

Bumps In The Road

by ader_snape

Severus stumbles upon a distressed Hermione with a bottle of Firewhisky. Will the night's events change both of their lives forever?

A Bottle Of Firewhisky

Chapter 1 of 5

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A/N: I own nothing. It all belongs to JK. Please read, enjoy, and review!

Chapter One A Bottle of Firewhisky

He strode through the house of number 12, Grimmauld Place, enjoying the silence it offered. He had the place to himself, and he was looking forward to the bottle of Ogden's Old Firewhisky he had stashed in the library earlier that month. It had been a long day of staff meetings at Hogwarts, and he was tired of dealing with people in general. The start of term was only a little more than a month away, and the Headmistress still had not found a replacement for Slughorn, who had insisted upon retiring. This left both the job of Potions master and the job of Defense Against the Dark Arts professor to him. It was a weight that he was loath to carry upon his shoulders, but it was his load nonetheless. And his strength was starting to wane.

As he neared the library, he paused. Was that sniffing? After another few seconds of silence, he waved the noise off, assuming it was Kreacher somewhere within the house, and continued his path towards solitude. He halted when he swung open the door. There, sitting on the couch holding his bottle of liquor, was Hermione Granger.

In the past three years, since the defeat of Voldemort and Severus's acquittal of all war crimes, Severus and Hermione had worked together at Hogwarts, repairing the damage and infusing the magic once again into its walls. She had also studied under his keen eye as she moved forward to gain her title as Potions mistress, as well as Charms mistress. He wasn't certain that their relationship could be determined as a friendship, but they did have mutual respect for each other, and he no longer carried any ill will towards the girl. In fact, he had expressed to her that he hoped she would be happy in whatever she endeavored to do with her life. And he had truly and sincerely meant every word. He pushed past the heavy door and was able to see her more clearly; it was obvious that she had been crying.

"Miss Granger...what, pray tell, are you doing here?" he drawled in an even voice. He was certainly annoyed that he would not be spending his evening in blissful seclusion, but he couldn't find the strength in him to take his displeasure out on the crying woman that he almost considered a friend.

"And with my Firewhisky, no less." He glanced down at the bottle in her petite hands. *Good gods!* he thought. *She's drunk a third of the bottle already!*

In the few years of working with Hermione, Severus had become familiar with her habits. She was a very neat person and was often cleaning her work space. Her clothing was always clean and fresh, often even ironed. Her unruly hair had been tamed into sweeping flows of honey curls that fell delicately around her slight face. She secured the mass into a tight bun or braid when she worked.

She finally looked up to acknowledge his presence. The girl sitting in front of him was a stark contrast to the woman he had come to know.

She truly was a mess. Her soft brown eyes were bloodshot and swollen, leaking tears consistently down the sides of her face. Her nose was red, as if she had been wiping

Sometime during her giggle fit, Hermione's curls fell forward, obscuring part of her wonderful face. For reasons unbeknownst to him, Severus instinctively reached out and

Severus stopped seeing Hermione as a student in his class. The woman sitting in front of him, her hand resting on his knee, laughing with him, not at him, was beautiful. And she was his equal, his colleague.

He couldn't believe he was doing this. He shouldn't be doing this. They were both drunk and not in a right frame of mind, but morals be damned! He had never been kissed so avidly in his life, and he was enjoying it as much as she seemed to be.

Her eyes glittered with just a hint of lust as she nodded and rolled off the couch very ungracefully. As quickly as his alcohol-addled body could manage, he stood. Grabbing her hand, he led her up the stairs.

A/N: Many thanks to my wonderful beta, AmyLouise. Also, to my friend and alpha reader, Morgan. You two make my fandom world awesome. *hugs*

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The burning sensation in his head brought him back to the pressing dilemma to which he had awoken. He gently pulled his arm out from underneath Hermione's body.

attempting not to wake her. He failed and heard her groan in pain. He squelched the urge to kiss her again. He had set his resolve. This would be nothing but a bad dream.

"Good morning," he half whispered. His own voice echoed painfully inside his head. She groaned again.

"Is it? I don't think I've ever had such a horrible hang..." She stopped speaking suddenly as the realization that she was in bed with Severus Snape sunk in. "Oh my god! I'm naked! And in bed with you! What happened last night?!" He was slightly relieved that she didn't seem disgusted, just completely confused.

"Judging from the pounding in my head, and from what I can remember and piece together, we drank a considerable amount of Firewhisky last night. And sometime after said consumption, we apparently ended up in bed, without our clothes." He wasn't about to admit to her that it had been his idea. Not if she didn't remember.

She slowly sat up, clutching the bedcovers to her chest. "Did we, um, you know..."? Her face turned a brilliant shade of red and she averted her eyes away from his.

Severus took a deep breath and said, "I believe so, yes. Not that I remember much after the removing of our clothing." It was such an awkward conversation. Severus had never been in this predicament before, and therefore had no idea how to proceed. Luckily, she continued for him.

"Oh God! I can't believe this. I'm so sorry. I was upset and drinking and..." She stopped suddenly again. A look of pure terror etched across her face as her brown eyes widened. "Please tell me one of us did some sort of birth control charm?"

Severus stopped. His blood turned to ice with fear. Had one of them cast a charm? He squeezed his eyes shut and thought hard. *We came upstairs. In the midst of kissing... gods she was a good kisser... our clothes started coming off. When we finally had all of them off, she laid down on the bed. And then... And then what!? He couldn't remember. He shook his head. Oh, and then I began to cast a contraceptive charm. But I couldn't because I was so drunk; I couldn't hold my wand steady. Potion! Yes! I retrieved the contraceptive potion from the medicine cabinet!* He sighed.

"No!" he exclaimed. Her face went white with horror. "But I gave you a contraceptive potion." Hermione visibly relaxed and let out a sigh of relief and a nervous laugh.

"Oh! Thank Merlin. Okay. Um, well, do you mind if I use the bathroom to wash up?" She winced as the sound of her own voice filled the room with noise. And then, suddenly her hand flew up to her mouth. As quickly as he could, Severus conjured a bucket and thrust it into her lap. He then moved around to her side to scoop up her hair while she heaved up the contents of her stomach. It took every ounce of Severus's self-control to keep himself from joining her.

Once he was sure she had stopped retching, he vanished the bucket and its contents and guided her to the bathroom.

"Towels are in the cabinet, and I believe there is a new toothbrush underneath the sink. Just tap the shower handles with your wand to start the water." He transfigured one of towels into a white, thick robe and hung it on the back of the door. "I'll start breakfast. And leave a hangover relief on the bedside table for you."

Hermione nodded in response. He nodded back in acknowledgment and closed the door. As soon as the water started, he conjured his own bucket.

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After cleaning himself up, Severus made his way down to the kitchen. He found the carton of eggs he had purchased last week and found a skillet in one of the cabinets. He rarely cooked for himself at Grimmauld Place since he was rarely there. He took all of his lunches at Hogwarts, sometimes even his dinners. He had never been a breakfast person. But today was different.

By the time Hermione arrived in the kitchen, Severus had eggs and fried potatoes ready and on the table.

"Something smells good." She inhaled deeply and took a seat at the table. Her hair was still slightly damp and hung gracefully around her radiant face, fresh from the shower.

"Are you feeling better than you were earlier, Miss Granger?" Severus inquired in a bored sort of tone. Hermione shot him an odd look.

"We just woke up naked in the same bed together. I think we've moved to a first name basis, *Severus*," she replied. "And yes, I am feeling much better. Just starving. I didn't eat dinner last night." She reached over to fill her plate.

"Indeed. Would you prefer coffee or tea?"

"Oh, coffee, please. Tea is fine for afternoon, but there is just something about coffee in the morning." She accepted the mug Severus offered and took a long sip.

She drinks her coffee black? Severus thought. *Interesting.* He filled his own plate and settled across the table from her. Now that the alcohol had completely left his system, questions started nagging his mind.

"Miss..." he started, but stopped short at the raised eyebrow staring at him from across the table. "Hermione, then. You never answered my question last night. Why were you here?"

"What do you mean? I came here because I was upset about Ron." The miserable look started to form on her features again. An unfamiliar pain crept through his chest.

"Yes, but why here? Why did you not go somewhere else, like your own home?"

Hermione's eyes began to fill with unbidden tears, and she was noticeably attempting to keep them from falling.

"Ron and I share...shared...a flat," she said sadly. "And I couldn't very well run off to the Burrow, could I? Harry and Ginny are still on their honeymoon. And my parents... Well, you know." He did know. She had modified their memories when the War had become more and more threatening and sent them to Australia. A year after Voldemort's defeat, she had attempted to go after them and restore their memories, but they had moved since their arrival, leaving no forwarding address. She had searched for months to no avail.

"This was the first place I could think of. I knew Harry never changed the wards when he moved out, so they would still recognize me. I didn't know you would be here." Her tone was almost apologetic, and she stared at her eggs.

"I see." He was at a loss for words. He was not sorry that she had found herself in his makeshift home, but was he glad about the whole situation? And even if he were, he shouldn't make her aware of it. With still nothing to say, he went back to his breakfast.

After several moments of silence, Hermione cleared her throat. He looked up expectantly.

"Um, should we be discussing this? Whatever this is? I haven't exactly found myself in this situation before." Her voice trailed off as she blushed once again. He quickly buried the fondness brought about by the faint coloring in her cheeks and hardened once more his resolve to make last night a distant memory.

"There is not much to discuss. We both consumed entirely too much alcohol and made rash, irresponsible decisions that neither one of us would have in normal circumstances. I feel that we should put the night's events behind us and not allow them to hinder our lives." The slightly hurt look on her face was quickly erased. She had become very talented at hiding her feelings, he had noticed, and it pained him that he could not allow himself to express an interest in seeing where the emotions of last night might go if not altered by Firewhisky.

"That makes sense." Her face was blank as she continued. "You're right. We will be working closely as colleagues this year, and we cannot afford to let something like this

hinder our jobs."

"Indeed. Now, you have mentioned that you have no home now. Might I ask where you intend to stay until the school term begins?" He had entertained the idea to offer her a room at Grimmauld Place, but thought better of it.

"I'm sure I could stay at Hogwarts. I'll just pop over to speak to Minerva." She grimaced. "But then there is the issue of going back to Ron's flat for my things. That should be fun," she finished as her face fell forward into hands.

"I shall escort you, if it will ease your mind. Or perhaps, place unease in his mind." He smirked and she let out a snigger.

"If you don't mind. I don't want to be any trouble. I would really appreciate it, though."

"It is no inconvenience, Hermione. I have no plans for the day, and the look on Weasley's face would be sufficient payment, I assure you. I will take a shower while you go discuss the details with Minerva and be ready to go when you return."

Hermione sighed with a smile on her face. "Thank you so much, Severus." She reached over, gave his hand a small squeeze, and bounded from the room.

*The distant memory plan will never work if she continues displays like that*he thought, subconsciously rubbing the hand she had touched. He sighed heavily and started cleaning their plates from the table.

This was going to be a long day.

A/N: Much love and thanks to my wonderful beta, AmyLouise. You are fabulous, my dear!

A Woman Scorned

Chapter 3 of 5

Hermione confronts Ron and Severus makes a discovery.

A/N: I own nothing you recognize. Also, just so that there is no doubt, this story is AU and I know there are several things not in canon, so there is no need to point them out to me. This chapter is a little short, but I wanted to get ya'all an update! Thank you so much to all of you who have left me such lovely reviews and to those who are following the story. Please continue to read, enjoy, and review!

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They stood on the street corner a block away from the flat building Hermione had shared with Ron until the day before. Hermione turned to Severus and began going over the plan once again. He huffed in slight annoyance. There wasn't really much to the plan, and they had already gone over it before leaving Grimmauld Place. But he allowed her to give the speech again, knowing that it was really a stalling tactic to give her time to gather her nerves.

When they finally reached the door, Hermione took a deep breath and reached for the door knob. But she jerked her hand back almost as soon as she had touched it.

"Ow!" she exclaimed, as she jumped back from the door slightly. Severus felt himself go into protective mode as he produced his wand almost out of thin air. Before he could do anything more substantial though, Hermione said, "He must have changed the wards already. Couldn't remember to set them to alert if I came home while he was in bed with that cow, but he can reset them not twenty-four hours after to not allow me at all?" She let out a high-pitched sound of frustrated anger as she pounded on the door.

Severus inwardly smirked. *This should be good*, he thought. Hermione was not only known for her intelligence, but for her fiery temper when pushed to her limit. The redheaded imbecile didn't stand a chance. He wasn't left wondering for long. There was a faint shimmer of fading magic around the door as it was pulled opened by Lavender Brown, who looked shocked at the sight of her lover's ex-girlfriend standing at the doorstep.

"Get out of my way," Hermione said, acid dripping from every word as she pushed past the stunned woman at the door. It was only after Hermione had let herself in that Lavender registered the presence of her former Potions professor. She stood there, opening and closing her mouth like a fish, until screaming from inside the flat caught the attention of them both.

"They are *my* things, Ron. I purchased them with *my* bank account or brought them from *my* home."

"That still doesn't give you the right to barge into my flat and take them!"

Hermione's face contorted so fiercely, that Severus, who had finally crossed the threshold and closed the door, almost felt pity for the Weasley boy. Hermione's voice was deathly quiet, but still full of venom. Not too far off the Muggle phrase, "the calm before the storm".

"The right? It doesn't give me the right?! I spent three years of my life with you! I put up with your immature ramblings and whining about the pains of being famous and how I wasn't as good as your mother. I listened to your stupid Quidditch stories and even pretended to be interested!" Her voice was steadily rising in volume and she was inching closer and closer to the young man, who backed away from her until he was pinned against a wall.

"I loved you! I remained FAITHFUL to you! I shared my LIFE with you! And what do you do? You jump into bed with THAT COW!!" There was an offended gasp from Severus's right as Hermione yelled her tirade. He shot Miss Brown a glare as Hermione whipped her head around and retorted, "Oh, shut it, Lavender. I'll get to you in a minute." Lavender shrank back and remained quiet as Hermione continued.

"Now, you will sit at *your* dining room table while Severus and I gather my things. If I hear so much as a whimper, I'll hex you to ensure you never fucker or anyone else ever again!" She was centimeters away from Ron's chest, forcing her to look up at him. Her voice took on a deadly hiss. "Do I make myself clear?"

Severus had never seen this side of Hermione. It actually frightened him slightly. Not just because of the nasty threat she had made, but because he was certain that if anyone had the talent to follow through on such a threat, it was she. But the dunderheaded boy didn't seem to recall this little detail. His face took on a nasty sneer.

"Severus, is it? You're on a first name basis with this greasy git? I bet you've been sleeping with him! I knew you were cheating on me!" Ron took a step forward, making Severus reach for his wand again, but Hermione stood her ground.

"I never cheated on you, Ron," she said in a sad, but strong, voice. "Severus and I are splitting classes at Hogwarts. We're colleagues. And from where I stand, there is only one git in this room: you."

Without giving him the opportunity to respond, she abruptly turned to face Severus, addressing him for the first time since walking through the door. "All of the furniture but the kitchen table and chairs, this armchair, and the tall set of drawers in the bedroom are mine. If you would be so kind as to shrink them for me, I would be most grateful."

Severus nodded his assent. "Of course, Hermione." He moved toward the sofa, but before he could murmur the incantation, the redhead again displayed his inability to keep his mouth shut.

"What?! Those are the only things you're leaving me? Hermione, I..." But before he could finish, there was a flash of light and the boy was writhing on the floor, holding his groin. Finally, apparently finding his voice through the pain, he shouted, "YOU BITCH!"

Without much thought, Severus threw a silencing spell at the boy. "That will be enough, Mr. Weasley," he said in his best professor voice. "Do not make me put a Full Body Binding Hex on you while we gather Hermione's belongings." He received a deathly glare in response. He glanced at Hermione and found her emptying one of the kitchen cabinets into the magically enlarged suitcase she had brought.

"It's a modified Stinging Hex," she said dispassionately. "It will wear off in an hour or so. Just leave him there." She quickly finished in the kitchen and made her way down the hallway that, he assumed, led to the bedroom.

After making short work of shrinking the sofa, love seat, coffee table, and two bookshelves, Severus assured himself that Weasley wouldn't be moving any time soon and went off in search of Hermione. He found her in the bedroom, simply staring at the four-poster bed in front of her. He cleared his throat gently to alert her of his presence. She looked back over her shoulder.

"This is my bed. I should take it with me. But how could I ever sleep on it again, knowing..." Her voice caught with emotion. Severus had to resist the urge to rush forward and pull her into his arms. He so badly wanted to tell her that they could find another bed and make memories passionate enough to drown out any thoughts of the redhead and his cow. But he couldn't. It would just complicate matters. She didn't need a lover; she needed a friend.

He stood so their arms were touching. He looked thoughtfully at the bed in question. "Well, you could burn it. That way, you're not taking it with you, yet you're still leaving Weasley without a bed. You are a Charms mistress, after all. I'm sure you'll think of something."

She looked up at him and gave him a watery smile, evil humor sparkling in her lovely brown eyes. It almost made him weak at the knees.

"Severus, I'm beginning to enjoy our friendship a great deal. Is all of the furniture is shrunk?" He nodded. "Good *Accio furniture!*" she said with a flourish of her wand. Several pieces of what could have been dollhouse furniture flew into the room and into the suitcase with ease. Hermione snapped shut the lid and picked it up. Without another word, she pointed her wand at the bed and blue flames engulfed the wood frame and mattress, leaving only a large pile of ash in the center of the room. Yes, Severus was now sure he never wanted to be on the receiving end of Hermione Granger's wrath.

Hermione turned on her heel and marched out of the room, suitcase in hand. She only paused when she reached Lavender. The girl shrank back, most likely afraid Hermione would hex her as she had Ron. But she didn't. She simply said, "Hope you've had your fun. You're stuck with him now. Oh, and it won't work properly for a week. Your shagfest will be postponed for now." She smiled sweetly at the dropped jaw displayed before her and then walked out the door without another word.

"Mr. Weasley. Miss Brown," Severus called as he followed Hermione out of the flat.

They made it to the corner before Hermione's tough exterior began to crumble. She sank onto a nearby bench, throwing her head into her hands, and began to weep. Severus instantly sat down next to her and slipped an arm around her shoulders. She twisted and buried her head into his chest and cried. They remained in that position for several minutes. Severus felt a pang of disappointment when Hermione finally pulled away from his grasp.

"I'm sorry!" she said, shaking her head and wiping tears from her eyes. "I keep falling apart on you."

"Think nothing of it, Hermione." He squeezed her hand gently before standing and holding a hand out to her. "I believe if we leave now, we can make lunch at Hogwarts." She smiled before taking hold of his proffered hand and picking up her suitcase.

Taking a calming breath, she said, "Yes. Lunch sounds amazing right now. You would not believe how much energy hexing bollocks can take out of a person!" Laughing, they both Disapparated.

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Severus arrived at his temporary home shortly after sunset. He went straight to the library. His head was pounding. It had indeed been a long day.

After lunch, he had been helping Hermione settle into her chambers, resizing the furniture and moving every piece what seemed like a hundred times, when Minerva had popped through the Floo. She had spent the remainder of the afternoon grilling them both on their combined curriculum. It had been taxing for them both since they had only decided which classes they would be teaching, not the substance of the classes. Their only escape had been dinner. After finishing his pudding and bidding the staff a good night, Severus had left the school immediately.

Now he sat on the sofa, attempting to read the latest edition of *Popular Potions*. Instead of comprehending the latest discovered uses for Hippogriff feathers, Hermione filled his thoughts. He knew he was only torturing himself by indulging in the thoughts of the night before, or what he could remember anyway.

Finally giving up on his periodical, he finished the splash of Scotch he'd poured himself before sitting down. His head was still pounding, and he pinched the bridge of his nose. Intent upon finding the headache relief he had in his medicine cabinet, he headed up the stairs.

As he entered his bedroom, he started removing his many layers of clothing and sending them zooming into the wardrobe after casting a cleansing charm over them. He pulled on a pair of black cotton pajama pants and made his way to the en suite bathroom. He pulled open the mirror to reveal the shelves behind it. He reached instinctively for the top shelf for the headache relief, but the bottle his hand retrieved was not a headache relief. He felt the blood drain from his face, and he had to grab the counter to keep from falling to the tiled floor.

In his hand was the contraceptive potion he had thought he had given Hermione.

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A/N: Many, many thanks and hugs to my incomparable beta, AmyLouise. She was the genius behind the chapter title because I was at a loss. She also is the queen of making my run-ons readable. Thanks again sweetie!

Good Intentions

Chapter 4 of 5

Severus attempts to rectify his mistake, but seems to just make matters worse.

A/N: I'm so sorry about the time lapse between these chapters! Especially after such an evil cliffy. But, I hope it will be worth the wait! Thank to all who have read and reviewed! Please keep it up!

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How could he have been so careless!? He should have never placed the two vials next to each other. Or put them in such similar containers. None of this would have happened.

His brain then took another avenue of thought. *Maybe it wasn't even necessary. I remember nothing past removing our clothing and snogging. Perhaps we didn't even get to actual intercourse.* He shook his head. It was wishful thinking, he knew. There had been evidence to the contrary on the sheets.

Severus walked back out to his bedroom and sank onto the bed. He ran his hands through his hair. He could fix this. He could brew a potion that prevented pregnancy up to thirty-six hours after copulation. He didn't know much about it, but surely it wouldn't have been approved by the WIZARDING Potions Committee without trial.

It was a tricky process and would take most of the night. He quickly did the math in his head. Right now, it was midnight, roughly twenty-four hours since they had slept together. The potion took six hours to brew and two hours to simmer. That would leave four hours to get it to Hermione.

He sighed heavily as he stood up and began to dress. He had better get started if he didn't want his bollocks hexed off by the woman he was sure did not want to carry his child.

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He poured his fifth cup of coffee and looked at his pocket watch. It was time to bottle the potion. And time to confront Hermione about his mistake and carelessness. Fortunately, he had been able to take a shower and short catnap while the potion had been simmering.

As soon as he had the cork in the small bottle, he walked back to the kitchen, took a pinch of Floo powder, and stepped through the green flames, arriving in his private quarters at Hogwarts. He took a few moments to spell away any residue ash and briskly walked out into the quiet dungeon corridor.

Hermione's quarters were near Gryffindor Tower, so that as Head of House she would be readily available to her students. As he neared her door, his anxiety suddenly came back in full force. What would she do? Would she hex him the same as she had Weasley? Possibly worse? He raised his hand to knock on the door, but paused in a moment of cowardice.

It has to be done. I must tell her now. It will only be worse if I wait! Taking a deep breath, he set his resolve and smartly rapped on the wooden door. There was no answer. He knocked again. Nothing. He looked at his pocket watch. It was half past eight. *Perhaps she is at breakfast. Wonderful,* his mind said sarcastically. Sighing, he set his path towards the Great Hall.

Since it was Sunday morning, there were only a few members of the staff at breakfast. He saw Hermione sitting to Hagrid's left. He walked around the table and stood just off to her other side, waiting for her conversation to take a lull so that he could pull her aside. But she turned her head toward him before he stopped walking.

"Severus! I didn't expect to see you this morning. Do you always come for Sunday breakfast?" she said with a smile that seemed to melt his insides. Severus cleared his throat nervously.

"Ah, no. I do not usually come for breakfast at all during the summer. But I do have something in particular I need to discuss with you. Do you mind stepping out in the corridor with me for moment?" He felt like a fifth year asking a girl to be his date for Yule Ball. His palms were sweaty and his words came out faster than he had intended them to.

"Oh! Well, I'm still eating. Surely, whatever you need to discuss can wait until we've both eaten properly?" she said with mock sarcasm.

"Hermione...", he started, but she cut him off.

"Oh, sit down, Severus. Have a cup of coffee and a muffin. Let me finish my eggs. Then we can go back to my quarters and talk." She poured him a steaming mug of coffee while she said all of this.

Severus sighed in defeat. "You clearly haven't lost any of your bossy nature. I've just never seen it tossed in my direction before."

Hermione giggled and said, "Well, you've never been my peer before. It wouldn't have been seemly for an apprentice to boss her Potions master around, now would it?" she quipped, while refreshing her own cup of coffee.

"Indeed," he replied with a slight smile. He reached for the basket in front of him and picked out a banana muffin and picked at it until Hermione had finished her breakfast. After telling Hagrid that she would see him for tea later that day, she turned to Severus.

"Well, shall we go or do you want another cup?" She was teasing him, he knew, but a part of him wanted to stay for fifty more cups of coffee if it meant never having to tell Hermione he had screwed up.

"No, I've had my fill, thank you." He stood up and motioned for her to precede him. "Lead the way, Professor Granger." Her smile grew wide at the mention of her honorific.

As they walked into the corridor, Hermione said, "Now, what was so important that you wanted to take me away from breakfast?" The urge to run out the front doors almost took over Severus, but he pushed it down.

"I believe we should wait to discuss it until we are behind closed doors." Hermione shot him a confused glance, but did not argue with him. They chatted amiably as they made their way toward Gryffindor Tower. Severus started to doubt his decision in having the conversation so far away from anyone else in the castle. And then he scoffed at himself.

You are a fully grown wizard! If you can't defend yourself against a twenty-one-year-old witch, you deserve what you get! His mind told him. He wiped his palms on his robes as Hermione let down the wards to her rooms.

"Come on in!" Hermione said in a cheery voice. "Do you want tea or anything?"

Severus almost answered 'yes' out of habit, but then thought better of it. Hot liquid was probably not the best thing to have around for the topic of discussion he was about to have with Hermione Granger.

"No. My breakfast coffee will sustain me until lunch, I'm sure. Thank you." She nodded and sat down in a chair and motioned him to sit on the sofa beside it. Severus sat and cleared his throat. He had no idea how to start.

"You're keeping me in suspense, Severus. What on earth is this all about?" Hermione said, slight discomfort coming through in her words.

"I must ask that you do not immediately react, physically or magically, to what I tell you."

"Now you really have me worried," she said with concern. "Just tell me. I'm sure it's not as bad as you're making it out to be."

Severus snorted. "You'll remember yesterday morning that I told you I had given you a contraceptive potion before we...um...well, before the events of the night before."

"Yes," she said, narrowing her eyes in suspicion.

"Well, it seems that I may have been careless in the way that I stored it, putting it directly beside a headache relief and in similar bottles. In my drunken state the other night, it appears that I mistook the headache relief for the contraceptive potion." He hung his head and braced himself for her wrath. But it didn't come. He tentatively looked up at her to find her white as a sheet and wide-eyed.

"So you're saying I was completely unprotected when we slept together?" she said in a small frightened voice. He nodded.

"When I discovered my mistake last night, I immediately began brewing a potion that would prevent pregnancy if taken within thirty-six hours of copulation." He took the vial out of his pocket and set it on the coffee table. She glanced at it and then back at Severus. Her expression turned from frightened to outraged. Snatching the small bottle off of the table and uncorking it, she took a small whiff of the turquoise liquid. She swiftly replaced the cork and tossed the bottle carelessly onto the table.

"That is Yattle's Brew."

Severus was completely bewildered. She was not upset at his negligence to protect her from conceiving a child before the act, but was instead upset that he had spent the entire night and early morning brewing an emergency contraceptive for after.

"Yes, it is. I brewed last night. I finished it just before coming here. Is there something wrong?" he asked, confusion heavy in every word he spoke. He glanced at his watch. It was now a quarter until ten. The time window for the potion to have effect was narrowing.

"Just how much do you know about Yattle's Brew, Severus?" Hermione crossed her arms over her chest defiantly and gave him a hard look. The truth was that he knew very little about the potion in question save that its purpose was to prevent pregnancy if taken within thirty-six hours of copulation and how to brew it.

"I take it by the look on your face, not much," Hermione interrupted his thoughts. "Well, let me fill you in. Although the women in the initial trials suffered no ill effects immediately, several of the women suffered from hemorrhaging that almost killed them months later. And none of them has been able to conceive since participating in the trials. The potion doesn't prevent conception. It prevents the fertilized egg from implanting into the uterine wall. By severing the fallopian tubes."

Severus stared at her, stunned. He had no idea that the potion was unsafe. As a fourth degree Potions master, he received the brewing directions for all non-commercial potions. But none of the notes had mentioned any of what Hermione had just disclosed to him. Why, in Merlin's name, had the WPC approved such a potion?

When he finally found his voice he said, "Hemione, I apologize. I had no idea there were such side effects to the potion. It was never my intention to sterilize or injure you in any way. I was simply thinking of rectifying my mistake."

Her face softened slightly. "No, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have gotten angry with you." She shook her head. "Very few in the Potions community know the true effects of Yattle's Brew. I find it entirely unacceptable and find myself in angry hysterics when I speak of it."

"Understandably so. But how do you have knowledge of this? Please take no disrespect from this, but you are only a second degree mistress. I myself only received the packet on Yattle's Brew two weeks ago."

"I am in the midst of my research project to gain my third degree title." Severus started at this revelation. Many Potions professionals didn't bother advancing to a third degree title. Those that did mostly waited years before receiving grants for starting a research project. Hermione was most assuredly setting some kind of precedence.

"Your third degree? Hermione, that is impressive. What is your field of study?"

"Reproductive studies. I received my letter six weeks ago. I've been allowed copies of any trial notes that pertain to the field, which included Yattle's Brew. I wanted to follow up on the participants to study any long-lasting effects. Imagine my horror when I found that all of them are now barren because of the experiment."

"Have you reported your findings to the Committee? Surely they would publish a warning."

"The master who created the brew is contesting that my research is faulty and incomplete. He's a fourth degree and apparently pulls more weight than I do as a second degree. So, unfortunately, I just have to complete my project and submit my findings with the completed research of the field. Which brings me to another point I think you should know."

Her face flushed slightly as she bit her bottom lip in apparent embarrassment. He had no idea why she should find anything between them embarrassing anymore. They'd shared more than two colleagues normally share. He nodded and said, "Alright."

"Well, when I decided on my field of study, I decided that I needed to track certain regularities within the human body to verify and document cycles. I decided that I would be part of my own study group, keeping a record of my own fertility and menstrual cycles." She paused, the flush deepening as she seemingly struggled to finish.

"Well, I've become very, erm, familiar with my body. Down to the point of knowing when I am fertile and most likely to conceive." She stopped talking and looked at Severus with a worried expression that could only mean one thing. He cleared his throat and it sound more like a choke.

"You're saying that you were at your peak fertility two nights ago," he managed to croak out, not quite meeting her eyes.

"Yes," she squeaked. His head went fuzzy and he suddenly felt as if a toxic gas had filled the room. He abruptly stood up and left the room, leaving Hermione by herself.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

A/N: Another cliffy, I know. But how would I get you back to read the next chapter? ;) A HUGE thank you to my invaluable beta, AmyLouise. I have no idea what this story would be without her. Please let me know what you think! Reviews are the only payment I get!

Regrouping

Chapter 5 of 5

Severus and Minerva have a discussion

A/N: I do not own anything you recognize. I, sadly, do not make any money off of this story. Also, this story is AU.

Many thanks to my lovely beta, AmyLouise. She has polished this into reading state, and I owe her a debt of gratitude. Also, to my amazing readers and reviewers. I know I kept you waiting for this update, and I appreciate without measure those of you who have stayed with me. Without further ado, here is Chapter 5.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Chapter 5 Regrouping

Severus knew it was a very cowardly thing to do, leaving Hermione sitting there after revealing to him that he had most likely fathered a child, but his mind was racing, and he needed air. Besides, she was the Gryffindor, not he.

As a student, and even into his teaching days, he had retreated to the Astronomy Tower to seclude himself. But Dumbledore had ruined that place for him, so his legs carried him to the Owlery instead.

His breath came in labored pants as he paced back and forth. *This cannot be happening*, his mind said over and over again. He walked over to the window and, leaning out over the edge, started taking in great gulps of air. The wizarding world was less forgiving of children born out of wedlock than the Muggle world. Hermione would bear the brunt of it. She would become a social pariah. She would possibly lose her job, if he knew the Board of Governors.

He ran his fingers through his hair and sighed. He had never formed an opinion on termination, but his mind considered it. No, he thought. It wasn't his choice. It was Hermione's. He would support her if she chose that route, but he would not bring up the option. He started pacing again.

Perhaps this would be a good thing. Growing up, he had always wanted a child so that he could be the father Tobias never was. But all those dreams had gone up in flames once he'd begun spying for the Light. Now, those hopes were rising from the ashes, like a phoenix being reborn. He and Hermione were getting along well enough. There was no doubt in his mind that he was attracted to the young witch. It wouldn't be improper now to have a relationship with her as she was no longer his student or apprentice. But would she see it as such? Or would she assume he was just doing it out of honor? *Was he considering it out of sheer honor?*

The heavy wooden door scraped along the stone floor, pulling Severus from his thoughts. He straightened and set his face into the iconic glare.

"Oh, relax your face, Severus. You know it never worked on me." Minerva stood in the doorway with a look that meant nothing good was coming his way.

"What is it, Minerva? I'm not in the mood for any of your lectures today," Severus said with a sigh. The Headmistress took a step into the Owlery and huffed.

"Well, isn't that a 'good day'! I was actually just curious. I asked Hermione at lunch if you were going to be joining us, and the poor thing burst into tears and left the Great Hall! Do you know anything about this? I would hate for two of my professors to start the new school year off in the midst of a disagreement."

He had reduced her to tears. He had felt murderous hate for Weasley when he had made Hermione cry twice and had even envisioned ways of repaying such an injustice. Now he was the culprit. He hung his head in shame, but kept his face as blank as stone.

"I acted in a cowardly fashion earlier after receiving some distressing news." Severus didn't know what else to say. He couldn't very well tell the Headmistress he'd likely knocked up her prized Gryffindor cub, especially without Hermione's permission.

"I see. And just what was this distressing news?"

"I cannot disclose that information. You would do best to ask Hermione," Severus said, his voice flat.

"Yes, I assumed you would say that, so I followed Hermione before looking for you. She explained the situation."

Severus took a step back and instinctively fingered his wand. She knew. She had him cornered. Minerva was nothing if not a mother bear to her cubs, even after they had graduated.

"Oh, stop it, Severus. I'm not going to hex you. Give you a tongue lashing, yes, but I'm not going to injure anything more than possibly your pride."

He relaxed, but kept his hand close to his wand.

"First off, I'm very disappointed that the two of you, both intelligent beyond your years, did not have the foresight to avoid a situation like this. Really, Severus, bottling a headache relief and a contraceptive potion in similar bottles? And then storing them next to each other? You of all people should have known better."

"Yes, Minerva. I am aware of my mistake. I have many faults," he replied in a stony tone.

"Hm, yes. Well, I'm also very surprised at your reaction today. Just leaving her there in her rooms? Honestly, Severus. You've faced Voldemort and the contempt of most of the wizarding community. Is Hermione that frightening to you?" She paused, obviously expecting an answer from him.

"It is not Hermione that is frightening." *Although, she can be if the situation warrants it*, his mind added. "It is the situation in which we find ourselves. You know what will happen to her when the general public finds out she's having a child out of wedlock! And what will the Board of Governors say when they catch wind of the story? Not even you can save her then." Severus felt a tightening in his chest. He wanted nothing but the best for Hermione. It pained him to think what her life would be as a single mother. He had to make sure that did not happen.

"Well, I believe she's had a taste of what it might be like this morning. She believes that you will never speak to her again. Do you know she attempted to put in her notice? I, of course, refused, but I suggest that you find that girl and calm her down. Unless, of course, she was correct in her assumption that you wish to no longer speak to her?" Minerva fixed him with a pointed look over the rims of her glasses.

The tight feeling in his chest grew stronger, making it difficult to breathe, let alone speak. "She was incorrect in that assumption. I am..." He stopped. What was he? He was not in love with the girl, but it was more than just a feeling one had for a friend, even a good friend. He started again. "I am fond of Hermione. She is an amazing young woman, whom I admire."

Minerva sighed in finality. "Good. You still have a week before a pregnancy can be detected magically. I suggest the two of you remain calm until you know for sure that Hermione is expecting. I will expect the results from the detection as soon as you know them." Minerva gave Severus a look of exasperation. "Now, kindly grow a pair and

Severus sighed heavily and slumped against the wall. Minerva was right, of course. He needed to speak with Hermione. He needed to apologize for leaving her the way he had. Perhaps they were getting ahead of themselves. It wasn't guaranteed that Hermione had conceived. They should attempt to act normally and not decide anything until the pregnancy was confirmed. Severus straightened his form and purposefully walked out of the Owlery in search of Hermione.

Hermione had not answered when Severus had knocked on her door. When he did not find her in the Great Hall, the teacher's lounge, or her classroom and office, Severus had begun to think she had really left, despite Minerva refusing her resignation. He stood in the Entrance Hall, a scowl etched onto his face.

It didn't take him long to find her tucked away in a back corner, her nose buried in a book almost half her size. She was so engrossed he had to call her name twice before she registered his presence. She looked up at him, an unreadable expression on her face.

"May I?" he asked quietly. Hermione consented with a nod. Severus took the seat next her. "I apologize for my behavior earlier today. It was very childish and unfair to you. It will not happen again. I beg for your forgiveness." He looked at her with pleading in his eyes.

"I could never be upset with you for something I did." That smile, Merlin help him. He was very glad he was sitting. "I believe both of us have overreacted to our current situation. Yes, there is a very good chance that we indeed did conceive a child, but there is also a chance that we did not. So, it is my opinion that we not let the possibility of something define our decisions until that possibility turns into reality."

Severus raised his eyebrow. "Did you eat lunch?" Severus asked, standing up.

Severus offered her his arm. "Well then, please allow me to escort you to dinner."

"Now, are we going to dinner or not? I'm starving." Hermione was back to her bossy self it seemed. Severus smiled, tucked her hand into the crook of his arm, and guided her out of the room.

A/N: Hopefully I wrapped this chapter up a little neater than some of my previous ones. I will be taking a hiatus for a few months to participate in my first ever sshg exchange! Check out my LJ account for updates and such. And keep reading and reviewing!