

# Durus Amor

*by Celisnebula*

Hermione Granger Weasley has lived in her widowhood much as she lived her married life, devoted to her family. An overheard conversation between her children has her reassessing her choices, and she's determined to make changes. Unfortunately, those changes bring her face to face with an unchangingly unpleasant Severus Snape. But she's survived worse.

## Durus Amor

*Chapter 1 of 1*

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I

"I can't believe you turned him down! Do you know how hard it was for him to ask?"

Rose shrugged. "It's complicated, Hugo. You just wouldn't understand." She let out a soft sigh as Hugo made the *'I'm going to explode'* face. "Look, I do love him, but it wouldn't work. Being his wife would require too many strings." She shifted on the sofa. "Could you imagine how well the scenario would go over when I couldn't attend one of the numerous dinner parties his parents throw simply because I was stuck in a dusty library doing research?"

"But Scorpius..."

"Is a Malfoy."

Hugo let out a snort. "Yes, I do know that quite well," he stated dryly. "As if that weren't the original attraction."

Rose let out a soft laugh. "True; remember how red Da's face got the first time Scorpius kissed me on the train platform?" She gave him a sad smile. "He could never see past Scorpius's surname didn't matter that it was a quirk of genetics that caused him to be a Malfoy."

"At least Mum never held his last name against him and I'm sure... given time, she could've made Da see reason. You know how he was: bluster and blow up but eventually he'd cool down."

"Only, she never got the chance," Rose said softly.

"Even so, I can't believe you told him no."

"What would you have me do? Be like Mum? Marry him and give everything up? No. I can't. I won't." Rose slumped back against the cushions. "I know Mum loves us loved Da, but you know she wasn't happy, still isn't happy. I don't want to be like that. I don't want to give up all of my dreams simply because I love Scorpius, and by marrying

him, I'd have to."

"Now, Rose..."

"Don't you *now*, Rose, me. You know what I'm saying is true. It wouldn't work. I'd be miserable. He'd be miserable. I'm not that sort. I can't be. And as much as I love Scorpius, I just can't be the wife he would need."

I sagged against the hallway wall; I had almost walked in, excited that both my children were home for a small visit. Now that they were older and out on their own, they didn't spend much time here. I paused, shamelessly eavesdropping. Trust me; it's a skill every parent develops. I hadn't known that my little Rose had grown so serious over that Malfoy boy.

I leaned my head back against the wall, letting the cool surface press into my cheek; it was chilling, the amount of disdain I heard in my daughter's voice as she spoke about the choices I had made after the birth of my children. I hadn't set out to become this a housewife whose only pleasure was looking forward to her children's visits. The fact that this, indeed, was what I had become made me want to cringe.

Once I was full of daring plans and brash ideals. When I was her age, I was determined to right the "wrongs" of the Wizarding world. I wanted to banish the prevailing prejudices Muggle-born Witches and Wizards faced every day as they integrated into a society that seemed to thrive on the inbred motto of "Pureblood" superiority. I wanted to vanquish the way that some sentient members of the Wizarding community were regulated to second-hand citizens...some being labeled as little more than beasts, others as slaves.

I wanted... a Wizarding World that held all of the wonder and idealism that my young brain dreamed of when I first discovered I was a witch.

I learned, quickly, to my dismay that what I wanted and what existed were on two vastly different planes. After Hugo was born, I decided to take my disillusioned self off to a quiet corner so I could salvage my wounded pride in peace. From there, I was determined to be the best mother and wife I could if I couldn't save the world (and lord knows, I had already tried that route once with Harry), then I would excel at what I *could* do.

If I was unhappy... was I unhappy? Lord, did I not even know myself any longer?

I took a deep breath and composed myself. While Rose's words (and Hugo's silent confirmation of those words) profoundly hurt me, I couldn't dispute the truth of them. I could, and would, I promised myself, reflect on that later. Straightening my spine, I backed up a few paces, then trod heavily on the wood floor leading to the front room.

"Mum!" Rose squealed as I entered the room. Ever the impulsive child, she jumped from her perch on the couch and flung herself into my arms. "I've missed you," she murmured against my shoulder.

"Then you shouldn't spend so much time away," I replied softly, kissing the top of her forehead.

Hugo, my more reserved child, slowly stood; he waited until Rose had untangled herself from around me. His hug was as strong and steady as Rose's had been wide and overpowering. My beautiful children.

"I've missed you both so much," I said, giving Hugo a squeeze.

## II

"Well, I, for one, think it's a marvelous idea," Luna announced, reaching for her glass of Camborne. She took a small savouring sip before continuing: "I'm really not sure why you hadn't gone for one sooner."

"Why on earth would she have needed to?" Ginny asked; her cheeks had two bright red splotches on them, a sure sign that she was getting upset. "It isn't as if Ron hadn't made enough to support..."

"It's not a money issue," I blurted out, cutting her off. Ginny puffed up her cheeks with air, ready to splutter something out, but I continued on: "I well, with the kids gone there just isn't much for me to do. And frankly, if I plant one more rose in the garden, I think I might go a bit mad."

That confession seemed to deflate Ginny's ire. "Oh," she said quietly. She reached across the table for the bottle of Camborne. "Still... to work? What on earth would you do?"

"Whatever she wanted, I suppose," Luna supplied. She raised her glass to me. "You could always come to work at *The Quibbler* we need someone to investigate an outcropping of Nargles; they've been stealing all sorts of things. Plus, we could always use a writer who actually knows how to write."

"Ah, no," I digressed, shaking my head. "I don't care for reporters."

"I suppose you could always go to the Ministry," Ginny offered. "Even now, Harry gets dozens of job offers from them. It's as if they can't honestly believe he wants nothing to do with them, and it's been years since he left."

I sighed. "Tried that once, remember? It didn't work out so well."

"Yes, but that was when you and Ron first got married..."

"Not everyone thinks home and hearth is the most important aspect of life," Luna said, interrupting Ginny.

Ginny gave Luna a narrow look. "That's not what I meant." She twisted in her chair a bit and leaned forward. "It's at least worth a shot, right? And if that doesn't work, I'm sure you could find something else." She gave a small shrug. "Or, you could always talk to Harry he was grumbling the other day about the newest research assistant to quit. Seems they aren't lasting so as long as he'd like."

"I don't know," I deflected. "It might be kind of odd working *for* Harry and all..."

"It is an option," Luna cut in. "One of many you have."

"We'll see," I replied, in a tone that I hoped conveyed the fact that I was done with this portion of the conversation, as I brought my glass of Camborne to my lips.

## III

"Hey," Harry said, rubbing his hand against the back of his neck, as I opened the door. "You busy?"

"Not really," I assured him, letting the door swing inward. "Why?"

He stepped into the foyer, making me take two steps back. "Mmm see... Well..." he stammered. I braced myself against the wall, unwilling to help him as he floundered. He took a huge breath, as if to steady himself, and blurted, "Ginny says you need a job," in a large gush of words.

"What?"

"Ginny... you know," he said, letting his voice trail off. I swear Harry hadn't gotten any easier to talk to with age.

"Ginny what?" I snapped. I had little patience for his stumbling today, and though I had a sneaking suspicion on what he'd come over to talk about, I wasn't in the mood to be helpful.

He let out a huge sigh and scratched the back of his neck again as he tried to find a way to tell me what he wanted to say. He dipped his head, black shaggy locks of hair falling over his face; he tilted his head just so, peeking at me through the curtain of hair. Bastard knew how to play the injured puppy dog look.

"Out with it, Harry," I prompted him.

"I want you to work at the Narthécium Foundation. Snape... he's..." He broke off and made a small shrug. "You know how it is. Snape's scared just about everyone I've hired to work with him off." He looked down at the floor, his attention focused on my foot. "He can't do it alone there's so much research, and the potions aspect sometimes it requires more than one person. But he refuses to have anyone around helping him."

"You can't force him to work with people, Harry," I said. "You've got to look at it from his perspective. He's..." I paused, trying to come up with the right words that wouldn't offend Harry he was often irrational about Snape. Not that his being irrational about Severus Snape was anything new. The only difference between his attitude now, and his attitude when we were kids, was the direction these days he would do just about anything to protect Severus Snape.

"Look, Harry," I started again. "He went from a precarious position as a Death Eater reviled and hated only to bring down the destruction of *You Know Who*..."

"Voldemort," Harry injected, his tone hard and unyielding.

"Voldemort," I conceded. "And he didn't expect to survive. The Wizarding World tolerates him at your behest. He has a position with the foundation simply because you started it and gave the bloody job to him have you any idea how long he'd even stay there if he knew what pains you went through just to create that position? He wouldn't. He's bent as far as he can Snape's a proud man, Harry."

"Bloody hell, Hermione, I'm not that thick. I know that he'd tell me to shove the job up my arse if he thought I created it just for him. And I know..." He sighed. "I really do know how hard this is for him. But the simple fact remains he cannot do it alone physically and mentally he needs help. He's never fully recovered from what happened in the Shrieking Shack... and I doubt he'll ever recover from what Dumbledore and Voldemort put him through." He dug the toe of his shoes into my wood floor. "I don't know what else to do, Hermione."

"Fine."

"Really?" His voice held a hopeful tone that was almost painful in its eagerness.

"Yes, Harry."

"Thank you, Hermione," he gushed, throwing his arms around me. "You won't regret it."

"Too late," I said as he eased up.

"Yes, well, you've agreed, so no trying to bugger off now," he replied with a cheeky grin.

"That's what I'm afraid of."

#### IV

I was nervous... I hadn't seen, nor actually spoken to Severus Snape since I was a teenager, and what I remembered of the man wasn't pleasant.

I brushed a shaking hand down the side of my skirt and wondered, briefly, if I should've chosen the more traditional Wizarding robes to wear instead of the charcoal grey skirt and white blouse I was wearing.

My sensible shoes clicked against the pavement as I walked up to the house. Harry had suggested I Floo in, but I distinctly disliked the idea of popping into any place where I wasn't quite sure of my reception. Instead, I had made Harry Apparate me to the outside of the lab a small, ramshackle little cottage about fifteen minutes from the closest town a few days ago so that I could Apparate myself here and then walk up the pathway. It was less stressful for me... and to a certain degree, safer.

Of course, the outside was just a disguise. Inside there was, at least in Wizarding terms, a substantial, state of the art potions lab, as well as a rather decent library and work station. It also housed a fully functional kitchen as well as a resting area which I suspect Snape used quite a bit, as many of his potions could be time sensitive and exhaustive.

I whispered the password to the protective wards and felt them shiver in the air around me as I pressed past their boundaries and into the actual space of the cottage's front stoop.

"You can just turn around and leave," a voice yelled from another room as I stepped into the foyer. I could hear his purposeful steps as he moved across the floor. "I've no desire, and even less inclination to..."

He paused in the hallway. "Unacceptable," he hissed. "This is simply unacceptable."

"Excuse me?"

"Did marriage to Weasley not only turn your brains to mush, but have you gone deaf as well? I said you should go."

I gave him the look I normally reserved for Rose when she was being overly dramatic. He glared right back at me, a sneer curving his upper lip.

I don't know how long we stood there, neither one of us saying a word and as loathe as I was to break down this mental game *off can out last you in sheer stubbornness* my feet were starting to ache. "As scintillating as this all is," I said, breaking off our Mexican standoff as I eased out of my jacket, "I really haven't time for this."

He stalked closer to me, so close I could smell the faint scent of various potions ingredients clovers, spices, other various herbs and the underlying scent of maleness that clung to his skin; it was a heady scent. Something warm unfurled in the pit of my stomach.

"No, you are quite correct. You *haven't* any time for this, because you're leaving."

"Hardly," I snapped, taking a step away from him.

He must've mistaken my movement as a sign of weakness because he moved closer his large body looming over mine. "Do not test me, Mrs Weasley..."

"Granger," I said automatically. I don't know why. I had been Mrs Weasley to the greater world for over twenty years, yet for some reason, I wanted to reassert myself as Hermione Granger to this man.

"...The door is behind you," he continued, as if I hadn't said a word. "I suggest you make good use of it." And with that, he whirled around and stalked out of the room.

I let out the breath I hadn't realized I'd been holding, and straightened my spine. He was about to find out that I wasn't going to scurry off like some scared little rabbit to his menacing snake.

## V

"I distinctly remember telling you to leave yesterday, yet, here you are again," he in a soft, almost whispery tone. He had come into the room silently; I stifled a surprised gasp. Clearly, I'd grown complacent in the last couple of years because I hadn't heard a thing until he spoke.

I lifted my chin up, just a notch, though my knees were knocking beneath my skirt. I wouldn't give him the satisfaction; I wouldn't let him know how much he still terrified me. "I do recall something of the sort." I turned away from him and nonchalantly re-shelved the volume I'd been perusing through; it wasn't quite what I needed. I heard him rustling behind me but I refused to turn around; I slowly ran my index finger down the length of the bookshelf in search of another tome.

"And?" he snapped.

"And what?" I could well imagine him grinding his back molars together in frustration over how blasé I seemed.

"I hadn't thought you obtuse, Ms Granger."

"Nor had I ever thought you particularly asinine, Mr Snape," I parried back, throwing him a look over my shoulder. "But, here we are."

He slammed his fist against the work table. I whirled around at the sound.

"I terminate your employment; leave at once!"

"Ah, you're forgetting, I don't work for you."

"I do not need, nor want *you* here," he snarled. "Your assistance is unwanted and unnecessary; I'd sooner have a trained monkey here to fetch and carry what I need."

"Well, then it's a damn good thing I'm not here to fetch and carry what you need, isn't it? I'm here to assist with the translations and research, whether you like it or not."

"Make no mistake, *Ms Granger*, I have no need of you. You were a swotty little know-it-all as a child, a trait that often caused you to think you knew best. I see nothing to indicate that you've changed as an adult. I highly doubt that your *research* will be of any use to me as your brain seems unable make deductions outside of the normal text book rote." He straightened to his full height. "Ah, but no matter. Stay, if that is your wish. I've grown accustomed to ignoring annoyances. You shan't be any different."

I wouldn't let that pronouncement scare me off; I'd been given the entire history of fellow employees Snape had encouraged to seek employment elsewhere, and his petulant tactics wouldn't work. In fact, this swotty little know-it-all was determined to drown him in information.

"Wonderful," I grit out. "Perhaps you'd like to accustom yourself to the situation somewhere else. I have *research* to compose."

Then, without bothering to see if he had left or not, I grabbed a quill, some rolled up parchment and started jotting down notes. Tomorrow I'd stop off at the local corner store before coming in and pick up some proper pens and notepads. I'd given up the traditional quill and parchment route years ago, and I wasn't about to start up that habit again.

A few minutes later, I heard my office door close. *Score one for me!*

## VI

"Bugger!" I cursed as I tripped over my own feet, spilling the coffee I'd picked up at the Apple Tree all over my shoes. Thankfully, I had missed most of myself, else I'd really be screaming. I set the half empty cup on my workstation along with the crushed bag.

Doing a spot check to make sure Snape was nowhere around, I quickly slipped off my shoes and shimmied out of the pantyhose. Grabbing my wand, I muttered a quick cleaning spell it didn't seem to help much; my shoes were still a bit sticky and slimy from all the sugar I had put into my coffee, and the dreadful state of my pantyhose made them fit for nothing other than the dustbin which they quickly made their way into.

I sat down and quickly grabbed the take out bag from the Apple Tree. The courgette cake with lime icing was crushed beyond recognition but still edible. The egg salad sandwich I had purchased with it seemed to be still in pretty good shape. I reached for the coffee.

"Lovely," I mumbled to myself as I peeked into the cup. The coffee was a lost cause.

I caught a glimpse of the stack of notes I usually piled up for Snape on top of the filing cabinet. Normally, the prat couldn't be bothered, and it sat, a forlorn reminder that he was determined to make me feel unwanted and unneeded. This morning, however, the pile was slightly askew. I pushed back the chair and walked over to filing cabinet.

I couldn't help but notice the red ink as I snatched a few of the notes off the pile. I quickly flipped through it, and my attention caught on a lengthy bit of writing in red ink.

*Really? You needed to include this bit? This work is dismal, Granger. You would think by now, you'd know which points were salient facts and which would be prudent to leave off. Simply regurgitating the material does nothing it neither forwards your knowledge nor does it further mine.*

I feathered through a few more pages, catching bits and pieces of his written responses on each.

Sodding hell, the bastard had graded them! I don't know which was worse, him actively snubbing what I had prepared or him grading it as if I were still one of his students. I set the stack of papers down and slowly tried to breathe in and out through my nose. It was just another method of Snape's to get me to leave... Had the bleeding bastard been in the room, I would've hexed his bollocks off.

## VII

"Stupid," I muttered to myself, scrubbing the roasting pan harder. "I should just tell Harry it isn't working and find something else."

"Mum?" Hugo appeared in the doorway to our kitchen. "Is everything all right?"

"Of course," I said brightly. "Why wouldn't it be?"

"You're scrubbing a pan... in the Muggle way. You only do that when you're upset about something." He gave me that shy, endearing smile of his. "Da used to say you were working out your anger."

"Oh." I let the pan slide from my fingers back into the hot water. I turned towards him and gave what I hoped was a bright smile. "I am really fine."

"Right..." he scoffed. His tone conveyed how little I had convinced him. "Is it Da? 'Cause, it is only normal to... you know."

"I ... Hugo..." I spluttered. His face was so earnest. "Oh, baby... I miss your Da every day," I said softly. "But, this isn't really about me missing him."

"Does it have anything to do with that job you took for Uncle Harry?"

"A bit."

"You don't have to work, Mum. I... I could take care of you."

I reached over and ruffled his hair, as I used to do when he was younger. "It's not a matter of having to work, sweetie. And it isn't really the work itself." I cupped his cheek. "I guess I'm just not used to being around difficult people anymore, and so I'm wondering if I made the right decision by telling Harry yes."

Hugo chewed on his lower lip for a minute a habit he seems to have developed from me since I don't recall Ron ever having done it. "It's just who you have to work with that's the problem?"

"Pretty much."

"It's not Nana Weasley, is it?"

I could only shake my head, a small laugh bubbling as I said, "No."

"Then I don't know what the problem is... Da always said you and Nana Weasley didn't get on because you were both pig headed. And you've always been able to get along, or work around, anyone else. Whoever it is can't be worse than Nana Weasley, could they?"

"You'd be surprised," I muttered under my breath.

Hugo gave me a wry smile. "I don't think anyone is worse than Nana Weasley. I think you're just bundled up in the problem and can't see your way clear. Just work around the person it'll drive them barking mad and do what you need to."

I kissed his cheek. "When did you get to be so wise?" I asked.

Hugo shrugged. "It was be wise, or be a wise arse like Uncle George," he cheekily replied.

I couldn't help the laugh that escaped at that pronouncement.

## VIII

Working around Snape tended to be far easier than I anticipated. I know Harry probably wanted me to be more of an active help to Snape in the potions lab, but honestly, I was entranced by the collection of rare manuals Harry had acquired. I knew the vast majority of them had probably come from the Malfoy estate though I hadn't the faintest clue how Harry wrestled them from Draco.

I stood up from my workstation, stretching. I'd been hunched over the desk, my face almost pressed against the pages of the manuscript I'd been reading obviously Master Alljeo's scribe in the 10th century had a deft, but small and cramped writing style.

The bones in my back creaked as I twisted from side to side, trying to allay the ache I could feel at the base of my spine now that I had stood up. To add insult to injury, my stomach growled. Even though I didn't know what time it was by my aches and pains, I could tell I'd been at it too long today. Still... I was making tremendous progress on the archaic passage I was working on who knows what I might learn if I continued on.

My stomach made another gurgling noise; I'd be able to concentrate on nothing more if I didn't find something to eat and soon.

I headed to the kitchen. I could hear Snape in the other room muttering to himself. I hazarded a peek in as I passed by. He looked truly awful his hair lank and disheveled, what I could see of his face was pale and bruised with lack of sleep. His robes hung loose on his gaunt frame. The mother in me wanted to rush into the room, make him sit down to eat something, then force him to take a nap. That would go over so well, wouldn't it?

With a sigh, I pulled back and made my way to the kitchen. There wasn't much in the cupboards, just a few tins of sweet corn, peas, vegetable soup, as well as some Rogan Josh sauce truly the fare of the clueless.

In the icebox there were about four eggs, a half a pack of butter, and what appeared to be two pints of milk. Behind the milk was a half-used package of cheddar cheese, several dodgy-looking tomatoes next to a bruised looking red pepper, a small onion and a bottle of cheap white wine. It wasn't much, but I could make a fairly decent omelet with what was in the icebox.

In no time I had the red pepper and onion chopped into small slivers and sautéing in a pan while I prepared the eggs. A little salt and pepper, a dash of milk and the eggs were ready to join the vegetables. When the eggs were almost done, I added the rest of the cheddar cheese.

As I plated the dish, I realized I had made far too much. I was hungry, but there was no way I could eat all of this. I grabbed another plate out of the cupboard and placed a portion for Snape upon it. He'd either eat it or not.

Grabbing a plate with each hand, I headed back down the hallway. I paused just outside of Snape's lab; he was still wholly engrossed in whatever he was working on.

I stepped through the threshold and placed the plate of food on the table that had the least amount of clutter, then I carefully stepped back, trying hard not to break Snape's concentration. I darted a quick look towards him; he seemed oblivious to my presence. As quiet as I could, I slipped out of the room and headed back to my makeshift office.

## IX

I had my back to the doorway; I didn't need to turn around to know that he was in my workspace. I turned around in a precise, measured movement all the better to hide my sweating palms and furiously beating heart. He was bent over my workspace, his features obscured by the curtain of dark hair that fell forward over his face.

"This notation is incorrect," he said without looking up. He grabbed up the pen resting beside the notepad and crossed out the notation, then scribbled something else beside it. "You're of no use if you cannot be accurate," he said, standing. Then, without another word, he left my office.

## X

The smell of well made coffee assaulted my nose as I walked into my office; on my desk was a cup of ambrosia. I sniffed at it warily. It smelled divine.

Snape didn't seem to be one to share his coffee and yes, I was sure this was a part of his stash. I could smell it every morning that I came in, though there was never any evidence of it about.

Yet, I had a cup of dark roasted temptation on my desk.

My hands cupped the mug of their own accord; I couldn't help the sound of pure, unadulterated bliss that came from my throat as I got my first taste. It was heaven. If he was going to provide me with bliss every morning, then I could be nice and leave him a share of whatever I made for lunch.

## XI

Over the course of the next few weeks, items from the local market would make their way to the kitchen. Most of those items were supplied by me... occasionally, there'd be something shoved into the icebox or into the cupboards that I would've never thought to buy. There'd be a note attached to it, something along the lines of *try making this instead of the gruel you tried to foist off on me or fresh ingredients are your friend, Granger, try using a dash of this, it won't kill you, and if it does, please refrain from dying whilst I am here.*

But if I made something truly outstanding, I'd find a cup of coffee waiting for me when I came in. I'm not talking the boring, run of the mill kind you find in the bag at the local market type of coffee. I mean full bodied, wholly roasted, must have been ground fresh that morning type of dark decadent delight. It was almost enough to make me go giddy.

## XII

I paused in the doorway, watching him move around the cauldron. His movements were precise and controlled, graceful even. I waited until he pulled back from the cauldron and made a soft coughing noise to announce my presence.

He whirled around, his dark eyes focused intently on me. Funny, I couldn't remember the last time I'd had someone focused this intently on me.

"I was wondering if... well, that is, if you wanted to... if," I stammered. "Well, if... you'd like to actually join me for lunch. I mean, it's perfectly all right if you'd rather not; I'd still make plenty enough for both of us."

"Why?" he asked. His voice sounded gravelly and disused. I wondered if, outside of the few comments he made here or there to me over the last few weeks, he actually talked to anyone at all.

"Because the company might be nice."

"And you chose me because...?"

"Because I thought you might like to interact with someone for a change have a chance to have an actual conversation... Oh, I don't know, maybe, for some strange reason, I thought that some socialization might be good, for the both of us."

"I don't socialize."

"Fine, consider it a working lunch then. You were absolutely correct about that notation and had you not pointed it out, it would've entirely changed the parameters of..."

"I am extremely aware of what it would've done," he said, interrupting me. "I still fail to see how that equates into the two of us having lunch together."

"Perhaps I'm tired of the back and forth of notes. If we, I don't know, say, actually sat down and had lunch together like two civilized people, we could actual talk instead of scribbling things down to one another."

"Again, that makes the assumption that I actually do have something to say to you."

"One that is wholly correct, given the amount of notes I've received over the last few weeks."

"Don't be insufferable," he said in a dismayed voice.

"Then don't be disagreeable," I shot back.

"I rather think that would be unavoidable."

My jaw dropped open. Who would've guessed, Severus Snape had a sense of humour; a warped humour, and about himself, no less. But still a sense of humour.

He arched his left eyebrow. "Do close your mouth, Granger. The gobsmacked look doesn't suit you."

I straightened to my full height, which still placed me rather shorter than Severus, and shot him a haughty look. "Lunch is at two, don't be late."

## XIII

I picked at my lunch; obviously, I had made a terrible mistake. We hadn't said two words to one another since we entered the kitchen.

"Should I be wary of what you created today?"

"What?" I looked up and caught the slight sneer on his lips.

"Then it's the company," he said, pushing back his chair.

"Don't you dare," I growled. "You sit right back down and finish. If this isn't turning out the way I had hoped, then it's my fault."

"All the more reason I should go."

"And hide back in your laboratory? No. We are going to sit here, and we are going to socialize."

"I don't socialize."

"Yes, so you've said. Yet I do. And I'm socializing with you."

"Why would you even want to?" He didn't sound angry, just actually perplexed as to why I would want to have lunch.

"Because you shared your coffee."

Snape arched his eyebrow at that pronouncement.

"It's as good a reason as any," I replied. "Or maybe I want to actually talk to someone about something other than my children, their children, or how I'm getting on without Ron." I looked up and caught his gaze. He was wholly focused on me and I had the distinct feeling that if I said or did anything to rash or forward, he would bolt out of the room like a startled buck. "You aren't going to ask me how I'm getting on without Ron, are you?"

His upper lip curled. "Do I look like a masochist?"

"Do you really want me to answer that?" I cheekily replied.

## XIV

"No, I can't believe that's correct!" I pushed the copy of *The Practical Potioneer* at him.

"I can't believe you actually read this rot," he said, disregarding the magazine. "I thought you had more intelligence than that."

"Just because it isn't academic doesn't mean it doesn't have something of value," I protested. I took a bite of my sandwich and chewed it forcefully.

"I wonder at your criteria of value. Is it simply because someone has taken the time to publish it?"

Scowling, I swallowed my mouthful of food. "I think you're an academic snob."

## XV

He was standing at the counter, dicing some vegetables when I walked into the kitchen.

"I was tired of sandwiches," he said by way of explanation.

"You could've said something," I huffed, reaching around him to grab two plates out of the cupboard. I felt Snape stiffen as my body brushed against his; I became wholly aware of him. I don't think I had ever stood this close to him before.

"Sorry," I said, placing my hand upon his back to steady myself. He stood stock still; his muscles were like granite under my palm. I moved back, taking the plates with me, and started setting the table as if nothing had occurred. A few seconds later, I could hear the sound of him chopping.

"So, what are we having?" I asked, snagging a bit of carrot from him.

"Fingers ala Granger if you keep putting them in the way," he grunted.

"Fine, I'll finish setting the table." This time, when I bumped into him to get into the silverware drawer, he hardly reacted at all.

## XVI

The fireplace in my office flared to life with a green flame.

"Luna!" I gasped, as the features in the flame became distinct. "This is a surprise."

"Hello, Hermione," she said serenely. "I thought I'd take you out to lunch." She stepped out of the fireplace, brushing the soot from her robes.

"That would be lovely, however, I do..." I tried to hedge.

"Oh, don't worry, we'll bring some back for Severus." She gave me a bright smile. "We wouldn't want him to think you'd abandoned him. He can be quite grouchy about things like that."

"I you... you call him Severus?" Goodness, she was always one for throwing me off balance.

"Of course, it isn't as if I would go on calling him Professor." She cocked her head to the side and studied me with those large blue eyes of hers. "Though, maybe you aren't ready for that sort of intimacy."

"Luna!" I couldn't help the shrilly tone of my voice. My cheeks felt hot, and I knew I was probably blushing.

"Hermione," she answered back, calmly. "You know, you really should try it. It rolls off the tongue like dark chocolate. Now, go and gather your things. I'll let Severus know we're leaving."

## XVII

I don't know how long I stood in the doorway watching Severus as he worked. Luna was correct, his name did sort of roll off the tongue like dark chocolate, even if I only mentally said it to myself.

He'd discarded his upper robe sometime after Luna and I had left for lunch. The sleeves of his white shirt were rolled up to his elbows, showing his pale, muscular forearms. I knew the exact moment he became aware of my presence because he stilled. I don't think I'd ever seen anyone who could force themselves to be so immobile.

"I brought you some fish and chips," I said in a tired voice, leaning against the doorframe. "And an Irn Bru. I hope you don't mind."

"I wasn't expecting anything," he said quietly.

I shot him a small smile. "I may have been forced to abandon you, but I wouldn't have forgotten you and left you hungry."

"I am quite capable of taking care of myself."

"Capable, yes. But the question is, did you?"

He shrugged. "I was busy."

"Which is why you're stopping now," I said, stepping into the room.

"Unlike some, I do actually have work to do."

"That can wait until you've at least eaten."

"I don't need a mother telling me when I need to do things; I had one, thank you very much." He moved over to the side table and used a pair of tongs to pick up a piece of what looked to be Erumpent tail. "If you're really in the mood to nag, perhaps you could entice our supplier to provide some fresh salamander blood."

"I don't nag."

"Go, Granger. I really do need to finish this."

"Fine," I harrumphed. "But at least eat something."

## XVIII

"I am not a nag." I told him, coming into the kitchen the next morning.

Severus looked up from the copy of *Contemporary Potions* he'd been reading. "Harridan, virago, shrew, insufferable—all the same."

"I just take charge."

"Of everything and everyone around you." He reached for a cup of coffee.

"Well, someone has to."

"Indeed," he replied. I think he took a drink of his coffee right then to hide his smirk.

## XIX

Rose was sitting on the couch. She swiftly wiped her face with her hands, but that didn't hide the fact that she'd been crying rather forcefully too, by the blotchy patches of red on her face.

I didn't say a word, just sat beside her. She flung herself at me, wrapping her arms around my waist.

"Oh, Mum," she sobbed against my shoulder. "Everything's falling apart!"

"Does this have something to do with Scorpius?" I asked, rubbing her back.

She nodded her head. "I think I've ruined everything."

"Ah."

She sat up and gave me a watery look. "Hugo told you?!"

"He didn't need to." I brought a hand up and cupped her face. "I know you."

"I don't know what to do," she whispered. "I love him so much, and he's so angry."

"I don't have the answers," I told her softly. "Only you, and of course Scorpius, can fix this."

"I don't think this is fixable, Mum. He..." She let out a little hiccupping sob. "He asked me to marry him, and I said no. Now, he wants nothing to do with me."

"Oh, sweetie." I pulled her back into my arms and hugged her tight. "He's hurting."

"I'm hurting too and he's never not talked to me, not ever. And... I feel so lost without him."

I put my fingers under her chin and angled her face up. "You're not lost just a little confused and hurt. Probably as confused and as hurt as he is." I brushed at her tears with the pad of my thumb. "What you need to do is sit down with him talk with him."

"I can't," she wailed. "He won't talk to me."

"Then you're just going to give up?"

"No!" she gasped. "How could you ask that?"

I shook my head. "All you've done is give me excuses on why you can't do this, or you can't do that. If you *really* loved him, you'd find a way to make him listen. You'd find a way to make it work."

"But, that's just it," she muttered. "It can't work."

"Really?" I sat back against the couch. "You sound so very absolute in this..." I reached over and grabbed her hand. "I would think that your father and I had taught you better nothing is unreachable or unworkable. Not even when the odds are stacked against you."

I leaned over and kissed her cheek. "I think that you and Scorpius are both smart enough to find a way to make your relationship work, if you really tried. It's just a matter of being honest with each other, and of course, the real skill of actually listening to one another." I stood up and ruffled her hair. "I've never known you to back down when things matter. I would sorely be disappointed in you if you gave up on Scorpius just because you've hit a stumbling block."

**XX**

"Did you ever imagine that this is where life would lead you?"

He stilled and I watched one dark, elegant eyebrow arch over his right eye.

"All right, a stupid question, I admit."

"Indeed," he concurred, reaching for one of the rolls. I watched as his nimble fingers tore the roll open. "I hadn't any thoughts to a future," he continued, dipping the piece of bread into the marinara sauce. "That I am alive, to me, is astonishing."

"Yet didn't you want more?"

He chewed the bite of bread thoughtfully for a moment, swallowing what was in his mouth before answering, "No."

"Not at all?" I pressed.

Snape lifted the napkin from his lap and dabbed at the corners of his mouth. "What precipitated this?" he asked, setting the napkin on the table beside his plate.

I sighed. "Rose."

"That would be?"

"My daughter," I revealed.

"Ah," Snape replied. "And what, pray tell, has this paragon of children done to cause you to become a dithering mess?"

"She is an adult, and it's not really her, it's more a matter of me."

"Are you displeased with who you are?"

"Well, no... not exactly."

"Which means yes, in Hermione speak."

"It does not."

He simply stared at me from across the table; I suppressed the urge to fidget under his gaze.

"Okay," I muttered a few minutes later. "Maybe it does." I reached for my glass of dark Australian red and took a deep sip. "I had... grandiose ideas," I started again, after swallowing the wine. "It was utter chaos after everything was said and done I... I don't know how much you remember of what happened immediately after, but I remember each painstakingly long moment."

I let out a soft sigh. "Maybe I should've set my sights lower." I gave him a wry smile. "Harry was content with just being himself he had... well, the whole Weasley clan I suppose... the family he'd been denied, and all he wanted was a quiet place where no one knew him." I brought the glass of wine up to my lips and took another sip. "Ron

was he had me, he had his family... and he had the fame he always dreamed of. I..." I bit at my lower lip. Sometimes being honest with oneself sucked and here I was, using Severus Snape as my Father Confessor.

"Wasn't content with the way things were," he finished for me.

"No," I said with a small shake of my head. "How could I be? There was so much that needed to be done. So much that needed to be fixed." I stared wistfully at the wine in my glass.

"Much like your rescue of the house-elves."

I let out a small gasp. "You knew about that?"

Severus let out a soft snort. "The entire castle knew about it. We almost had a revolt the house-elves refused to go near Gryffindor tower for nearly two terms because they were afraid they'd have clothing thrust upon them."

"That should've warned me how entrenched the Wizarding World was in its customs... but I I was determined. And learned the hard way, that even the unstoppable Hermione Granger, backed by the indomitable Harry Potter couldn't budge the world."

He merely shook his head. "The Wizarding World has never been too keen on change, no matter how well meaning that change is."

"No, I suppose not. Still I had to try."

"Yes, you're the sort who would have to."

"You make me sound as if I've some sort of hero complex."

"If the shoe fits," he replied pushing his chair back.

"I do not have a hero complex," I protested, rising from my seat.

He merely offered his arm to me. I placed my hand in the crook of his arm, glad for his steady presence. I drank far too much wine and was feeling a bit unsteady. Though, if I were to be honest, I seemed to always be a bit unsteady around Severus. We walked slowly down the street.

"I honestly can't see why you would think so," I said into the silence.

He snorted. "I can't think of anyone, besides Potter, who has tried as much as you to fix things."

"You say that like it's a bad thing."

"Not bad, merely fruitless."

He Apparated us to just outside of my cottage. The moon was high overhead, huge and white, causing the world to be lit in a magical white glow.

"Thank you," I said as we materialized. "You're rather easy to talk to." Then without thinking, I arched up on my toes and placed a light kiss against his lips.

He stilled for a moment, a small calm before the tempest of dark emotions.

"Don't," he hissed at me. "Don't do this out of some misplaced pity." His eyes flashed; dark and furious.

I felt as if he had just slapped me across my face.

"Damn it, Severus," I whispered furiously. "Does this have to mean nothing more than I pity you? Do you really think *that* of me?" I brought a hand up and brushed the tears from my face; I would not cry for him. "Never mind. Forget I said anything." I turned from him and walked up the pathway to my cottage.

I could hear sharp, quick footsteps following behind me, but I refused to slow down. His fingers closed savagely around my arm just as I was about to reach for my door handle, and I was jerked back against him. I let out a gasp of air as he spun me around.

I could feel his fingers in my hair he pulled my head back and before I could utter a word, his lips descended on mine. Severus's kiss was... frantic vicious even. The kiss was meant to be punishing, yet I thrilled in its brutal glory.

I tilted my head and parted my lips; his mouth tasted of bitter coffee. One of us moaned. I'm pretty sure it was me. I pressed myself against him, feeling the taut, whipcord strength of his lean form. I wanted oh, how I wanted so much more. I reached up to cup his face.

Then, as suddenly as it began, it ended. His eyes filled with a deep, confusing look before his features closed down.

"This was... unwise," he said in a soft tone, as he took a shuddering breath and stepped back from me. I collapsed against the door, my legs unable to hold myself up. I was unable to stop the gasping sob that tore from my throat as he slowly, unsteadily, backed away from me and walked away.

## XXI

I didn't go into work the next morning.

I was embarrassed. I threw the covers back over my head and burrowed under my pillow.

I had thrown myself at Severus Snape, and been turned down. Horribly.

And quite possibly had damaged the... friendship we had tentatively started. I can't believe how foolish, irrational and impulsive I'd been.

## XXII

"Hermione Jane Weasley," Ginny shouted, pulling the covers off. "Get that scrawny arse out of that bed now."

"Go away," I muttered, pulling a pillow over my face.

"Don't make me call Mum," she threatened.

"You wouldn't," I gasped, sitting up. "That would be cruel and unusual."

"I don't care." She yanked the pillow away from me as well. "My husband is beside himself."

"Oh, bugger Harry. It's all *his* fault anyway."

"That's it!" she yelled, storming out of my room. She was angry enough to actually call Molly Weasley. I shuddered at the prospect.

"Wait," I yelled back, scrambling to the end of my bed.

"No. You can explain to Mum why my husband is fretting; he hasn't had a decent night's sleep in days, and all because he's worried over Severus *Bloody* Snape." I could hear her rustling around the other room, possibly looking for the Floo powder. I pulled on a pair of shorts and followed her out to the living room.

She whirled around, her red hair flying about her face, her brown eyes snapping with annoyance. She poked her index finger into my chest. "And, while you're at it, you can explain to her why Severus Snape is threatening to quit that stupid job Harry created for him unless he fires you."

"He what?" I sank down onto the couch. I chewed on my lower lip. "He can't do that."

"What did you do?" she practically screamed.

"I kissed him," I whispered softly.

It was comical, how fast her face went from frustrated rage to total confusion. "You kissed him?"

I nodded.

She sank down into the chair directly across from me. "You *kissed* Severus Snape. The Severus Snape?"

I simply nodded again.

"You *kissed Severus Snape!*" she squealed.

"Yes!" I yelled. "And he bloody well kissed me too!"

Ginny collapsed back against the cushions of the chair. "Oh, bugger."

"How do you think I feel? One minute he's kissing me for all he's worth, the next, he's telling me it's a mistake and walking away."

"He kissed you back."

I sighed. "Yes, Gin, he kissed me back."

"And you let him?"

I let my head dropped back against the back of the couch and stared at the ceiling. "Yes, Gin. I let him."

"Then why is he..."

"Being a total and utter prat?" I closed my eyes.

"No, why is he threatening to quit if Harry doesn't fire you?"

"Did you miss the part where I said he stopped kissing me, said it was all a mistake and left?" My voice cracked, and I could feel the tears gathering behind my eyelids.

"Oh, Hermione," she said in a soft, sympathetic voice.

"Don't," I said raising my head. "So, he rejected me. It's not the end of the world."

She gave me a speculative look. "And you're sure he kissed you back?"

"Oh, yes," I sighed. "I'm extremely positive he kissed me back my toes still haven't uncurled."

"And then what did he do?"

"He stepped back, muttered something inane like, 'This was unwise,' and then left."

"He's nothing like Ron, you know that."

"Of course I bloody well know that."

"So..." she said, obviously trying to get me to follow her line of thinking.

"I'm tired, Gin you're going to have to be more specific."

"So," she continued, throwing one of the chair pillows at me. "He's more likely to be preemptive..."

"Than reactionary!" I exclaimed. "Ginevra Potter, you are brilliant!"

"Yes, I rather am," she said smugly. "The question is... what are you going to do now?"

### XXIII

I Apparated to the lab; the sun was just starting to go down, but I knew Severus would still be there. I slowly walked up the pathway, feeling as nervous this time around as I had the first day I started. Only this time the stakes were higher.

I felt a slight resistance as I pushed through the protective wards, only to breathe a sigh of relief when they allowed me through. For a moment, I was afraid they'd been spelled to repel me.

As soon as I stepped into the foyer, I slipped off my shoes. I gripped my wand with my right hand; my palms were so sweaty I was terrified that I'd drop it. I only had one chance to do this properly.

I padded, barefoot, to his laboratory. His robes were thrown over one of the chairs in the corner. His wand was on the table beside the freshly chopped potions ingredients.

"*Accio wand*," I whispered. He whirled around at the sound of my voice, his face a picture of disbelief as I palmed his wand with my left hand.

"I suggest you give me my wand," he said in a menacing tone, taking a step forward.

I stiffened my spine, trying to make myself taller than I actually was, and lifted my chin. "No."

"I think this conversation would go better without these," I said, tossing both of our wands out into the hallway. I couldn't help but notice his wince.

"We have nothing to say to one another."

"See, I believe we do," I replied, walking slowly towards him. He watched me with a wary expression on his face, his body tense, as if ready to bolt at any moment. "I think we have a great deal to talk about." I reached out and placed my right hand on his chest, directly over his heart. I could feel its steady, strong beat under my palm. "I think you're suffering under a misapprehension." I slowly closed my hand, gathering the material of his shirt in my fist. "One that I fully intend to correct," I said huskily.

His eyes darkened as I forcefully pulled him towards me. I arched up and kissed him. He stood immobile, no reaction other than the beat of his heart speeding up. With a disappointed sigh, I ended our kiss and loosened my grip on his shirt.

Embarrassment flooded through me. I had miscalculated again. I dropped my gaze to the floor and stepped back. "I'm sorry," I whispered, turning around.

His touched my hand tentatively and I hesitated. "I'm not one of your projects," he said harshly.

I yanked my hand from his. "No... you're not one of my projects."

"Then why?" He moved in front of me, blocking the door. "You can't want this..."

"Oh, Severus... that's where you're so very wrong." I gave him a small smile and tried to brush past him. He blocked the way once more, and I forced myself to look at him knowing that if he wanted, he could know anything.

Slowly, he bent his head down and covered my lips with his own. It was everything I had remembered... I sighed into his mouth and felt him take advantage of my parted lips. Severus's kiss claimed every corner of my mouth with considerable skill. He pushed me up against the frame of the door; I could feel the wood digging into my back. I clutched at his shirt, holding on for dear life as a whole host of sensations rushed through my body.

He lifted from the kiss, panting slightly. "I'm not good at things like this," he admitted.

I reached up and brushed the hair from his face. "Me either," I admitted as well. "But... I'm willing to try."

I vaguely remember us moving out of the laboratory through the cottage to the makeshift resting area. I entered the room and turned around. From the doorway, Severus watched me with a hungry gaze, and I froze.

"Take off your robes," he ordered. My fingers trembled as I undid the few buttons that held my robes in place. I felt a jolt of pure feminine satisfaction when I heard Severus suck in his breath as the material pooled at my feet, leaving me clad in only my bra and knickers.

I could feel his eyes on me like a physical caress as I arched my back so that I could unhook my bra.

"You've too many clothes on yourself," I said in a husky voice, letting my bra drop to the floor. I stepped over the clothes on the floor and placed a hand on his chest, flicking at one of the buttons with my index finger. "Perhaps we should change that?"

Severus made a small noise of pleasure in the back of his throat as I exposed his flesh. I couldn't help myself; I trailed a finger over his chest, brushing it against his left nipple. It hardened, and I leaned forward to lap at it.

I splayed both of my hands against his chest, marveling in the ripple of his muscles and the masculine dusting of dark hairs. I pushed his shirt off of him, and it too fell to the floor.

I arched up and kissed him again, thrilling in his growl as I playfully bit his bottom lip. Severus pulled me sharply to him, one strong hand coming up to cup the back of my head as he deepened the kiss. I could feel the coarse hairs tease against my sensitive nipples, the length of his hard erection between us. Every nerve in my body responded to his touch.

Somehow we crossed the room to the narrow bed. He tugged me down with him, rolling us so that I lay under him. His touch was gentle as he traced the curve of my waist. I could feel my nipples harden as his hands slid up the sides of my body, brushing against the underside of my breasts. I arched up off the mattress, moaning as he bent his dark head and dragged his tongue slowly around my right nipple.

I groaned in delight as he suckled me. His hands seemed to be everywhere touching me lightly, teasing me here and there, but never exactly where I needed him to touch. I could've screamed in frustration.

"Severus," I pleaded, my body straining. He worried my nipple gently between his teeth, making me shiver and moan. He shifted, and I felt the hardness of him press against me. "More," I growled.

And, as if he could read my mind (and probably had), his right hand finally strayed to the top of my knickers. "What do you want, Hermione?" he asked, his breath fanning against my nipple. His fingers crept under the fabric, teasing the edge of my curls. "This?" he whispered, letting a finger slowly stroke my fevered flesh.

"Please," I moaned. He moved, and I made a moan of disappointment. He divested himself of his trousers and boxers, and then pulled at my knickers. I lifted my hips so he could drag them down my legs.

His artful fingers found just where I needed him to touch. I felt the bed dip as he settled against me, his warm solid body pressing against me as I arched into his fingers. A strangled, "yes," escaped my lips as his thumb rasped against my clit.

I wound my arms around his neck as he shifted his weight to settle between my legs. Severus entered me slowly, with a gentleness that brought tears to my eyes. I pulled his head down and kissed him deeply as he sank into me.

He dropped his head to my shoulder, his breath hot, short and fast against my neck. I twisted my hips and he let out a harsh groan.

Nothing in the world existed but us as he slowly drew himself from me, only to plunge back in, as deeply as he had settled before. My body rose to meet his movements, my nails digging deeply into his shoulder as we danced in the rhythm older than time.

"Severus," I cried in a guttural groan, matching him, movement for movement. His fingers gripped my hips, digging into the soft flesh. I felt his teeth sinking into my shoulder, and suddenly everything clenched as I came hard. Severus thrust into me once more and then collapsed on top of me. I could feel him still deeply inside of me as our tremors subsided. The intensity was incredible.

He made a move to slide off of me, but I locked my arms around him. "No... stay," I said breathlessly.

"I'm too heavy," he muttered in protest.

"I don't care," I replied. "I'm not ready for this to end."

He pinned me with his dark gaze. "Is it going to end?"

"Only if you really want it to," I whispered. "But I hope I've convinced you not to."

"I can try."

"Good," I said, smiling mischievously. "I'd hate to lose both an excellent lover and a good friend because he was being asinine."

### **Consummatum Est**

#### **Author's Notes:**

Thank you to my lovely betas S, T, and M you know who you are!

Of course, thank you, ozratbag2. I know this isn't probably what you envisioned when you created your prompts, but I couldn't help myself. I actually did try to create the Muppets art prompt my head has been filled with visions of Snape as Ms Piggy and Hermione as a happy curly haired Kermit but the male Piggy version of Snape kept coming out with huge breasts. So, you're stuck with the splicing of two prompts together.

Also, thanks to Shiv, Shattered Logic, Ginny, and I know Molly has her fingers in the pie here too I can only imagine the sort of masochistic desires that make y'all run the exchange, but thank Hades you do!

#### **Original Prompts:**

1) It was the job of a lifetime and they both wanted it. Friends become rivals... or maybe not. Do they help or hinder each other? Do they grow closer or both breathe a sigh of relief that they never quite took the next step?

And 3) Hermione feels her life has passed her by (I'm thinking she's older perhaps 50-60) and any opportunities she was offered as a war heroine were merely traps to be avoided. She has, however, kept in touch with some of her old professors, who, seeing her so despondent, plan a spot of matchmaking with an equally bitter and reclusive Snape. Let the fireworks begin. Any rating. DH compliant, or ignored it's up to you. Friendship, romance, smut or not. Snark and biting comments are a must, though.