reports from the others. She only realized it was her turn when Ted Warner kicked her under the table. Without lifting her eyes from her papers, she gave her report, trying to keep the nervousness out of her voice, but failing miserably. Thankfully, he didn't ask her any questions.

When he passed out new work assignments, she found it very difficult to concentrate.

"If there are no further questions, that concludes the meeting," he finally said.

Hermione was relieved. Once she was out of this office, she could avoid him for the rest of the week, sending him reports by memo rather than in person. She was dismayed when he addressed her.

"Weasley, remain behind. I have additional questions for you."

She sat nervously and waited for the room to empty. This was the last place that she wanted to be.

Approaching her from behind, he leaned forward and whispered into her ear, "Is something bothering you, Hermione?"

She inhaled deeply at the seductive sound of his voice. How many times had she imagined him using her first name? Far too many. Against her better judgment, she turned to look at him. The black depths of his eyes engulfed her. The feelings she had spent the weekend trying to suppress came rushing right back up to the surface. "I, er..."

"Is there something you wanted to say?" he asked as he leaned closer to her.

There had been, but this close to him, she found her body remembering how it had felt to be with him, and she wanted nothing more than to feel that way again. He was so close; all she had to do was lean just a little bit closer.

The next thing she knew, she had jumped into his arms and was delving deeply into his mouth with her tongue. She was breathless when she broke the kiss and was pleased to see the slight look of shock on his face.

He regained his composure quickly. "Am I to assume you have changed your mind about our arrangement?"

She answered his question by locking the door with a flick of her wand and shoving him backwards onto his desk.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 4

Severus's love potion was a smashing success, far more effective than he could have hoped. Will it be responsible for a positive change in his life?

A/N: Okay, folks, at long last, I have finally started the continuation of this story. Whereas Chapter 1 was pretty much straight PWP, this chapter, and the rest of the story, take a bit of a more serious turn. After all, it's hard to do a multi-chaptered story that doesn't have a plot. So, I hope you will excuse the abrupt change to some seriousness.

Chapter 2

Severus was amazed by the longevity of the potion. Most lust potions lasted only a few hours; the effects of this one had already lasted several days. He knew that searching through the book again for more information would be a waste of time. But what would he do when the potion wore off? Had Hermione Weasley's declaration of the crush she'd had on him for the last decade been the truth, or had it only been the potion? For a brief moment, he considered confessing to her what had happened, but quickly decided that it would accomplish nothing useful.

Severus thought that the potion might be something he could market once he had more thoroughly deciphered its properties. For now, he had only tested it on one witch. That was not a large enough sample group to establish its commercial possibilities. There was always a segment of wizarding society searching for the next lust potion, and he had provided several of those in the past. This one was definitely better than any he had brewed for his acquaintances before, and as such, he anticipated that he would be able to charge significantly more. This potion might prove most beneficial in more way than one.

In order to test its effectiveness, he had stopped by a pub on the way home and had flirted with some of the women. They had all given him the usual cold reception. He wished he could observe Hermione to see if the effects had worn off during the day. But she had been avoiding him of late. Unfortunately, there was no way that he would see her now before tomorrow morning.

When he arrived at work the next morning, he casually searched for Hermione. Unfortunately, she was already in her lab working with the other members of her department. She had been very successful at not being found alone the last few days. He needed to see her privately.

After lunch, he found his opportunity. She had gone alone to the secure storeroom.

As she turned to leave, she almost ran into him. "Oh, Severus. You startled me."

"That was not my intention. I was coming to retrieve some Boomslang skin," he said softly while he tried to judge her reaction. "I have not seen much of you this week. I would almost think that you are avoiding me."

"No. I haven't been avoiding you," she replied nervously. "We've had a lot of work to do, that's all."

"Is that all? I thought that perhaps you might be having... regrets." He moved closer to her, forcing her back into the room.

"Er, no, no regrets. I just think that perhaps that it's not something we should repeat. You know, me being married and all."

"Of course," he replied as he leaned closer to her.

She seemed about to kiss him. Then suddenly she slipped under his arm. "If you'll excuse me. The potion we're working on is quite time sensitive."

He watched her leave the room. He was disappointed, but the meeting had not been a total failure. He thought now that she did harbor some feelings for him, and moreover, that she was willing to act on them. Whether it was the potion or just her realizing how she truly felt about him, he did not know. This was something he definitely wanted to explore. Having had a taste of her, he found that he only wanted more.

It was disquieting that the potion seemed to work only on her. Clearly, further testing was in order. He would have to take a fresh dose of the potion before he headed out to a bar this weekend to conduct another test. After that test, he would have to consider recruiting others to test this potion, but he had no idea whom.

Hermione had been able to avoid Severus most of the rest of the week. She still wasn't sure what had caused her to give in to her buried emotions lately. She had been nervous about working with him when she had first learned he would be her new boss. Mostly because she remembered how she had been treated when she was his student, but also due to her feelings for him.

At the end of the war, she had been one of the first to support his innocence, along with McGonagall. In time, Harry and Ron had grudgingly accepted his innocence, though neither was pleased when the Ministry named Snape Head of Potions Research.

Even with her actively avoiding Severus, she could not completely eliminate contact with him, and when she found herself in the same room with him, she could feel her pulse begin to race. Being with him was far different from being with Ron, far more passionate.

Shaking her head, she tried to clear those thoughts. She couldn't think about that sort of thing as she made her way home. She already thought about Severus far more often than she should. She had made her choice, and she was happy with that. Wasn't she?

Not wanting to think on it any longer, she quickly straightened up her lab and slipped out of the building before anyone could notice.

She was quite surprised when she arrived to a dark house. Ron was always home from practice by this time. Checking the owl perch, she saw that it was deserted and that no letter had been left for her. If Ron had been injured, they would have notified her. Since it was after dark, they couldn't still be practicing. It just wasn't like him to be this late. Of course, she was rarely home quite this early, but at least she always had a good reason for coming home late.

Finally, she heard the door open. "Where have you been?" she demanded.

"Hermione?" replied a very startled Ron. "What are you doing home?"

"I do live here, you know."

"I know that. I just wasn't expecting you home so early, that's all," he stammered.

She couldn't help the slightly suspicious feeling that his words caused. "Did you get hit with a Bludger again?"

"No. Nothing like that, though we will be practicing longer hours because of the upcoming match with the Harpies."

"Oh, right, that's next week, isn't it?" She had been hoping to spend some more time with him, to try to work through her feelings of guilt and to try to get Severus out of her mind.

"In fact, I have to be in early tomorrow, and I probably won't be home before dinner, but you were going to work anyway, weren't you?"

"I hadn't decided. My current project is coming along well and needs some simmer time this weekend. I thought...we might find some time together this weekend."

"I'm sorry, honey. This just isn't a good weekend for me. We have to have a really good showing in this match to have a chance at the championship. You understand. Weekend after next I should have some time off. How about then?"

She wanted to be upset with him, but he had such a cute boyish grin, and she found it impossible. She really didn't want to wait that long before they could really discuss

what was happening, how they seemed to be growing apart. "Why not that Sunday and Monday after the match? I can take the day off; I have plenty of leave on the books."

"Uh, sure, that sounds great," he replied.

From the tone of his voice, she had the impression that he did think it was great. She was finally realizing that maybe she didn't really know Ron as well as she once thought, no, knew she had. Somehow they had grown apart over the last year or so, and she hadn't even noticed it happening. Until now.

"That was a good practice," Cliodna Reilly said as they walked back to the locker room together.

Ron thought her voice was musical and the loveliest sound he had ever heard. She was the new Chaser on the team, recently acquired in a trade, and she had stayed late, wanting to practice on their pitch to get used to the field before next week's game. Watching her fly, he didn't see that she needed practice at anything. The broom was part of her, and she made everything look effortless. It had been very hard for him to concentrate on blocking her goals, but he had done his best because he wanted to impress her. "It really was, wasn't it? I don't think the Harpies have a chance."

Circling his right arm, he tried to work out a kink that had resulted from him over-extending himself in what he thought was a rather spectacular save.

"You alright?" she asked.

"Yeah, I'll be fine. It's just a touch sore, that's all."

"Well, we can't have that for our Keeper." By now they were in the locker room. "Here. Lie down on the table and let me work that out for you. I'll need you to take your shirt off."

"Maybe I should wait for the trainer," he said skeptically.

"We both know that if you sleep on it, it'll be worse tomorrow. This won't take long."

Slowly, he took his shirt off, nervous about what she would think of his body. He found her incredibly attractive, even though he knew he shouldn't think about her that way. But Hermione basically ignored him, burying herself in her work. The appraising glance she gave him before he stretched out on the table did not go unnoticed.

She started rubbing his shoulder, and he had to admit that she had a wonderful touch. "That feels really good," he muttered as he started entering a state of relaxation.

"You should be good as new tomorrow. You do have a lot of knots," she said as she started moving her hands across his back.

"Oh, Cliodna, that feels so good," he moaned.

"It's good to see you relax. You should do that more often."

"Easier said than done," he replied, trying not to think about his life away from the pitch. Of course, having a beautiful woman giving him a massage helped him with that.

After several minutes, she leaned down and whispered to him, "How does that feel?"

Reaching up to keep her from moving away, he replied, "Fantastic." Looking into her eyes, he could see the same desire there that he knew was mirrored in his eyes. When he pulled her close for a kiss, she didn't resist.

Soon, they were both on the table, wrapped in each other's arms and giving in to their passions.

Severus paced the work area at his house. He had run several tests on the potion, trying to determine how the individual components had combined to provide such a singular reaction.

What was even more perplexing was that even after taking a fresh dose of the potion, none of the women he had approached last night had been remotely attracted to him. It seemed more and more plausible that this potion really did react only with one person. Now, the question was: why?

Did it have something to do with the unrequited love that he and Hermione shared, or was it because she was the first woman he had come across? There was a possibility that he was still feeling the effect of his first dose since he had no idea how long it was effective. He was beginning to regret using this unknown potion, but desperation could do strange things to a person.

Of course, he had no idea how to proceed. He had never had much luck with women, let alone one who was married, though he seriously suspected that this was a marriage in name only at this point. But she did not seem willing to admit it. He would have to work to convince her that she was better off without Weasley. Or perhaps that she would be better off with him, but he would have to be careful about how he went about this. It would not be fitting for him to actively woo her.

Hermione slammed the jar of lacewing flies on the counter. The intimate weekend she had hoped to have with Ron had been completely ruined. The Cannons had won and had promptly gone to the Leaky Cauldron to celebrate. Unfortunately, some of the Harpy fans had not taken it well, and a brawl had broken out.

While Ron's injuries had been superficial and quickly healed, Hermione was furious that she had been forced to bail him out of gaol. She hadn't said anything to him when he had been brought before her. Instead, she had turned her back on him and stormed out of the gaol.

He had followed her home, but his apology had not been sincere. He could have just had the good sense to apologize for embarrassing her. Instead, he had chosen to make the excuse that he had been forced to defend the team's honor. A part of her had not been surprised to learn that he had actually played a major part in instigating the brawl. Rather than listen to his pathetic excuses any longer, she had retreated to her lab.

Closing her eyes and taking a few deep breaths, she tried to regain her composure. She needed a steady hand and a clear mind to work on her potion, and right now, she had neither.

"Is there something I can assist you with?" came a smooth, familiar voice from behind her.

She cursed herself for not checking to make sure she was alone in the building. "No," she said sharply, before adding more softly, "thank you."

"My apologies for my intrusion, but I heard a commotion and came to investigate. I wanted to make sure that we didn't have a poltergeist or some other menace haunting the building."

"No, just me."

He moved further into the room. Standing close, but not too close, to her. "I would hardly consider you a menace," he said smoothly.

She locked eyes with his and found that she could not look away from their black depths. The feelings that she had been trying to hide started rushing back to the surface. Drawing on her anger towards Ron to overpower the stirrings of lust, she demanded, "Is there something you wanted?"

He examined several of the ingredients she had assembled for her potion. "I notice that you are working with some volatile ingredients. I think it would be best if you calmed down before proceeding with your work. I have some brandy in my office that would help you relax."

She most definitely did not trust herself to be alone with him. Especially not if alcohol was involved. "I don't think that would be appropriate."

"Then perhaps lunch at the Leaky Cauldron?"

It took her several seconds to answer. She wanted to be with him, but she didn't trust herself to be alone with him. The Leaky Cauldron was a public place, and if they confined their discussion to professional topics, no one would think anything of the two of them being seen together. She was still trying to determine why now, of all times, she had been struck by such a rush of emotion while around him, a rush that she had not felt since sixth year. "All right. I do have some ideas about the potion I'm working on that I would like to run by you."

He gave her a small smile. "I would be honored."

Lunch with Severus was not as bad as she had feared it might be. They had started out discussing her potion, but soon the conversation had turned to the reason why she was so upset. Of course, the fact it was right on the brawl was immortalized on front page of the *Daily Prophet*, with Ron prominently featured, hadn't helped. Had it not been for that, she would never have discussed it at all, but once she started talking about Ron's behavior, it was as if the floodgates had opened and could not be shut again until the pressure was relieved.

Severus was surprisingly sympathetic and non-judgmental. Something about his behavior bothered her, but she couldn't say exactly what it was. She did remind herself that when she had been at Hogwarts, he had not been her head of house, and she had actually befriended the son of his childhood nemesis. Surely, he would have provided some extracurricular mentoring to the Slytherins much as McGonagall had done for the Gryffindors. And his actions in the war had proven that he wasn't all bad. She had just never taken the time to notice this side of him. For a moment, she wondered how different things would be if only she had.

Severus had not been surprised when she had turned down the offer to go to his office. He had actually been pleasantly surprised that she had accepted his invitation to lunch. Now, he could really get to know her, find her weaknesses and most importantly, find out what she saw in Weasley.

It had been much easier than he had anticipated to get her to open up about Weasley. Of course, he had the *Daily Prophet* to thank for that. And *Witch Weekly*. All the hours he had spent reading articles trying to understand women were finally paying off. It was beyond him why more wizards did not read that periodical. He knew that witches liked a wizard who would bother to show interest in them, ask what was bothering them and be non-judgmental. He was also careful not to overtly place the blame on Weasley; he didn't want her becoming defensive. Instead, he was calm and sympathetic, reiterated her strong points, made her feel attractive.

Casually, he moved his leg under the table until it came to rest against hers. Quickly, he pulled it back. "I'm sorry."

"No, it's all right. I suppose we have been sitting here for a long time. I could use to stretch my legs, too."

Not wanting to lose the momentum he had with her, he said, "We could finish our discussion by taking a walk in the park. That way, no one would overhear you." He locked eyes with her, trying to gauge her reaction to his request.

"Sure."

He quickly paid for their meals and led the way out the door. There was a small park down the road that would afford them some privacy. Of course, it was a Muggle park, which meant that the chances of a wizard overhearing them were even smaller here.

He continued to provide her reassurance and comfort, asking questions meant to sow the seeds of doubt in her mind. The sooner she realized she was better off without Weasley, the better for him. From time to time he would casually brush against her.

When they were deep in the park, he gently pushed the discussion towards topics that she would find painful, that would require him to comfort her. He wanted to feel her in his arms again. Finally, he achieved his goal. It seemed that she was quite upset by the amount of time Weasley was spending at Quidditch practice the last few weeks. Yes, yesterday's match had been important, but even before the championship game last year, he had not been away this much.

She started sniffing to try to hold back the tears, and he handed her a handkerchief. After she took it, she dabbed her eyes a few times and then collapsed into his chest. "I don't know why I even bother. He doesn't even notice me."

Knowing it would comfort her, he wrapped his arms around her and leaned his head against her. Her scent nearly overpowered him. It was intoxicating. "Then that is his fault, not yours." He stroked her hair and tried not to be too obvious about soaking in her fragrance. After a few moments, he gently tipped her chin so that she was looking at him. "You are a beautiful young witch who deserves someone who appreciates you." Gently, he brushed a tear from her cheek with his thumb before leaning down to press his lips against hers.

It started as a relatively innocent kiss, but it soon became quite passionate, the pent up emotion from the last week breaking free. He pulled her tight, letting her know how he felt. Her hands were rubbing his back, and he was pleased.

Finally, she pushed away. "I...I think I should go," she said quietly.

"What about your experiment?"

"It can wait until Monday," she replied nervously. "Thank you for lunch." She walked down the path a ways before glancing over her shoulder at him and Disapparating.

He scowled after she left. For a moment, he thought he had once again broken through her defenses, but he had been wrong. Was the potion finally losing effectiveness? And if it was, then what would that mean for him?

After Hermione left the park, she didn't return home immediately. She wasn't ready to face Ron. Instead, she decided to pay a visit to Harry.

"Hermione? Come on in," Harry said as he recovered from his surprise. "What brings you here?"

"Can I talk to you about Ron?"

"Er, sure. Tea?" he offered as he led her into the living room.

"Thanks." Once they were settled and sipping the tea, she asked, "Harry, have you noticed Ron acting odd lately?"

"How so? I don't see that much of him anymore, you know."

"Oh? I thought that maybe he was spending more time with you, because he's not home very much lately. I thought perhaps you had gotten a break on your job."

He chuckled. "Hardly. They like to keep the new Aurors busy, but it's okay. I enjoy the work. I think it's been two weeks since I've seen Ron, not counting the Quidditch match."

"He hasn't mentioned anything odd to you lately, has he?"

"Nothing odder than normal. You know how Ron is. Is something wrong with him?" Harry asked, his voice full of concern.

"I don't know. I thought I'd grown used to him being away a lot for Quidditch, but he's been gone more than normal lately. I mean, I could understand if this was before Nationals, but it's not. They still have two matches before those start."

"Do you think he's up to something?" he asked suspiciously.

She put down her teacup and leaned back on the sofa. "I don't know. I don't know what to think anymore. He seemed surprised the other day when I was home early." She buried her head in her hands. "I tried to set up an intimate weekend for just the two of us, and he...he got into a bar fight."

Harry shifted over to the sofa and wrapped his arm around her, pulling her to him. "Do you want me to talk to him?"

"I don't know. I don't want him to think that I've set you on him."

"I can do it without letting him know what I'm on about. After all, he's been avoiding me, too."

She felt badly about pulling Harry into the middle of this when she was the one who had been unfaithful. She still wasn't sure why she had given in to her hidden feelings for Severus. If Harry found out about her behavior, she wasn't sure he would forgive her. But if she could figure out why Ron was acting so oddly, it was worth the risk. "Would you?"

"For the two of you? Anything. I'll come see you at work next week and let you know what I've found out."

"Good luck cornering him," she said sarcastically. Rising, she said, "Well, I guess I should go. I can see if he has any better apology for the fight today."

Harry gave her a hug before letting her go. "Don't worry about Ron. You know how he gets. I'm sure you two are just overreacting."

She smiled weakly. "I'm sure you're right."

When she returned home, it was oddly silent. Ron wasn't anywhere to be found, and she could feel her anger returning. He should have been waiting for her to apologize for his boorish behavior.

A/N: I did a fair bit of research on the name of Ron's new love interest, Cliodna (Klee-na) Reilly. Her name comes from the Celtic goddess of beauty and the underworld. She often took the form of a seabird and symbolized the Celtic afterlife.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 4

SexGod!Snape Challenge response. Severus fails to perform and decides to turn to potions to restore his virility. How does his unwitting victim respond?

Severus returned home and promptly kicked the dustbin across the room. After everything that had transpired, Hermione was still repressing her emotions. She still felt some loyalty to that Weasley fool even though he was ignoring and disrespecting her. There had to be a way to make her understand that she did not belong with Weasley, but with him.

Of course, given the fact she was avoiding him, this was going to be difficult to accomplish. He had to find a way to make her feel comfortable around him. Their conversation at lunch had been pleasant, and he had gotten her to lower her defenses, if only briefly.

Looking at the coffee table, he rummaged through the pile of Witch Weekly and assorted Muggle women's magazines. They had helped him get through to her this afternoon, perhaps he could avail himself of their advice again.

As he flipped through magazine after magazine, he couldn't help but marvel at how emotional and easy to manipulate women were. If only he had read these women's magazines years ago, he would likely not be in a situation where he was alone in his mid-forties. But then again, he never would have set his sights on Hermione. Now he could think of no other woman who was worthy of his attention. They others had all acted like the harlots described in these magazines.

A part of him wanted to write a letter to the editor saying that if women were so desperate for male attention, that they should act rationally, and not like helpless twits. But he knew that it would do no good.

There was a knock at his door, and it startled him. The Wards must have gone off, but he had obviously not noticed them. Quickly, he banished the magazines to his bedroom before moving to crack the door. He was met with a most unpleasant sight.

"Potter? What do you want?"

"I need to talk to you about Hermione. May I come in?"

Thankfully, his years as a double agent had taught him to conceal his emotions, but he still could not help the unsettled feeling in his stomach that Potter knew of the affair they had had. "What about her?"

"Look, I don't want to talk about it on your doorstep. Let me in."

Severus scowled at the younger man. He was loath to let Potter into his personal space. Finally, he opened the door, curiosity getting the better of him. "Be quick about it. I am in the midst of an important experiment."

"I won't be long. I don't want to be here any more than you want me here. Has she been involved in an accident at work?"

"Of course not. She is the most capable person I have working for me. Why do you ask?"

"She was acting a little odd, and I thought that perhaps something had happened at work."

"What sort of odd?"

"Nothing you'd notice, I'm sure. Thanks for your time." Potter turned to leave.

Severus wanted to stop Potter and ask more questions, but he knew that he could not. That would only draw undue attention to his feelings for her. Staring at the closed door, he tried to reason why Potter would have come to see him. Clearly, she had decided to confide something to Potter, but what?

It was obviously not the fact that she had been unfaithful to Weasley. Had that been the case, Potter would have hexed him into the next century. Perhaps she had told Potter what she had told him earlier that afternoon.

Ron hadn't cared that Hermione had been mad at him. She had never understood Quidditch, or him for that matter, and her recent behavior only reinforced that. He had always had the impression that she looked down on him for his career choice. When he had told her the Cannons had recruited him, she had cautiously asked if he was sure he wanted to do that rather than Auror training with Harry. While Ron knew he could have been an Auror, he knew that it would not have made him happy. He had had enough of chasing and fighting Dark Wizards. Yes, some might think that playing Quidditch was frivolous, but he did not care. He thought that he had earned a respite from the seriousness that had been the last few years.

Now, he had found someone who appreciated him, understood him. She was perfect for him in a way that Hermione never could be. She would never truly accept him for who he was, but Clidna did.

That was why he was standing in front of the door to her flat. He needed to be with someone he could hold an actual conversation with.

"Ron? What a pleasant surprise," she said in her musical lilt.

"I thought you might like to talk a little strategy for the upcoming match," he said, his best boyish grin on his face.

She leaned against the doorframe and smiled back at him. "Is that really why you are here?"

He took a step closer to her. "No, but I thought it sounded good." Unable to control himself any longer, he reached out and pulled her tightly against him for a kiss.

"Aren't you expected at home?"

"She's a workaholic and she doesn't miss me. On the other hand, I missed you terribly."

"Practice only ended a half an hour ago," she replied playfully, leading him into her flat.

"And what a long half-hour it's been." His couldn't keep his hands off her, wanting her out of her clothes.

"Then why do you stay with her?"

He shrugged. "I hadn't had a reason not to." He pulled her shirt over her head.

"And now?" She was fumbling with his trousers.

"Things are going to change." He gently pushed her onto the bed. "But for my mum's sake, it has to be her idea." Seeing the look of disappointment on her face, he added, "I wouldn't worry. I'm being as inconsiderate as I can, and it's frustrating her to no end. I'll be free before the season's over."

She flipped him over so that she was on top. "That's excellent news. I think we should celebrate." Slipping her hands under his shirt, she pushed it up his chest so that she could tease his nipples.

Hermione was not at all surprised to find that Ron was not at home when she returned. Feeling guilty about the passionate kiss she had shared with Severus, she decided to go and watch him practice. It was something that she rarely did, but she hoped that Ron would appreciate her small show of support.

When she arrived at the clubhouse, there was no one out on the Pitch. Checking the locker room, she also found it deserted. If Ron wasn't here and he wasn't at Harry's, where could he be?

She couldn't go back and talk to Harry about this since she had just come from there. She sighed, realizing how alone she really was. Harry and Ron had always been her closest friends, and without them, she found she had no one to confide in.

There was always Severus; he understood her, but she wasn't sure she trusted herself to be alone with him, not with the way she had felt when she had left him.

Once again, she found herself missing Ginny. Of course, she wasn't sure that Ginny would have been on her side. After all, she was a Weasley, and blood ties surely would have been stronger than friendship. Wouldn't they?

Hermione was all alone. Just as she always was.

Two weeks had passed, and Hermione's efforts to reach out to Ron were still failing. If anything, they seemed to be growing further and further apart. She was trying to spend more time at home, but she would continually come home to an empty house. Of course, it was possible that Ron had always come home late, and she had just never been home to notice. Though strangely, he no longer seemed surprised when he came home to find her already there.

At night, if she would try to initiate intimacy, he would claim that he was exhausted or sore from practice. She was beginning to feel that she was no longer attractive.

Of course, she still had her feelings for Severus to deal with. She kept trying to avoid him, but he always seemed to know where she was going to be. Thinking back, she couldn't tell if she was running into him more often or if she was merely noticing it now. True, some might think that he wasn't exactly the most attractive man in the wizarding world, but he was a man of substance, her intellectual equal, something Ron would never be. They could have stimulating conversations that did not involve Quaffles and Bludgers.

A part of her wanted to talk to him, but she did not trust herself alone with him. Especially not after what had happened in the park.

Deciding that staying at home was doing nothing for her sanity, she decided to go for a walk. She didn't want to take the chance that Severus would be at the office.

Alone with her thoughts, she started making a mental list of assets each man had. She was shocked that Ron's list was so short, but then she realized that she was strangely at peace with that conclusion.

The only problem she could see was that if she divorced Ron, it would devastate Molly. Ever since her parents had been killed, Molly and Arthur had become a very important part of her life. She sighed. How had her life become so difficult?

She decided another visit to Harry was in order. He hadn't owed her with anything specific about his discussion with Ron. Perhaps she could get Harry to be more frank with Ron.

Though, what was to be gained? What did she want Harry to uncover? Did she want Harry to tell her that Ron was as miserable as she was?

A part of her wanted exactly that. She collapsed into her favorite chair, trying to decide what she should do. The logical part of her told her that she should confront Ron and find out once and for all what was going on with him. But another part of her feared that he would start asking her questions too. Ones she didn't want to answer.

She ended up doing nothing.

The following day at work, she was quite irritable and distracted by the drama of her personal life. As was her habit when she got into one of these moods, she was working alone in the lab, everyone else in her department having found somewhere else to be.

"Hermione, something is bothering you," Severus said behind her.

She tried not to jump at his sudden appearance. "Not at all."

He reached over her shoulder and grabbed her hand. "Then why are you adding unicorn tears to that potion?"

"I'm not..." She looked closely at the phial in her hand and saw that he was correct. She had been about to add unicorn tears and ruin nearly a month's worth of work. Setting the phial down, she sighed and said, "I guess I am."

He pulled up a stool and took a seat next to her. "May I ask what it is that's bothering you so?" After a few seconds, he added softly, "Is it Ron?"

His voice was so gentle and caring that she broke down. "He's been ignoring me for weeks. I can hardly get him to talk to me anymore. I don't think he loves me anymore."

"Do you love him?" he asked gently.

"I do, but I don't think it's the same as it once was. We've drifted apart. Quidditch is his life and this," she swept her arms around the lab, "is mine."

"Why don't you talk to him about that?"

"I try, but he's either not at home or he's too tired. He just doesn't seem to care anymore."

He placed his hand on her knee. "You need to force him to discuss this with you."

She just stared at his hand, unable to meet his eyes. "I know. It's just..."

"You're frightened," he finished for her. "It's understandable. The two of you have been together for a long time."

Looking up at him, she tried to read his expression, but found she couldn't. "Why do you care so much?" she asked, trying not to sound suspicious.

"You are one of the most brilliant minds I have ever met. And I would like to consider you a friend, if you would let me."

She couldn't suppress the giggle. "I think you are a bit more than a friend."

He smiled warmly at her. "I suppose that I am." His hand drifted up her leg.

"Severus, I'm a married woman," she cautioned.

"Are you really? Is what the two of you have really still a marriage?"

She sighed. "No. I guess not." Suddenly, she realized that he was right next to her, and she wasn't sure how it had happened. Even more surprising was the fact that she had wrapped her arm around him. "We can't do this here." Her heart was racing.

Leaning down, he gave her a deep, passionate kiss. "My office. Five minutes."

Nodding numbly, she replied, "Okay." A few minutes later, she found herself standing outside Severus's office door, looking nervously down the hall to make sure no one saw her. But she craved physical attention from someone, and he was offering to give it to her.

As soon as the door was closed behind her, Severus pulled her into his arms and quickly locked the door.

His touch excited her and she wanted more. This was not a time for words, but a time for action. She backed him towards the small sofa and was quite surprised to find herself flipped around and flat on her back. But she didn't protest as he slipped his hand under her robes. Fumbling with the front of his garment, she longed to touch him, to feel the intimate contact of skin on skin.

He expertly teased her and soon had her writhing and moaning. She gripped the sofa, fighting for control of her body as she started panting. "Severus, please," she moaned.

He gently pulled off her knickers before slowly entering her. His motions were smooth and slow to prolong the experience.

She was so close to the edge that she grabbed at him, hooking her legs around his, trying to pull him even deeper and faster. This is what she had wanted for so long. Finally, he quickened his motions, giving her what she wanted. She started moaning and crying out.

He captured her mouth in a kiss, momentarily pausing. "Quiet, my dear. I only locked the door and there is no Silencing Charm."

She didn't really comprehend his words, only wanting him to continue. "Okay." When he started again, she felt his hand on her mouth as she gave in to her passions. As her orgasm started to wash over her, she bit her lower lip and gripped him tightly, wanting to feel him deep inside her.

In the euphoria following their encounter, she felt that she could spend all day with him.

He disturbed her reverie. "You really should head back to your lab."

"What?" Her voice fell with disappointment. "I suppose you're right."

He brushed stray strands of hair from her face. "Come by after work."

"What?"

"Come over to my house. I'll make it an evening you won't forget."

The offer sounded wonderful. It was exactly what she wanted, but she still hesitated. "I don't know."

"He expects you to come home late, doesn't he? And this would be much more pleasant than more research." He teased her nipple with his fingers. "He comes home late to you; why should you feel guilty about doing the same?"

The same. Those words resonated in her mind. What if he was doing the same? It all seemed to make sense now. He was ignoring her because there was someone else. She had been replaced. Now that she was contemplating the possibility, she was determined to catch him. This would not be her fault. "We'll see. I might have something to do."

"More important than being with me?" he asked in mock hurt.

A devious grin spread across her face. "If this works as I think it will, there will be much more time for you and me in the future." After a hurried Cleansing Charm, she gave him one last kiss before flitting out of his office. She had no intention of returning to work this afternoon. She had something more important to do.

Once again, Ron lingered behind after practice, hoping Cliona was doing the same. Once they were alone in the locker room, he moved across the room and pinned her against the wall, nibbling at her neck. "I was thinking about taking a shower..." he started.

"I hope you were doing more than thinking," she replied playfully.

He spun her around. "Why you..." But he didn't get to finish as she gave him a passionate kiss and guided him backwards toward the shower. It was a long, luxurious shower, both of them enjoying the touch of the other.

"Perhaps we should go somewhere more intimate?" Ron asked.

"I'd love to, but my sister's at my flat for the week."

He didn't want to settle for being with her in the locker room. "It's still early. We could go to my place."

"Are you sure?"

"She won't be home for hours."

A wicked grin spread across her lips. "I like that idea."

They quickly dressed and Ron Apparated them to his house, which, as he had expected, was deserted. "I told you."

"So where is this bedroom of yours?" she asked as she started undressing him.

"A little randy, are you?"

"Around you? Always." She kissed him deeply, showing him exactly how she felt about him.

He pushed off her robe and led her down the hall to his bedroom.

Hermione left the office and was not surprised to find the Quidditch Pitch empty. Practice was generally over by this time of the day. Knowing that Ron had a team roster at home, she decided to start her search with the other players on the team. She didn't think he would be thick enough to get involved with a teammate, but then again, this was Ron that she was thinking about. Though it wasn't like he didn't have a lot of young women fans.

She decided to head home and consider her next step.

When she opened the door to their house, she was quite surprised to see clothing strewn all over the front hall floor. It didn't take much to figure out that some of the clothing belonged to a woman.

She was beyond incensed. While she was ready to call it quits with Ron here and now, she still couldn't believe that he would dare bring his dalliance to their home. A part of her wanted to shatter the door and hex both of them to oblivion, but a voice deep inside reminded her that such rash action would accomplish nothing.

Slowly, she crept down the hall, not wanting to give either one of them a chance to escape. The bedroom door was cracked open, and through it she could hear moans of passion. Once again, her anger bubbled to the surface. Wand at the ready she prepared to immobilize them.

Throwing open the door, she saw Ron's bare arse in the air, with a pair of long legs wrapped around him. "What is the meaning of this?" she shouted.

He pulled away from the woman, who grabbed at the sheets to cover herself. "Hermione? This isn't what it looks like."

"This isn't what it looks like? It's exactly what it looks like." She pointed her wand at Ron. "Get dressed." Then she pointed at the woman. "Get out of my house!" She then stormed out of the room, holding onto her anger to stop the tears that were threatening to flow.

A/N: Thanks again to nota for prodding me along and helping me rediscover those words I can never remember when I'm writing. The real life issues that were keeping me from writing as much as I wanted to seem to have finally abated. I am hoping to be able to get the next chapter done in a reasonably short period of time.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

Hermione ran into the living room and collapsed into tears on the sofa. She had always known that Ron could be insensitive, but she never thought that he would stoop this low. She was vaguely aware of hearing the pop of Disapparation.

Ron's voice came from the doorway. "Hermione?"

"Just go away!" she shouted. Right now she wanted nothing to do with him.

After a long pause, he said quietly, "I'll – I'll be at my folks'. If, you know..."

Finally, she heard the front door close. After a few more minutes, she wiped the tears from her face and made her way to the loo, where she could wash her face. Her eyes were bloodshot and puffy.

She did the best she could to make herself look presentable and decided to visit the one person that she could talk to, Severus.

Severus was anticipating yet another evening alone. He had stopped at the market and picked up food for his pathetic solitary dinner. Hermione had claimed she had something to do that might ensure they could spend more time together. She had even looked excited about it, but he refused to get his hopes up. After all, he had lived a life filled with disappointment. Why should it change now?

There was someone huddled on his doorstep and he scowled. He knew it wasn't one of the better neighborhoods in London, but the vagrancy was starting to get out of hand. "Move..." He stopped when the 'vagrant' looked up at him. "Hermione?" Reaching a hand out to help her to her feet, he asked, "What are you doing here?"

She collapsed against his chest and began sobbing. "Oh, Sev-Sev-Severus..."

Deciding he didn't want her making a scene on his doorstep, he gently pulled her away. "Let's go inside and talk about this."

Once he got her settled and offered her some tea, she finally calmed down enough to relate what she had come home to. He had never liked Weasley, but found himself working very hard to control his rage at the sheer audacity of the act. Knowing he needed to be calm for her, he placed his hand on her knee. "I know it hurts, but that pain will pass. You didn't want to spend the rest of your life with him, did you?"

She dabbed at her eyes with the handkerchief he had given her. "No. But to find them *in our bed*?"

Moving over to the sofa to sit beside her, he pulled her into his arms. "You *did* suspect he was betraying you. I know that the location of where you found them was upsetting, but was this not the outcome you were looking for?"

She leaned against him. "It was. I just didn't think he would make it this easy."

"Why don't I make us something to eat for dinner? Then you can go home and prepare for tomorrow."

"But I want to stay here with you."

He closed his eyes, burying his emotions before he answered. "I know. But you must maintain the moral high ground. In order to do that, you cannot spend the night here. Until this is over, no one can know how we feel about each other."

"That could take forever," she sighed.

"Not in cases involving adultery. Wizard law is different from Muggle law. It will be over sooner than you realize."

"Really?"

"I promise." He wouldn't tell her that he had ways to ensure that her case was expedited. Being willing to brew potions of questionable legality had its advantages. As soon as she was gone, he would send an owl to his contact in the Ministry to begin the process. "Take the day off tomorrow. And the one after if you need the extra time."

"Thank you," she said before wrapping her arms around him and giving him a passionate kiss.

He wanted nothing more than to ravish her right there, but he knew the time was not right. "You're quite welcome. Now, I think I should prepare dinner."

She followed him to the kitchen. "I'll lend a hand."

When she left late that evening, he was disappointed. He knew that it would not be long before they could be together whenever they wanted, but their parting was still painful. After sending the owl, he lay awake in bed for a long time before he was finally able to fall asleep.

Even though Hermione had been living in the Wizarding world for many years, there were still many things that she was not familiar with. She was learning the legal system was one of them. The sheer speed at which everything had happened had caught her completely off guard.

As she had anticipated, Molly had turned quite cold to her. Harry was the only one left on her side. Well, other than Severus, but he could not publicly show his support. She felt a hand slip into hers.

"How are you doing?" asked Harry.

"I've been better."

He gave her a comforting hug. "I know. I wouldn't have thought Ron would do that either. It must be hard for you. You lost your family once, and now it's happening all over again."

"Yeah." After a few seconds, she added, "Are you sure you want to be seen supporting me? I know the Weasleys have been your family as well."

"You're my family, too, and I won't leave you alone right now."

She was glad for Harry's support. She felt less alone, less isolated. "Thanks, Harry."

"How about I treat you to dinner?"

What she really wanted was to finally spend an evening with Severus, but she knew it would look odd if she insisted on being alone. Severus had been so understanding that surely he would understand why she had to spend the evening with Harry. "Sure."

After dinner at a Muggle restaurant, Harry took her back to her house. She had tried to be a lively conversationalist, but they found that Ron had been such an integral part of their lives that it was difficult to speak of the past without mentioning him. That had led to many awkward silences.

Harry had offered to stay in her guest room so that she would not have to be in the house alone, but she pointed out that she had been alone the last few months and that he needn't worry.

Once she was sure that he was gone and would not be returning, she Apparated to Severus's house and knocked on the door.

"I wondered if you were going to come over," Severus said dryly when he saw her standing in his doorway.

"Harry insisted on taking me to dinner. May I come in?"

He was scowling at the mention of Harry's name, but finally stood aside.

She threw her arms around him. I would have much rather spent the evening with you. He's the only other friend I have right now, and I don't want to lose him."

"Of course," he said in an unemotional voice, but still wrapped his arms around her.

"So... where do we go from here?" she asked as she looked up at him.

"Wherever you would like." A small smile turned up the corners of his lips.

~The End~