

The Beauty of Science

by Hanagasume

In collaborating to find a cure for a magical condition that is thought to be irreversible, Potions mistress Granger and Potions master Snape discover the beauty of science and the lasting companionship of love. Written for WriterMerrin and based loosely on the life of Marie Curie.

Chapter 1: The Silent Scientist

Chapter 1 of 20

In collaborating to find a cure for a magical condition that is thought to be irreversible, Potions mistress Granger and Potions master Snape discover the beauty of science and the lasting companionship of love. Written for WriterMerrin and based loosely on the life of Marie Curie.

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This is a gift for WriterMerrin, for being one of the sweetest, kindest people I know. I hope you enjoy your gift!

Thanks go out to lyn_f and VIVAvivacious for beta-ing this chapter for me.

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In science, we must be interested in things, not in persons. Marie Curie.

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Wythenshawe, Manchester: 25th May, 2009

The potions workroom was stifling with the seven cauldrons bubbling away, making it difficult to breathe or even think.

One of the cauldrons emitted a loud sizzling sound, much to the surprise of the room's only occupant. Potions master Hermione Granger crossed the room, taking in the sight before her. A simple miscalculation on her part, and the entire potion had turned into a brown mess of coagulating sludge. Sighing heavily, she snatched an old towel from the table and grabbed the handle of the cauldron, lifting it up and carrying it over to the bench beside the basins. She immediately knew what had gone wrong: too much powdered horn of Bicorn. It was an unstable ingredient, and even so much as a quarter of a milligram more than was required would render a potion useless. Noting the effects that it had in her working journal, she went back to observe the rest of her projects.

The afternoon ticked by slowly as she stirred her experiments, making the flame hotter or lowering the temperature as needed, and sometimes even adding new ingredients if she thought they would make a significant improvement to the mix. It was a peaceful and almost relaxing environment, being in a potions workroom, when one was not desperately trying to correct the mistakes of a fumbling schoolmate in order to remain alive and intact. Nor did she have to contend with her moody former Potions master hovering over her and making her feel nervous.

A trickle of sweat ran down the back of her neck, and she used another towel to wipe it away. Deciding that enough was enough, Hermione went to the far side of the room

and cracked open the lone, little window there. While some people might have been content to work in the heat, she was not one of them. She needed fresh air, no matter how cold, and had no wish to contaminate any of her potions with her bodily fluids. In her workroom, it was nobody's fault but her own if something got in to pollute her hard work.

Her cooling charms on the walls were mild so as not to disturb her brews with magical signatures. If she could have improved upon them and raised their power in a safe way, she would have done so long ago.

When night fell, she cast a stasis charm on each individual cauldron, noting their progress up to that point in the separate journals she kept for each potion she worked on. Once satisfied she had made as much headway as she could for the day, she retreated up the stairs that led out of the workroom and onto the ground floor of her house. Her basement had been converted into her laboratory, which had cost her a great deal of her meagre earnings as a Potions lecturer at the Aberdeen College of Magic.

But in the end, she reasoned that it was *her* laboratory and *her* achievement, and nobody else could take credit for it.

Taking a deep breath, she noticed that the house was quite cold now that she was no longer working in a room filled with heat and cauldrons. She was also quite certain that one of the potions itself was generating a lot of heat, so she would have to research that the next day. Walking into the sitting room, she ignited the wood in the fireplace with a spell before stoking it with the iron rod kept nearby. Walking upstairs to her bedroom, she lit the fire in there so it would be warmed when it came time for bed.

Hermione returned to the kitchen and began preparing her dinner. As she was waiting for the water to boil for her pasta, her mind ticked over the things she needed to work on the next day. She would need to go to the Apothecary to pick up some fresh ingredients for her potions: dittany, Jobberknoll feathers, nettles, and star grass. Perhaps she could place an order for some dragon's blood.

Sighing, she focused her attention back on the water that was beginning to bubble. Tossing in a little salt, she added the fettuccini and turned up the heat. Cooking, not unlike potion making, was a favourite pastime of Hermione's. She liked the precision of timing how long it would take the water to heat to the correct temperature for boiling the pasta. How long until the pasta was cooked al dente. Which herbs and what amount to use in the sauce. She topped it off with a little shaved parmesan and sat down to eat.

It was perfect.

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Camden, London: 25th February, 1999

Hermione nibbled at her bottom lip as she listened idly to the lecturer at the front of the lecture hall.

Her professor had been droning for two hours, and she was beginning to grow weary. She was months ahead in her readings and had been attending various seminars. Her first six months at the London Institute of Magic had been thrilling, but lectures were less than interesting; Hermione had always found more value in the practical application of Potions. Her major assignment for the year, for example, was almost in the brewing phase.

She just had to purchase the ingredients. However, it would take another two weeks of tutoring for her to be able to afford them ... it was the story of her life. During the year that should have been her final one at Hogwarts, she, Harry, and Ron had been camping out in forests, continually shifting from place to place. Hermione had secretly moved her parents to Australia, modifying their memories and setting them up with a dental surgery there. After the Final Battle was won and everything had calmed down, she had returned to find them, only to find they had died in a vehicle collision.

She had been devastated, and because they were no longer alive and could not verify that they did indeed have a 19-year-old daughter, she was left without a leg to stand on: no money, no home, and no family to speak of. Even her relationship with Ron Weasley had fizzled into nothing.

The little money that she did earn was from tutoring students at the Institute to pay the rent on her flat and other basic living expenses. Harry had wanted to support her, but she never would have been able to accept his charity. Despite the struggle that it was, she worked hard and pushed forward, determined to achieve her goal of becoming a Potions master. After two years, she would need to work under a Master as an apprentice. Until then, her most important task to focus on was her Master's thesis.

Refocusing on the class, she looked down to the front to find that a few of her classmates had gotten into a heated discussion with the professor.

Feeling disinterested, she packed up her belongings and made her way towards the back of the theatre, exiting through the fire escape door. She made her way to the library and picked one of the empty study carrels, spreading her notebooks over the table and claiming the space as her own for the afternoon.

If her major project for the year went well, she would be able to begin her thesis and complete it before the date it was due.

'Hermione Granger?' said a vaguely familiar voice from nearby.

Spinning around in her chair, Hermione looked over her shoulder and saw her former schoolmate, Susan Bones, walking over to her from the book aisles. She looked back to her workbooks and frowned for a moment. She really needed to work on her project, but she didn't want to be rude.

'Hello, Susan,' she greeted, standing up and walking over to meet her.

'I didn't know that you were studying here!' Susan exclaimed. 'I've been here since the beginning of the semester, and I've never seen you around. I do Transfiguration.'

'I've been studying Potions since the beginning of the semester,' Hermione answered. 'I'll be accelerating my degree to finish in three semesters' time.'

'Wow, that's impressive,' Susan said with a big, false smile. 'Of course, nobody would expect anything less from you, Hermione.'

'Well, I would love to be able to catch up, but I'm afraid I have some rather pressing work to get onto,' Hermione explained, hoping she didn't sound too rude.

'It was nice seeing you,' the other witch replied, waving before walking away.

Hermione very much doubted her sincerity. She had recently become shrewder when it came to people and sensing their feelings, and she could read Susan like a book. Her classmate was trying to be nosey, and she just didn't have the time for those sorts of distractions. Retreating to her desk, she was nose-down in her books for the remainder of the afternoon until the librarian came around to throw everyone out for the night.

She walked home from the Institute, only two blocks away in a flat she shared with another exchange student from France.

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Newtown, Reading: 3rd June, 2009

The annual "Potions Through Time" seminar was being held in London that year.

Hermione had already accepted her invitation and prepared her brewing schedule around it. Two weeks was a remarkably short time away, and there was a lot she had to do before she would be ready to go. She was with the Potters, staying in their home to help Harry with his two older children while he was busy working and visiting Ginny in St. Mungo's. Two days earlier she had given birth to their third child, and only daughter, Lily Luna Potter.

Hermione was thrilled for her friends. Although she was too busy with her work life for dating and attempting to build a family of her own, she often wondered what it was about that life that brought people joy. She did find the two Potter boys to be rather amusing whenever she was around. She supposed growing up surrounded by adults made it difficult to understand children.

While all the other children in the neighbourhood had played in the park, Hermione had been at home reading science and dentistry periodicals. Her dad had been a loving and nurturing father, but he had always been more proud of her academic achievements than whether or not she was wearing the prettiest dresses. Her mother had indulged her father and allowed him to coddle her.

'Aunty 'Mione?' said a small voice from beside her.

Hermione blinked and closed the book she had open on her lap, looking over her shoulder to see a pair of green eyes peering up at her, covered by a messy shock of black hair. James, who was five, was a curious and lively boy, not unlike Harry himself. Reaching a hand over, she tousled his hair gently.

'What can I do for you, young man?' she asked with a smile.

'Can I please have a sandwich? I'm hungry,' he said with a big, toothy grin.

Placing her book on the coffee table, she got up from the armchair she had claimed and held out a hand for James to take. Walking with him to the Potters' kitchen, she opened the fridge and pulled out the fillings for a sandwich. She summoned the bread and began to put one together for her young charge. Cutting the ham, cheese, and chutney sandwich into four triangles, she plated it and passed it to him.

'Thank you!' he said enthusiastically, bouncing over to the kitchen table and sitting to eat.

Deciding that a sandwich was a very good idea, she made another two for herself and for Albus Severus, who was still sitting in his playpen in the sitting room. After finishing hers and clearing away both her plate and James's, she led him back to the other room and went over to the pen to give Albus some food. After he was fed, Hermione sat down with the two boys on her lap in the chair and read them the book that James had handed to her: *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*.

She was always confused as to why this happened to be James's favourite book. Harry had hated it every since discovering the reason why Hermione had been given it, but one time when the Potters had paid her a visit, James had seen it and immediately fell in love with it. Regardless of her ill feelings about the book, she read.

Harry returned to his home at six that evening, tossed out of St. Mungo's because visiting hours were over. Hermione served up a delicious meal of mushroom risotto and herbed bread she made the night before. After they cleaned the kitchen and put the two boys to bed, Hermione packed up her things and got ready to leave. Ginny would be returning home the next day, and she had a potion at her house that was calling her.

'Thanks for all of your help here, Hermione,' Harry told her as he helped her to collect the last of her things. 'I really appreciate it, and Gin does, too.'

'It's not a problem at all, Harry,' she said with a smile. 'Your two boys were very sweet and well behaved. It's been a pleasure spending time with them when I ordinarily only see them once every two months. I'll stop by to see the baby and my two favourite boys again soon,' she promised, accepting Harry's hug and giving him a kiss on the cheek. 'Bye, Harry.'

'Take care,' he told her.

She nodded and smiled before Apparating home.

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Greenwich, Ipswich: 3rd June, 2009

His house was located on the very edge of town.

Very few people lived in that area, and even fewer visited. He preferred it that way; it was much less of an inconvenience. For nine years he had lived in the traditionally styled house, a shed in the small back yard for his laboratory. No more would he keep his potentially volatile concoctions in his house where they could blow up and destroy it. The shed was sturdy and well insulated, built with one purpose only: to serve as the workroom for all his potions. His only two places of solace and peace were with his potions, or with the books in his study.

He spoke to no one, even when he was in town to buy groceries or in London collecting ingredients from the apothecary. Nobody really expected him to, and some were even under the impression that he was incapable of speech. A lot of people in the town had taken to calling him the Silent Scientist, although none of them really had any idea just what it was he did. A few business owners became curious whenever he purchased something unusual, but most knew well enough to leave him alone.

But he was not lonely. His potions work captivated him. It took up a great deal of his time but never left him wanting. Unlike the fickle nature of people, science had yet to fail him. Chopping with precision, weighing ingredients for exact measurements, and knowing how and when to adjust heat all came naturally to him. He was one of the finest Potions masters in all of Europe, after all.

But Severus Snape did not care a whit for celebrity.

It was why he lived where he did. It was a town surrounded by enough folk tales and urban myths that it was a safe enough place to live a magical life amongst Muggles. Most were already accustomed to, or had been told of, the strange goings-on throughout the town's history.

That afternoon, his focus was on one cauldron in particular. It was a potion he was creating to counter the effects of the Cruciatus curse. His intent was to reverse the severe nerve damage and to grow new nerves to replace those that had been destroyed beyond restoration. His own nerves had suffered some damage, but it was mostly due to years of overexposure to a dangerous lifestyle. His new life suited him very well.

After a few hours, tiny bubbles began to form on the top of the pearlescent liquid in the glass cauldron. During his life as a Potions master, Snape had come to find that the slower the potion was brewed, the more receptive it was to the addition of new ingredients to the mix. Thus, Ashwinder eggs and other usually volatile ingredients became far less of an explosion risk. At just the right temperature, he could even prevent the potion from boiling over.

It had taken the better part of twenty years to perfect his technique.

And in two weeks' time, when he went to the annual "Potions Through Time" seminar, he would attend and take notes. Countless times he had been invited to speak as a special guest, but each time he refused. He would not speak about his research to the simpletons that attended. It would be a frivolous waste of all his life's precious work. No, he would write down what he believed could improve others' work, and after it was over, he would ensure that the people who did speak would know what he thought. His opinion was valued.

It was a nice change after spending the first half of his life despised and mistrusted.

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To be continued.

Chapter 2: Mastering the Science

Chapter 2 of 20

In collaborating to find a cure for a magical condition that is thought to be irreversible, Potions mistress Granger and Potions master Snape discover the beauty of science and the lasting companionship of love. Written for WriterMerrin and based loosely on the life of Marie Curie.

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Thanks go out to VIVAvivacious for the beta of this chapter.

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Be less curious about people and more curious about ideas. Marie Curie.

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St. Mungo's, London: 19th January, 1999

He stared at the ceiling, less than happy about being in the white-washed room.

Snape hated the room, the people, and the very fact that he was still alive. He was supposed to be dead. He had anticipated death. So, why was he still alive and in this godforsaken hospital with people harassing him every hour on the hour? Well, he had a feeling it had something to do with the fact that Miss Hermione "Know-It-All" Granger had seen fit to go back to the Shrieking Shack after Voldemort was dead only to find him still alive...at least, that was what he had been told. Apparently she was the one he had to thank for his continued existence.

Growling under his breath, he turned his neck, causing it to throb slightly, so he could look at the window. The blinds were shut, but the sunlight was already beginning to peek through. What on Earth were the Healers and their underlings doing? It was already half past nine, and his blinds were still closed. Did they think that just because he was injured that he was an invalid who needed to sleep twelve hours a day? He was used to four hours of sleep at any time, and that he was managing to sleep six or seven hours was a miracle. He supposed that had more to do with the potions they were administering to him and the traces of Nagini's venom that was still in his bloodstream.

He heard a knock at the door and sighed heavily. 'If you've any brains, I would stay away if I were you,' Snape growled. His voice was still a little rough from where the snake had torn at his vocal chords.

The door opened just a crack and a young, freckled man poked his head through. 'I am just coming to administer your morning potions, sir,' he stammered. 'Would you like me to open the blinds as well?'

Snape frowned as the man entered the room regardless of his warning. 'Fine, open them, give me my blasted potions, and then get the hell out,' he snapped.

The man hurried to open the blinds before returning to Snape's side and setting out a row of vials. Carefully lifting Snape into a sitting position and propping him against some pillows, he handed Snape the first vial. Snape drank it down, ignoring the foul taste with the ease of someone who was used to them, and continued to drink all the vile concoctions he was handed until he was done. As soon as he had been administered his potions, the nurse retreated from the room quickly without a backwards glance.

Snape relaxed against the pillows he was seated against as soon as the door was closed. Pleased at having some natural light in the room, he reached out a hand towards the drawers on the opposite wall and summoned a book and the pair of glasses that had been left for him. He hated having to wear the silly things, but apparently his perfect vision had been one of the things to suffer when he was injured. If he wanted to read, he would have to do so with the spectacles on.

He finally looked down at the book and saw the title: *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* Who on Earth had thought to leave him that book? Opening the cover, he read the list of names scribbled there. His breath hitched when he read Albus Dumbledore in his former master's usual flourish, and then his brow furrowed when he read the name directly beneath in neat, familiar script: Hermione Granger. He should have known the silly chit would come to visit him.

He'd have the book returned to her after he read it.

Half an hour after beginning, Snape suddenly realised exactly what it was he was reading. He was reading his death sentence, or rather, the reason why Voldemort had tried to kill him. Dumbledore had never said a word to him...not a thing about a wand or a cloak or a ring. He had thought the ring was a just a Horcrux, but it was something far more serious than just that. Perhaps there was more to the ring than just the curses that the Dark Lord had applied to it? Shaking his head, he closed the book. He would not think on something that could not be undone.

A short while later, the door opened again, and his Healer walked in. 'Ah, Professor Snape, good to see you awake,' he said, voice dripping with false sincerity.

'I can't say I feel the same way about you, *Healer* Turner,' Snape replied rudely, roughly removing his glasses and crossing his arms over his chest.

'Relax, Snape,' Turner said, dropping all false pretences of civility. 'I'm just here to check your vitals. I wouldn't be here, either, if I had any other choice.'

Snape snorted as the younger man performed a few diagnostic spells on him. Healer Turner left his room as swiftly as he came, his silence on leaving more telling than any conversation between them would have been. Confident that he was reasonably healthy despite his neck and blood, Snape relaxed back against the pillows, tilting his head to the side so he could stare out the window.

As he reclined in silence, he thought. The fates were tricky indeed to play him and lead him sweetly towards death, only to deny it to him at the last moment. He had been sent back to impose on the world his presence once more. Sighing, he thought that perhaps he still had an unfulfilled role to assume, something left for him in this life he had to complete before he could finally move onto a new life. He thought it was mighty rich of the person playing with his life threads, to continue to play him after what life had thrown him until that point.

Snape supposed that he would just have to let the events unfold.

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Camden, London: 5th June, 2009

Looking out over her classroom, the teacher sighed softly.

Hermione had been sitting and listening to the scratching of quills against parchment and the occasional coughing fit for almost three hours. The College year was drawing to a close, and she was overseeing her class's final exam. Hermione had taken a part-time stint as a Potions lecturer for a couple of classes at the London Institute of Magic. It was three days a week in London, which provided ample income to maintain her house and provide for all of her basic needs, not to mention potion ingredients. Another upside was that it freed up the rest of her time for her life's most important work her potions.

Unfortunately, with the summer break just around the corner, Hermione would be forced to resume making potions for apothecaries to keep herself from going broke in the three months without classes to teach. It wasn't such a bad life, really. She had everything she needed: a small house of her own with a laboratory in the basement, enough money to get by, and friends who supported her ambition. She had never walked through life wanting wealth, power, or fame. The only thing she desired more than anything else was knowledge and the wisdom to use it well.

She drummed her fingers lightly against her desk as she checked her silver wrist watch. It was only half past three in the afternoon. There was still another half hour until time was up.

Sighing heavily, she stared at the wood grain of her desk, tracing the slight ridges of imperfections with her index finger. Her thoughts travelled to the upcoming Potions symposium that was just a few short days away. She could have used work as an excuse not to attend, if not for the fact that classes for the year finished inconveniently early. She knew the organisers deliberately planned it that way so there were no excuses not to attend ... short of death, which would exempt a person from attendance without causing offense. And because Hermione could never stand it when something like that was held over her head, she attended, but not without some complaint.

It appeared, as far as her potions brewing went, that she had hit a brick wall. It stood between her and her brewing like the Berlin Wall had once segregated the two halves of many a family. Hermione felt like a stranger in her own mind at times like those ... able to see and touch everything, but not quite able to find what it was she was searching for. Her lack of focus was due mostly to the fact she had been around her potions by herself, without asking for a stitch of help, for too long.

Glancing down at her watch again, she noted that it was time to end the exam. 'All right, ladies and gentlemen,' she said with more enthusiasm than she felt. 'It is now time to put your quills down and hand in your papers. Pass all of them to the person on the left end of the row and then all down to the front.'

Her students hurried to comply, packing up their things and leaving without a backward glance.

As soon as the door closed behind the last one, she went to the front and collected the neat stack of papers. She had a long few days ahead of her if she was to get all of her marking done before the symposium. Deciding not to put off the inevitable any longer, she packed up her own desk for the last time until the new school semester and left the classroom. She walked the short way to the Apparation point, and soon where she had been standing, there was an empty space.

Reappearing in the entry hall of her house, she removed her teaching robes and hung them on the coat hooks by the door. She took her work to the sitting room and deposited her students' exams on the coffee table in front of the armchairs. Heading into the kitchen, she put the kettle on to boil and began pulling things out of the freezer for dinner. Settling on the idea of a stir fry, she left some frozen tofu on the bench and made herself a pot of green tea before retreating back to her sitting room. The day had been reasonably warm, so her house was thankfully not as cold as it usually was.

Pulling out a pot of red ink, she picked up the exam on the top of the pile and set to work. Two hours and one third of the way through the first stack of exams later, Hermione set them aside and potted back to the kitchen to begin preparing her stir fry. As she was chopping the carrots, she thought about how similar it was to cut into root of asphodel, especially when preparing it in the traditional fashion. She had been too preoccupied with exams and marking over the past few days that all her personal research had been set to the side until she had time to try to break through the wall she had reached with her formula.

Flicking some water at her wok, she watched as it sizzled and evaporated before adding a little oil to the pan and tossing in some minced garlic.

She added the chopped tofu and vegetables she had washed and sliced up, stirring them through with seasoning and soy sauce. She fished out a snow pea from the wok and tasted it before tipping her dinner onto her plate, satisfied with the flavour. Taking her food back into the sitting room with her, she sat down on the couch and turned on her television. She flicked through the channels until she found a documentary on seals.

Smiling, she settled in to eat, and when she was finished, she Banished her plate to the kitchen sink and continued with her marking.

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Greenwich, Ipswich: 5th June, 2009

Snape frowned at the potion in front of him before picking up the cauldron by the handle and carrying it back over to the row of sinks in his shed laboratory.

Growling under his breath, he tipped the potion into the sink and placed the cauldron into the bottom, filling it with hot water to soak off the sticky residue. It was his fourth failed attempt that week, and no matter how many times he tweaked the formula, it was never quite right; sometimes it even went horrifically wrong. But that was the nature of potions.

They were unstable, and they depended a lot on precision. He sighed, leaning against the bench and closing his eyes for a moment, before pushing away and walking to collect a new cauldron.

He selected a glass cauldron of the exact same size as the one in the sink and filled it halfway with water. Setting the flame beneath it to begin heating the contents, he went to the ingredients cupboard and began pulling out the ones for his base: fluxweed, Shrivelfig juice, valerian, moondew, and wormwood essence.

He crushed five Shrivelfigs with the side of his knife, drawing the blade along them in a few spots to open them up more so the juices could flow from them with more ease. The valerian, he used three inches of the root and minced it as finely as he could manage before adding it to the lightly bubbling mix. Stirring it ten times counter-clockwise, he continued adding the other ingredients accordingly until he was stirring a base of cloudy white liquid. He turned the heat down so the potion only simmered slightly, small bubbles appearing on the surface.

He left it in that state and went to collect another lot of potions for the Infirmary that he had on stasis since the night before. His base would need another day to mature enough to begin the next steps. Noting the time in his workbook, he closed it and left to work on his Blood Replenishing potion. Apparently the last Quidditch match of the season was occurring in two days, and Poppy Pomfrey feared the worst. The professors always got nervous when the last match was Slytherin versus Gryffindor.

He removed the stasis charm and turned on the flame beneath it, immediately setting it to a low heat to warm it again. There were only a few more steps left until it was completed and he could decant the doses. He added salamander blood to the potion, stirring clockwise continuously before adding the final ingredient, honeywater. He turned up the heat, stirring with a silver rod all the while, until the potion began to boil. Allowing it to boil for three minutes exactly, he reduced the heat in stages before extinguishing the flame.

Removing the stirring rod, he reached for a silver spoon and extracted some of the potion, dipping a long finger in to test the consistency and then wafting the scent to his nose to smell. It was the perfect colour, consistency, and smell, and he was sure it would taste sweet like the honeywater he added at the end. Unlike a lot of other Potions masters, he believed in making adjustments to potions in order to make them easier to stomach. Well, the sort of potions people had to take when the injury or illness was not self-inflicted. He would never improve the taste of a hangover cure.

Ten minutes later, it had cooled enough to decant, and he had filled enough vials with the Blood Replenishing potion to store in two small crates.

He left his base simmering on the bench and cast a charm on the room to prevent anything from falling into it. Sure his potion would not be tainted while he was away, he

took the two crates of potion to the house with him and wrote a missive to Poppy Pomfrey to attach to it. He sent them via the Floo network to the Hogwarts Infirmary before leaving his study and heading to the kitchen.

He whipped up two ham, lettuce, and mustard seed sandwiches, then took them with him to the sitting room and summoned one of his books to read. He ate all his food and continued to read for an hour before he fell asleep, drowsy from a morning of constant brewing.

He woke up with a start a few hours later and saw that it was already five in the evening. Removing his glasses from the end of his nose and blinking rapidly, he launched himself from the chair and walked out the room and through the back door, heading towards his shed to check that there were no changes to his potion base. When he found it unchanged, he locked the shed for the night and returned to his house, heading straight up to his study to write up a to-do list. He had a great deal to complete before the symposium.

On entering, he heard a soft hoot and saw his hawk owl perched on his stand. Snape smiled slightly and went over to his familiar, allowing him to nip at his fingers.

'Hello, Hephaestus,' he greeted quietly. 'I suppose you've come to be fed then?'

Another hoot indicated that he was, indeed, looking for some food. Snape went to his desk and opened a drawer, pulling out some of the owl food he kept there and putting it on a plate. He held out an arm and Hephaestus flew across the room to settle onto it. Snape let his owl step from his arm and onto the desk to eat.

'There you go, bird,' he said gruffly.

He settled into his chair and pulled out a sheet of parchment and some black ink, dipping the end of his quill into the pot and beginning his list.

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To be continued.

Chapter 3: Science, in a Nutshell

Chapter 3 of 20

In collaborating to find a cure for a magical condition that is thought to be irreversible, Potions mistress Granger and Potions master Snape discover the beauty of science and the lasting companionship of love. Written for WriterMerrin and based loosely on the life of Marie Curie.

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I would like to say a big thank you to VIVAvivacious for all of her hard work beta-ing this chapter for me.

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After all, science is essentially international, and it is only through lack of the historical sense that national qualities have been attributed to it.

Marie Curie.

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Wythenshawe, Manchester: 9th June, 2009

Hermione was packing the last few items of clothing she would need for the conference into her suitcase when the doorbell rang.

Making her way downstairs, she paused to brush her hair out of her eyes before opening the door. She smiled on seeing Ginny Potter, who was wearing a pink baby sling with her little girl inside. She opened the door wider to let them in, and the two women bussed each other on the cheek in greeting.

'If I'd known to expect visitors, I would have had something better out for lunch than bread and sandwich condiments,' Hermione said with a smile as the two walked through to the kitchen.

'I didn't mean to stop in unannounced, but the boys are both with mum for a few days. Harry and I have to go to Bulgaria tomorrow for some silly international relations banquet that Kingsley is forcing him to attend,' Ginny explained. 'And I knew you were going to be at that convention, so I thought I would bring Lily by to see her godmother.'

'Oh, really, Gin? You're not actually going to make me the godmother of all your children, are you?' Hermione exclaimed as she opened the fridge.

Ginny smiled. 'Of course we are! Who could be a better example? And this way, you're more or less an official Auntie and part of the family without even having to be married to one of my idiot brothers,' she said enthusiastically. 'I always wished to have an older sister, and you're the closest I have to that.'

Hermione blushed a little at that. 'All right,' she agreed as she made two turkey, cranberry, Swiss cheese, and lettuce sandwiches. 'But I'll have you know, even if you didn't make me their godmother, I'd still consider you family.'

Hermione sat down at the table and pushed one of the plates towards Ginny, who, with the ease of practice, negotiated around the baby sling to eat her food. After lunch, Hermione cleaned up the kitchen, and the two women went into the warm sitting room, where she took hold of little Lily. The baby already had a precious shock of red hair growing in wisps on her tiny head, and she had the softest skin imaginable. She was enchanting. She wondered whether she would have Harry's green eyes or Ginny's blue ones when she finally deigned to open them properly for the world to see.

'She's such a beautiful little thing,' Hermione said softly, stroking Lily's cheek. 'I can see a heartbreaker already.'

'That's what Harry has been afraid of ever since the moment we found out we were having a girl,' Ginny replied. 'He's worried that the second he sends her off to Hogwarts, she is going to be stolen away from him by some thug who doesn't deserve her.'

'He'll always worry about his only girl,' Hermione said bluntly.

Harry and Ginny had decided together that after Lily was born, there would be no more Potter children. Hermione thought it was nice they stopped before they got ahead of themselves like so many others...like Molly and Arthur had. She was not a terribly family-orientated person, and while she loved the Weasleys, she had trouble fitting in with all of them when she was so used to just being by herself or with her parents. Hogwarts had been a real struggle for her when she realised you needed friends in order to avoid becoming an outcast.

Shaking herself from her thoughts, she looked down at the little girl in her arms and smiled. If she ever had children, she would make sure that they had everything she had in her life from her parents, and more.

Ginny left with Lily snuggled back in the baby sling an hour later, the two women hugging each other awkwardly so as not to squash the baby. Hermione closed the door behind them and went back upstairs to her bedroom, intent on having her packing done before going to bed that evening. She was planning to Apparate to London early the next morning to get a decent cup of coffee before resigning herself to the caterer's coffee at the symposium. When her bags were packed, she got all her notes together in the study and packed them into her briefcase so she could work on them when there was free time or if she was bored.

When her packing was complete, she potted back down the stairs to her lab where she had a single glass cauldron simmering softly over low heat. The liquid within was a clear purple colour, and after testing it, she found that the potion base was just as it should be. She wrote down a few more notes in her journal, noting the difference in colour and flavour from the last time, and musing over her introduction of the lemongrass into the potion rather than the knotgrass.

True, both had different properties the knotgrass comprised of dark green leaves and had a purple flower atop it that was much softer and finer and came in weedy bunches that were often caked with dirt. They required a lot of preparation beforehand and often dissolved too quickly in potions if one was not careful keeping the temperature at its absolute lowest. Lemongrass was much more coarse and hardy, allowing the use of high temperatures during brewing for longer periods of time, something that she had discovered that was required for the base. It also gave the potion a much more appetising flavour.

Pleased with this little bit of progress, she turned off the flame beneath the cauldron and immediately put a stasis charm on it. Moving it to her shelf, she set it to one side and cast a few simple protective shields on it to prevent any breakages or contamination while she was away. The stasis charm was good for five days before it would wear off and she'd have to re-brew the base from scratch. She left her workroom, taking her last few journals with her, locking the door to the basement with an old-fashioned wrought iron key, and slipping it into her pocket with her wand.

After that she went through the motions of making and eating dinner, bathing and settling into bed with a good book to read before going to sleep. She fell asleep with the book upside-down over her lap.

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Piccadilly, London: 10th June, 2009

Severus Snape frowned deeply as he stared at the small groups of people who decorated the small reception area.

For the entirety of the 'Potions Through Time' symposium, 250 guests in the Potions field had been invited to attend various lectures and talks that were to be presented. That year, the organisers had chosen London, and more specifically, the William Kent House off the Ritz as their venue of choice. The house was more of a large manor, really, and while all the different workshops would occur there, the guests were still roomed in the actual hotel itself. Despite all the grandeur, Snape felt uninspired from the moment he had walked through the doors of the house.

There were too many people, and the number of strange looks he was continually on the receiving end of had not changed one whit over the years. People were always far too curious for their own good. He wasn't spending his hard-earned galleons to attend the symposium to simply be gawked at over half the time. He found it terribly rude of people to assume he wanted to be seen or socialised with simply because he had shown up.

As usual, he stood in a quiet corner, leaning against a wall and staying as far away from everyone else as he could. He could see all of his exits and would make use of the nearest one if someone decided to put on a brave act and walk over to him. As the afternoon drew on, Snape was relieved to find that nobody had been stupid enough to try and confront him.

It wasn't until nearly three o'clock that they were finally given their room assignments and keys for the hotel rooms that had been reserved in the main hotel.

'Here you are, Professor Snape,' said a familiar-looking young blonde boy, who handed over an envelope presumably containing his room key.

Snape simply nodded at him before turning on his heel and leaving William Kent House, making his way back to the hotel to retire to his rooms for a while until it was finally time for dinner in the Music Room. Weary from spending long hours in his potions laboratory, he simply fell onto the delightfully comfortable and roomy queen bed in his room, still wearing his boots, and passed out.

He didn't wake up until nearly seven that night, and when he did, he hurried to shower quickly and make himself a little more presentable.

When he was ready, he made his way back down to the lobby via the elevator and walked back over to the Kent House. There were people still out in the hallway chatting to one another. Frowning, Severus passed them by and went straight to the Music Room for dinner. He always hated the first afternoon of the symposiums and conferences, as they were oftentimes the part when all of the initial socializing began and people would form cliques that would remain together all the way through. It was like starting at a new school every year.

Once in the makeshift dining area, he saw that there was a simple layout with large round tables scattered around the middle of the room, a buffet along one wall, and a few small tables that were on the outskirts of the room nearest the windows that looked on outside. He collected a plate and piled it with various dishes, not really interested in what the fare was by that point, and moved to one of the small tables, his back to a wall. He picked at his meal slowly, eating the parts that looked enjoyable and discarding anything to one side of the plate that tasted like cardboard.

Snape thought it was interesting that even in fancy hotels such as The Ritz, the catering was subpar at best.

As he was coming to the last few bites of the enjoyable parts of his meal, he looked up to watch the people come and go from the room, analysing each of them. Some of them he knew, others he did not know or care about. In fact, there were very few people in the field that he had any respect for. *And why should I?* he thought. He was one of the very top Potions masters in the world, and very few held more clout or even equalled his talent. While he was not exactly likeable, he was the best, and everyone knew better than to upset the go-to man.

He was brought back out of his thoughts, however, when he saw a tall, elegant brunette witch enter the room, her curls pinned out of her face, which was still very much the same despite her age. Snape frowned. He would know that face anywhere, no matter how old the witch was. Her hair and figure may have improved since she was a teenager, but he very much doubted that anything else had changed. The wasn't a doubt in his mind that Hermione Granger was still every bit the swot and know-it-all she had always been in his eyes.

He paused, recollecting the memory of the last time he had seen her in person. It had been a very similar circumstance to the one they were currently in. She had still been a greenhorn back then, a rookie. Now he was faced with this attractive, mature-looking woman who smiled and walked across the room with a calm grace he had never recognised she had the potential to develop.

Something had obviously changed Hermione Granger.

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Berlin, Germany: 2nd July, 2005

He snarled as he watched the newest Potions masters be introduced to the world of science in the magical realm.

They all were smiling exuberantly with their young, fresh faces. Their optimism was practically rolling off of all of them in waves, crashing against him. Diamonds, however, did not erode as rock did in the face of water. So, too, was Snape impervious to their presentations. None of them really seemed to exert any brilliance, and if they did, they hid it very well. Through the powers of observation, Snape could pick up anything he liked from the speeches that were being given. At the moment, the only thing they were saying to him was that it had been a bad idea to accept the invitation to this conference in particular.

Just as he was about to make good on his escape from the hall, the master of ceremonies announced the next speaker: Hermione Granger.

He paused, balancing on the edge of disinterest and curiosity about the girl. His decision could have slipped either way at that point, but he decided to stay. She was, after all, the only of his former students to achieve Master status in Potions. He had not seen her in a long while and was interested to know if she was as good as he had heard on the grapevine. She spoke for ten minutes, keeping the talk about her projects concise but just descriptive enough to discourage further questions on it. Snape left the room afterwards feeling mildly impressed.

Although he shouldn't have been surprised, he was. Granger had a lot more fortitude than he had given her credit for.

Later that day as everyone was heading to the dining hall for the afternoon tea, Snape kept himself to a corner to enjoy his tea and biscuits on his own. He opened a book in front of him, intent on reading and not anticipating that anyone would try to bother him. He was corrected of his assumption immediately when he looked up to see Hermione standing right in front of his table with a small smile on her lips.

'May I sit with you, Professor?' she asked hesitantly, her smile faltering when he looked up at her darkly.

'I don't suppose I would be able to stop you,' he murmured, looking back down at his book.

She, apparently, had take that for a 'yes' and plopped herself down into the chair across from him. 'I was surprised to see that you will not be giving any talks here, sir,' she commented idly as she sipped at her own tea.

'Why is that, Miss Granger?' he asked, his boredom at the topic quite evident.

'Well, Professor, to begin with, you're one of the most sought-after Potions masters in the whole of Europe,' she answered. 'Everyone is always saying that should any problems arise, you are the man to see.'

'And why should that be of importance to me? Tell me, Miss Granger, do you need the attention of other people to feel that your work is important?' he sneered in reply. 'Do you needs the sycophants to kiss your feet and tell you what a great job you are doing at your job, when really you should know far better than anyone whether or not this is so?'

Hermione looked stunned but still opened her mouth, attempting to form some sort of rebuttal.

'Well, what do you have to say in response to that?' he taunted as she snapped her mouth closed.

She took a moment to glare at him then. 'I came here with the hopes that we could talk about potions and similar interests with one another,' she said, her eyes glowing with anger. 'I can see now that it was a fruitless waste of time. I should have taken the advice of the others and stayed away.'

Snape smirked. 'I see you're finally getting the idea,' he said, crossing his arms in front of him.

Hermione gave him an exasperated look at his lack of cooperation. 'Look, we don't really have to even like each other to speak to one another here,' she said simply. 'Why don't you just pretend I wasn't your student for six years at the conference? It can go back to being however you would like after we leave.'

'Unfortunately, Miss Granger, I do not organise my social obligations around the wishes of silly girls with more brains than they know what to do with,' he snapped, noting her slight flinch at his use of the word 'miss.' It seemed he had hit a sore spot with the young woman before him with that one.

Huffing angrily, she picked up her tea cup and drained the cold contents. 'You, Severus Snape, are an insufferable bastard, and I hope you rot.' She stood and stomped out of the dining hall muttering something that sounded vaguely like 'miserable git.'

He looked at his tea in front of him and then back across the table to where the insufferable girl had been sitting. There was a tan leather-bound journal sitting on the edge closest to the wall. Presumably it was hers, but just to be certain, he unbound the leather straps tying it shut and flipped to the title page and ascertained that it did, indeed, belong to Miss Granger. He was tempted to open it up properly and look through the pages, but his stomach turned as a fit of conscience overrode his curiosity. He immediately closed the books and tied the leather straps back into place, returning the book to where she had left it. Soon she would realise that she had forgotten it, and he would not be caught holding it when she did.

After all, despite all his faults and antisocial tendencies, Snape was not the sort of man who would invade the intellectual property of another. For him, some things were just too sacred.

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To be continued.

Chapter 4: A Living Science

Chapter 4 of 20

In collaborating to find a cure for a magical condition that is thought to be irreversible, Potions mistress Granger and Potions master Snape discover the beauty of science and the lasting companionship of love. Written for WriterMerrin and based loosely on the life of Marie Curie.

Disclaimer: All publicly recognizable characters, settings, etc. are the property of their respective owners. The original characters and plot are the property of the author.

Thanks go out to VIVAvivacious for all her help beta-ing this chapter for me.

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Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less. Marie Curie

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Piccadilly, London: 10th June 2009

Hermione wanted so desperately to concentrate on the lecture being presented, but she found herself otherwise preoccupied with thoughts of none other than Severus Snape.

He sat stiffly in his chair on the other side of the room, not looking a day older than the last time she had seen him. In fact, he looked a little younger than she remembered, but her memory of his face was vague. The last time she had seen him, she had been too occupied with fuming over his rude behaviour towards her to even care what the man had looked like. This time, however, she no longer cared about his attitude from four years before and was interested in the man. He was the top of the field and the one man who everyone sought out when they were stuck.

She thought back on the last time they had spoken. She had broken off her yearlong engagement to Viktor Krum just days before the conference, and his words had dealt a heavy blow to her already shaky self-esteem. He had been unnecessarily harsh towards her, saying cruel words that reminded her of just how single she was. At the time, she had been hurt and had taken his rejection of her company poorly. But she knew now he could hardly have known about Viktor Krum when so few of her friends had even known she was involved with the Bulgarian Seeker.

With four more years of growing up, learning, and discovering new things, Hermione could look back on that day with barely a hint of annoyance.

She let her eyes wander back up to the podium where the speaker was rambling away about the importance of Veritas serum and its various uses in Magical Law Enforcement. She snorted. Surely there were more interesting things to talk about than that. She wondered for a moment just how much the Ministry of Magic must have invested into the symposium in order for that to be a featured talk. She flipped open her progress journal on her lap, casting a charm over the pages to deter the eyes of others who thought to pry, and began to go through her calculations.

She continued in that manner until the lecture was finally over and those who were in the room began filing out. Hermione watched Snape dodge a few people who tried to talk to him, beating a hasty retreat through the exit. Hermione made her way out at the same pace as everyone else, her colleague from the Institute, Maria Savvedra, walking along beside her.

'Thank the lord that is over,' Maria commented as they followed the crowd down the stairs towards the Music Room.

Hermione grinned at that comment. 'Yes, I did expect something like that here, but I certainly didn't think it would be the very first lecture,' she agreed. 'The Ministry has too much influence here, and the organisers must have been short on sponsorship from individuals this year.'

The other witch nodded in agreement. They made their way to the buffet and collected some sandwiches and juice before looking around for a table to sit at. Everything looked to be fairly full, save for two seats: one, at a table of younger witches and wizards, and one seat directly across from Severus Snape. Hermione thought that fate had a terrible sense of humour.

'I'll go sit with Snape,' Hermione offered, watching Maria's expression turn to one of relief.

'Thank you, Hermione,' she said with a smile. 'You have no idea how horrible that man is. I tried to talk to him once last year, and he told me to shut my mouth and leave. I'd be too scared to even try something like that again.'

Hermione shook her head. 'It's no trouble,' she said, lying with some success. 'He was my professor at Hogwarts for six years. Trust me, I know exactly what he is like. I'm actually happy to sit with him. I'll make him more uncomfortable than anyone else here.'

Maria laughed at that, and the two parted ways. Hermione made her way over to Snape with a determined expression on her face. On arriving at his table, she placed her plate down and seated herself gracefully in the chair across from him. Without bothering to look up or acknowledge him, she picked up one of her sandwiches and began to eat. When she was about halfway through that piece, she finally did look up at him and saw the indignant look that he was directing at her.

'Is there a problem, Professor Snape?' she asked.

He didn't reply and instead looked back down at the newspaper he had spread out on the table before him, picking up his own sandwich and beginning to chew on it. She almost smiled at his obvious discomfort in her presence and returned to eating her food in silence. After she was finished, she picked up her journal, and without giving him a second glance, left the dining room, her robes swishing around her legs.

The afternoon drew on even longer than the morning sessions had, and Hermione found that she had to pinch herself awake more often than she would have liked. It was exceedingly annoying, as she had to save up a lot of her money in order to attend the symposium, only to be bored to death and feel like it had all been a waste. After the last session of the day, she left the house and went back to her room in the hotel, taking a long, hot bath before drying herself and setting an alarm. She crawled under the covers of her freshly made bed nude and fell asleep almost the moment her head hit the pillow.

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Piccadilly, London: 11th June, 2009

Hermione smirked inwardly as she observed her breakfast companion from across the table.

The night before she had awoken after her nap and attended dinner, only to impose her presence on Snape once more. He didn't speak to her the entire time, and she didn't bother talking to him either, which she could see was having an interesting effect on the man's mood. He appeared to be neither angry nor annoyed at her any more, but rather was confused by her lack of questions or chatter. Pleased by his reaction, she decided that it was time to begin attempting to converse with Snape.

'You know, if you have a question, you are more than welcome to ask it of me,' she said, looking up from her porridge to her companion's face.

'What are you doing here?' he asked gruffly, not returning her gaze.

'Well, I am a Potions master,' she answered with a smile, knowing exactly what he meant by his question but choosing to skirt around the correct answer. 'I was invited to this symposium, the same as everyone else in attendance.'

'You know that's not what I meant, woman,' he growled, his deep voice as resonant as ever despite his delivery.

Hermione's eyebrows rose at his use of the term 'woman' as opposed to 'girl,' as he had the last time he had spoken to her. 'There are very few other places to sit, and I happen to be the only person here who is not scared of you, Severus Snape,' she answered with a smug smile.

'You were much less audacious when you were younger,' he murmured with a slight frown creasing his brow.

'And you were much more intimidating when I was younger,' she retorted. 'But people change, Professor.'

He grunted noncommittally at her response and went back to reading his paper while he spooned porridge into his mouth. She smiled in satisfaction. So far, so good.

Snape hadn't snapped, nor had he rejected her like he had the last time. He seemed determined to pay her as little notice as he was able. But Hermione had already decided that it was going to change. While she was not the most sociable person in the world, he was a total recluse and was far too antisocial for his own good.

After breakfast, everyone adjourned to the main lecture room at the top of the stairs. Hermione beckoned Maria over to sit with her, and in her determined way, sat herself right beside Snape. Her colleague's eyes were wide with apprehension when she sat on Hermione's other side, and she looked pointedly at Snape before looking back to the younger witch with a question in her eyes.

Shaking her head, Hermione turned to watch the Master of Ceremonies announce the program for the day. After the schedule was passed around the group, everyone began dispersing to the various different sessions that were available. Hermione watched Snape beside her circle the few he was attending and found she was going to be attending the very same ones. As she and Maria were passing through the doors, Hermione felt her friend tug her sleeve to pull her aside.

'Be careful with Snape, Hermione,' she said seriously. 'He's not the sort of person you need to be hanging around. I don't trust anyone when I can't tell what they're thinking by their eyes, and that man's eyes are inscrutable.'

Hermione nodded and smiled. 'It's all right, Maria,' she informed her confidently. 'I can take care of myself as far as Severus Snape is concerned.'

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Hermione barely contained her flinch when Snape narrowed his eyes at her when she joined him at his table at dinner after the second night of the symposium.

While ignoring his death stares and cold looks was coming more easily to her, she still got caught off balance sometimes and would end up feeling chastened by him in his presence. Although they did not speak often when they were in each other's company, Hermione felt like she understood him better. Even so, there was still much more that she wanted to know about the reclusive man.

She took a bite of her pasta and observed Snape discretely from beneath her lashes. He had a book open with pages that were blank. She smiled. It was probably the same spell she used on her journals to prevent others from being able to read her notes. She respected that his intellectual property was his own to do with as he pleased. Clearing her throat slightly, she managed to earn another narrowed gaze from her former professor.

'Oh, come off it,' she exclaimed in exasperation. 'You don't need to always glare around at everyone suspiciously as though they are out for your blood.'

'You might be surprised, Miss Granger, by just how many people are still out for my blood,' he murmured back, surprising Hermione.

'That's not true!' she said insistently.

'Oh, really? Miss Granger, while I do not fear any eminent threat from the convicted Death Eaters who are all locked up in Azkaban, the fact still remains that I am the known murderer of one of the greatest wizards known to our world,' he said without expression. 'Though it has been many years, there are some people who are unwilling to forgive that I was forced to kill Albus Dumbledore.'

'What do you mean by that?' she asked, a frown creasing her brow.

'What I mean, Miss Granger, is that I still receive the occasional letter describing in great detail what the person wished to do in order to exact their punishment upon me,' he said simply.

Hermione drew in a sharp breath at that, covering her gaping mouth quickly. 'But, you should report these people for that!' she said.

'And what, pray tell, will such a thing achieve?' he replied, focussing his eyes back on his journal. 'If I were to live my life afraid of a few little death threats, I doubt I would have managed to survive this long.'

Hermione's next question stilled on her the end of her tongue. Perhaps she had pried into the man's life enough for that day. She ate the rest of her meal in silence and left with a murmured goodnight before leaving the table and heading back to her room to read herself to sleep.

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Piccadilly, London: 16th June, 2009

The morning of the final day of conference was bright and reasonably warm.

After spending breakfast sitting with an extremely silent Snape, Hermione walked into the first session for the day alone. She pulled out her notebook straight away, her hopes for the conference sufficiently curbed. It really had been a waste of her time she had learned very little, and though she had tried as hard as she could, Snape was still as reclusive as he had been three days earlier. The speaker was at the front organising a stack of notes and was about to begin just as Snape swept in and took his seat beside Hermione.

She turned to look at him and saw he was staring straight back at her with an unreadable expression. She smiled at him, regardless of his reasoning, and turned to look back at the raised platform and try to pay attention to the talk about medicinal potions in the Dark Ages. Like these people knew half of what there was to know about those kinds of potions. She snorted mentally. The man seated beside her had more knowledge than any of the buffoons who had spoken in his little finger alone. The rest of the day continued in the same fashion: Hermione pretending to listen whilst hiding behind her work journal, Snape seated beside her in silence.

At lunch, Snape shared their usual table with her without complaint or raised eyebrow.

'There is only one more of those god-awful sessions before this whole experience is over,' she commented as she poked at a cherry tomato.

'I have never been more relieved,' Snape said dryly as he pushed his copy of *Ars Alchemica* across the table towards her. 'There is an interesting article on page twenty about the discovery of a new use for the Midnight Orchid as an ingredient in nerve regeneration.'

'Interested in that sort of thing, are you?' she asked with a cheeky smile, earning herself a glare from the man opposite.

'You're awfully cheeky,' he stated as he picked up a sandwich and took a bite. 'I was under the impression that know-it-alls such as yourself were always respectful towards your betters.'

'No one could ever accuse you of being charming,' she muttered under her breath as she slipped through the periodical to the page her companion had suggested.

Her eyes scanned the article, and a twinkle soon appeared in them when she understood what it was she was reading. This flower might be the answer to all the problems she had come up against with her potion. If she was reading it correctly, she could cut back on her ingredients for the potion by about a third and replace most of the other nerve regenerative ingredients she had included with this one plant. The only problem was that the plant grew in subtropical climates and would be extremely expensive to first acquire and then maintain. What she would have given for England to have more variation in its weather patterns it was usually either cold, wet, or both.

'This is quite a breakthrough!' she exclaimed when she sat back after reading it.

'Indeed,' Snape said, accepting the journal back with a nod. 'It could mean a lot to the medical community if the discovery was put to good use in potions and the like.'

'I can't believe we sat through that boring lecture this morning when we could have been hearing about this,' Hermione said, nodding her head towards the journal on the table. 'I do not think I will be attending in future.'

'I have been asking myself the same thing since my arrival,' Snape said, finishing off his sandwich in two bites. 'That article was just the beginning of a new era of potion making. Mark my words: someone will put this new knowledge to good use very soon.'

Hermione's eyebrow lifted slightly at that comment. 'Do you intend to use it?'

He frowned at her then. 'Whether or not I do intend this knowledge to serve any purpose is hardly any of your business, Miss Granger.'

'I apologise if it seems as though I'm prying,' she said, looking at her hands. 'I can tell that you seemed somewhat enthusiastic about the article. I thought it may have some significance to you or your work.'

'Your Gryffindor curiosity will get the better of you one day,' he said quietly.

'And your Slytherin penchant for hoarding information and keeping secrets all of the time will do the same to you,' she retorted.

He smirked. 'Touché, Miss Granger.'

As lunch drew to a close, everyone made their way to the main lecture room that they had begun the conference in. The last talk was being held in there, along with the departure ceremony and the last chance for everyone to socialize afterwards. Hermione sat with Maria to her left and Snape on her right side, seated at the end of the row closest to the nearest exit. He sat stiffly the entire time, and two long hours later, it was finally time to bring the weekend to a close and send everyone packing. Before Snape could get too far ahead, Hermione called out to him.

'I look forward to seeing you again, Professor,' she told him, holding out her hand to shake his.

Unexpectedly, Snape took her hand and swept it up to his mouth, brushing his lips over the back of her hand in a gentlemanly fashion. 'Until next time, Miss Granger,' he said formally, and releasing her hand, he turned on his heel and strode out.

Hermione looked at her hand to the spot where her skin still tingled from the contact with his lips. Shaking her head, she continued on, eager to go home.

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To be continued.

Chapter 5: For the Sake of Science

Chapter 5 of 20

In collaborating to find a cure for a magical condition that is thought to be irreversible, Potions mistress Granger and Potions master Snape discover the beauty of science and the lasting companionship of love. Written for WriterMerrin and based loosely on the life of Marie Curie.

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Thanks go out to VIVAvivacious for the beta of this chapter.

Note: I am aware that in canon Ginny's eyes are brown, but for the purpose of this story, I have deliberately made them blue.

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Life is not easy for any of us. But what of that? We must have perseverance and above all confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are gifted for something and that this thing must be attained.

Marie Curie

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Wythenshawe, Manchester: 21st June, 2009

The sun shone through the window, the glass reflecting the light oddly due to the convex shape of each individual pane.

Hermione sat staring at the fireplace in the sitting room. It was dark and dusty, and the logs that sat in a small pile within it were dry and grey. She had spent the past week sitting in the laboratory going over her notes time and again, but she could not for the life of her figure out what it was that seemed to be stopping her from completing the Cruciatus Reversal Potion. She had used Snape's hint from *Ars Alchemica* and replaced a few ingredients in the potion with the rare orchid. She had spent a small fortune on purchasing enough of the precious flower to brew in trials and the final formula when it finally came to that.

The problem left to her now was Snape himself.

Though she had not seen him since departing London, she had been constantly going over their conversations in her head. Though they had been few and far between, she had gained more from him than she had from any of the talks at the symposium. She had a strong feeling Snape had been trying to communicate something important to her that she had simply been unable to understand. Why had he shown her that article? What on Earth had he been working on in his workbook whenever he thought nobody was looking?

Sighing in frustration, Hermione stood up and walked to the kitchen, filling her kettle with water and putting it on the stove before igniting the flame beneath it. As she waited for the kettle to begin whistling, she prepared a pot with peppermint tea leaves and collected the water just as the pot began to sing. Pouring in the water until her pot was three-quarters full, she let the tea steep for five minutes before pouring herself a cup. Taking a sip, she let out a soft sigh, smiling at the delicate, soothing flavour. She loved tea when it was properly brewed.

Returning to her books in the sitting room with her pot of tea and cup, she set them down on the coffee table in front of her before reaching out to grab a thick textbook she had yet to crack open. As she read the contents page, her mind returned to thoughts of her former Hogwarts professor.

Snape was a genius. He was the one teacher she had never managed to impress in her entire career as a student. But even so, he was the height of his field, and ever since her first day in Potions class, Hermione had aspired to be like him. Not that she wanted to be snarky or unlikeable; she simply wanted to be as good as he was in Potions. She wanted to work with someone of his calibre and learn from him. After all, to be the best, you had to learn from the best, and she was desperate to do so.

Heaving a heavy breath, she took another sip of her soothing tea. Her stomach began to slowly unknot itself. Snape was a puzzle. He allowed very few people to speak to him and was, for all intents and purposes, a total recluse. So why had he allowed her to spend time in his company? She supposed it might have been because she pestered him to no end and persisted in forcing him to endure her presence. He had probably just given in to stop her from asking him annoying or invasive questions. But she had a strong feeling there was more to it than that. Had she not seen him looking at her notebook thoughtfully?

She frowned, and then it finally dawned on her.

The article, the way he spoke and evaded many of her questions. It was all very simple. He was trying to create a counter potion for the Cruciatus curse, also. He had to be. She thought hard about all of the stilted conversations and the hints she had gotten from him, even if he had dropped them by accident. Snape was trying to create the exact same potion as she was. And if her assumptions were correct, he had been as of yet unable to complete it.

A smile grew on her face. She was floored by the knowledge that she and Snape might both be striving to achieve the same end. Throwing her arm out in the direction of the doorway, she wandlessly summoned a piece of parchment from her upstairs study to her. It flew into her hand and she pulled her notebook onto her lap to so she could write a letter. If Snape and she were both stuck while trying to create the same potion, it made absolutely no sense to her for them to continue in vain when two heads were better than one. Together they might have a chance of coming to some sort of resolution.

Professor Snape,

I somehow doubt you were expecting to hear from me so soon, if at all. I have spent a lot of time today thinking about my research and some comments you made at the conference, as well as that article you were so kind to show me. I have come to the conclusion that you must also be searching for the same thing as I am and that you have also come up against a wall.

I would very much appreciate if we could collaborate on this venture together. After all, as they say, two heads are better than one. I think we could achieve a great many more things if we were to work together on this. Please send a reply with my owl and let me know if this is agreeable to you.

Thank you for your time.

Regards,

Hermione Granger

She placed her quill back into the pot of ink in front of her and blew on the parchment to dry the words she had hastily penned to Snape. She knew it was a bit sudden to be writing to the man, especially when all she was going on was a hunch. However, she felt in her gut that she was right, and she was never one to waste her time when it could be otherwise occupied on more important things, like the potion.

Rushing upstairs, she went to her study and threw open the window, whistling a high-pitched tune. She didn't have to wait long until she heard the beating of wings, and soon her eagle owl, Ophelia, was perched on the sill before her. She reached out a finger and gently stroked the bird's beautiful, dark feathers, lingering on the softer feather of her head and neck. She had received her second familiar as a gift from Harry and Ginny upon completing her Master's in Potions. She folded her correspondence over at her desk and sealed it with navy blue wax before grabbing a bit of yarn and tying it to her owl's leg.

'Please take this to Professor Snape as quickly as you can,' she informed the owl. 'Wait for him to write back to me.'

The owl hooted softly and rubbed itself affectionately against Hermione's palm once more before taking off from the windowsill and into the orange-pink of the sunset. As Hermione closed her window, she paused for a moment to stare after her familiar. She hoped Snape was willing to give her a chance to prove herself.

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Greenwich, Ipswich: 23rd June, 2009

Snape sighed when he heard the tapping against the window nearest his desk in the study.

Standing from his chair, he made his way over to the window and saw that the thrice-damned owl of Hermione Granger was once again perched on the edge of his windowsill. For the third day in a row her familiar had come with a letter attached to its leg. It was a feisty bird, much like its owner, and it was one of the more beautiful owls he had come across. Much like its owner, the owl was uniquely beautiful, although Snape would never be admitting that aloud. That his thoughts had even gone in that direction was something he was ashamed of. After all, the woman had been his student and was young enough to be his daughter.

Opening the window, he quickly untied the letter from the leg of the creature and pushed an owl treat onto the windowsill beside it. Leaving the window open, he retreated to his desk as he unfolded the correspondence. He knew what would be written there even before reading it. For the past three days, Hermione Granger had been asking him to consider collaborating on the Cruciatus Reversal Potion with her.

While they had been at the conference, he had gotten the distinct impression from her that the project she was working on was the same as his. When he had shown her the article on the Midnight Orchid, his suspicions had been confirmed by the excitement she displayed over it. To be frank, he had been rather excited about the discovery also, but when he had returned to his home to integrate the flower into his formula, there was still something missing that was holding him back from his goal.

When he had received the first letter from Granger three days beforehand, he had discovered that she was experiencing trouble also.

He knew he should have responded affirmatively to her first letter, but something in him was still unwilling to do so. To collaborate with another was something he was as unfamiliar with as he was unfamiliar with Divination theory. The idea of coming out of his shell and interacting with another was daunting. He had spent many years content to be on his own, in peace, after a lifetime of struggle and atoning for a mistake he had made when he was very young.

He was afraid of being taken advantage of again, even though he was quite certain that Hermione Granger was the person least likely to do so. Everything about the woman screamed sincerity, and he was hard-pressed to ignore her. Snape sighed heavily, pinching his brow to try and ease the headache that was starting to distract him from thinking clearly. Once it began to ebb, he looked over to see her owl still perched on the sill. As if it sensed his indecision, it launched itself off the sill and flew over to his desk, landing gracefully on the parchment before him. It made a soft hooting noise, and unlike the last two times it had visited, it rubbed its soft head against the back of his hand instead of trying to bite him.

He laughed out loud at this action and proceeded to stroke the soft feathers. It was as if Granger's owl was entreating him to give in to its owner's request.

'You're a strange bird,' he muttered, and then chuckled when said bird turned sharp eyes on him. 'I didn't say it was a bad thing.'

Content, the bird allowed him to continue petting it. Snape rolled his eyes. Well, he had come to a figurative brick wall in his research, and Granger was correct two heads were oftentimes better than one. Sighing in resignation, he removed his hand from the owl and opened the top drawer of his desk, pulling out a fresh piece of parchment. Grabbing a quill, he began to write.

Miss Granger,

I concede. You make a fair point, and I will agree to collaborate with you on this project. I will expect a set of the notes you have gathered thus far tomorrow, and will send you a copy of my own.

Look for my hawk owl in the next couple of days.

S. Snape

Satisfied that the message was clear, he folded up the small note and attached it to the leg of her familiar. 'Take that to your Mistress,' he told the bird.

With a soft hoot, Ophelia took off into the darkness of the night sky. Snape watched for a moment until all he could no longer see the shadow of the bird as it flew back to Granger. He got up from his desk and went to the armchair before the empty fireplace, Summoning all the notebooks he had that concerned the Cruciatus Reversal Potion. It would take him all night to make copies of his written notes, but he imagined Granger would be doing the same for him. If he was consistent, their collaboration could continue via owl post, and he wouldn't even have to leave the comfortable surroundings of his own home and laboratory.

Picking up his first journal, he pulled out his wand and began to make copies.

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Wythenshawe, Manchester: 26th June, 2009

Hermione looked at the two piles of bound notes before her. The day before, Snape had sent his work so far to her with his hawk owl, who she was amused to find he had named Hephaestus.

His notes were as comprehensive as her own, and he had so many that he had been forced to bind them into two separate volumes. Hermione was just glad that in the Magical world they lived in, there was such a thing as Weightlessness Charms to cast on packages, or their postal delivery system would have collapsed into chaos long ago. Then again, she supposed with their society being the way it was, there would be a solution for it regardless of the charm.

She was still reading the first few pages of a summary he had written that encompassed basic facts about each of the parts that she would encounter as she read. Snape was, if nothing else, extremely comprehensive and considered everything when he agreed to send her his work up-to-date. She, too, had been considerate enough to categorise her notes and do up a sort of rough summary and contents page for him to refer to when he wanted specific information. She had no doubt that once they were past the tedious beginning stages of their collaboration, the two of them would work very well together and might come to a conclusion in the near future.

Midday was upon her sooner than she had expected, and she was forced to leave the sanctuary of her upstairs study and make a trip to her kitchen in search of some sustenance for herself and a snack for her owl. She threw together a small platter of sandwiches so that she could nibble on them slowly while she worked for a few more hours and pulled out the box of owl treats she kept in her food store. Hermione was already at the top of the stairs and was surprised when she heard the front doorbell ring. Unsure of who would be lurking in her doorway at that time of the day, she cast a levitation charm on the food and sent it into her study before heading back down to greet her unexpected guest.

On opening the door, she immediately smiled widely at the shock of red hair that greeted her in the form of Ginny Potter.

'Ginny! What brings you this way?' she exclaimed, standing aside to allow her entry.

'Well, I was sitting alone at home thinking about what I could possibly do today, and it occurred to me that I haven't seen you for a few weeks now,' she replied as she walked in and revealed that she was wearing one of the baby carriers on her back. 'So I thought I would drop by and let Lily spend some quality time with her godmother.'

'Oh, look at that hair,' Hermione said softly, gently lifting the little baby out of the carrier and into her arms before stroking the fluffy shock of red hair.

Ginny laughed softly. 'Harry and I didn't think she'd end up with his hair,' she said with a smile. 'She has my eyes, though blue as the sky when she opens them.'

'Well, come on upstairs,' Hermione said, gesturing for Ginny to walk ahead of her. 'I made some sandwiches to eat up there while I work on reading some research notes that Professor Snape sent to me.'

'Severus Snape?' Ginny asked, the shock in her eyes belying her neutral tone.

'We've begun to collaborate on a potion,' Hermione answered, walking into the study and sitting down on the lounge with the little baby still in her arms.

'Oh! Well, that is really something,' Ginny said, picking up a triangle of sandwich and biting into it, chewing with relish. 'The last I heard, Snape was a bit of a recluse and stayed out of the way of anyone from the old days.'

Hermione nodded, looking down at the girl in her arms. 'Well, I suppose he feels like the work is important enough to sacrifice a little of his solitude,' she murmured.

'For your sake, I hope it goes well for you.'

'Thanks, Ginny,' Hermione replied, stroking Lily's soft, little cheek. 'She really is a chubby little thing at the moment, isn't she?'

Ginny laughed aloud at that. 'She is always hungry, I swear. I can never eat enough to feed that girl,' she replied.

Hermione grinned. 'She'll grow out of it and be as beautiful as her mother, one day.'

Ginny walked over to join Hermione and the two women embraced, breaking apart when the little girl between them started to make gurgling sounds to gain their attention. Hermione wondered if there would ever be a day when she was looking down at her own baby as she held Lily gently in her arms, rocking her ever so slightly.

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To be continued.

Chapter 6: A Union of Scientists

Chapter 6 of 20

In collaborating to find a cure for a magical condition that is thought to be irreversible, Potions mistress Granger and

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Many thanks to VIVAvivacious for all of her help beta-ing this chapter.

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Humanity needs practical men, who get the most out of their work, and, without forgetting the general good, safeguard their own interests.

Marie Curie.

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Wythenshawe, Manchester: 28th June, 2009

Hermione groaned when she heard the sharp tapping begin against the glass window of her study and hauled herself to her feet.

Opening the window, she allowed Snape's owl, Hephaestus, to fly into the room with yet another small scroll attached to his leg. After untying the ribbon that bound the parchment there, she fed him an owl treat before sending him on his way. Because it was a fine day outside, she chose to leave the window open before returning to her armchair and flicking the seal open with her thumbnail and unrolling Snape's missive.

I think that combining the Dragon's blood and Raven's blood is too dangerous if not watched carefully, it could combust, and then we would be forced to begin again. Let's not waste our time with such drastic ideas and attempt something doable.

S.

Hermione sighed heavily and sat back in her chair, tossing the scroll onto the coffee table in front of her and closing her eyes. Snape was so fast to reject many of her ideas, and she was beginning to pick up a pattern. She knew he thought because she had less experience in the field than him, that she was some sort of incompetent student, mixing anything together and creating messes to clean up. But that wasn't the case. She was a professional, and much more open to the modern advances in potion-making that Snape seemed to have decided were nonsense.

Their main problem was that they were from two different eras of Potions, and while Hermione was willing to embrace new things, Snape was reluctant in all things. He was too traditional. Their second problem, one that Hermione felt more apt to deal with in the near future, was their means of communication. They were wearing their familiars out with all of the letters they sent back and forth to one another during the day. Hermione had once counted a total of ten letters each.

Finally tired of everything being Snape's way or the highway, she summoned a piece of parchment to her, picked up her quill, dipped it into some ink, and began to write.

Once she was finished, she sealed it and walked over to where Ophelia was perched, head tucked beneath her wings as she slept. Hermione stroked the top of her head, gently waking her from her slumber. Without Hermione even having to ask, the owl stuck her leg out to receive the letter she was about to send off. She smiled and tied the note on with a purple ribbon, and after allowing the owl to creep up onto her arm, Hermione carried her to the window and let her launch into the air.

She knew she had done the right thing, sending a letter to Snape complaining about his closed-minded behaviour.

It was yet another road block in their efforts to create the potion, and Hermione was trying to remove them while they still could. If she could get Snape to give just a little bit more, it would make their work easier in the long run.

Deciding to take a break from the work, she went to the kitchen and heated a bowl of leftover pumpkin soup from the night before. She sat down at the table to eat it while sorting through the mail she had collected from her post box earlier in the day. Because she lived in a Muggle area, she still paid rates, electricity, and water bills just like everyone else.

After she had eaten and prioritised her mail, she Apparated to the alley behind the post office and went in to pay all of her bills for the month before returning home to clean the kitchen up. She returned to the study and saw that Ophelia had dropped a letter on the top of her desk, most probably from Snape.

She decided to leave it there and take a nap while it was warm and quiet. She always worked better during the night, anyway.

Later, when she awoke and found herself in her dark bedroom, she felt a moment of disorientation before realising she had moved herself there to sleep in the first place. She stumbled through the bathroom to attend to her needs before walking back into the study and yawning as she picked up Snape's letter from her desk that Ophelia had delivered earlier.

"What did Snape send for me this time, hmmm?" she said, looking up to see if her familiar was on her perch or not.

Though she found the perch empty, she disregarded it. It was a nice night, and her owl had most likely gone out for a hunt. Turning her attention back to the note, she opened it and sat down in the chair behind her desk to read it.

Granger,

I will concede that the way that we have been proceeding thus far has not exactly been an ideal arrangement. You are welcome to come to my house tomorrow to continue our work. I will expect you at nine sharp. Attached is a photograph of the house. Picture the house and yard, and you will surely find yourself where you wish to be.

S. Snape

Hermione found the photo of Snape's house attached with a mundane little Muggle paperclip on the back of the letter. She couldn't help but smirk a little at that. Who would have thought Snape even knew how to use Muggle stationary? Shaking her thoughts away, she stared at the photograph and saw that his house was a simple two-storey Victorian, not unlike her own home. She did notice that her own front yard and gardens appeared to be a little more tidy and kempt than his did, although she had no idea when the photo had been taken.

Sighing for the second time that day, she placed the letter and photo, along with the rest of Snape's correspondence, in the top drawer of the desk before securing it. The next few weeks looked as though they would be very telling.

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Greenwich, Ipswich: 29th June, 2009

It was almost nine in the morning, and Snape had found himself pacing his sitting room for the better part of an hour already.

Hermione Granger was due to arrive at his door at any minute, and he was nervous. It was unlike him to be in such a state, but her first impression of his house and how

he lived mattered for some reason, especially as he was certain that she would be spending a lot of time there in the weeks to come. He supposed inviting her to his house first would be a way of extending a hand of companionship in her direction, to fix whatever problem he had inadvertently caused by corresponding with her in the way they had begun. Admittedly, he was not an expert by any means when it came to the minds of women, so he was just going with his gut on this.

He had been finding himself continually surprised by Granger while reading over all her notes during the past week and a half. She was much more comprehensive and innovative than he had thought she would be, and he knew that he had made the correct decision in conceding to the collaboration, but he was not yet ready to accept that they would need to take any drastic action where the potion was concerned. Although he knew they very well might have to try different and newer techniques, the old ways had never failed him yet.

He was disturbed from the thoughts rattling around in his brain by the sound of the doorbell ringing before a light knocking sounded on the front door.

The wards on the house recognised there was another magical signature on his property, and he assumed Granger had arrived for the day. Straightening himself out a little, he strode from the sitting room to the door and pulled it open to reveal Granger wearing a set of mauve robes over what he assumed was Muggle attire. She had a briefcase clutched in one hand, the other moving up to smooth a stray curl behind her ear. She had worn her hair tied back in a loose braid, and flyaways were the result.

'Good morning, Professor,' she greeted cheerfully.

Snape nodded at her gruffly, standing aside and opening the door wider to allow her passage into his house. 'You needn't be so formal with me, Miss Granger,' he said as he ushered her out of the front hallway into the sitting room, then through the next door into his study. 'Make yourself comfortable in the spare armchair.'

She complied without question and opened up her briefcase, reaching in and pulling out the bundle of his notes and placing them on the table in front of her. 'I have already been through all of this twice, and I have highlighted the points that I think we need to work on,' she informed him.

'I think you know what my stance is on your suggestions,' Snape said, cutting across whatever it was that she was going to say when she opened her mouth to continue speaking.

He watched as Granger crossed her arms over her chest and gave him a look that clearly said he had best watch what he said around her. He decided to ignore it. After all, it was his house.

'Professor Snape, if you aren't going to respect my opinions and accept me as an equal partner in this project, then why on Earth did you agree to collaborate with me in the first place?' Hermione asked, stirring him from his musings.

'Are you quite finished laying down the law, Miss Granger?' he asked, stalling anything else she had to say when she opened up her mouth for a second round.

She snapped her mouth closed and breathed out a heavy sigh, one filled with a weariness he had not recognised until that point. He could see she was much paler, and the dark circles beneath her eyes were more pronounced than the last time he had seen her just a few short weeks ago. When she had been a student of his at Hogwarts, she had been a lot shorter and weightier than the woman who sat in the armchair adjacent to him.

He sucked in a deep breath. Granger had grown up, and he had missed it completely. He had been so set in seeing her the same way she had been as a student that he had overlooked that she had matured quite a bit. She even had the beginnings of crow's feet beside the outer corners of each eye. She was the type of person who would have wrinkles from smiling. Resigned to his fate, he stuck out an arm in the direction of his desk and summoned the stack of Hermione's notes to him.

'Let's get to work then,' he said quietly. 'We'll discuss your Dragon and Raven's blood idea another time when we are closer to that stage of the potion.'

A small, triumphant smile lit up her features, particularly her chocolate brown eyes that still seemed large, even then. 'Well, to begin with, I think we should come up with a schedule of whose house we shall work in on which days, and days when either of us will be too preoccupied with other tasks,' she said, whipping out a clean sheet of parchment to jot the days down.

'I do research from Monday to Thursday, and work on other potions I supply to various apothecaries on Friday and Saturday,' Snape listed off. 'Sunday is the day I do my deliveries, in the morning, and in the afternoon and evening, I do not work.'

'You don't work on a Sunday afternoon? Why, Professor, I am shocked,' she said, the hint of teasing in her tone belying her words.

'What about you, Miss Granger?' he asked, choosing to ignore her comments.

She sobered up immediately from her teasing. 'I do research on my weekends, twice a week during the school term when I am not required to teach,' she answered, listing off her duties on her fingers. 'As it is the summer, and I am not required to do any teaching, I spend five days a week doing research, and on the weekends I visit my friends occasionally and work on potions to restock the college medical centre.'

'I propose that on Monday and Wednesday we work at your house, and on Tuesday and Thursday at mine,' Snape said simply. 'Four days a week collaboration should be enough to begin with, unless we come to a point where we need to invest extra time into the project.'

After agreeing, the pair fell into silence as they began reading over each other's work for their individual potion bases. By the time it was afternoon, they had debated over the various positives and negatives of both, and decided that they would work with Granger's base consisting of lemon balm, lemon grass root, ginseng, ginger and camomile with pure spring water. The ingredients would create a calm base to work with, which would decrease the risk of creating a volatile reaction in the later stages of the potion, when the ingredients were slightly less calming.

When Snape saw Granger to the door that evening, both were pleased with the progress they had made, and they agreed to each brew a base potion with which to work the following day. As soon as the door was closed behind him, he leaned against it, allowing himself to sag against it wearily. It was not very often that he was subjected to the presence of another person for that length of time. Even though he had found her company to be less irritating than he had expected, it still exhausted him.

Returning to the study to tidy up the papers they had been writing notes on, he carefully stacked them in order and bound them, putting them with all the notes he would be taking to Granger's house the next day. He pulled out the small sheet of parchment she had written her address on and handed to him at the front door as she left and attached it to the corner of the stack with a small paper clip.

He sighed and dropped into his usual armchair before the fireplace, closing his eyes and tilting his head back so it rested against the cushioning of the back.

When he next opened his eyes, the house had grown rather cold, and it was pitch black, the fire having been extinguished long ago, as it had consumed all the firewood. He pulled out his pocket watch, squinting to see the face to read that it was already two in the morning. Groaning, he rubbed a hand over his weary eyes before hauling himself out of his chair and stalking out of the study and down the hall to the bathroom. Stripping out of his clothes from the day and tossing them into the hamper, he turned on the taps of the shower and allowed the warm spray of water to wash over him.

Once he bathed, he dressed in the long cotton pants he had hanging on the towel rack in the bathroom and walked into his bedroom, sliding beneath the covers.

He was wearier than he had thought, too tired to even think about food. Rolling over onto his back, he let his arms rest on top of the covers and stared up at the white ceiling. He was collaborating with Hermione Granger on the Cruciatus regeneration potion, and they were going to be spending an inordinate amount of time with one another. She was a surprise in every meaning of the word. She surprised him with her knowledge, creativity, and innovation. She was surprisingly easy to put up with. She was surprisingly easy to look at, as well.

'Get a grip, Snape,' he said to himself, rolling over onto his side and groaning, pushing thoughts of Granger out of his head. 'Focus on the Cruciatus potion.'

He forced himself to concentrate on the work. As he was going over the calculations and amounts of the ingredients for the base potion that he would begin later in the morning in his head, he finally drifted off to sleep again.

A few hours later, the sound of crows calling from the tree right outside his window woke him. After spending several minutes trying to ignore it and go back to sleep, Snape found himself unable and finally swung his legs over the edge of the bed and got up. After finishing his morning ablutions in the bathroom, he dressed in his sturdy black work trousers and shirt, pulling on his frock coat over the top without bothering to button it. After he made himself a cup of coffee in the kitchen, he took his notes with him out the back to his laboratory.

He was so focussed on his work that he barely noticed the time until he checked it to write down the time of completion for the base. He saw it was already ten minutes to nine, and he had yet to wash up from his potions work. Grumbling under his breath, he put the potion under a stasis spell before quickly cleaning up the workbench and washing all his tools.

After he was certain everything was in order, he locked up both the lab and his house, casting the wards on the property before collecting his notes and journals to take to Granger's house. He thought about her address and Apparated, reappearing in front of an old Victorian house that looked as though it had been repainted within the last couple of years. An immaculate front garden lined either side of the pathway leading up to the front porch.

He walked up to the front door and pressed on the doorbell once. He heard short footsteps almost immediately afterwards and was unsurprised when he was greeted by Granger wearing a stained apron with her hair pulled back in a messy bun, dragon hide gloves protecting her hands.

'Ready for work?' she asked with a smile.

Snape was surprised by her lack of mention of his lateness. 'Lead the way.'

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To be continued.

Chapter 7: Pure Science

Chapter 7 of 20

In collaborating to find a cure for a magical condition that is thought to be irreversible, Potions mistress Granger and Potions master Snape discover the beauty of science and the lasting companionship of love. Written for WriterMerrin and based loosely on the life of Marie Curie.

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Many thanks to my beautiful beta, VIVAvivacious, for all of her help with this story.

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Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.

Marie Curie.

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Hogwarts, Rural Scotland: 8th August, 2000

The sound of the clock ticking away above the mantelpiece was both a comfort and a distraction to the occupants of the room.

For one, it signified that, despite the occurrences over the past two decades, time would continue on. For the other, it distracted them from the conversation at hand. For both, it set a slow and steady beat in the room. Minerva McGonagall looked up over the rim of her small, rectangular glasses, staring at the dark-haired man in the armchair adjacent to her own in front of the fireplace. It was the main source of light and warmth in the office that unseasonably chilly summer evening.

She sighed heavily as she took in the appearance of the man. As if he weren't already pale and gaunt enough during his tenure at Hogwarts as a teacher, it seemed Severus Snape had managed to find himself even sparer of weight and colour than he had before. The war had been difficult for him. He was thought to be on the side of darkness and was doubted so often by those he was truly working with. She was not so certain she could have been so resilient in the face of having everyone with whom you were friends or colleagues hate you.

Minerva felt a pang of guilt. She had been one of those friends who had doubted him, from the night of Albus Dumbledore's death to the end of the final battle. If only the two wizards had been more forthcoming with her over the years, she might have been able to spare Snape a lot of trouble with the other professors while he had been stationed as Headmaster. She wished that times had not been so secretive. She wanted to turn back time and question all those things she had ignored due to prejudice and anger when she should have been supportive.

If only she had done a better job of not just accepting everything at face value.

'Why did you ask me to come here, Minerva?' Snape asked, snapping her out of her musings. His once smooth voice was now quiet and harsh from the injuries caused to his throat by Nagini.

'I want you to come back to teach at Hogwarts at the beginning of next month when the school term begins,' Minerva answered simply. 'You can teach Defence or Potions whichever position you want, it's yours.'

Snape looked across at her as though she had spoken Voldemort's name out loud. 'You know as well as I that there is nothing left at this school for me but bad memories of the poor choices I have made throughout my life,' he said quietly, trying to conserve what little voice he had left.

Minerva would not be discouraged that was how Snape responded to most things those days.

'I need you, Severus,' she said, adding a note of pleading to her tone.

'Come now, Minerva,' Snape chided despite the harsh rasp to his voice. 'Begging is beneath you. I can make a few recommendations for a decent Potions professor, and I am certain you could manage to find yourself a Defence teacher quite easily these days.'

'I remember a time when you would have jumped at the chance to teach the students Defence Against the Dark Arts,' she said with a smirk, trying to keep her humour even in a time when she was likely to lose him. 'Something about you has changed, Severus. Just what happened in the Shrieking Shack?'

'Exactly what all of the reports said,' he murmured, turning his eyes to stare at the fire. 'I arrived to meet the Dark Lord there, he set his great big bloody pet snake on me, and it tore out my throat with its nasty fangs. I didn't die, and it turns out that I was not the master of the Elder Wand.'

'You already knew that you were not the master, didn't you?'

He nodded and closed his eyes, rubbing his temples. 'I knew it, but I was bound to go along with whatever it was that Dumbledore had planned for me,' he answered. 'You know as well as I that the entire thing was a set up.'

'Are you angry with Albus?' Minerva prompted.

'Incredibly... I am not,' he said, looking up at her. 'Rather, I am saddened that the course he chose was not the only option available simply the one he chose.'

'You believe Albus wanted to die?'

'Minerva, you and I both know Albus was an old man,' Snape said simply. 'He was tired, and he felt it was his time, so he offered himself as a sacrifice.'

'Old fool,' Minerva whispered. 'I have missed him a lot in the past couple of months. Since the war, there has been little else to occupy my mind.'

'He was a fool,' Snape agreed. 'But I will admit, I do miss having someone to talk to when things become... too much for me.'

'Hogwarts will not be the same without you, Severus,' Minerva said quietly, looking down at her hands clasped in her lap before her.

'It will be better, Minerva,' he replied, standing from his armchair and walking over to stand beside her, grasping her shoulder with a shaky hand. 'I have to be off, now I have a strict medical regimen.'

Minerva watched as he walked away, limping slightly on the same side that Nagini had torn his throat. She hoped he would make a full recovery from all his injuries. He would give up on life if his ability to brew potions and make a living were beyond his grasp due to the extent of his injuries. The magic in the castle shifted a little, and Minerva knew that it meant Snape had already left the building. Standing from her chair, she moved to the window that overlooked the long road that led down from the castle to the front gates.

From her vantage point, she could just make out Snape's black-clad figure as he slowly limped away from Hogwarts.

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Greenwich, Ipswich: 28th July, 2009

Snape looked over at the cauldron bubbling across the bench from him and stood up from his seat, grabbed his glass stirring rod, and lowered the heat of the flame as he stirred exactly five times anti-clockwise.

He felt Granger's arm brush against his own as she moved to stand beside him and observe as he paid attention to their potion. It turned out that her ideas about using various types of blood had been one of merit when he had finally taken it into consideration. He was a man of tradition, and unconventional ingredients, such as Raven's blood in potions, were a concept as foreign to him as wearing a cheerful colour, like orange. He found he hadn't even minded when she had walked down the street with a spring in her step and a smarmy smile plastered to her face.

When they walked through the village to the Apothecary, he knew what people were thinking when they saw the two of them together. He could see it in the judgment in their eyes. He was an old man, and she was far too young for the likes of him. And they were right he was just shy of fifty, and she was only thirty years of age. Even though there was nothing between them other than their work, he still felt like working with her was tarnishing her reputation in one way or another.

'You'll need to add the dittany in a few minutes,' she murmured from beside him, snapping him back out of his thoughts.

He looked at her from the corner of his eye and saw a small bead of sweat slide from the top of her hairline, down her cheek and neck, to stop just at her collarbone. His fingers itched to reach out and brush it away, but his common sense reined him in and prevented him from doing something potentially stupid. Pulling a handkerchief out of his pocket, he pressed it into her hand and removed the stirring rod from the potion.

'It's warm in here,' he muttered at her questioning look. 'Bodily fluids will contaminate the potion. I will open some of the windows and adjust the wards shortly. I am beginning to feel a tad uncomfortable myself.'

Hermione nodded in understanding. 'I didn't want to say anything while the potion was at such a delicate stage,' she said, dabbing at her forehead and neck with the handkerchief. 'I would be grateful if you could crack a window, actually.'

Snape nodded and proceeded to walk around the laboratory, opening a few windows and waving his wand to prevent contaminants from coming in through them. He allowed his focus to stray momentarily, and he glanced at Granger once more. She was sitting atop a stool, her head bent low as she was reading and scribbling notes down at the speed of light. Her hair was piled atop her head, and she had both her wand and a long quill stuck in the mass of curls to hold it there. He could see the graceful, unblemished line of her throat and the back of her neck, her skin slightly shiny with perspiration.

He watched as her tongue darted out to lick her bottom lip and was horrified that he wished he had been the one to perform the task. Blinking and shaking his head, he turned away. Thoughts like those were dangerous ones. Finishing the task at hand quickly, he returned to look at the potion and saw that the prepared dittany was sitting in a small pile on the chopping board beside the cauldron. Hermione nodded at him, and he carefully sprinkled it over the top, allowing the minced leaves to slowly dissolve.

Stirring anti-clockwise precisely five times, he lowered the heat so the potion would simmer. Five minutes later, he cast a stasis spell over it, and they began cleaning up the laboratory. If their calculations were correct, the potion would be completed in exactly two weeks from that day. The day before as they had been discussing the work through their lunch break, Granger had struck gold, suggesting outsourcing ingredients from other countries.

And so, during their research that afternoon, they discovered that Brahmi root, and the essence that was produced by crushing it, was an essential ingredient in a lot of North Indian herbal and organic medicines. In a medical journal that Hermione translated for the two of them, they found that Brahmi was useful in treating a variety of conditions that involved impaired mental capacity, including Alzheimer's disease, attention deficit disorder, memory problems, and Parkinson's disease. It also mentioned the herb improved intellectual function primarily by balancing the chemicals gamma-aminobutyric acid and glutamate in the brain. That afternoon they calculated the outcome of the formula with the herb included.

It was the missing ingredient; he only hoped that their Potions theory and the final product proved to be one and the same.

'On Monday, if we add the final ingredient, the potion will then only need approximately two weeks to mature,' Snape said aloud, even though he knew Granger was already aware of the fact.

'I look forward to Monday, then,' she replied with a bright smile. 'If I had been left on my own, I'd have never come so far in just a couple of months.'

'Although I hate to admit it, I feel much the same,' Snape said, an uncomfortable feeling settling in the pit of his stomach at his admission.

He was surprised when she did not have something scathing to say in return. 'We do work well together, don't we?'

Snape had to hold back a smile that tugged at the corner of his mouth. 'That we do, Miss Granger,' he replied, pulling the journal towards him to finish jotting down their calculations.

They spent the next ten minutes tidying the benches in the room and putting away all the ingredients they no longer required. After that, Snape set himself a timer and left it on the bench before leading the way up to the study. He went about the room opening the windows as Granger arranged the two armchairs in front of the coffee table so they would be able to sit and discuss the potion further. He placed their recording journal on the coffee table between them and looked over to see that she was gazing pensively out the window at the oak growing beside the house.

'This potion will be completed much sooner than you or I could have anticipated,' he said, snapping her out of her musings.

Her eyes drifted to his face, and he couldn't help but to feel nervous under her gaze. He was lucky that his feelings did not often reveal themselves in his expression, for surely then she might have discovered his regard for her. She wandlessly Summoned a quill and pot of ink to them and placed them on the coffee table beside the journal.

'Well, for a start, when this is complete, we will have to patent the rights to the potion and the formula,' she said, waving her hand over the journal.

The book opened to the next clean page.

Snape nodded in agreement. 'And we will also need to discuss what is to be done with the royalties made from the sale of this potion. I imagine this will have to be distributed globally,' he added, waving his hand over the ink and quill.

The quill stood to attention and dipped itself into the inkpot, beginning to write as they spoke.

'I think we will have to make the recipe and method exclusive,' Granger said with a smile. 'This recipe in the wrong hands could be dangerous indeed.'

'Of that, I have no doubt,' Snape replied. 'No, we shall not make the potion recipe available to anyone else. The exclusive distribution rights must remain ours...'

'Ours?' Granger's expression was one of surprise.

Snape chuckled dryly. 'Well, of course the potion will be patented in both of our names. We did this together, Miss Granger,' he said seriously. 'Any idea what we will name this potion of ours?'

The smile she gifted him with was enchanting. 'Well, I have a few suggestions, but I think that is perhaps the least important issue at hand. What we do need to decide is what to do with any royalties we receive,' she said, her pragmatic mind kicking in and forcing its way to the forefront of the conversation once more.

Snape stroked his chin thoughtfully. 'I have an idea I would like to put forth as far as that is concerned. I think a significant portion of the money should go towards a charity of sorts I was of a mind to begin,' he said thoughtfully.

'Well, by all means, sir, continue,' she said with a grin.

Snape had to compose himself briefly. All of this time he was spending with her the smiles she would throw his way he didn't deserve any of them, and yet, here was this amazing woman, smiling at him of all people. He was a damned fool. Cursing inwardly, he tried to put it out of his mind and focus on their work once more. Realising he had paused for a moment too long, he cleared his throat and looked back up at her.

'I am aware it has been many years since the war. However, this does not mean there are not still young people who were orphaned during the Dark Lord's reign who have no families or money left to them,' he said, turning his eye to where the quill was scribbling furiously on the page. 'I want to begin this charity and fund it with seventy percent of the royalties made from the potion. This money should be sufficient to give many young people an opportunity to afford clothes and books and decent things in their lives while they are completing their magical education.'

'That sounds like just the sort of thing we should be using the money for,' she said, smiling at him. 'It's perfect, really. Only ten per cent of the money will be needed to reimburse us for the expense of the potion, and the other twenty per cent we could split between us for the time we invested into the making of it.'

'I thought you would like that,' Snape said, looking at her fondly.

'Professor?' she asked, looking down at her hands.

'Yes, Miss Granger?'

'Do you think, perhaps, we could call each other by our first names now?' she asked, looking back up at him shyly.

'I didn't think you would be comfortable with calling me by my first name,' he admitted, waving his hand and ceasing the movement of the quill.

'I would be honoured to be granted the privilege of such familiarity with you,' she said, her cheeks heating and turning pink. 'I've never really heard anyone say your name, save for Minerva. I always thought that to be allowed to call you by name would mean I have gained your respect.'

'You have had my respect for longer than I care to admit,' Snape said, feeling a little uncomfortable after her small confession.

They sat in silence for a few moments longer before Granger finally stood from her chair and brushed out imaginary wrinkles in her clothing.

'Well, I must be off for the day,' she said quickly. 'You'll let me know if anything happens with the potion?'

Snape nodded and walked her to the front door.

'Goodbye, Severus,' she said, testing out his name.

'Goodbye, Hermione,' he said as he watched her walk down the front path and onto the street.

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To be continued.

Chapter 8: Scientific Breakthroughs

Chapter 8 of 20

In collaborating to find a cure for a magical condition that is thought to be irreversible, Potions mistress Granger and Potions master Snape discover the beauty of science and the lasting companionship of love. Written for WriterMerrin and based loosely on the life of Marie Curie.

Disclaimer: All publicly recognizable characters, settings, etc. are the property of their respective owners. The original characters and plot are the property of the author.

Many thanks to the lovely VIVAvivacious for all of her hard work beta-ing this story.

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I am one of those who think like Nobel, that humanity will draw more good than evil from new discoveries.

Marie Curie.

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Greenwich, Ipswich: 12th August, 2009

The sand in the timer seemed to almost slow to a stop as it trickled through the hourglass from the top to the bottom. It seemed as though the longer he spent looking at it, the slower the sand moved. Snape had been waiting for so long that he could barely stand the anticipation any longer. He closed his eyes and rubbed his hands over them wearily. He heard the door at the top of the stairs leading down to the lab open and the footsteps that followed.

He looked up just in time to see Hermione enter the room. It had been two weeks since he had stopped thinking of her as Granger, since they had come to an agreement on calling one another by their first names. She flashed him a nervous smile. He wasn't surprised. He was just as anxious about the outcome of their potion.

'How much longer do we have to wait?' she asked, walking over to the window to open it after a brief pause to check that the wards surrounding the potion were intact.

'Just a few more minutes,' he answered. 'Are the test subjects ready?'

Hermione nodded. 'I left them upstairs in their cage. I didn't think it would be prudent to bring them down here. They seemed to sense something this morning and have been a little on edge.'

Snape snorted. 'They're rats, Hermione,' he replied. 'They have no idea what is in store for them. I assume you have performed the memory charm on them?'

'Yes,' she answered with a nod. 'They are all quite barmy at the moment, hence their current state of irritation.'

Snape shook his head and turned back to look at the timer. He watched with bated breath as the last few grains of sand fell through and joined the rest of the sand at the bottom of the hourglass. He sighed in relief and walked over to the potion, taking the protective charms off it and putting out the flame beneath. Hermione joined him and put a hand on his arm, practically grabbing it and shaking it in her excitement. She smiled at him in a way that made his heart almost come to a halt.

Together they decanted the potion into a row of flasks, putting stoppers in all of them, save one. As Snape labelled all the jars, Hermione went upstairs to collect their test specimens. When she returned, he had finished putting the spare flasks on the shelf near the sink and was placing a security ward on it so that no harm would come to the potion. He hadn't noticed it before, but the potion was a crystal clear jade colour. He attributed it to all of the herbs and organic extracts they had used in its creation.

He waited as Hermione picked up each of the rats and inspected them. She made a noise of triumph when she found the one she was looking for. He stepped up behind her and relieved her of the rodent, holding it up by its tail.

'Why don't you prepare the serum to be administered to the rat, and I will prepare the confinement container,' he said, taking it over to a row of small containment boxes they had pre-arranged on the benches beside the sink.

Two minutes later, Hermione joined him at the bench with an eyedropper filled with the serum. 'Can you pry his mouth open for me?' she asked after her failed attempt to entice the rat into opening its mouth of its own volition.

Snape gently pried its jaw open, and Hermione immediately inserted the point of the eyedropper into the rat's mouth and pumped the contents in it.

Once they had finished with the first one, Snape secured the containment unit it was in so it was unable to escape, and they proceeded to test the rest of them. Once they had completed their work, they tidied their workspace and made notes in the journal before sitting down to watch their subjects. Neither of them knew how long it would take before they would see results, let alone if their potion would work at all. It was all based on theory, but Snape hoped all their hard work and time had not been a waste.

When nothing had happened after the first hour, Snape went upstairs to the kitchen to make tea as Hermione continued to observe.

He was glad for the time alone. There was nary a day that he had not spent in her company over the past two and a half months. It was more time than Snape was used to spending with another person in such close quarters. Yes, he had been a professor at what was essentially a boarding school, but it was different when there was someone constantly in his personal space. When he had been living at Hogwarts, there was rarely a moment when he had allowed a soul into his personal chambers. Of all the staff that worked at the school, only Albus had been there more than once, and he had only visited a handful of times himself.

Once he had brewed the pot of tea, he grabbed two mugs and levitated it all down to the lab with him.

Hermione looked up at him when he entered, and she shook her head. Nothing had happened while he had been away. He poured their tea, and they sat side-by-side to watch their experiment as it progressed.

After three hours, Snape heard the first rat start squeaking a lot more often, and move around in its confinement unit. He got up immediately and walked over, taking the charms off the box and picking the rat up to examine it. He just barely lit the tip of his wand, and he held the light up to the rat's eyes, watching its pupils dilate and become smaller. It appeared to be slightly more aware of its surroundings. He performed Legillimens on the specimen, and while it was confusing to dig around in the memories of the rat, it appeared that the potion had been successful in retrieving its lost memories.

'So, what is the diagnosis, Professor?' Hermione asked, her eyes as wide as saucers in anticipation.

'From my professional perspective, it would seem to me that this rat, after enduring severe memory loss and amnesia, has recovered its memories due to the potion we have created,' he said, smirking in triumph.

'Yes!' she exclaimed before jumping towards him and wrapping her arms around him in her excitement. 'We did it!'

When she finally released him and murmured an apology, he relaxed and put the specimen back in its container. 'It is indeed a great triumph for us. However, we still need

to achieve the same results with the other eleven rats we have before we can begin testing it on humans. We will also need to alter the equation to find out how much we will need to administer to each person based on their overall height and weight,' he added, his mind defensively switching to logic in his nervousness.

Hermione smiled and shook her head. 'Ever the scientist,' she said, although her tone was tempered with a fondness he had not picked up on before. 'Can't you just take a moment to step back and enjoy our victory?'

'It is not easy for me to be so optimistic,' he answered, surprised at his own honesty.

'Well, I will be the optimist for the both of us,' she said, moving over to check on the second rat, which also appeared to be making more noise than it had earlier.

By the end of the day, all the rats had been cured of their amnesia and were as healthy as they had been upon purchase. He walked Hermione to his front door to see her off as usual, and the two of them parted for the day, both with a little spring in their step, pleased at what they had managed to achieve.

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St. Mungo's, London: 26th August, 2009

Two weeks passed in a blur as Hermione and Snape continued to do rigorous testing on as many magical and non-magical creatures as they dared.

They were careful to make certain to test on larger animals as well as the small, though none so large as an actual human being. All of the tests had been positive once they had begun using the special equation for the amount of potion that would be required per dosage. The thick journal they had been using to write down all of their notes was nearly full, and they had only one step left to take before they would submit their paperwork of the potion and the patenting rights information to the Ministry of Magic for approval.

They needed to test the potion on two living human beings of incapacitated mental states.

This was the reason for Hermione's visit to St. Mungo's that day. She was there to recruit a volunteer, someone she had high hopes would acquiesce to their request. She caught the lift from the lobby to the Janus Thickey Ward and made her way to the main desk on that floor. As she approached, she could see the confusion in the eyes of the ladies sitting there. She knew why. What possible reason would Hermione Granger have for visiting that ward?

'I was wondering if you could point me in the direction of Frank and Alice Longbottom's room, please,' Hermione asked upon reaching the front desk.

'They are in room 609, just down the hall and to the left at the end,' answered the youngest witch, a blonde who seemed to be intent on examining her fingernails rather than gaping at Hermione like the others.

'Thank you for your assistance,' she said before making her way to the end of the hall.

Upon reaching the correct room, she paused at the door and knocked a couple of times, then opened the door to enter. She peeked around the door and was surprised by how cheery the room looked in comparison to most of the rooms within St. Mungo's. She supposed it was different in the long-term ward, as most of the patients would be interred there for life.

'Hello?' she said, looking around the room to see if there was anyone in the room other than the two Longbottom patients.

'Hey,' said a voice from behind her, causing Hermione to spin around quickly, her wand in hand. She had never really been able to change her immediate reaction to being surprised after the war.

'Neville!' she exclaimed when she saw her friend standing behind her with a grin on his face.

'It's good to see you too, Hermione,' he replied, looping an arm around her shoulder and ushering her into the room properly. 'Have a seat wherever you like.'

'How have you been, Neville?' she asked as she sat in one of the chairs between Neville's parents' beds.

'Oh, you know, I have actually been pretty good. Luna is taking care of the twins at home at the moment, so I decided to pop in and see how my parents were faring today,' he said, cheerful despite everything he had been through in his life. 'They are much the same as usual, I fear.'

'I suppose you are wondering what I am doing here,' Hermione said, getting straight to the point.

Neville chuckled lightly. 'Well, I suppose some sort of explanation might be nice. It's not every day I come to see my folks and find Hermione Granger lurking in their doorway.'

Hermione laughed at that also. 'Well, I suppose I will get right to the point, then,' she said with a smile. 'I have some pretty amazing news that will hopefully mean the return of your parents to you. I have been working with Professor Snape for the past three months, tirelessly trying to perfect our mind restoration potion for magically-induced amnesia and brain damage.'

'You and Snape? Together?' Neville managed to stutter out, utterly in shock. 'You think you've found a potion that will cure my parents?'

'We certainly have, Mr. Longbottom,' said a deep, familiar voice from the doorway.

Hermione looked up and saw that Snape had entered the room wearing his customary black robes and attire. His arms were folded across his chest, and he had a weary but not unhappy expression gracing his features. He crossed the room to stand beside her chair and extended a hand out to Neville in perhaps the most polite greeting she had ever seen from the man who was once her professor.

'How are you, Longbottom?' Snape said as Neville nervously grasped his hand to shake it in return.

'Well, I think I would have to say I am better now than I have been for quite a few years,' he stammered, releasing Snape's hand to run it through his hair, clearly still in shock over the whole situation.

'I understand this is a lot to take in, Mr. Longbottom, but Professor Granger and I would both be very much obliged if you would allow us to test our potion on your parents in the hope that we might restore their minds to what they once were,' Snape said simply. 'We have done extensive testing on a variety of creatures of different sizes and constitutions, and we have one final test to complete before we can finally deem this potion a success.'

Hermione decided to throw in her two cents then. 'Neville, we really want to help your parents, and we've had nothing but success so far. I know this is a lot of pressure, putting you on the spot like this, but the sooner we try it, the better,' she implored. 'I wouldn't ask if I didn't feel it was worth the risk, but at the same time, I can't promise that this will be 100 per cent effective.'

Neville nodded, seeming to come out of his daze. 'No, it's fine. I understand why you are asking me. You know I would trust you with my own life, Hermione. How could I not trust you with my parents' lives?' he answered, finally giving her another smile. 'When do we start?'

'Right now,' Hermione said, pulling a black velvet pouch out of her robes and returning it to its usual size with a wave of her hand.

'We have formulated an equation that has allowed us to calculate how much of the potion will be safe to administer to your parents,' Snape explained.

Meanwhile, Hermione went about the task of filling the syringes they had brought with the potion so they could inject the liquid straight into the IV lines connected to their arms. Snape injected the first round of the potion for Alice while Hermione took care of Frank on the other side. When that was done, they disposed of the used syringes and the waiting began.

After three hours, Hermione immediately checked their vitals and made sure that everything was in perfect working order. Pleased at the level of change in their brain frequencies on the monitor, Hermione and Snape proceeded to administer the second round of the potion to the patients. They resumed their seats and everyone sat around, the anxiousness in the room almost overpowering.

It was nearly five in the afternoon when a soft moan and a sound of disgruntlement coming from Alice Longbottom's bed alerted the room to a change.

Snape jumped out of his seat immediately and went to the woman with Neville hot on his heels. Hermione observed and jotted down notes as Snape checked and prodded her until he was satisfied that the sound was not just a fluke. Neville grasped his mother's hand and nearly jumped up and down for joy when her eyes rolled up to meet his dazedly, and her hand gave his a light squeeze in return.

'Ally,' a soft voice croaked from behind all of them.

Hermione spun around to find Frank Longbottom looking around the room in distress, grasping at his dry throat as he croaked out his wife's name. She walked over to him and grasped one of his hands in hers, drawing his attention to her.

'Hello, Frank,' she said with a smile. 'I am Hermione. We've never met before, but I am here to treat you. Your wife is fine and in the bed beside us. She is experiencing similar confusion to you.'

'Where?' he rasped.

'We are at St. Mungo's,' she answered. 'You've been here for a long time.'

'How... how long?' he asked.

Hermione closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Her answer would not please him, she knew. 'You've been here for about 30 years, sir.'

Snape chose to step up beside her at that moment and place a hand on her shoulder. Hermione felt like she was about to either cry or fall over. She had no idea what the right thing to feel at that time was. Elation at having done something that no one else had been able to do before, or sadness for how much of their lives the Longbottoms had missed out on.

'Snape?' Frank said, his brow furrowing.

'Hello, Frank,' Snape replied with a nod.

'You got... old,' he said before crumbling into a small coughing fit.

Hermione immediately rushed to get water for the man and helped him to sip it while Snape sat down in the seat beside his former colleague...and apparently friend. Once she had completed her task, she took a moment to step back and survey the people in the room. Neville was sitting on his mother's bedside, holding her hand and smiling, tears shining on his cheeks. Snape sat beside Frank, and everything seemed to be right for once.

She watched her former professor with a fondness she had felt creeping up on her for the longest time. However, when she turned her attention back to Neville, she found her friend staring at her with curiosity in his eyes.

Hermione ducked her head and stared at the floor. She could not have Neville asking her questions she couldn't even comprehend the answers to herself.

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To be continued.

Chapter 9: The Two Scientists

Chapter 9 of 20

In collaborating to find a cure for a magical condition that is thought to be irreversible, Potions mistress Granger and Potions master Snape discover the beauty of science and the lasting companionship of love. Written for WriterMerrin and based loosely on the life of Marie Curie.

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A giant hug of thanks goes out to VIVAvivacious for all of her help as my beta for this story.

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You cannot hope to build a better world without improving the individuals. To that end each of us must work for his own improvement, and at the same time share a general responsibility for all humanity, our particular duty being to aid those to whom we think we can be most useful.

Marie Curie.

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Greenwich, Ipswich: 2nd September, 2009

The light filtering through the curtains of the study was bright and hot, indicating that it was almost noon. Snape had spent the better part of the day locked up in his house, ignoring the countless letters he was receiving via owl post and not reading the newspaper that undoubtedly had a photo of himself and Hermione Granger plastered to the front of it.

When their potion had proved successful after administering it to the Longbottoms a week ago, they had gone back every day to ensure that the effects had not been temporary and to help Neville with updating his parents on what had gone on during the time they had been incapacitated. Everything had been going so well, and they had remained undisturbed until the day before when apparently they had managed to make the front page of the *Daily Prophet* because one of the employees at St. Mungo's had been unable to keep their mouth shut.

People had crowded the hallways, spectators and the media alike, and instead of getting into the room, Snape grabbed Hermione's hand immediately, and they fled the hospital from the same direction they had come. He Apparated them to her house and left her there with the promise to contact her the next day as to whether St. Mungo's had managed to contain the leak of information and drive out the media circus.

When he contacted St. Mungo's that morning, however, they simply told him that there were reporters stationed on all the entries and that it would be nigh impossible for them to visit unnoticed. Snape had considered using Polyjuice Potion, but he thought better of it. No matter what disguise they used, if they went to see the Longbottoms, they would be discovered and harassed.

He finally summoned some parchment, along with a quill and ink, and decided to write Hermione a letter.

Hermione,

Things have not calmed down at St. Mungo's. I think perhaps you have already discovered that there are some disturbing reports about the two of us. Do not pay any attention to this nonsense. They will report what they will.

I gave some thought to going in some form of disguise, but have since discarded that idea. If you have any ideas, let me know.

Severus

He went over to the bird stand that his own Hephaestus shared with Hermione's owl, Ophelia, every time she came to his house after a flight. After gently coaxing the owl into wakefulness, he opened the window and then attached the letter to the owl's leg.

'Take this to your Mistress, Ophelia,' he said, carrying her over to the window and allowing her to use his arm as a launch pad.

He returned to his chair and dropped into it wearily to await her reply. He was startled to find that his house was oddly eerie when Hermione was not there to bring warmth into it. He wasn't sure what to make of it. On one hand, he disliked the way the media was trying to portray the two of them in some sort of secret relationship, all because the two of them were just not ready to give interviews on the matter. They barely even had the paperwork submitted for the potion, and people were on their backs trying to pump them for information.

On the other hand, however, he worried that the way the media had been talking about the two of them in the paper would affect both their working relationship and the way they interacted with one another. Since the day they began calling each other by first name, he felt he and Hermione had become friends. It was difficult for him to admit, but he liked her. She was intelligent, beautiful, and easy to talk to – not to mention, she accepted him as he was, and not once had she forced him into a social situation that he was uncomfortable with.

Shaking his head, he summoned a book from the shelves and flipped it open. He needed to keep his mind from dangerous thoughts such as those.

An hour later, he felt the wards shift and sensed the presence of another person on his property. He closed the book and left the study, heading straight to the front door. On reaching it, he looked through the peephole and saw Hermione was standing on his front doorstep. He stepped back and opened the door, ushering her in straight away and taking her robes from her shoulders to hang up in the closet in the front hall.

'I thought it might be easier if we just talked rather than wear poor Ophelia out by sending letters back and forth all day,' she explained with a shrug.

'I don't suppose you had a tail on your way here?' he asked.

'I did, actually. I Apparated to Harry and Ginny's place and chatted to them for twenty minutes before I came here to lose them, actually,' she answered with a smile, following him into the kitchen. 'How about a cup of tea?'

He nodded and put on the kettle while Hermione went about fetching the teapot and leaves. When they had two mugs of steaming green tea, the pair sat down across from one another at Snape's kitchen table. He stared at the greenish liquid in his mug and sighed heavily.

'You really hate all of the publicity, don't you?' Hermione asked, causing his focus to switch to her immediately.

'Unbelievably so,' he answered, taking a sip of his tea. 'We weren't planning to go public this soon.'

'It was inevitable,' she said, reaching across the table and putting her hand over his in what he assumed was supposed to be a comforting gesture. 'Now all we have to do is put up with a little bit of this speculative rubbish, and then when we get the okay from the Ministry, we'll call a press conference and announce our intentions to the public properly.'

'You make it all sound so easy,' he grumbled, pulling his hand out from hers. His fingers still tingled from the contact, but he thought if he left his hand there any longer, he might not want her to let go.

'Ever the pessimist, Severus,' she said, shaking her head. 'We will make it out of this just fine, you'll see.'

'I am not a pessimist, Hermione,' he argued, his brow furrowing in annoyance. 'It is more of a problem than you are treating it. This entire thing is an invasion of our privacy and borders on defamation of character, as far as I am concerned. The media has no business putting their noses where they don't belong. We have important work to do, and they are corrupting the results with their very presence in St. Mungo's. They would have followed you straight here, too, which is on the same level as stalking in the eyes of the law.'

Hermione's frown at his rant made him stop and pinch his lips together in annoyance. Surely she of all people would understand why he had such a huge problem with the media hovering over them. If she tried to defend their actions, he was sure to snap at her, so tightly wound he was that day.

'I won't disagree with you,' she said finally. 'I suppose I just haven't had as many negative experiences with reporters as you have, save for any article Rita Skeeter has written about me over the years. She has the tendency to portray me as some sort of harlot most of the time.'

'Rita Skeeter is wholly without conscience,' Snape remarked with a smirk. 'I seem to recall quite a few articles from your time at Hogwarts where you were the featured subject of her focus.'

Hermione pouted at his remark and took a swallow of her tea before looking out the kitchen window. The afternoon sun beat down on the roof of the small tin storage shed in Snape's backyard.

'This will all blow over, won't it?' she asked, suddenly not sounding as sure as she had earlier.

Snape paused for a moment to take a sip of his now lukewarm tea. 'I certainly hope so.'

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Wythenshawe, Manchester: 4th September, 2009

The dark clouds in the sky were depressing. It had been two days since Hermione had visited Snape, and from the moment she had left his house that afternoon, the early autumn storm had barely stopped pouring rain. All the water was keeping her indoors and giving her too much time to think by herself. And in the state she was in, thoughts were a very dangerous thing indeed.

She looked across the room and saw James and Albus Potter both sitting on the rug playing with their toys. Well, at least the two boys were getting along. All day they had been fighting, and it had been a struggle to keep the two of them apart but happy that one wasn't getting more attention than the other at the same time. Once more she had agreed to babysit for Ginny, who had to go to St. Mungo's to have check-ups done for both her and little Lily, and Harry had been unable to get time off from the Ministry himself.

When the two boys had taken a nap just after lunch, Hermione had managed to get some class schedule work done. Next week would be the start of the school term, and she still had much planning left to get through before she would be ready to begin teaching again. She asked for a cut in the number of classes she had to teach due to the overwhelming demand from medical hospitals and clinics that had already begun sending letters to her and Snape.

Little did either of them know just how large a can of worms they had opened when they began researching and working on their potion.

She looked up at the clock on the mantelpiece of the fireplace and saw that it was already 3:30 p.m. Ginny would be coming by soon to collect the boys and take them home.

Deciding to make sure they were presentable and ready for their mother when she arrived, Hermione got up from her chair and walked over to begin putting their toys in the baby bag Ginny had left for her. When everything was packed save the toys the two boys were already holding, she sat down on the rug with the two of them and summoned *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* over to her, causing James to squeal with joy.

'Auntie 'Mione, can you read the one about the brothers, please?' James pleaded so sweetly that Hermione was hard-pressed to find a reason to refuse him.

'All right,' she said with a smile, leaning in to give him a kiss on the cheek. 'But only because you asked me so nicely.'

'Bard! Bard!' Albus chirped loudly, feeling left out of the conversation.

Hermione laughed and gathered both boys onto her lap, opening the book on their laps so they could turn the pages with her. When they were nearing the end of the story, the Floo activated in the fireplace, and Ginny stepped through with Lily curled up inside the baby sling she had wrapped around her. The boys were so enraptured with the story they didn't even notice their mother until Hermione finished reading.

'Mummy!' James said, jumping up from Hermione's lap and throwing himself around her legs in a hug.

'Hello, darling,' Ginny replied, tousling his dark hair. 'Hi, Hermione! The boys weren't any trouble, were they?'

Hermione shook her head and stood, taking Albus with her and carrying him over, giggling and wriggling around, so she could give Ginny a one-armed hug in greeting. 'They were fine,' she said, hugging Albus tightly to her and giving him a kiss on the cheek. 'How was the check-up?'

'Boring and long,' the younger woman replied, wandering over to the fire again and taking a seat in one of the armchairs. 'Honestly, sometimes I think pregnancy is easier than all the fuss and tests they put you through after you give birth.'

James followed his mother over and sat on the little footstool beside the chair so he could look at his little sister while Ginny rearranged her in the sling. Hermione followed suit and seated herself and Albus in the opposite chair.

'It might be a while before I even know what that feels like,' Hermione said with a small smile.

Ginny frowned slightly at that. 'And you are sure that you don't want me to get Harry to set you up on a date with that guy from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement?' she teased.

Hermione laughed at that. 'Honestly, Gin. The last thing I need is to be set up on another blind date,' she replied. 'I don't like the sort of men Harry works with all action and very little thinking involved.'

'Well, Harry always did say you were too smart for the likes of him and Ron,' Ginny said with a grin. 'Who would be the ideal man for you? We know that all that stuff about you and Snape in the *Prophet* is rubbish.'

Hermione could not stop the heat from travelling to her face at the mention of Snape. In a matter of seconds her face was pink, and she felt speechless. Ginny's eyes widened and her mouth gaped open unattractively. Hermione stared down at Albus' hair, embarrassed at her own instantaneous reaction to the mention of her former professor. She had spent weeks trying to convince herself that she was being ridiculous, and then to top it off, the articles in the *Daily Prophet* had begun appearing.

'You little sneak, Hermione Granger,' Ginny said with a massive grin on her face that screamed 'I caught you out.' 'Are you and Snape actually dating one another?'

'We're not dating,' Hermione said shyly. 'But I can't deny I have grown... fond of him during the time we've been working together.'

'Are you in love with him?'

'Ginny! What a question to ask. I don't think I have had a lot of time to process the entire thing yet, if I'm honest,' she replied. 'I've spent the past few weeks trying not to even think about it. It won't get me anywhere good, that's for certain. Snape does not have any feelings for me, other than perhaps friendship.'

'Well, what makes you think he doesn't return your feelings?' Ginny argued, her blue eyes narrowed seriously.

Hermione laughed out loud. 'Severus Snape could not possibly have feelings for me, Ginny. I was his student once upon a time. He tolerates me,' she said, anxiety settling in the pit of her stomach. 'And in any case, I thought you would be totally against me having feelings for... Severus.'

'Oh, so it's Severus now, is it?' Ginny teased. 'But in all seriousness, I don't think Harry or I have any right to be against or for anyone you have feelings for. In the end, we just want you to be happy. If Snape is the one who makes you happy, then I say you should act.'

Hermione's brow furrowed slightly. 'You've given me a lot to think about, but I won't be making any decisions now, especially not while all this nonsense in the papers is still around. If there was any hope for him to return my feelings, these stupid rumours have surely destroyed it.'

'I wouldn't give up so soon, if I were you,' Ginny said before standing. 'All right, I think it might be time for me to take the kids home for their baths.'

'I hate bath time, mummy,' James complained, reluctantly getting up from the footstool. He had been such a little angel while the two of them had been talking, but one mention of a bath and the eldest Potter child became a brat once more.

'Well, if you don't want to take a bath, maybe you will have to go without dessert tonight,' Ginny said firmly. She was such a good mother.

'Fine, I'll have a dumb bath,' James said petulantly.

Hermione laughed at the banter and carried a now sleeping Albus over to give to Ginny. After helping them into the fireplace with all their belongings, and James wrapped around Ginny's leg, the Potters left via the Floo, and Hermione was alone once more. She went around the room tidying up things the boys had left askew, and then went to the kitchen to do the dishes from the day.

After she scrubbed all the plates, cups, and cutlery, she rinsed them and began stacking them in the drying rack while reflecting on her conversation with Ginny. Despite being younger, the redhead did have a lot more experience with relationships than Hermione did, and Ginny often knew exactly what to say. She knew she should heed the advice she had been given, but part of her objected to it strongly, telling her she should give up entirely.

Sighing, she pushed the thoughts out of her mind and finished up the dishes quickly. She still had much planning to do for work, and there was no time for her to be fretting over her personal crisis. Hermione returned to the study and opened her planning journal to the marker where she had left off earlier.

There would be time to think about Snape at a later date.

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To be continued.

Chapter 10: Unrelated to Science

Chapter 10 of 20

In collaborating to find a cure for a magical condition that is thought to be irreversible, Potions mistress Granger and Potions master Snape discover the beauty of science and the lasting companionship of love. Written for WriterMerrin and based loosely on the life of Marie Curie.

Disclaimer: All publicly recognizable characters, settings, etc. are the property of their respective owners. The original characters and plot are the property of the author.

Thanks go to VIVAvivacious for all of her help as the beta for this chapter.

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All my life through, the new sights of nature made me rejoice like a child.

Marie Curie

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Greenwich, Ipswich: 20th September, 2009

Snape sighed and stared at the fireplace, the flames crackling gently with their movement before he moved his gaze to the window. He had been sitting in his study for the most part of the day. If he were totally honest, he had been rather unenthusiastic about anything for the past two weeks. He had not seen Hermione once during that time, nor had he left his house for anything other than essentials. A week before, he had received a letter from the Ministry of Magic, putting the official seal of approval on the potion and stating that the Ministry would be delighted to host a press conference for the two of them.

Snape neither replied to the letter nor gave it much thought. He had been too preoccupied with the reports in the *Daily Prophet* and the rumours that had already infected the public about a clandestine relationship between him and Hermione a relationship that did not exist, and nor would it ever. Any hope that he might have had for a chance of returned feelings from Hermione had been dashed a fortnight ago.

He closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. All of this thinking in circles he had been doing was giving him the headache from hell. Earlier in the week, he had been on the cusp on making the decision to go and see Hermione and confess his feelings for her, and now he was back to square one, fretting and as nervous as a teenager. He was 50 years old, for God's sake.

When he opened his eyes, they fell upon the recording journal he and Hermione had been writing all their research and the actual potion instructions in. He hadn't touched it since the last time he had visited the Longbottoms at St. Mungo's. From what he had read in the paper and in letters from Neville, Frank and Alice were making quite a decent recovery. Their memories were still patchy in places, but it was a miracle that they had come so far. They would undoubtedly be in hospital for a few months for monitoring and to help them with physiotherapy and magical stimulation to get their dormant bodies used to movement again.

Neville had also reported that Hermione had been there several times to help with their therapy and to monitor their progress.

Hermione had been there without him, and she had not informed him she would be continuing on without him. He had not received a letter from her since the last time she wrote to convince him not to go into seclusion because of the newspapers. It was his own damned fault. He had not replied, and so she had not bothered to pry and bully him further. It had been what he had wanted at the time, but now he felt a fool for it. He was far too ashamed of his own behaviour to even face her at that point.

Growling in frustration, he hauled himself out of his chair and began pacing.

What the hell was he doing, wasting away in his house by himself? He was becoming a worse recluse than he had been before the fall of the Dark Lord. The only thing left to do was to pick himself up with what little dignity he had left and go to apologise to Hermione to patch up the friendship they had begun to form before he had drowned himself in his pointless self-doubt.

He was above letting the stupid, pitiful mongrels at the *Daily Prophet* bring him down with their lies and defamation. He was Severus Snape after all, and he was not a man who feared his reputation being tarnished. People were still afraid of him, and he had every intention of reinforcing that fear when he was finished speaking to Hermione and getting their potion completely sorted out.

Walking over to the mantel of the fireplace, he grabbed the small clock to check the time and balked. It was already after 10 p.m. He had no business going to Hermione's house at that time of the night. Sighing heavily, he leaned his head against the wall and returned the clock to its former position on the mantel. He would have to wait until morning to disturb her.

He had really hoped to be able to apologise to her for his severe overreaction that very moment.

Gathering himself together, he pushed away from the wall and sat back in his armchair, pulling the research journal towards him. If he wasn't going to see Hermione until the next day, he would at least get some work done in the meantime. Summoning a quill, some ink, and spare parchment, Snape finally got to work for the first time in many days.

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Wythenshawe, Manchester: 21st September, 2009

The sun was on its way up, and bright beams of light were filtering through the curtains in Hermione's bedroom when she finally woke up that morning. Yawning and stretching out like a cat, she turned on her side to find her wand and check the time. She saw that it was only 7:00 a.m. Groaning, she was sorely tempted to pull her pillow over her head and go back to sleep for another few hours. However, common sense kicked in, and she hauled herself out of bed.

She walked by the windows and opened the curtains more fully, allowing the bright morning sun to fill the room. It was the first day after two full weeks of rain that the sky was clear and blue. She opened the window a tiny crack and shivered. It was getting cooler every day as autumn set in.

After stopping by her bathroom to perform her morning ablutions, she pulled a deep purple wool sweater over her cotton pyjamas, stuffed her feet in black slippers, and made her way down to the kitchen. She put on the kettle and pulled out fixings for tea and toast. Ten minutes later she was sitting at the kitchen table, nibbling on her toast while her tea was steeping. She had a copy of the *Daily Prophet* as well as *The Quibbler* in front of her and was flipping through, not really paying close attention.

When both she and Snape had refused to react publicly to the claims in the *Prophet* two weeks earlier, the paper stopped making them front page news, as readers were obviously getting bored of the same old clap-trap. Hermione wasn't surprised. She couldn't think of anything more boring than reading about herself.

She lifted the lid of the teapot to check on the state of her tea. Happy with the darkness of the brew, she lifted the pot to pour herself a cup when there was a knock at the door.

Surprised that she hadn't felt a shift in her wards, she assumed it might have been one of the Potters or Ron coming by so early. She always left her wards open to the people she trusted. Pulling herself out of her chair, she went to the front door to let her visitor in. Without bothering to look through the peephole, she opened the door and almost immediately regretted it.

Instead of her school friends, Severus Snape's dark, towering figure stood on her doorstep with a look of surprise on his face at her state of dress, she imagined.

'Severus!' she exclaimed, her nervousness and embarrassment causing her to almost squeak at him. 'What brings you here so early?'

Snape opened his mouth to reply, but he said nothing and closed his mouth again. Hermione detected an air of nervousness about him, and she decided to spare him, even though she was mildly annoyed with him for closing himself off and not speaking to her for the past two weeks. She reached out and took his hand, leading him out of the cold and closing the door once he was inside. Ever the courteous host, she took his coat and hung it in the cupboard with hers and directed him to the kitchen so that she could return to her breakfast.

'Would you like a cup of tea?' she asked as she poured herself one and waved her wand at the breadbox so more bread floated into the toaster.

'Tea would be grand,' Snape answered, allowing her to push him down into one of the chairs at the table before she shuffled about the kitchen.

She grabbed another mug from the cupboard and collected the toast that was ready and brought it all to the table, placing a plate and knife in front of Snape and a mug of steaming, strong black tea in his cold hands. He had not worn gloves, and the chill in the air was enough to make them go numb if one wasn't careful. She finally resumed her seat and buttered a slice of toast for herself before coating it liberally with peach jam.

'So, you were going to tell me why you decided to grace me with your presence this early in the morning, were you not?' she said, taking a bite of her toast.

'Impudent woman,' he muttered, picking up a piece of toast and buttering it despite himself. 'I came to apologise for my lack of... presence, as it were, for the past couple of weeks. I was... wallowing.'

'I assumed as much,' Hermione said with a triumphant grin. It wasn't quite the apology she had hoped for, but it was probably the best she could expect from Snape.

'I am sorry, Hermione. I made a commitment to our work, and I have been remiss in fulfilling my part of this project,' he said, staring at the table.

'I accept your apology, Severus,' she said with a chuckle and a smile. 'You can relax now I'm not going to bite your head off. I knew, despite our last conversation, that you were bound to reflect on the whole debacle poorly and compare it to all the other times you were publicly deprecated.'

Snape nodded and took a bite of his toast and a swig of tea. 'I know I have been a poor partner in our work recently, so last night I went to work and transcribed all of our work into a final and clearer copy, so we might refer to it instead of the journal with all its scribbles. It will make it clearer for documentation purposes.'

Hermione's eyes widened in surprise. 'But this must have taken you all night!' she exclaimed when he pulled it out of his robes and enlarged the book. 'Did you make more than one copy?'

'I made one copy for each of us and filed the original journal in the warded section of my library,' he said, looking almost proud of himself.

She smiled. 'Thank you for doing this, Severus,' she said, reaching out and placing her hand on his, giving it a brief squeeze.

His hand tightened under her touch, and she quickly removed her hand. She had relished the brief moment of skin on skin, but it had not lasted long enough for her to truly enjoy it. Snape was not the kind of man one touched freely and often. He had a personal space bubble a foot out from his person.

'So, are there any other surprises you have for me?' she asked, picking up her toast and resuming eating.

'Well, as I am sure you know, we have been offered the opportunity to hold a public press conference at the Ministry. I sent an owl out this morning to the representative asking that one be organised for next Saturday morning. I hope that this is agreeable to you,' he replied, hesitantly.

'That's fine,' she answered. 'I will have enough time to prepare before then.'

Hermione looked up from her food to see Snape staring at her, his eyes wide and anxious. He looked as though he hadn't slept, which of course she knew he hadn't. He also had what looked to be three days worth of stubble, at the very least. She sighed inwardly. That man did not know how to take care of himself. Strangely, it was one of his more endearing qualities, and she felt her heart flutter in her chest just watching him.

She forced herself to be calm. It was no use losing her head over Snape, not when she knew there was no chance for him to return her regard.

'I have to teach today,' Hermione said, putting an end to the awkward silence.

'I'm not getting in your way, am I?' Snape asked.

'I don't have to teach until later today, but I will ask you to excuse me so I might go and change into something more appropriate,' she said, blushing. 'Had I known you were coming, I would have been dressed properly before you arrived.'

'It was my fault for arriving at your doorstep unannounced,' he said, bowing his head in apology. 'I can leave now if you'd prefer...'

Hermione shook her head. 'No, stay and finish your tea and toast,' she answered quickly. 'I was planning to stop in at St. Mungo's to visit the Longbottoms on my way to the Institute. Perhaps you might like to join me? I know Frank and Alice would be thrilled to see you again.'

Snape nodded in concession, so Hermione turned on her heel and headed up to her bedroom. She closed the door and leaned against it to give herself a moment to get it together. Her thoughts were scattered all over the place. She never thought that something so simple as having feelings for someone would make her think so irrationally. But, she reasoned in her mind, perhaps it was a little more complicated than she wanted it to be.

Snapping back out of her thoughts, she quickly shed her pyjamas and pulled on black stockings and a knee-length wool knit dress in violet with a turtleneck collar. She quickly tidied her hair and wound it into a bun low at the back of her neck. Pulling on a pair of black boots, she left her room, applying some lip balm as she walked down the stairs to the kitchen. She found the kitchen spotlessly clean and saw Snape with his shirt-sleeves rolled to his elbows. He was drying the last of the dishes they had used that morning by hand and floating them into the cabinet with the rest of her dinnerware.

'Thank you,' she said, a little stunned.

'It was no problem,' Snape said, hanging up the tea towel and rolling down the white sleeves of his shirt.

Hermione led the way to the front entry and handed Snape his frock coat and long, black winter cloak as well. She grabbed her black teaching robes and pulled them on, pocketing her wand. After she made certain that the wards were intact, she looped her arm around Snape's and they Apparated together. Hermione let go of his arm when they arrived in the lobby at St. Mungo's and followed him to the lift. They got off on the third floor, where the Longbottoms had been transferred to, and walked in silence to their new room.

Snape looked surprised to find that the room had been decorated in the same manner that their previous room in the long-term ward had been. Hermione and Neville had gone to the effort of transferring everything themselves a week beforehand when they had moved them.

'Hello, Severus,' Frank Longbottom greeted with a smile.

'Sorry that I haven't been by lately,' Snape said, walking into the room and taking the chair between Frank's and Alice's beds. 'How are you feeling, Alice?'

'I'm feeling much better than you are looking today, Severus,' she said with a soft chuckle. 'Have you not slept?'

Hermione laughed along with the Longbottoms at that and entered the room, walking directly over to Alice and giving the older woman a friendly peck on the cheek. Since Neville's parents had "awoken" from their state of vegetation as such, Hermione had been spending a great deal of time with them talking about their past, sharing stories about her own life with them in exchange, and just getting to know the people who missed out on the chance to raise their only son.

'Severus has been busy working on a few things for our potion,' Hermione said with a bright smile in his direction.

'This remarkable woman has told us all about your exploits over the past thirty years, Severus,' Frank said with a smirk that made her proud.

'I don't believe I gave her leave to be telling all and sundry the dark secrets of my past as a spy,' Snape said, looking up at Hermione, and she thought for a moment she saw fondness in his dark, inscrutable eyes.

She blinked and gave herself a mental shake, but when she looked back at Snape, he had returned his focus to Frank and Alice. Hermione pulled up a seat on the other side of Alice and listened while the three of them chatted and reminisced about their time at Hogwarts and the brief period during which they had served as members of the Order of the Phoenix when they had been younger than Hermione was that very moment.

After Merlin only knew how long, she looked up at the clock on the wall and saw it was thirty minutes until a class for which she was supposed to be giving a lecture was to begin. She stood and brushed invisible wrinkles from her robes.

'Well, as much as I am loathe to leave, I have to dash,' Hermione announced. 'I've got a class to teach.'

'I'll see you out,' Snape said, standing and following her out.

Hermione stopped him at the door and shook her head. 'I'll be fine, but thank you for the offer,' she said with a smile, and without thinking, she leaned up and kissed his rough, stubbly cheek.

When she pulled back and realised what she had done, she was mortified. Snape's eyes were unreadable, and she could feel her stomach tying itself in knots. Before he could say anything more, however, she fled, walking down the hallway without daring to look back.

She was not sure how she'd be able to face him again any time soon.

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To be continued.

Chapter 11: Scientifically Improbable

Chapter 11 of 20

In collaborating to find a cure for a magical condition that is thought to be irreversible, Potions mistress Granger and Potions master Snape discover the beauty of science and the lasting companionship of love. Written for WriterMerrin and based loosely on the life of Marie Curie.

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Thanks go out to VIVAvivacious for all of her help with this chapter.

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I was taught that the way of progress was neither swift nor easy.

Marie Curie.

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Greenwich, Ipswich: 23rd September, 2009

The room was cold from a draught that was entering via a small gap between the window frame and the sill, despite the warm glow of the fireplace. Groaning in frustration, Snape rolled over, grabbed his wand from the nightstand, and aimed it at the window. He cast a temporary sealing charm, which fell into place with a strange squelching sound, before he returned his wand to its home for the night and rolled onto his back.

He had been in bed for no less than two hours, tossing and turning, finding fault with everything in the room, trying to blame it on the cold and the weather, rather than face the fact that his mind was in turmoil.

There had not been a time in his life that Severus Snape had found himself kept awake at night because of a woman. Hermione Granger had managed to worm her way into his subconscious and penetrate every thought he had on a daily basis. It was irritating the hell out of him, and he had no idea what to do in order to fix it. He could talk to someone and ask them what to do, but everyone he used to trust and talk to about serious things had died and left him behind.

The main question lingering at the forefront of Snape's mind was, why the hell had Hermione kissed him?

He realised it had been all but a peck on the cheek, but she had smiled at him and leaned up and kissed him without any provocation. And then she had fled from him with a look of horror on her face that mimicked the confusion and elation that he had immediately felt. He wasn't sure what she had been feeling, and he desperately wanted to. He wanted to know what was going on in that woman's head; she remained a mystery to him in many ways.

He sighed. He felt like he was going insane. He had worked so hard to build up a wall around him, to think logically and use his common sense, and above all to keep other people out. The more he let in, the more likely it was that he would end up hurt by those things, and he hated it. He hated feeling like he was being used and then discarded when he was no longer of worth. He knew Hermione was not the sort of woman who would take advantage of him.

Snape groaned in frustration and pulled his pillow over his head. He was going to have to sleep on it before he did something rash and made a mess of things with Hermione even further.

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St. Mungo's, London: 25th September, 2009

The hallways were alive with people that day. It seemed to Snape as though everyone in the Wizarding world had something ailing them, and it took him almost 10 minutes to get upstairs to the Longbottoms' room. He made his way down the hallway and opened the door, walking in to see Neville sitting in Snape's now-customary seat between his two old friends. He nodded at the younger man, now nervous about why he had come for a visit.

'Hello, Professor,' Neville said, standing and walking over with his hand extended before him.

'Good afternoon, Neville,' he replied, accepting the handshake. 'And if you recall, I asked you to call me Severus. Frank, Alice, how are you today?'

'Even better now that you are here,' Alice replied with a smile. 'You look like you haven't slept in days again. Come and tell us about it.'

Neville shifted out of his way and smiled. 'I have to head off to work now, but it was great to see you again, Severus. Hopefully next time I might be able to stay and chat for longer,' he said, waving to his parents and ducking out the door and out of sight.

Snape walked over and sat between his friends, looking down at his hands in his lap. He had come for a reason, convinced that the only way he could make a decision on what to do was to seek another opinion. He could think of no one, other than Minerva, who he would be willing to talk to. But the Headmistress was too far away, and he doubted she'd be any help where his feelings for Hermione Granger were concerned. Frank and Alice were the only two people who could possibly understand his dilemma.

'I need some advice,' he said finally, breaking the silence in the room.

'About Hermione, am I correct?' Alice said, smiling at him knowingly. 'What would you like us to tell you?'

Snape sighed. How did they know? Was he so predictable?

'I have been unable to get Hermione out of my mind. She... she means a lot to me, but I have been so convinced there was not a hope in hell she would return my feelings,' Snape explained, unable to look at either of them. 'But now I am conflicted. That day last week, when we visited, and I stood to see her out when she had to leave... she kissed me on the cheek. I'm sure you both saw it. I do not know whether to confront her and ask what she meant by it, or to just let it go and assume she just wants to continue as friends... friends do kiss each other, do they not? I'm not certain of anything. I am too socially inept for situations such as these.'

'Severus Snape, you daft fool,' Frank said with a chuckle. 'You may be the most socially awkward man I know, but even you should be able to tell when a woman has feelings for you.'

'She is far too good for me. I will only cause her trouble, and she has more sense than to get involved like that with someone like me,' he argued.

'Hermione is intelligent, mature, and exceedingly competent,' Alice said, her voice soothing. 'She can make up her own mind as to who and what she wants. Don't you go making that decision for her, Severus.'

'I would hate to ruin our friendship and working relationship,' Snape said seriously. 'If I say something to her, and it turns out she does not return my feelings, things would be awkward between us. I would sooner have her around as a friend than lose her completely.'

'Now you listen to me,' Alice said, wagging a finger at him warningly. 'You do not want to be alone forever. We humans are not made for loneliness, and you have had your share of that in this life as it is. Do not waste the opportunity to share your life with someone. If you leave it for too long, you might miss your chance, and you'll regret it forever if you do. Frank and I have so many regrets from decisions we made, and we would hate to see you die alone and regret everything.'

Snape stared at her for a moment, then looked to Frank as well. Hell, if he went and talked to her about it, the worst that could happen was that she rejected his feelings. He would put it out of his mind and move on, and he would hope against hope she would allow them to continue being friends. He had a small circle of friends who would comfort him and support him, and that would just have to be enough.

Snape knew he wasn't much of a risk-taker, but for once he planned to make a gamble. With that thought fresh in his mind, he got up from the chair and went over to shake Frank's hand, then turned around to kiss Alice on the cheek.

'I am going home,' he said, heading to the door. 'I have to sleep.'

Alice smiled. 'Get some rest and clean yourself up,' she said, care etched into the wrinkles around her eyes and mouth.

'I will,' Snape replied before turning and walking out of the room.

He would go home, shower and shave, get a good night's rest, and when he was presentable, he would go and speak to Hermione.

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Wythenshawe, Manchester: 26th September, 2009

Hermione sighed and gave her potion three clockwise stirs, one stir counter-clockwise, and lowered the heat down to the very lowest temperature she could. Withdrawing the stirring rod from the brew, she went over to the sink and gave it a thorough cleaning. Her potion would need several hours simmering before it was complete. Her period was only three days away, and she had decided to brew her monthly contraception potion a little early so that she could take it once her monthly visitor had departed.

She wiped away a bead of sweat that was travelling down her forehead and began to make her way upstairs so that she could shower before she made her dinner. Once in her bathroom, she stripped out of her soiled clothing. She was rather filthy, as she had spent all day cleaning the house, so she had sweat and dust all through her thick, curly hair. She turned on the shower so it was nice and hot and stepped in, letting the heat and water wash over her, soothing her sore muscles and washing away the evidence of her hard day at work.

Once she was thoroughly cleaned, she dried herself off and pulled on an oversized navy sweater and a pair of black tights. She left the room after slipping her feet into her warm slippers and headed back downstairs to the kitchen to prepare her dinner. She pulled two chicken breasts out of the refrigerator and wrapped them in cling-wrap before beating them with a meat mallet.

Before she could do much more, she heard her doorbell. She sighed and went to the sink, washing her hands quickly and picking up a tea towel to dry her hands. She opened the door unthinkingly and was once again faced with the sight of Severus Snape with a nervous look in his dark eyes, his hands stuffed into the pockets of his long, black winter coat.

'Come in, you must be freezing,' she said, slinging the tea towel over her shoulder and pulling him inside. 'Have you eaten?'

'Dinner?' he asked, confused.

'Yes, dinner,' she answered with a small, nervous smile. She had not seen Snape since the day she had kissed him on the cheek, and she had been worried that she had crossed the line and he would not want to speak to her again.

'I have not,' he replied, taking off his cloak and hanging it up in the cupboard beside him. 'You look tired.'

'I've been cleaning the house all day,' she said, leading the way into the kitchen. 'I'm making chicken picatta. You might like it, if you want to stay for dinner.'

'I would like to stay for dinner,' he said, rolling his sleeves up to his elbows and joining her at the kitchen bench. 'Can I help you with anything?'

She felt her cheeks heat up when his arm brushed against hers. She pushed a plate towards him and instructed him on how to coat the chicken with the flour, spice, and Parmesan mixture. After they had finished with that, Hermione heated a skillet with oil, and as Snape took care of the chicken breasts, she made the butter sauce with capers, white wine, lemon juice, and butter.

'When the chicken is ready, put it in the sauce for a couple of minutes on both sides,' she said, walking over to the bench and pulling apart a head of lettuce to make a salad.

'It is ready,' Snape said a few minutes later.

He levitated two plates over to him and plated up the chicken, drizzling the remaining sauce over each breast. Hermione finished the plates off with the salad, and they each carried their plates and cutlery over to the table. They ate mostly in silence, but every now and then, Hermione paused for a moment to glance over at him from beneath her lashes. He was clean-shaven, and his hair was falling in silky black strands around his face, rather than being lanky and oily as it was wont to be when he was making potions.

'This is good,' he said, taking another bite of his chicken. 'What was your inspiration for it?'

'I felt like having something sharp tasting. The capers are nice when they've been slightly crushed into the sauce,' she said with a small, shy smile. 'I'm glad you like it.'

Snape nodded, and the two of them finished their dinner and together made easy work of cleaning up the kitchen and washing all the dishes. Hermione led the way to her study, and with a wave of her wand, she lit the fire and walked over to stoke it with the poker. She sat down in one of the armchairs and curled up, tucking her legs beneath her and staring at the flames as they grew. Snape took the other chair and leaned back in it, closing his eyes. Hermione wondered why he had come over to her house the entire time, but just now, she thought it might be the right time to ask.

'Why did you come here tonight, Severus?' she asked quietly. 'I haven't seen or heard from you in almost a week, and you chose to show up now for a reason. Why?'

His lips thinned, and he averted his gaze, staring instead into the fire. 'I wanted to talk to you about what happened at St. Mungo's the last time we saw one another,' he said softly.

'About that, Severus... I want to apologise for kissing you. I never should have done that invaded your personal space that way,' she stammered. She didn't want him to tell her he was unhappy with her. She didn't want him to say they couldn't be friends anymore.

He held up a hand to silence her, and she exhaled shakily.

'Hermione, please... let me speak before I lose my nerve,' he said firmly. 'I have spent many days trying to get to this point, and it took me all that time to figure out what I want to say to you.'

'Okay,' she whispered, her stomach sneaking up her throat. She felt sick.

'I don't want you to apologise for kissing me on the cheek last week,' he said seriously. 'In fact, I was thrilled. I didn't say anything when you kissed me because I was shocked that you would even bring yourself so close to me. You are an intelligent, beautiful, interesting, and inspiring woman, Hermione. How could I not be elated to have you willingly touch me in that way?'

Hermione was stunned. Was he saying what she thought he was saying? 'Are you saying that you... like me?' she asked, her heart pounding away in her chest rapidly.

Snape nodded. 'Of course I like you,' he said, leaning forward in his chair and looking at her with his intense black eyes. 'I haven't been able to think of anything but you for... well, I don't even know how long now. I am attracted to you in more ways than I can even name. I... I was worried that everything that was written in the *Daily Prophet* would cause problems between us.'

Her heart fluttered, and she moved forward in her own chair, her knees meeting his in the centre. 'I don't know what to say...' she said softly.

'Please,' Snape said quickly, cutting her off. 'Do me one dignity and tell me the truth, Hermione. One word from you, and I will disappear and never bother you again.'

'Don't disappear,' she said, her eyes wide. 'I... I haven't been able to stop thinking about you for quite some time myself. Severus Snape, you are a hard man to understand sometimes.'

Hesitantly, she reached out and placed her hand on his knee, and he looked up at her face. To her surprise, Snape slid his hand over hers and gave it a gentle squeeze. She smiled, a blush settling over her cheeks and creeping down her neck. She watched his Adam's apple bob as he swallowed. He was obviously as nervous as she was about this whole relationship and the change in their dynamics. Her eyes followed his tongue as it darted out to lick his lips, and she wondered if his lips were soft, even though they were thin.

She saw his eyes do the same when she licked her lips nervously. Emboldened by this, she moved forward even further, sliding herself out of her armchair and easily wedging herself between Snape's legs. His eyes widened in surprise, but she pressed on, running her hands up his arms and letting them rest on his broad shoulders. Sucking in a shaky breath, she leaned up, wrapping her arms around the back of his neck and gently pulling him towards her. When their lips were only an inch apart, she stopped and gave him a chance to pull away.

'Do you want me to stop?' she whispered, her warm breath washing over his lips.

He closed his eyes and sucked in a sharp breath himself. 'Don't stop,' he answered, leaning in that little bit further and meeting her lips in a kiss.

His arms came around her, and Hermione found herself being pulled up onto his lap, her legs straddling him and his arms tight around her waist as he kissed her fiercely. She couldn't contain the small mew of pleasure when his tongue snaked teasingly into her mouth and one of his hands found its way into her hair. After a few minutes, they parted, both breathing heavily from their exertion.

Hermione looked into his eyes and saw that they were crinkled around the edges as a smile travelled down his face and ended with the corners of his mouth lifting. She smiled back, gently stroking his cheek.

As she leaned her forehead against his, she closed her eyes and thought things just might be looking up.

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To be continued.

Chapter 12: Compound Science

Chapter 12 of 20

In collaborating to find a cure for a magical condition that is thought to be irreversible, Potions mistress Granger and Potions master Snape discover the beauty of science and the lasting companionship of love. Written for WriterMerrin and based loosely on the life of Marie Curie.

Disclaimer: All publicly recognizable characters, settings, etc. are the property of their respective owners. The original characters and plot are the property of the author.

A massive hug of thanks goes out to VIVAvivacious for all of her hard work as my beta.

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There are sadistic scientists who hurry to hunt down errors instead of establishing the truth.

Marie Curie.

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Camden, London: 13th November, 2003

As the potion bubbled away on the little table she had converted into a "lab" of sorts in her kitchen, Hermione flipped her way through textbook after textbook, looking for something that she could work with. Since her apprenticeship had ended with Master Elderbrook several months beforehand, she had not been able to find stable employment. Certainly, she had been able to do a little work brewing for some apothecaries and tutoring students at the College, but it had only been just enough to keep her afloat and pay her rent in the dingy flat she had been living in since the start of her tertiary education.

Aside from finding a useful job that would utilise, at the very least, her basic potion-making skills, she had made plans to take on a huge first project to get her name recognised within the Potions world. It was a very small niche sector, and they rarely welcomed newcomers into the fold unless they were able to prove themselves academically in a journal of some description.

Hermione's solution to this was to find a cure for Lycanthropy. She wasn't so sure it would be the thing to put her name in the books, but she was going to keep trying until she made her own way. She was not the kind of girl who rode on the coattails of others.

Pushing her book to the side, she got up and looked over the lip of the cauldron to ensure that the potion was simmering correctly. She had been brewing copious batches of Pepperup potion for all of the apothecaries in Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade that week, and the one currently in the cauldron was the last one she had to do before she would send all of it out. She bottled the potion in simple glass flasks; the apothecaries would do with the flasks whatever they liked once they were received, often repackaging the doses in their own bottles.

Satisfied that all was well, she made her way to the other side of the kitchen to put on a kettle to boil.

Hermione knew that the road ahead would be difficult for her. She had always anticipated that she would be forced to work hard to get where she wanted, and she was just fine with that. She was somewhat of a workaholic, and this often irritated her friends to no end, but they always ended up supporting her, no matter what her decision was. She was actually quite lucky to have Harry, Ginny, and Ron. If she didn't have them, then she really would probably be alone.

The kettle on the stove whistled loudly, drawing her focus back to the present. She removed it and poured the water into a teapot and sprinkled some leaves in it to brew. She let it steep for a few minutes before pouring herself a cup, then walked into her tiny living room. She wandered over to the fireplace and looked at the photos that she had placed along the mantle. Her favourite one pictured Ron, Harry, and herself all in the formal robes at their Hogwarts graduation. They were all smiling and waving, looking so young and happy, just like they ought to have.

Smiling, she moved away from the mantle and went over to one of her numerous bookshelves and pulled a thick novel out of the stacks. She was just about to take a seat in her armchair when she noticed the flames in the fireplace turn a violent shade of green. When Ginny's head appeared in the flames, Hermione abandoned her plans of sitting in her armchair and sat on the rug before the fire instead.

'Hello, Hermione,' Ginny said with a grin. 'That was good timing.'

'Hello, Ginny,' she replied, taking a sip of her tea. 'What can I do for you this evening?'

'Well... you remember how I said there was a new Healer coming to work at St. Mungo's from Canada? He's arrived now, and he is totally gorgeous,' Ginny exclaimed excitedly. 'He's working with me in the long-term care ward. I'll be finishing my last semester of internship with him as my mentor.'

'That's wonderful, but how does Harry feel about you working with such a gorgeous man?' Hermione teased.

'Very funny,' the younger witch said sarcastically. 'I am not interested in him myself, but I would be very happy to arrange for you to meet him. He is just your type smart, good-looking, charming. You need to get out of that flat and start dating, Hermione.'

Hermione snorted. 'I am perfectly fine, and I really don't need you to keep trying to set me up with people who you work with, Gin. Besides, I have a very important Potions project that I am about to start, and the last thing I need is romantic entanglements to distract me from my work,' she said with a smile. 'And anyway, no man wants a girlfriend who is smarter than he is. Harry is exempt from this, of course. He needs a smart girl like you around.'

Ginny giggled. 'What's this work you find so important that you'd turn down a date with a dreamy Healer?' she asked, curious.

'I've decided to make my first Potions project a cure for Lycanthropy,' Hermione answered.

Ginny's eyes visibly widened. 'Are you serious?' she asked.

Hermione nodded. 'I was thinking that I wanted to do something important with what I learned at school and through my apprenticeship, something that means something to me. I had watched Remus struggle with himself for so long, and I would like to be able to help people like him,' she said, looking down sadly. Remus Lupin remained a sensitive topic since his death.

'That's actually really wonderful news,' Ginny said with a wide smile. 'You have no idea how excited people in medicine all over the world would feel about that kind of development!'

'You can't tell anyone I am working on it, Gin,' Hermione warned. 'It is only in the beginning stages, and I don't want to get anyone's hopes up.'

Ginny nodded in agreement. 'Well, I know I won't be able to convince you to let me introduce you to Healer Gibbons, but this is good news, as well. I'd better get going Harry and I are going out for dinner somewhere. He hasn't told me, but he said to get dressed up,' she said, looking excited.

'I hope you have a good time out,' Hermione said, waving before Ginny's head disappeared from the flames, leaving her alone once more.

She smiled and stood, relocating to her armchair. She had a lot of work to do, and by the sounds of things, it was something important.

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Wythenshawe, Manchester: 1st October, 2009

The sun filtered through the curtains, and the warmth of the rays woke Hermione from her slumber. She stretched and yawned, rolling over and grasping for her wand. She waved it at the curtains so they would open and brighten the room. Looking over at her clock, she saw it was almost eight in the morning. Sitting up drowsily, she eased out of bed and made her way over to the bathroom, using the loo before stripping off her pyjamas and stepping into a warm shower.

After she was fully awake, dry, and dressed, she plaited her hair in a sloppy braid and let it hang down her back, then wandered downstairs in a pair of jeans and a rough-knit wool sweater. She put the kettle on in the kitchen and arranged her teapot and leaves. She was not at all surprised when she heard the doorbell ring. Smiling, she walked into the hallway and opened the front door, beaming up at Snape, who was looming on the front doorstep. He had made a point of consistently arriving at the same time on days she was not teaching.

'Good morning, Severus,' she said, leaning up and kissing him lightly on the lips.

Snape's cheeks flooded with pink, and he cleared his throat uncomfortably. He was still unused to such a friendly greeting from her. 'Good morning to you,' he said, ducking his head down to meet hers in a second, longer kiss.

When they parted, Hermione's breathing was slightly irregular and coming out in short puffs as she struggled to compose herself. She beamed up at him again and pulled him inside, walking to the kitchen while he hung up his coat. He joined her there shortly after, pouring both of them a cup of tea while Hermione went through the refrigerator looking for the fixings to make breakfast.

'How do you feel about eggs?' she asked.

'I like eggs,' he said with a small smile. 'How are we going to eat them this morning?'

'I was thinking omelettes with mushrooms and spinach,' she replied, taking the eggs, cream, and vegetables out of the fridge.

'I approve,' Snape said, finding the mixing bowl, whisk, chopping board, and knife for them to cook with. He always had considered cooking to be rather like brewing potions, rather the same way Hermione had.

When they were sitting at the table with two steaming omelettes, Hermione decided it was time to approach Snape with her next potion idea. She had been doing rather great deal of thinking about things she had tried but had been unable to complete on her own, and she thought, with Snape around, the two of them would be able to provide different perspectives for one another. She just hoped he would be as amenable to the idea as he had been the last time.

'Severus, I wanted to talk to you about a project that I have been meaning to begin,' she said after swallowing a mouthful of egg.

'What kind of project?' Snape asked, intrigued.

'A cure for Lycanthropy,' she said, looking over at him nervously. She was uncertain how he would react. 'I had begun research on the subject when I first finished my apprenticeship, but after going in circles with it, I gave it up and put it in the pile of things I thought I'd never achieve. But with you... well, I think we could do something together. I mean, look at how well the brain regeneration potion worked...' Hermione knew she was babbling; she really wanted him to agree to work with her.

Snape held a hand up to stop her before she said any more. 'I would be honoured to collaborate with you on such an endeavour,' he said simply. 'Remus Lupin, despite all evidence to the contrary, was a valued friend and colleague of mine, especially toward the end of his life. I have some research of my own in this area that I would be glad to share with you.'

Hermione beamed. 'I was hoping you would say that,' she said, reaching across the table and grasping his hand. 'I know my own notes are not nearly as comprehensive as they could be, but we can easily fix that.'

Snape smiled at her eagerness. She knew she was coming off a little bit like a child in a toy store, but she couldn't help it. Their last collaboration had gone so well that she couldn't help but to be optimistic about this one, also. They quickly finished their breakfast and cleaned the kitchen, and Hermione enthusiastically led Snape down to her lab by the hand. She moved to go through the filing cabinet she had stored down there for her paperwork, but she stopped when Snape did not release her hand.

Instead, he pulled her back towards him and wrapped his arms around her, swooping in to steal a kiss. She looked up at him, dazed and confused, when the kiss finally ended.

'What was that for?' she asked with a smile.

'You are very beautiful when you are excited,' he said simply. 'Your eyes sparkle, and it amazes me that one person can be so passionate.'

Hermione blushed at his compliment and leaned up to give him a kiss on the cheek in thanks. He dipped his head shyly then and allowed her to lead him over to the filing cabinet. She dug around inside it for a while until she finally found the folder she was looking for, crowing in triumph. They moved over to the bench and sat on the stools, and she opened it up and pulled out all of her past notes on the project.

'This is how far I got when I last did research on the subject,' she said, flipping to the last page of the journal. 'I was eventually of the opinion that instead of creating a totally new formula, we should instead adapt the Wolfsbane Potion to include a feature that would prevent the change from human form into wolf and make it more permanent than a monthly potion.'

Snape nodded, looking thoughtful. 'I agree that the old potion should be looked at, but I am afraid that the potion is a volatile one. It would be very hard to find the proper ingredients that would not counteract the original properties of the potion, or create an explosion from a negative chemical reaction between non-compatible ingredients,' he explained.

'I do agree with you there,' she said with a small, embarrassed smile. 'I did a little experimentation with ingredients before I gave up on it and created something of an explosion in my old flat.'

Snape smirked. 'Had a bit of a Longbottom moment, did you?'

Hermione frowned and pulled a face at him. 'I learned from it,' she said with a sigh. 'I was evicted from that flat when the owners found out what had happened, and I decided then that I would need to find a place of my own.'

'This house?' he asked.

She nodded. 'I had saved a fair bit of money by that point, and I was able to get a loan from Gringotts to buy this house,' she explained.

'That is quite an accomplishment for one so young,' Snape said sincerely.

Hermione blushed. 'Thank you,' she said quietly.

Snape offered her a small smile and flipped to the next clean page in her journal. 'Let's get started, then, shall we?'

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Grimmauld Place, London: 3rd October, 2009

Snape walked through the now clean, but still very empty, former headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix and sighed. The place looked nothing like it had when he had first seen it over ten years beforehand. It was, he assumed, Potter's doing, as he was the owner of the building since Sirius Black had perished. Shaking thoughts of his former tormentor from his head, Snape focussed on the task at hand. He made his way up the stairs and entered the library.

The room was cleaner than it had been, but otherwise, very little was changed; all of the same furnishings were still being used. Snape hoped nothing much else had changed either, or it would make his search that much more difficult. He left the library and continued up the stairs to the next level. Once there, he walked down the hall and entered the last bedroom on the right-hand side of the corridor. It was Remus Lupin's room from when he stayed at Grimmauld Place.

He walked over to the chest beside the bed and began opening each of the drawers, starting from the top and working his way down.

When he opened the third drawer, he found it filled with dusty, old photos and a thick, leather-bound journal. He grabbed the journal and wiped the dust off the cover with his hand. Removing the leather thong fastening it shut, he opened the book; inside, it was just as he had anticipated Remus Lupin's journal. He closed it quickly and fished around inside the drawer until he pulled out a stack of photos.

The photo on the top was one of the original Order of the Phoenix. Beneath that was a photo of Remus and his parents when he had been a child. Snape bundled all of the contents of the drawer together and decided to take it with him. He would save the photos and all of Lupin's belongings and make sure the man was not forgotten with time.

Satisfied he had everything he had come for, Snape stood up, and after taking one last look around the room, departed from the house. He walked to the park across the road from Grimmauld Place and found a secluded thicket of trees. Once he was certain no Muggles were around, he Apparated to his house and went straight down to his laboratory.

He placed the photos and the journal on the bench and sat down on one of the stools before opening the journal once more and slowly reading the first entry. It was dated back to 1980, a few years after he and the Marauders had graduated from Hogwarts. The entry had some pieces of research Lupin had done into the cause of Lycanthropy and how the "disease," as it were, mutated the genes of the person infected with it.

Despite not being a Potions expert, Lupin had a fair bit of insight into Wolfsbane and the properties of all the ingredients. Snape was surprised at how thorough the man had been. A lot of the rest of the entry detailed how Remus felt when the transformation occurred and the different stages he went through over the course of the month.

He flipped through and read a few more of the entries. He found that each one carried more detail than the next, and that the man included more of his feelings along with more detailed research as time passed.

Pleased with his find, and what it would mean to his and Hermione's research, he closed the book. He would get a chance to read it more when he was sharing it with her.

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To be continued.

Chapter 13: A Scientific Career

Chapter 13 of 20

In collaborating to find a cure for a magical condition that is thought to be irreversible, Potions mistress Granger and Potions master Snape discover the beauty of science and the lasting companionship of love. Written for WriterMerrin and based loosely on the life of Marie Curie.

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We must have perseverance and above all confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are gifted for something.

Marie Curie

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Camden, London: 30th October, 2009

The classroom was silent as Hermione looked over at her students. That morning she was teaching her first-year college students, and they were completing their theory essays on the uses of dragon's blood in potions. She looked back down at the small clock on her desk. It was only another hour until the class was over, but she was counting the very seconds until she could make good her escape.

She hadn't been able to stop thinking about two things. The first one was her current Potions project. Snape had found Remus Lupin's journal three weeks beforehand, and it had been incredibly helpful to them as far as researching the reactions of those infected by the werewolf mutation was concerned, among other things. They would not be able to find a more accurate account anywhere in Britain.

The second thing she had been unable to stop thinking about was none other than Severus Snape.

They had been seeing one another after a fashion for a little over a month, and she still found herself blushing when he touched her tenderly and gave her the kisses she so desperately wanted from him. She had been unable to comprehend just how attracted to him she truly was. Of all the people she had to go and fall for, Snape was the last person she, or anyone else for that matter, would have expected.

It wasn't as though he were a sweet or even gentle man. He was still quiet and downright grumpy some of the time. He wasn't a handsome man, but she liked the way he looked just fine she could never be one to judge based on looks. Hermione had spent most of her life being the odd one out and the plain girl. He had a strong chin and the darkest, most beautiful eyes she had ever seen, and even though his nose was long and hooked at the end, she thought it would be strange if he had any other nose.

She shook her head and sighed to herself. She was beginning to get sappy over a man, something she was not known for. Since leaving Hogwarts and splitting up with Ron when they had decided they were better suited as friends, she had gone on two dates. The first one had been with a man so self-absorbed she had feigned illness after the first course and gone home to read a book alone. The second man had been a lot nicer, and she had actually gone out with him a few times before deciding there just wasn't a spark.

But with Snape, it was different. He was an intelligent man who also happened to possess an incredible wit and the gift of common sense, unlike most other men. He never made her feel stupid, and he had not once called her a know-it-all and mocked her intelligence since Berlin. She wasn't sure what had changed his mind about her, but she was glad for it, and she was also glad she'd had the opportunity to get to know him better.

She looked back at the clock once more. There was only half an hour left until the class would finish. She couldn't believe she had been daydreaming about Snape for that long.

Hermione looked down at the paperwork in front of her and began filling out the class attendance sheet. She made a habit of keeping track of her students so she knew which ones could be relied upon to show up for class and actually learn and those who did not and who would require extra encouragement and tutoring. By the time she had figured out which student was which, she had used up twenty minutes, and then she simply sat, staring across the room absently while the last ten minutes ticked by slowly.

Finally, when the timer she had set for herself went off, she stood and cleared her throat before addressing the class.

'All right everyone, I expect you have had sufficient time to complete your essays. I would like you all to leave them on my desk as you leave,' she announced clearly. 'For those of you needing assistance with your term project, I will be here all day on Monday and Tuesday so you may consult with me. There will be a timetable on the classroom door, so fill your name out in an empty time slot, and I will be able to discuss your work with you then.'

There was a rustling of parchment and scraping chairs that followed as all of the students began gathering their belongings to leave. A lot of them were talking to one another on their way out, gossiping about what they would be doing on their weekend and the like, but not a single student failed to hand in their essay. Hermione ran a disciplined classroom, not unlike Snape when he taught at Hogwarts. However, unlike her partner, she did not scare the living daylights out of her students. She was firm but fair.

She gathered up all of the essays in one pile after the last student left and placed it in her briefcase along with her work journal and Lycanthropy notes, which she did not go anywhere without these days. Satisfied that the room was in reasonably good order, she left for the weekend that she would inevitably spend marking essays from both her first year and senior classes and working on the Lycanthropy potion with Snape.

She made her way to the Apparation point on the Institute grounds, and with a wave of her wand and a swirl of black teaching robes, she Apparated home.

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Newtown, Reading: 31st October, 2009

The whoosh of Apparation washed around her ears as she arrived in the backyard of the Potter residence.

Smoothing out invisible wrinkles from her robes, Hermione straightened herself out and made her way up to the back door into the kitchen. She could hear a lot of chatter coming from there and assumed that the Potters were well and truly awake and having breakfast with the children. She knocked on the screen door before opening it and letting herself in. There was a bit of an unsaid rule between her and her friends; nobody should stand out in the cold if they could let themselves into the house.

Before she even had a chance to greet anyone, a shock of black hair came careening around the corner, and an excited and very awake James jumped up in front of her and tugged on her shirt sleeve so she would pick him up for a hug. She laughed and obliged, picking him up and carrying him with her into the main square of the kitchen where her friends were seated at the breakfast table eating what appeared to be fresh blueberry pancakes.

'Hey, Hermione,' Harry greeted, standing to give her a one-armed hug.

'Hello, Harry,' she replied with a smile, letting James get back down again so that he could re-join the breakfast table. 'Smells good. Who was the cook?'

'I did actually,' he said with a grin. 'Pull up a seat and dig in.'

Hermione nodded and took the empty space beside Ginny. James, who apparently had learned some gentlemanly manners since the last time she had seen him, helped by loading two big pancakes onto her plate as well as a generous serving of whipped cream and fresh berries.

'You look hungry,' he said with a wide-eyed innocent grin.

'Thank you very much, I am hungry,' Hermione said before picking up her knife and fork and beginning to eat.

'What brings you to our little part of the world?' Ginny asked curiously as she discreetly breast-fed Lily under a blanket she had draped over them. 'We haven't heard from you for a couple of weeks. What's new at school?'

'Just the usual essay-marking, exam writing, and lecturing,' she answered, watching Harry clumsily feed Albus the cut up pieces of pancake. 'I thought I would come over today before I bury myself under the rock of responsibility and do some marking this afternoon.'

'We're glad you came by,' Harry said. 'Ron sent us a letter from Romania and said to ask how you were. You know he'd write to you himself, but he's always been rubbish with letters.'

'Oh, how is he going over there? I hadn't thought to ask,' Hermione asked, curious. 'I thought he was only going to be in Romania for a month.'

'Well, the department head asked him to remain there for a few more months, so Lavender and the kids have moved over as well while he's there, and they were given a house to live in,' Harry replied. 'He loves it. It's just the kind of thing Ron needs to be doing, and it makes him feel more important.'

Hermione chuckled at that. 'He has always had self-esteem issues, what with having five older brothers, each of them brilliant in their own way,' she said.

'So, are you going to tell us about what is going on in your life?' Ginny asked, looking at her with curiosity in her eyes. 'Particularly in relation to your life. I heard tell that there was a hunky new professor at the Institute.'

'Really? I hadn't noticed,' Hermione said, looking down at her food. 'I've been rather busy with the teaching side of things and my latest collaboration with Snape, so new staff members tend to not register on my radar. I am only teaching part-time as well, so I am not on campus every day.'

Harry looked over at her then. 'You're working with Snape again, huh? What's the next big Potions miracle the two of you are going to create?' he asked.

'A cure for Lycanthropy,' she said simply, looking up at Harry to see his reaction.

His mouth was closed, but Hermione could tell that the cogs were turning ferociously inside his head. Ginny smiled at her at the mention of the cure before rearranging her shirt and bra, then removing the blanket. Lily gurgled and Ginny lifted her to rest over her shoulder and began to burp her. Hermione looked back to Harry, who had yet to say a word.

'I think Remus would be really happy to know you two were working on something so important,' Harry said finally.

'I really hope so,' Hermione said with a huge smile. 'Severus and I have been poring over every scrap of information we can get our hands on, working on it whenever we have a free moment.'

Harry blinked at the mention of Snape's first name. 'Calling him Severus now, are we?' he said teasingly.

Hermione could not stop the blush from travelling across her cheeks and down her neck. She averted her gaze to the pancakes before her once more and took a bite, deliberately avoiding giving them an answer. She mumbled an affirmative response through a mouthful of food, but apparently that did not satisfy Ginny.

'Hermione Granger! Has something happened between the two of you since you told me about liking Snape?' she asked, sounding scandalised.

'She likes Snape?' Harry exclaimed loudly.

'Of course she likes the man, are you completely thick?' Ginny scolded before turning back on Hermione immediately. 'Now, spill the beans, Hermione. Is there something between the two of you now?'

'There might have been a development on that front,' she said shyly, poking at her pancakes. 'And it might have involved Severus coming over to my place and admitting to having feelings for me, and I might have admitted that I felt the same towards him.'

Ginny squealed with delight. 'Oh, that's so... well I'd say cute, but it's not really a word I associate Snape with. But really, that is great to hear!'

Hermione smiled and felt the blush recede before looking over to see that, to her surprise, Harry was smiling. 'You're not mad, are you?' she asked him.

'No, Hermione,' he answered. 'So long as you are happy, I will not object to you dating Snape.'

Hermione smiled. 'I am happy, Harry. He has been lovely by his own standards, and we are well matched as far as our minds go,' she replied. 'He is... honestly, he is brilliant, and thoughtful, and kind. I wouldn't go so far as to call him sweet, but he cares for me, and I care for him, quite a bit actually.'

Ginny beamed at her. 'You sound like you're in love with the man,' she teased.

Hermione's eyes widened as her young friend said those words. She was in love with Severus Snape. The thoughts about him that had been niggling at the front of her mind had been trying to tell her for days. She loved him, and she had no idea what she should do with the knowledge, now that she had it. Shaking her head, she turned her attention back to her friends.

'You know what... I think I do love him,' she said simply with a soft smile, ignoring the shocked faces of her two best friends.

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Hogwarts, Rural Scotland: 1st November, 2009

Snape sat in the chair before the Headmistress's desk, wondering why he was sitting there in the first place. He had merely come to Hogwarts that day to deliver the Pepper-up potion that Poppy Pomfrey had ordered in preparation for the winter and all of the inevitably sick students that would walk through the halls. He sighed heavily and looked around the room. It hadn't really changed a lot, as Minerva had kept a lot of Albus's belongings there. He wasn't so sure he would have were their positions reversed.

He was just about to get up to look for the Pensieve when he heard footsteps echoing in the hallway outside the office. The door opened, and Minerva walked in, looking the same as ever, if a little more healthy than the last time he had seen her.

'Hello, Severus, it's good to see you,' she greeted. 'Can I offer you anything to drink?'

'Thank you, Minerva, but I just came up to say hello and hear you out before I head off to work on an important project,' he replied.

She nodded, understanding his unspoken desire to leave. 'I know this is the last thing you want to hear from me at the moment, but come next school year, I am going to be short a Potions professor here at Hogwarts again. Professor Allan has been here for 8 years now, but he had recently gotten engaged to a Canadian, and will be departing at the end of the school year in May,' she explained. 'I would like it if you would consider taking the role up once more.'

Snape frowned. The last thing he ever wanted to do was return to Hogwarts to teach. And aside for his loathing of the place, he had too many other things that would be disrupted by going back to that godforsaken school his personal Potions work, his project with Hermione, and his budding relationship with the aforementioned young witch.

'Minerva, honoured though I am by your request, I am afraid I must decline again,' he said seriously. 'You know how I feel about this place. And there are other factors involved with my decision this time.'

'Would these other factors include Hermione Granger, by any chance?' Minerva asked, smirking when Snape's face flushed with colour. 'Why, Severus, I didn't think you had enough warmth in you to blush.'

'Oh, you are a riot, Minerva,' he said sarcastically. 'When did my personal life suddenly become the business of every Tom, Dick and Harry?'

'When you collaborate with attractive young single witches and create a super potion that until now did not exist, you have to expect everyone will want to know if the two of you are involved. And by the look on your face, I would say that it was closer to a yes than a no.'

'You are close to hitting my last nerve,' he grumbled.

'Oh, cheer up, Severus,' she said. 'What is life without love?'

'Who said anything about love?' Snape asked, folding his arms across his chest and looking down his nose at her.

'When you have been alive as long as I have, my boy, you'll be able to spot love from a mile away,' she said with a heavy sigh. 'You have been too long without love in your life, Severus. It might do you some good to welcome it for a change. And you could do a lot worse than to fall in love with Hermione Granger.'

Snape stopped to consider her words for a moment. Did he think he was in love with Hermione? Well there was a very strong possibility there. In fact, if he were totally honest with himself, he had probably been in love with Hermione for a while now. He rubbed his chin, feeling the slightly rough stubble that was beginning to grow there. Minerva was rarely wrong about anything, so why would she be incorrect now?

Grumbling, he stood from his chair and walked around the desk to give Minerva a hug goodbye. She accepted it gracefully and gave his shoulder an encouraging squeeze.

'I will see you again in the near future, I imagine,' he said politely.

'You take care of that girl, Severus,' Minerva said warningly. 'She is not someone to be regretted or wasted. Tell her that you love her before it is too late.'

'I shall consider what you have said,' he replied.

And with a nod, he turned on his heel and headed out of the Headmistress's office and out of the school. He had much thinking to do on the matter of his feelings for Hermione Granger.

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To be continued.

Chapter 14: Scientific Engagement

Chapter 14 of 20

In collaborating to find a cure for a magical condition that is thought to be irreversible, Potions mistress Granger and Potions master Snape discover the beauty of science and the lasting companionship of love. Written for WriterMerrin and based loosely on the life of Marie Curie.

Disclaimer: All publicly recognizable characters, settings, etc. are the property of their respective owners. The original characters and plot are the property of the author.

As usual, thanks go to VIVAvivacious for her help with beta-ing this chapter.

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A scientist in his laboratory is not a mere technician: he is also a child confronting natural phenomena that impress him as though they were fairy tales.

Marie Curie

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Greenwich, Ipswich: 17th December, 2009

As the clock ticked, the consistent noise thrumming through the house with every stroke of the second hand, Severus Snape felt himself growing more anxious. It was eight days until Christmas, and he had yet to procure the perfect present for Hermione. They were always so busy with their Lycanthropy research; there was barely any time around his potions making for all of those whom he supplied and visiting her for research and relaxation that he hadn't thought to go to the shops to find something suitable.

The last time he had spoken to Minerva, she had cautioned him against being afraid of the consequences of being in love. Since then he had come to accept that his feelings for Hermione were indeed quite strong, and he was wont to call it love despite his common sense screaming that it was too soon. He had ignored that side of his brain and instead let his feelings direct his encounters.

Certainly he and Hermione had been intimate to a certain extent, but thus far they had gone no further than kissing and the occasional grasping of her breasts over the fabric of her clothing. He was still too afraid to broach the subject of sex, figuring they ought not rush into anything, lest they make a silly mistake. He was not willing to risk how far they had come by trying to push her into something she was not ready for.

Sighing heavily, he rubbed a hand over his weary eyes and stood from the armchair he was sitting in.

He went down to the lab and pulled down a pewter cauldron, then headed into his storage closet to gather the ingredients he would need to make a large batch of Pepperup Potion. He had received a letter that morning from Poppy asking him to brew more, as they had recently had somewhat of a flu epidemic at the school.

He filled the cauldron halfway with water and placed it carefully on the stand above the flame he lit, setting it on a low temperature. He started the preparing all of his ingredients, mincing, crushing, slicing, and squeezing the juice from various plant roots and herbs. As he was pounding the black peppercorns with his mortar and pestle, he allowed his mind to wander for a moment.

It wasn't long before Snape was thinking about Hermione yet again. He didn't know what he was going to do about her. Should he take her away on a holiday? Should he ask her if she had any plans for Christmas? What if she already had organized something? Would he then have to spend Christmas alone for another year? Well, he'd managed to cope just fine over the years, but he was quite certain he did not want to spend this one by himself.

His inner monologue was cut short when he heard the water beginning to boil in the cauldron. He began tipping ingredients in and stirring them until they started to dissolve. After adding three tablespoons of ground grape seeds, he gave it a quarter stir to the right and withdrew the stirring rod, taking it over to the sink and giving it a thorough wash. The potion would need an hour to simmer before the next step in the brewing process, so Snape went upstairs to the sitting room to Floo Hermione before he imploded.

He lit the fire and tossed in a scoop of Floo powder, making the flames turn instantly green. 'Hermione Granger, Wythenshawe, Manchester,' he said clearly.

A moment later, Hermione's head appeared in the flames. 'Hello, Severus,' she said with an enigmatic smile. 'What can I do for you?'

'You can tell me what your plans for Christmas are so I can make arrangements myself,' he replied.

Hermione looked surprised by his request. 'Oh, well, I actually hadn't really thought about it,' she said, looking a little sheepish. 'I think Harry and Ginny were expecting the two of us over for Christmas lunch. Ron is supposed to be there too. And there is the Order Christmas party on Boxing Day at Grimmauld Place.'

'I was wondering if you would like to go away for a couple of days after Christmas,' he replied on a whim. 'I wasn't aware I had been invited to the Potters' house for Christmas lunch, actually.'

Hermione's eyes widened and she looked at him apologetically. 'Oh! I am sorry, it totally slipped my mind, but I would be thrilled if you would come with me,' she said quietly. 'And I would love to go away with you.'

'Excellent, I shall make some plans then, to leave, say, the day after Boxing Day?' he suggested. 'Did you have anything planned on Christmas Eve?'

She shook her head. 'No, but now that you mention it, would you like to have dinner with me that night?'

'That sounds like a good plan,' he said with a small smile. 'Well, I have a potion on downstairs that I had better check on. Can never be too sure that everything is going well.'

'All right. Will I be seeing you tomorrow?' she asked.

'I have a few tasks I need to get done tomorrow, and I'm not sure how long they will take me,' he replied. 'I will have to get back to you. If I don't make it, I will owl you, and I'll be by the day after to work on the project.'

Hermione had a puzzled look on her face for a split second, but she smiled and nodded at him. 'All right, well, I'll see you when I see you. Goodbye, Severus.'

'Goodbye, Hermione,' he replied before closing the Floo connection.

He sat on the floor and leaned his head back against the lounge chair behind him, sighing heavily. Well, at least he had some idea of what the holiday would bring. He would need to find a place to go away for a short trip now, but that wouldn't be terribly difficult. He had a favourite holiday location in the south of France that he used to visit during the summer when he had been a teacher at Hogwarts before the Dark Lord had returned. It was a place he could associate with good memories, and that was what he wanted to share with Hermione.

Pleased he had come up with something, Snape was left with one last task finding Hermione something special for Christmas. Price was no issue, as he was willing to spend whatever necessary to get the perfect present. He had been considering for the past day or two that there was something very particular he wanted to give to Hermione at Christmas, but the more he thought about it, the less he was certain that it would be received well.

He summoned a velvet box from upstairs to him and opened it up, staring at the pretty white gold ring within. A single square-cut obsidian gem sat between two small solitaire diamonds. He tilted it from side to side, watching as it sparkled and changed colour on the surface. The black opal was rare and beautiful, and he had commissioned the ring to be made by the jeweller in Diagon Alley last week. He had been considering giving it to Hermione as an engagement ring.

But, they had barely been together for three months, and she was sure to say no. His palms were sweating then, and he was more nervous than ever before. He wasn't sure what he would do if she were to reject his proposal. He wasn't so sure he'd ever be able to work up the courage to do it again. He groaned. Being in a relationship with another person was a lot more complicated and tricky than he was used to. He just wished everything were a lot less difficult.

He really needed to find Hermione another gift in case he choked and decided not to propose to her, and he needed to do it fast.

Deciding he would do just that, he got up from the floor, placed the ring back in its box, and put it in his pocket. Resolved, he headed back down to the lab.

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Wythenshawe, Manchester: 24th December, 2009

Hermione bustled around her kitchen, pulling things out of the refrigerator and pantry, gathering together everything she would need for making dinner that night.

She had invited Snape over to dine with her and had prepared a menu a few days beforehand; she had even bought all of the groceries she would need. However, she had gotten so wrapped up in catching up on the month's academic periodicals that she had lost track of the time, and now she had a mere two hours before Severus was supposed to arrive on her doorstep. She still needed to shower and get dressed on top of cooking both dinner and dessert.

She set about the task of preparing the dessert. It would, after all, require more time, as it had to set in the refrigerator, than it would take for dinner to cook. She found a set of four medium-sized dessert glasses and lined the bottoms with a layer of sponge fingers. She then carefully poured the espresso and hazelnut liqueur mixture she had prepared earlier over each of the sponges.

From there, she beat the mascarpone cream cheese with vanilla essence and some white sugar, gently folding some whipped cream and beaten egg whites into it. She then spooned some of that over the sponge layer, and then repeated the process twice more. She topped each of them off with the remaining whipped cream and a dusting of cocoa powder. Pleased with the resulting tiramisu, she placed them all on a tray and slid them back into the refrigerator.

After quickly waving her wand so the mess she made would tidy itself, she got to work on the main course. She hadn't planned anything spectacular or overly tricky, but she had hoped it would impress Severus nonetheless. She pulled out four large mushroom caps and removed the stems, peeling the skin from all of them before giving them a wash. She then combined a smooth Greek feta cheese with semi-dried tomatoes and some basil in her Muggle blender until it was mixed together well.

She stuffed the mushrooms with the cheese mixture and placed them on an oven tray lined with baking paper, then placed them on the stove. She proceeded to dress two chicken breasts, cleaning and marinating them with a bit of salt, before cutting a slot just large enough through them so she could stuff them. She made a stuffing from more basil, pine nuts, cream cheese, dill, and small pieces of chopped sweet potato, carefully wrapped each breast with thin strips of prosciutto, and then covered them on a lined tray with aluminium foil so they would not dry out.

When everything was ready, she placed them into the preheated oven to slow roast and set a timer before leaving the kitchen and heading up to her bathroom. She showered and washed her hair, then stepped out from under the water to dry herself thoroughly. She used a blow dryer on her hair, combing jasmine oil through it as she did so her curls were more sleek than usual, and managed to fashion it into a French twist. She applied a little makeup to her lips and eyes and chose a dress that was made of emerald silk; it had spaghetti straps and quite attractively cinched in at her waist before falling loosely to her knees.

Before heading back downstairs, she sprayed some perfume on her wrists, pulled on a pair of simple black heels, and made certain to check her appearance in the bathroom mirror. Pleased that she looked pretty but not overdone, she walked downstairs to the sitting room and stoked the fire, making sure there was plenty of firewood so she did not grow cold. She looked at the clock on the mantelpiece and saw that it was almost seven o'clock.

She hurried to the kitchen to do one last check on the dinner, then walked across the hall to the dining room that adjoined the sitting room to make certain her table settings were just so. Satisfied that everything was perfect, she sat down at the table to await Snape's arrival.

At exactly 7 p.m., the doorbell rang, and she jumped to her feet, hastening down the hall to greet her guest. When she opened the door, the sight of a clean-shaven Snape, in his customary black winter coat, greeted her. Smiling brightly at him, she pulled him inside and leaned up for a kiss. He ducked his head slightly to give her a light buss on the lips before resuming his straight posture and shucking off his coat. Hermione was surprised to find him wearing a silk charcoal-coloured waistcoat over a nice black button-down shirt, which were both tucked neatly into his finest pair of black linen trousers. He was even wearing his good leather shoes rather than his usual dragon-hide boots.

'You look lovely, Severus,' she exclaimed. 'You clean up very nicely.'

His dark eyes glanced over her form, and there was immediately a hungry look in his eyes she usually saw after they had been snogging for a time. 'You look very beautiful, also, Hermione,' he replied in kind. 'Ravishing, some would say.'

Hermione felt her cheeks heat up. She took him by the hand and led him into the sitting room, offering him a seat and a glass of champagne. He accepted graciously and sipped at the bubbly drink while Hermione regaled him on how her day had been and all the academic journals she had been catching up on. He smiled and was attentive and answered all of the questions she asked.

At 7:30 p.m., she left him to quickly check on dinner to see if it was ready. She poked the chicken breasts and found that both they and the mushrooms had been cooked to perfection. She whipped up a quick balsamic reduction and drizzled it over the breasts and mushrooms once they were on the plate, garnishing them with a few basil leaves. She took the food to the dining room and stuck her head into the sitting room, calling Snape for dinner.

They sat down together and ate in relative silence, only occasionally pausing to speak. Hermione found she didn't mind. The two of them did not need to always be talking to enjoy one another's company. When Snape finished, he arranged his cutlery in the sign of defeat and sat back in his chair to relax.

'That was beautiful, Hermione. I thank you,' he said with a smile. 'A lovely combination of flavours.'

She grinned back, setting her cutlery down, as she had finished also. 'Thank you,' she said. 'I was just experimenting, actually, so I am glad it turned out all right.'

'The best potioners are the ones who are not afraid to experiment, get things wrong, and then get back up and try again,' he said wisely.

Hermione smiled and nodded. They retreated to the sitting room once more after Hermione had banished all the dishes to the kitchen to take care of themselves. That night, she wanted everything to be perfect, and doing dishes was hardly a romantic activity. She sat beside Snape on the lounge chair, leaning against him as the two of them perused the *French Potions Monthly* together.

After a while, Hermione remembered the present she had stored under the lounge to give to Snape that night. She hauled herself up and reached below, coming up with a small package and holding it out to her partner.

'I know it isn't Christmas yet, but it was always tradition in my family to exchange one gift each on Christmas Eve,' she said quietly.

Snape nodded and carefully unwrapped the package, opening the box contained within to find a beautifully engraved pocket watch nestled on a bed of silk. 'This is stunning,' he said, flipping it open to find the face was made of ivory. The numbers were hand-painted and elegant. 'I assume this is an heirloom of sorts?'

'It belonged to my great-grandfather on my father's side of the family,' she replied. 'It is not the sort of trinket a girl would carry around, and I thought it would suit you very nicely.'

He nodded. 'I know this is an important part of your family history. I promise you I shall treat it well and put it to good use,' he said sombrely. 'And now, I have a gift for you, of sorts...'

'Really?' she asked in surprise.

Snape nodded, swallowing nervously, if his bobbing Adam's apple was anything to go by. 'I have wanted to give this to you for some time now, but had never been presented with a better opportunity. This night somehow seems perfect to me right now,' he explained.

Hermione's eyes widened in surprise, and a nervous lump formed in her throat as Snape got up from the chair and then lowered himself to the floor before her on one bended knee. Her stomach was filled with butterflies, and she wanted to cry, vomit, and jump up and down all at the same time as he withdrew a small box from the pocket of his trousers.

'Hermione, I doubt I will ever find the courage within me to do this again,' he began nervously, almost tripping over his own words. 'I am in love with you. I care for you deeply, and I would be the most honoured and happy man in the Wizarding world if you would consent to becoming my wife.'

Hermione could feel the tears beginning to blur her vision then. She looked at his nervous, wonderful face and laughed as the tears spilled over. Grinning like a fool, she held out her hand for him, and as he slipped the beautiful white gold ring onto her finger, she couldn't stop shaking. He moved to re-join her on the couch, and they immediately hugged fiercely before she attacked him with a passionate kiss, clinging to him tightly.

'This was a perfect Christmas Eve,' she whispered before kissing him again.

'That it was,' he agreed, holding onto her even more tightly.

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To be continued.

Chapter 15: Scientific Planning

Chapter 15 of 20

In collaborating to find a cure for a magical condition that is thought to be irreversible, Potions mistress Granger and Potions master Snape discover the beauty of science and the lasting companionship of love. Written for WriterMerrin and based loosely on the life of Marie Curie.

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As usual, I'd like to thank VIVAvivacious for all of her help as my beta.

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So perished the hope founded on the wonderful being who thus ceased to be. In the study room to which he was never to return, the water buttercups he had brought from the country were still fresh.

Marie Curie

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Newtown, Reading: 9th January, 2010

The two weeks following Christmas had raced past, and soon Hermione had returned from her extended trip with Snape to a sweet, secluded cottage in southern France. Her first stop the day after her arrival home was, of course, the home of the Potters. As she walked up from beside the shed in the Potters' backyard, she contemplated the happy events that had occurred over the past three weeks.

She had gotten engaged to Severus Snape, enjoyed a lovely Christmas with him and all of her friends, who had congratulated the two of them and welcomed Snape into the fold, and then had spent two weeks in paradise with not a care in the world before the new school term forced her to return. She was visiting her best friends that day with a very specific purpose in mind: to ask Ginny and Harry if they would consent to being part of their wedding party.

She walked up to the kitchen door and knocked before letting herself into the house. She could hear talking coming from the front sitting room and made her way towards it. The first person she spied was little James, sitting on the floor surrounded by crayons and colouring pencils with a big sheet of butcher's paper spread out beneath him.

'Aunt 'Mione!' he squealed excitedly, jumping up and running to hug her around the legs. 'I've been drawing and colouring in!'

'That is wonderful,' she replied, walking further into the room while holding the boy's hand.

She saw Ginny sitting on the lounge chair with a magazine in one hand while she gently rocked the bassinet that baby Lily was sleeping in with the other. Albus was fast asleep in the armchair before the fireplace, and Harry was nowhere to be seen as far as she could tell. Shucking off her winter coat, she hung it over the arm of one of the chairs and sat down beside Ginny while James returned to his masterpiece.

'How was the holiday?' the younger woman asked with a grin.

Hermione smiled back. 'It was very nice,' she answered. 'Lots of reading and picnics and spending time out of doors.'

Ginny smirked at her. 'So there weren't any other extracurricular activities you indulged in while you were there?' she asked curiously.

Hermione blushed shyly then. 'We weren't intimate that way, if that is what you are asking,' she replied. 'We haven't actually done much more than snog a fair bit and feel each other up. I'm not sure when I got the impression, but I think we might be waiting until we get married. Not on purpose, but I think he is trying to respect me or some silly chivalrous nonsense like that.'

Ginny's eyes widened in shock. 'Well, I have to say I am surprised. I thought that Snape would be one of those take-as-he-likes kind of men,' she said with a giggle. 'Are you going to tell him he doesn't have to take it so slow?'

Hermione shook her head. 'I kind of like that he is such a gentleman,' she admitted. 'He's not like other men.'

'He certainly is not,' Ginny concurred. 'So, what brings you by our humble household this morning?'

'I had a very particular request to make,' she replied with a smile. 'I'd be very happy if you would consent to being my maid of honour. I was going to ask Harry if he'd stand in as one of Severus's attendants as well.'

Ginny beamed. 'I would love to!' she squealed, hugging Hermione tightly in her excitement. 'Oh, this is so exciting! So have the two of you decided a date for the wedding then?'

Hermione nodded. 'Yes, we were thinking about having it in the middle of March, so we have to get some of the wedding planning happening rather soon so invitations can be sent out to everyone.'

'That makes sense. Well, Harry should be getting home soon, and I'm sure he'll be thrilled to accept as well,' she said with smile. 'We are both truthfully very happy for you, Hermione.'

Hermione smiled back at her friend, and they sat and watched for a while as James doodled. A little while after, Albus yawned and stretched to wakefulness. He joined his brother on the floor, and they shared the paper and crayons. Harry returned from his errands two hours later and greeted Hermione with a huge hug, then took a seat in the armchair Albus had previously been occupying. Hermione asked Harry to be a part of the ceremony, and he graciously accepted.

'After all, Snape is not really so bad any more,' he said teasingly.

Hermione threw Albus's stuffed dinosaur at him and pulled a face. 'You had better be nice to him, Harry Potter. That is my fiancé you are talking about,' she quipped.

Hermione stayed until nightfall, and she left having been assured that her friends were going to support her marriage to a man who had once been the bane of their existence at Hogwarts. She took her coat off and hung it up in the cupboard by the front door of her home. She wondered for a moment where the two of them would live once they were married. Would they live in her house? Or would they live in his and put her house up for rent?

Resigned to ask Snape that question the next time she saw him, Hermione went to the kitchen to fix herself something to eat for dinner.

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Greenwich, Ipswich: 17th January, 2010

Snape wandered from one side of his laboratory to the other, pacing while he read through the contents of Lupin's journal.

He had stumbled upon a bit of interesting information in the middle of the journal, which had given him pause. He and Hermione had been working slowly on the research for the Lycanthropy cure, making certain they did not miss anything crucial. They had to be sure that every stage they went through was perfect so they did not have to come back later and revise mistakes.

Lupin made reference to another werewolf he had met whilst travelling the Asian continent who had been afflicted with the genetic mutation for a lot longer than Lupin himself had. Apparently, during their time travelling through Nepal, they stumbled upon a witch doctor who had been including a certain root of a tree that grew near the Mahabharat Range in a potion she gave to others who had also been afflicted. The root was of the broad-leaf rhododendron, common to that area, amongst others; however, it was the soil in the area that was an important key to the success of the plant in the treatment.

The remaining problem was the combination of that plant with the existing ingredients in the Wolfsbane potion.

In this instance, Snape had no choice but to consider giving up on simply improving the Wolfsbane potion, which would mean having to come up with something else. It was something he and Hermione had discussed before, but they had decided to leave that as a second option. They had done a little research into the rhododendron family before, but as they had discovered, the plant itself was exceedingly difficult to match up with other ingredients without causing a negative chemical reaction. Lupin's journal entry simply confirmed yet again what they had already discovered which, annoyingly, would set the two of them back a few weeks in their progress.

He sighed wearily and closed the journal, placing it back on the table with the rest of his and Hermione's combined research. Walking upstairs, he went to his sitting room and lit the fire, tossing some Floo powder into it and calling out Hermione's name and address. He was aware she had made plans to be in London that day to speak with a wedding planner, but he had hopes he would catch her either before or after her errands. Her head appeared in the flames moments later, much to his relief.

'Hello, love,' she said with a smile. 'What can I do for you?'

'We might have a bit of a problem with the Lycanthropy cure,' he said seriously, watching as her smiled faded into a worried look. 'It isn't something we can't solve, but it does mean a fairly decent set-back.'

'Okay, what seems to be the problem?' she asked, having appeared to resign herself to the idea of problems.

'It's a problem with the ingredient that we were hoping to use to increase the strength and longevity of the potion the rhododendron roots,' he replied. 'We won't be able to use the Wolfsbane potion as a base to work from.'

Hermione nodded slowly and sighed. 'All right, I will come through,' she said. 'If you could just move back for a moment...'

Snape moved out of the way and allowed Hermione to enter his home through the Floo connection. The flames returned to their normal colour, and she immediately moved into his arms and gave him a hug. He returned the embrace and kissed the top of her head before they parted. He grabbed her hand and led her towards the stairs that went down to the lab.

'I went over our own research countless times and found no way to incorporate the root into the potion,' he explained. 'And Lupin's journal confirmed this. The root from the plants that grow in that particular area of the Himalayas neutralise all types of gene mutation and disease, and we will need to incorporate it into a potion base that will increase the strength and make the mutation neutralisation permanent.'

Hermione nodded. 'I suppose we'll be going from square one now,' she said with a heavy sigh. 'I was so convinced that using the original Wolfsbane would be the key to this project.'

'It was wishful thinking, my dear,' he said, reaching out to tuck an errant curl behind her ear. 'On both of our parts. Do not despair, though; there will be plenty of time for us to complete this potion together. There are things coming up in the near future that are slightly more pressing.'

'Like what?' she asked with a smile.

'Our wedding plans, perhaps?' he answered. 'If I recall correctly, you were going to meet with a wedding planner in London today. Have you already been there?'

'Yes, I met with her this morning, actually,' Hermione answered excitedly. 'I think she will be just perfect for the job. We talked about venues for the wedding and the reception. She suggested a garden wedding with a Ministry of Magic representative presiding over the ceremony. I think I would prefer to do something a little different.'

'Did you want to tell me what your idea was?' he asked, raising an eyebrow at her.

'Well, if you approve of the idea, I would really like for us to get married in Scotland. There is a beautiful Wizarding town on the coast with an anvil. A Ministry-registered official could preside over the wedding. Minerva, I am certain, would be more than happy to perform the ceremony. We might be able to get permission to have Alice and Frank attend, which would allow you to have him as your best man.'

Snape nodded when she finally finished speaking. 'All right, that sounds like an acceptable plan. We will have to invite people fairly soon, I imagine, if we are to give them enough warning, and book the location. And about the reception location?' he asked curiously.

'We could have a little dinner party at Grimmauld Place. Harry would be happy to allow us to use the dining room there,' she replied. 'It's such a big place, and it would mean that Molly would be satisfied as well she's been nagging me since Christmas to allow her to help with the wedding plans and the catering for the reception.'

'Well, by all means, if that will get Molly to cease her incessant pestering, allow her to do that,' he replied, walking over to where she was seated on a stool beside the bench and wedging himself between her legs. 'Is there anything else about the wedding plans that you would like to impart to me?'

'No, I believe I have told you all there is to know for now,' she said with a smile, wrapping her arms around his neck. 'However, if you would like to involve yourself in the plans a little more, I would be more than happy for you to have some input. Unless you are just happy for me to have my way with the planning?'

Snape chuckled and shook his head. 'I will write you a list of people I would like for you to invite, and anything you want me to handle, I will be happy to do for you. However, weddings are more or less a woman's territory.'

Hermione laughed, and Snape couldn't help but to lean in and nuzzle her neck, placing a kiss just behind her ear. She stopped laughing and made a small mew of pleasure, so he continued, kissing his way down her neck and pausing to nip at her collarbone. He stopped and looked up into her eyes, and he saw that her pupils were slightly dilated.

'Should we perhaps start working on the project?' she asked, wriggling in his embrace to straighten the jewel-green silk blouse she was wearing.

Snape shook his head. 'Let's go and sit upstairs,' he said, moving out from between her legs and grasping her waist to lift her off the stool. 'I've been working all day, and I'm tired.'

He led the way upstairs and then stoked the fire, tossing on a few more logs so it built up again. He joined her on the lounge before the fire and summoned a blanket to drape over her legs. She tucked her legs up beneath her and rested her head against him. He lifted his arm so it was draped around her and held her close while they simply stared into the fire.

'Severus?' she asked after a while.

'Hmmm?' he replied tiredly with a yawn, leaning against the chair heavily and closing his eyes.

'I wanted to ask you a few things regarding our future,' she said, sitting up a little in his embrace so she could see his face.

He opened his eyes and looked at her then, curious to hear what she wanted to talk about. 'Do tell,' he prompted.

'I was wondering, when we are married, where are we going to live? Are we going to live at my house? Or did you want me to live here with you and rent my house out? We never really talked about what we would be doing there...'

Snape pondered for a moment. He would be happy to move into Hermione's home with her, if it was her wish. However, if she was not against it, his house was slightly larger, and he would be thrilled if she were to consent to moving into his home. They could renovate her house slightly and make it suitable for renting, and if they ever had need of it or wanted to sell it, they could do that, too.

'It is entirely up to you, my sweet,' he answered with a smile, leaning over to kiss her on the forehead. 'I am perfectly happy to live in either home.'

Hermione smiled at him then. 'I think it might be nice if we live here together,' she said with a smile. 'I'd be happy to rent my home out for a while. It would be a nice little bit of extra income for us. We could eventually sell it one day.'

Snape nodded. 'I think that arrangement would work very well for us,' he agreed willingly. 'Are you content to continue living there until we are married, or would you want to come and live with me sooner?'

'Would you want me to come and live here with you?' she asked, looking at him in surprise. 'I didn't think you'd be willing to sacrifice your personal space so soon...'

Snape smiled and shook his head at her, making a clicking noise with his tongue. 'You are a silly woman,' he said simply. 'I do not consider you living with me an invasion of my personal space. I would be more than happy to have you come live with me before we are married. This way we could make any reparations on your house that are required sooner, and you could do with it as you wished.'

'I would love to come and live with you,' she said quietly, a blush infusing her cheeks with colour. 'But where would we put all of my books?'

Snape felt a laugh bubble up and did not bother to hold it back. He threw his head back and let it fill the room, much to Hermione's surprise. 'My darling woman, we will be able to fit your books in the library upstairs. There is more than enough shelf space for new additions. And there is also room for another bookshelf down here.'

Seemingly pleased by his response, she settled comfortably back into his embrace, and the two of them resumed staring into the fireplace as Hermione chattered away about plans for her house. Snape listened to her, feeling his eyes drift closed as her sweet voice washed over him. He really was in love with that woman.

He woke a little while later lying down on the couch with Hermione asleep and snuggled up against him. The blanket was covering the two of them, and the only light in the room came from the glow of the logs still burning in the fireplace. He paused to look down at her sleeping face for a moment and smiled sleepily.

Yes, Severus Snape was a very happy man indeed.

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To be continued.

Chapter 16: The Future of Science

Chapter 16 of 20

In collaborating to find a cure for a magical condition that is thought to be irreversible, Potions mistress Granger and Potions master Snape discover the beauty of science and the lasting companionship of love. Written for WriterMerrin and based loosely on the life of Marie Curie.

Disclaimer: All publicly recognizable characters, settings, etc. are the property of their respective owners. The original characters and plot are the property of the author.

Many chocolates and hugs to DHLane for taking on the job as my beta for the last few chapters of this story.

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I have no dress except the one I wear every day. If you are going to be kind enough to give me one, please let it be practical and dark so that I can put it on afterwards to go to the laboratory.

Marie Curie.

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Greenwich, Ipswich: 30th January, 2010

Snape frowned and ran a hand through his hair as he went over his calculations for the seventh time that morning. For some reason, it just wasn't working out on paper, even though their theory was relatively sound. He tossed his quill aside and rested his head in his hands, closing his eyes and rubbing a hand over them. He got up from his stool and walked upstairs to take a break.

He made himself a cup of tea in the kitchen and went through his post for the day, setting aside his bills and opening the paper. What he saw on the front page did not please him one bit. Plastered on the front page was a photo of himself and Hermione as the two of them walked side-by-side in Hogsmeade. They had not been touching, as they had hoped to keep their impending nuptials somewhat secret until after the wedding had taken place.

Apparently there would be no more need for discretion. Their engagement would be known to the entirety of the wizarding world by the end of the day.

Furious, he grabbed the paper and hauled himself out of his chair, going to the fireplace and lighting the flames before tossing some Floo powder in. He called out Hermione's name and sat back to wait for her response. Her head appeared in the flames moments later, looking confused by his angry expression and tone of voice as he had called her.

'Did I do something wrong, Severus?' she asked, her brow furrowed with worry.

'No, it was not you. Have you seen this morning's *Daily Prophet*?' he asked, his lips still tight with repressed anger.

'I haven't actually,' she replied. 'Give me a moment and I'll go get it and take a look.'

Snape nodded. Well, that explained why she had not immediately called him or expressed any sort of anger. He waited for a few minutes until her head finally reappeared in the flames. She looked annoyed, and huffed at him, shaking her head in resignation.

'Well, it's too late to take any of it back now, but I am thinking of filing a restraining order on all reporters and photographers for the *Prophet*,' she said seriously. 'If they can't come near us, they will have very little to report, will not be able to attend our wedding, and won't have any way of getting information about us, short of finding out from one of our friends.'

'How do you think they found out about the engagement in the first place?' he asked, trying to get her to see the bigger picture. 'One of our friends has either betrayed our trust, or they work for the Ministry and their mail was searched, our wedding invitation in there.'

'It couldn't have been that their mail was searched. I sent all of the invites to their homes,' Hermione replied.

'Then, we shall simply have to find our rat another way,' Snape said.

Hermione shook her head firmly then. 'No, Severus. We will not be asking all of the people we invited that question. To be honest, it is far too much effort. And secondly, if they were even talking about it in a public place and someone from the *Prophet* happened to be walking by or had been snooping around so they could overhear something, it wouldn't be entirely their fault.'

'Hermione, this is our privacy that is being invaded here...'

She shook her head once more. 'Look, step back so I can come through,' she said bossily, putting a stern expression on her face.

Snape did as she said reluctantly and waited for her to come through and the Floo connection to close. She stepped up to him immediately and wrapped her arms around his waist, looking up at him so that he was forced to establish eye contact.

'Severus, this is one simple incident. We will file a report at the Ministry about the article, and I'll ask Harry if he can do a little digging around to find out who has been tailing us for the past few months,' she said, brushing his hair out of his face soothingly.

Snape nodded, deflating and allowing Hermione to comfort him. He always got wound up so easily. She led him back to his kitchen, and the two of them sat down to have a cup of tea.

'So, tell me how the calculations for the potion are going,' she said, blowing on her hot tea.

'I took a break from them because they were doing my head in, and then I came up to find the newspaper covered in photos of the two of us, which has simply given me a bigger headache,' he answered. 'Our theories are sound; I have just got to come up with the correct amount of the rhododendron to add to the potion, and ensure that the timing fits. After that, we can begin the brewing process and start testing to ensure that the potion is effective.'

'Excellent. I am looking forward to beginning the brewing,' she said with a jubilant smile. 'Is there anything that I can do to help before we need to start making it?'

Snape nodded. 'Actually, yes. We need unicorn blood, as you well know. And you are in a far better position to collect it than I am,' he said simply. 'You have never killed for the sake of killing before; therefore, a unicorn will be more likely to allow you to approach and ask for the blood.'

'Alright, I will send an Owl to Minerva tomorrow and ask her if I can stop by Hogwarts on the weekend some time,' she said, nodding. She appeared to be a little nervous, but Snape knew she would be strong and come through.

'That's my girl,' he said, leaning towards her and giving her a peck on the cheek. 'Now, how goes the cleaning and packing?'

Hermione smiled. 'I have managed to pack up my entire lab and the library. Everything I won't be using, I was hoping to store it in the attic and the shed here, but most of the things I have we can incorporate into the house,' she said. 'I'll be leaving the beds and most of the furniture there to include as part of the rental package for tenants, but that just means I'll be able to charge a higher premium.'

'That sounds like an excellent plan,' he said with a small smile. 'How long do you think it will be until you move here with me?'

'No more than a week from now,' she replied. 'I have very few personal belongings left to pack other than my clothing, but I will start bringing over boxes of my books and my lab gear.'

'I will make a space for you down in the lab for you to store all of your things, and I might even consider installing another bench along the far wall,' he said seriously.

Hermione beamed at him. He was pleased that despite all of the hiccups they had been experiencing in their plans, things were coming along rather nicely. Soon he would have Hermione living with him all of the time, and he wouldn't have to worry about her being alone in her house. He reached across the table and grasped her hand, giving it a gentle squeeze. His life had taken a very pleasant turn indeed.

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Greenwich, Ipswich: 14th February, 2010

Hermione looked over the table-planning chart once more and sighed. Ever since the location of their reception had been moved to a giant gazebo in the Weasleys' backyard, there had been an added layer of organising to do. After going over the number of people they had invited to the wedding who she and Severus would also be obliged to invite to the reception, hosting the event at Grimmauld Place was not an option any more. So, Molly and Arthur had offered the use of their residence to host the event, which Hermione had been forced to accept. She found it exceedingly hard to deny Molly Weasley when the older woman was set on an idea so strongly.

Sighing, she got up from her chair at the kitchen table and picked up the seating plan, taking it with her down to the lab.

She found Severus labouring over a steaming cauldron, his long hair tied back with a leather thong to keep it out of his face. He looked up from his chopping when he heard her enter the room and nodded at her in acknowledgment. Hermione knew he was a little too busy to speak for the moment, so she sat down on one of the stools and waited for him to finish.

He finished tipping the chopped ingredients into the cauldron and gave it three sharp turns to the left, setting the flame on a higher temperature before walking over to join Hermione at the bench.

'What can I help you with?' he asked, leaning in to kiss her cheek.

'I need help with the reception seating chart,' she answered. 'I don't know what to do about the people I know we can't seat together at the same table. There are too many different things to factor in, and it's making my head hurt. Honestly, potion-making is less stressful than social gatherings.'

'And this, my dear, is why I avoid getting involved in occasions such as this normally,' he said simply.

Hermione did not know why, but the way he voiced that set off something inside her. She was already wound pretty tightly from the stressful time she was going through, planning the wedding mostly by herself along with all of the general tasks that were being taken care of by the wedding planner. It was the finer details that were grating on Hermione's nerves. And just something about the flippant way Snape had dismissed her irritation made her annoyance with him expand.

'You know, I might be a little less stressed if you were to have a little more input into this wedding,' she said tersely. 'I know you think you did the hard part asking me to marry you, but there is a lot more involved than just getting on bended knee and popping the question.'

Snape frowned in confusion. 'Hermione, I don't understand where this has come from,' he said, sounding a little annoyed. 'I have never refused you any request you have made of me. I do not read minds not even yours. If there is something you wish for me to do so far as our wedding plans are concerned, I would be happy to oblige you. However, as I was under the impression that you wanted to be in charge of planning, I was also under the impression that you would know to bring errands and jobs you need completed to my attention.'

Hermione sat back on her stool, looking down at her hands and feeling sheepish. She looked up at him and was saddened by the look of annoyance etched across his features. She felt something of a pout coming on, but held it back, determined to behave like an adult.

'I'm sorry, Severus,' she murmured, looking back down at her hands.

He sighed heavily, and Hermione felt him put his hand on her shoulder, letting it slip around the back of her neck and travel up into her hair. He massaged the back of her head and neck, using his free hand to tilt her face up to look at him. He no longer wore his annoyed expression.

'I will make certain to ask after the wedding plans a little more often, pet,' he told her seriously. 'But you must also agree to ask me to do things instead of wearing yourself out and losing your cool like you did just before.'

'I agree,' she said, smiling up at him.

She really needed to learn to rely on others more often, or she would surely lose her mind before long. With that thought in mind, the two of them sat down together and went over the seating chart.

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Diagon Alley, London: 18th February, 2010

Hermione walked along the cobblestone road that was Diagon Alley with Ginny and Luna walking along behind her, chatting away about something that had been in *The Quibbler*.

Much as she loved both of her two closest female friends, spending as much time with them as she had been as the wedding drew closer and closer made her feel like she was being smothered. It was strange. She spent a lot of her time with Snape, and yet, she never felt uncomfortable with spending hours with him, day after day. Not once since she had moved to live with him had they clashed or gotten in each other's way. This pleased her it was the way things should be.

She was brought out of her musings by Ginny, who grabbed her by the arm and practically dragged her inside a shop she had been about to pass.

'You nearly walked right past it!' the younger woman exclaimed. 'We're here on a mission! We promised Severus we'd find you the perfect robes.'

Hermione rolled her eyes. Really, they were just wedding robes. 'I don't want anything overly fancy,' she said, looking back and forth between both women. 'I need your counsel nothing with too much lace or silly bows or anything gaudy or extravagant.'

'Silly, that is what the seamstress is for,' Ginny scolded. 'We're only here to coo and gasp as you are paraded around the shop in white.'

'I really would prefer something in cream or ivory,' she said as she walked towards the counter at the back of the shop. It had been a long time since she had been to Madam Malkin's.

'It's not very traditional to wear anything other than white,' Luna said, looking around the shop dreamily. 'What colour shall we be wearing?'

Hermione smiled. 'I'll have you both in different colours, and the groomsmen will dress all in black, save for the kerchief and the tie which will be the two colours I choose for bridesmaid robes,' she answered. 'I wanted to see you wear blue, Ginny. It will bring out your eyes. And Luna, it'll be purple for you.'

Both of them seemed to be pleased with her choices. They found the front desk unattended, and so Luna picked up the bell and gave it a small ring. Moments later, a short, slightly portly woman bustled out from the back room with a smile on her face. Hermione was vaguely reminded of Molly Weasley, save for the woman's colouring and face.

'Ladies, how can I be of service?' she asked politely.

'I am looking to procure a set of wedding robes, and two for the ladies in my wedding party also,' Hermione answered. 'I'll be needing blue for Ginny with the red hair over there, and purple for Luna.'

'Excellent,' the woman said. 'I suggest we begin with the bride. What style and colour do you favour?'

'I was thinking I would like to wear ivory robes instead of white. I like square, wide-necked dresses and robes and something simple, but beautiful.'

'I have just the thing!' she announced excitedly, bustling quickly back into the spare room out the back. She returned moments later with what appeared to be robes encased in protective wrapping. They opened it up and spread it over the counter. It had a square neckline with a simple Celtic pattern embroidered around it with three-quarter length sleeves that had the same pattern around the edges. The robes came in two parts: a long, light ivory silk slip to be worn on the inside almost like a dress with no sleeves or straps, and a shorter "jacket" in a slightly darker shade with embroidery along all of the edges.

'It's perfect,' Hermione said, gaping at it inelegantly. 'Whatever is something like this doing in storage?'

'We had a line of less successful period wedding pieces back two years ago when historical dress came into fashion. This was modelled after medieval wedding attire,' the sales witch answered. 'It wouldn't suit just anyone, but if you try it on, we might just find that it will suit you nicely.'

Hermione nodded and took the dress into the changing rooms. Luna and Ginny sat down excitedly outside, waiting as she stripped out of her jeans and sweater before assembling both parts of the robes on her. She noticed it was a little loose in the chest area and around the waist and was a touch too long as well. She sighed and cleared her throat, walking out of the cubicle to show everyone else.

Ginny's eyes nearly fell out of her head. 'It's perfect, Hermione!' she exclaimed while Luna nodded enthusiastically in the background.

'You don't think it's too simple?' Hermione asked.

The sales witch bustled over then and began waving her wand, prodding and poking the dress in places to take it in at the waist and chest and to shorten the ensemble slightly. When she stepped back, the dress felt a lot more comfortable and the lady nodded in satisfaction.

'Indeed very pretty,' she said with a small smile.

Hermione knew there was only one thing for it. She would buy the dress so that the whole sordid affair of buying clothing would be over. She went back to the changing rooms to get out of the robes and back into her normal clothing and brought the robes back out to the counter, gently placing it down.

'I'll take it,' she said, and the woman nodded and began wrapping it, preparing it for her to take with her.

A few moments later, they were sitting down as they waited for Ginny to try on the first of what promised to be many different outfits. Hermione sighed heavily, dreading more hours of shopping. It was going to be a very long afternoon.

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To be continued.

Chapter 17: A Marriage of Scientists

Chapter 17 of 20

In collaborating to find a cure for a magical condition that is thought to be irreversible, Potions mistress Granger and Potions master Snape discover the beauty of science and the lasting companionship of love. Written for WriterMerrin and based loosely on the life of Marie Curie.

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Many thanks to DHLane for the beta of this chapter.

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I have frequently been questioned, especially by women, of how I could reconcile family life with a scientific career. Well, it has not been easy.

Marie Curie.

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Greenwich, Ipswich: 14th March, 2010

Hermione stared in the mirror, barely able to recognise herself. The make-up Lavender had applied was not overdone, however, for a woman who rarely wore more than tinted lip balm out in public, it seemed like a lot. Her eyeliner was dark, framing her long, dark eyelashes. She was wearing eye shadow of a silver shade on her upper lid for the first time since she had graduated from her degree and completed her apprenticeship. Her cheeks were tinted slightly with rouge, and she was wearing foundation for perhaps the first and most likely the last time in her life.

She did not feel like herself with all of the paint on.

Her hair was carefully combed back from her face, save for a few small curls framing her slender jawline. It was pinned at the back of her head in a twist of curls that fell gracefully down to the bottom of her shoulder blades. It was ridiculous, the amount of effort a woman was required to go to in order to be the centre of attention at her own wedding.

She looked down at her hands, her engagement ring sparkling on her left hand. At first, the ring had made her hand feel heavy. Now, months later, she was more accustomed to the weight. It barely felt like she was wearing anything. She wondered if the new ring she would receive today would feel heavy with the weight of responsibility.

Hermione was startled out of her thoughts when a sharp knock rang out on the heavy wooden door.

She got up from the chair in front of the dresser and walked over, opening the door just a crack to make sure it wasn't her husband-to-be. Luna and Ginny, all dressed up in their blue and purple robes with their hair and make-up already done, were standing there. She sighed in relief and let them in, closing the door behind them.

'You both look so lovely,' Hermione said, resuming her seat in front of the mirror.

'Us?' Ginny exclaimed. 'Hermione, you look so beautiful it almost hurts to look at you! You're going to draw the eye of every man in the room! Severus ought to know what a lucky bloke he is, managing to get the attention of a catch like you.'

Hermione giggled nervously. 'I feel ridiculous with all of this make-up and hair product all over me,' she said, gesturing at her head.

'Don't worry it's just for a few hours through the ceremony and reception, and then the two of you will be off on your honeymoon, and you can wear whatever you feel like there,' Ginny said, walking over and sitting beside her on the long dresser stool.

'You don't look like you have a lot of make-up on,' Luna said. 'You were already very pretty before Lavender came by.'

Hermione smiled at her friend. 'Thank you, Luna.'

'She's right,' Ginny said seriously. 'You are already one of the most beautiful people I know, inside and out. You don't need a stitch of make-up. Lavender did a really good job of highlighting your already gorgeous face.'

Hermione nodded, feeling a little less nervous about the make-up. She knew how critical people could be when it came to women. For a woman who never wore make-up to begin wearing it often sent the message that the woman in question had low self-esteem and had only just become aware of it. She didn't want anyone to think that she actually cared about the way that she looked. She had worked so hard not to care about how people viewed her that she was annoyed with herself now because she had discovered that she actually did.

'I am nervous,' Hermione said, reaching over to grasp Ginny's hand. 'My stomach is in knots. Is this how you felt before you married Harry?'

'I was just as nervous. I know you were there, but I just didn't know what to say to anyone, so I kept it to myself and was nearly sick right before my father came to collect me to walk down the aisle,' Ginny said, squeezing her hand reassuringly. 'I think Harry and I rushed into marriage we were very young.'

'It doesn't mean the two of you didn't make the right decision,' Luna said with a smile. 'You are happy and have three beautiful children.'

Ginny beamed. 'They are the most wonderful children anyone could ask for,' she said proudly. 'Oh! That reminds me! Before we forget, there are a few things that we have to give you before the ceremony.'

Ginny pulled out her wand and summoned a velvet pouch from the corner of the room, opening it and pulling four items from it. There was a small, ornate seashell comb, a pair of white gold earrings with teardrop-shaped diamonds hanging from them that came with a matching chain and pendant, a white silk handkerchief with M.P. embroidered into it, and a pale blue garter for her thigh. Hermione smiled and knew that her friends had gathered together four items that stuck true to Muggle wedding traditions. She appreciated the effort her friends had gone to.

'We managed to pull all of this together a couple of days ago,' Ginny explained. 'I know you aren't having a Muggle wedding ceremony, but we wanted you to have something from your old world. We know your parents can't be here, but Luna and I hoped that this would be a nice way to include them.'

Luna nodded enthusiastically. 'The comb is your "something old". We asked Harry to do some digging around, and he actually found it at your parents' old house it was in a jewellery box that he said belonged to your great-grandmother,' she added. 'I hope you will wear it in your hair.'

Hermione felt close to tears. She was touched that they had gone to the effort of finding a family heirloom for her to wear. 'Thank you for finding this for me,' she said, allowing Luna to tuck the comb into her hair.

'The necklace and earrings are your "something new". Severus gave them to us and said you should wear them,' Ginny said, helping her put on the necklace and handing her each earring to attach herself.

'This silk handkerchief is your "something borrowed". Ginny wore this on the day of her wedding, and all of the rest of the Weasley boys' wives wore this on the event of their weddings also,' Luna said, tucking the handkerchief into the inner pocket of her wedding robes. 'It belongs to Molly. She was given it by her father on the occasion of her wedding to remind her where she came from.'

'And this is your "something blue". A garter to wear so that Severus has something to remove later on,' Ginny said with a smile, helping Hermione slip it up to mid-thigh.

When she had finished, Hermione stood up and pulled her friends to her in a tight hug. 'Thank you so much, both of you!' she said holding in the tears that were threatening to spill over. 'I really appreciate that you did this for me. It really means a lot.'

'You're family,' Ginny said as they released each other. 'We Weasleys would do anything for one another.'

Hermione was about to say something when a knock sounded at the door. It opened and Ron's head popped around it. 'Are you ready to go, Hermione?' he asked with a wide grin.

Hermione nodded and went to the door, looping her arm around Ron's and accepting the kiss he placed on her cheek gently. 'Let's get this over and done with,' she said, looking back at the other two women.

'Let's do it,' Ginny said, grabbing Luna's hand and following them out.

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Snape looked at the woman beside him from the corner of his eye. Her delicate hand was in his, and he couldn't help but to feel like he was the luckiest man in the world. She looked so beautiful, and he felt a little bit like the Beast standing next to Belle. His stomach was working its way up and down his throat, and had been almost the entire way through the ceremony.

The green field that the plateau and anvil stood upon was beautiful. It had been the perfect location for the wedding. There was not a cloud in the sky and no wind, although the air was still a little chilly. All of their friends and the few family members that they still had were standing around them in a circle as the Ministry official, who was presiding over their ceremony, was chatting away while they were supposed to be listening.

He turned his attention back to Hermione and saw that she was glancing his way. He offered her a smile and gave her hand a squeeze.

'... And now, if there are rings that you would like to exchange, this is your opportunity to do so,' the official said, looking at the two of them.

Snape turned to his best man, and Neville pushed Frank forward in a wheelchair. His friend handed him the ring that he had been safekeeping. Snape turned back to face Hermione and saw that she was also holding a ring. He held out his hand to her, and she gave it to him willingly. He carefully eased the white gold ring onto her finger to join the engagement ring he had given her a few months beforehand.

Hermione pushed a plain white gold band onto his ring finger in return, and the two faced each other and moved to hold hands over the anvil as the official recited more drivel. The two of them were handed documents to sign and touch with their wands, which they did readily. Afterwards, he smiled at her, and she beamed at him. When they were given the all clear, the couple leaned forward and kissed one another gently, and they were announced as man and wife.

Snape walked around the anvil to his wife, hugging her and picking her up, spinning her around in his arms, indifferent to everyone who was watching them. He set her back down on her feet and planted another kiss on her lips, still a little stunned that all of this was actually happening to him.

'We're married,' he said breathlessly, looking down at her.

'Yes, we are, husband of mine,' she said, slipping her hand into his as they began walking back down the hill with everyone else following them.

They arrived at the edge of a small forest of trees and Apparated together, arriving in the backyard of the Burrow. A smiling Molly Weasley, who swept the two of them immediately into a tight hug, greeted them.

'Oh! I am so excited for the two of you! Married! Finally!' she said, bustling around them and ushering them into the giant tent that they had arranged for the reception dinner. 'Everyone should be starting to arrive here in an hour or so. We have everything ready to go when the dinner party starts, no need to worry about any of that. I have it all well in hand.'

Snape saw the smile on Hermione's face and nodded to the Weasley matron. 'We would like to thank you for the tremendous effort you have gone to in order to prepare this spectacular dinner party for us, Molly,' he said, bowing slightly to the woman. 'It really does look like you have everything under control.'

'Well, I don't like to brag, but I have had a fair bit of practice,' she said, blushing from Snape's compliment. 'A lot of children...'

Hermione stepped forward and hugged the older woman again. 'We are really grateful to have you in our lives,' she said seriously.

Molly looked for a moment as though she might cry, but she simply nodded and sniffed lightly. 'I think you two should go inside and have a little bit of a rest before the guests start to arrive,' she said, shooing them.

Snape tugged Hermione along to the house with him, opening the door for her to enter before him. 'Why don't you go and have a lie down on the couch,' he suggested, following her through to the lounge room.

She nodded and sat down on the couch, letting herself fall back so that her head was resting on one of the arms. 'I can't actually believe that this day is happening. It all feels so surreal,' she said quietly. 'Like a dream...'

'I know how you feel,' he said, dropping into the armchair beside the fireplace. 'I am not sure how I even feel right now. It's almost as though I am numb.'

'Could you please light a fire?' she asked, yawning and stretching her arms out over her head. 'It's a little chilly in here.'

Snape lit the fire with a wave of his wand and sat back in the chair to relax for a little while. The room was silent, and he took a few moments to contemplate the events of the day. He had arrived at the small town just down the hill from the anvil that morning. He knew Hermione was staying at the local inn with her two best female friends and the wife of Ronald Weasley. The wedding itself had run smoothly and on time, going off without a hitch, just the way Hermione had planned. He was not surprised. Every plan that his lovely wife had a hand in always went off without a hitch she had to be one of the most organised women in Europe.

As he was thinking, he felt himself drift off to sleep, only to be woken a little while later with someone shaking his shoulder gently. He opened his eyes to see Harry Potter's green eyes behind his glasses, peering at him with an amused expression. Snape sat up and rolled his shoulders before hauling himself out of his chair and walking over to the couch to wake his bride.

'Hermione, come now, wake up,' he said softly. 'It's time to go and greet all of our friends at the reception dinner. Hermione, my sweet...'

Her eyes flickered open slowly, and she stretched her arms up, linking them around his neck and allowed him to pull her up into a sitting position on the couch. 'What time is it?' she asked sleepily.

'It's 6 o'clock,' Harry said from the doorway. 'Nearly everyone from the wedding is here now.'

'Oh, you shouldn't have let me sleep for so long!' she exclaimed, standing up immediately and quickly rushing over to a mirror in the hallway to fix her hair.

'Hermione, your hair still looks lovely,' Snape said, stepping up behind her and grabbing her hands away from her fussing. 'Let's go out and be polite now. We only have to do so for a few more hours, and then we are off on our honeymoon.'

'Where are we going, again?' she asked, though she knew very well that she would not be able to trick him into revealing their destination so easily. She had tried many times before this day, and he had yet to fall into the trap.

'That is a surprise, my pet,' he said, ushering her through the kitchen and out the back door along with Harry.

'CONGRATULATIONS!' everyone chorused loudly as they stepped out into the garden.

Snape saw that the entire congregation of people had lined up and created something of an archway for the two of them to walk through leading up to the massive tent. They walked through, shaking hands with some and exchanging embraces with others. Minerva McGonagall stood somewhere nearest the tent and accosted Snape with a tight hug, tears swimming in her eyes as she congratulated first him and then Hermione.

They finally made it to their seats in the middle of the head table with the Longbottoms, Potters and Luna Lovegood also seated at the table with them. Soon enough the tent was filled with laughter, talking and people enjoying themselves eating and drinking champagne. Molly's catering was a huge success, and Snape was glad he had told Hermione to allow the older woman to participate in the organisation of their reception. The Weasleys and the Longbottoms were the closest thing he had to a family these days, Hermione aside.

He looked at Hermione and she looked back at him, flashing him what he could only describe as an adoring smile.

'This has been an incredible day,' she said, reaching across to grasp his hand on the table.

'It really has,' Snape replied, using his free hand to feed himself. 'Although, I am looking forward to this day being over. I think that this wedding has been quite a tiring affair for both of us.'

Hermione nodded. The dinner continued without a hiccup, everyone getting slowly more intoxicated. Snape felt a little tipsy himself from the few glasses he had consumed. When the time came, all of the dinner plates were cleared away by the house-elves from Hogwarts, supplied by Minerva to help Molly with the reception, as well as the cooking and cleaning. Dessert was served, and Hermione and Snape cut the wedding cake together, which was also served to the guests.

It was almost 10 o'clock at night when the party began to wind down and people started to either Apparate home or head upstairs to the rooms they would be staying in at the Burrow. Snape touched Hermione's wrist and saw that her cheeks were flushed pink from the alcohol and warmth from the crowd in the tent. It was time for them to leave. She nodded in understanding and turned around to say a few words to Ginny Potter.

Snape took her hand and led her out of the tent moments later, saying goodbye to a few people on their way out. When they reached the edge of the orchard beside the Burrow, the two looked at each other, and Snape leaned in to kiss her just as they Apparated away to their honeymoon destination.

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To be continued.

Chapter 18: Scientific Conclusions

Chapter 18 of 20

In collaborating to find a cure for a magical condition that is thought to be irreversible, Potions mistress Granger and Potions master Snape discover the beauty of science and the lasting companionship of love. Written for WriterMerrin and based loosely on the life of Marie Curie.

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Many thanks to the lovely DHLane for all of her help beta-ing this chapter.

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One of our pleasures was to enter our workshop at night; then, all around us we would see the luminous silhouettes of the beakers and capsules that contained our products Marie Curie.

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Greenwich, Ipswich: 28th March, 2010

The fire crackling in the fireplace sent a warm, orange glow in the otherwise dark sitting room. Hermione had only returned home from the Institute in London two hours beforehand and had been busy going over the calculations for the werewolf potion once more. She and Severus had begun the early stages of brewing once they had returned from their honeymoon a week before, and she was just going over their final calculations once more to ensure that their ingredients would not have any sort of negative reactions to one another.

Snape was downstairs in the lab as she read, working out a method and the increases and stirring patterns they would have to implement along the way. It would most likely take them a few trials, but they were dedicated to getting it perfected as soon as they were able.

Stirring from her seat, she waved her wand at the lamps on the walls and lit the room properly. She walked down the hallway to the kitchen and switched on the lights before heading over to the fridge and rummaging around to find the fixings for dinner. She found a bag of mushrooms and garlic, some eggs and cream. After digging around in the cupboard for some dried pasta, she put a big pot of water onto the stove to boil, and went out to the back garden and collected some garlic chives from the vegetable garden.

She went back to the kitchen and began chopping all of the ingredients, summoning a frying pan from the cupboard and putting it on the stove to heat up. She placed the pasta into the boiling pot of water and placed a small blob of butter into the other pan to melt. Once it was melted, she tossed in the minced garlic and mushrooms, and added the chives shortly afterwards. With a touch of salt and pepper, she poured some white wine into the pan and let it simmer for a while before adding the cream and a couple of egg yolks.

Using a teaspoon, she tasted the sauce and was pleased with the flavour. She checked the pasta and drained it once it was cooked before putting the pasta into the sauce and tossing it through.

She plated the food and put some shaved Parmesan over the top and placed them on the table with their cutlery and cast a stasis charm over it.

She walked back down the hallway and down into the lab where she found Snape labouring over a bubbling cauldron. She stepped up behind him and wrapped her arms around his waist, snuggling up against him. He jumped a little as if he had been surprised.

'Dinner is ready,' she said, slipping around to stand beside him.

He turned his head to look down at her and offered her a small smile. 'I'm almost done here,' he said, stirring the potion counterclockwise three times. 'Alright, let's go up.'

Snape put a stasis on the potion before they walked up to the kitchen together. Hermione removed the stasis charm from both of their meals, and they sat down to eat. Snape flipped idly through the *Daily Prophet* as he picked at his food, and Hermione watched him, feeling a little worried about her husband. He had been very quiet all day, almost to the point of ridiculous, and she had every intention of finding out what was wrong with him.

'So, how is the potion coming along today?' she asked, interrupting him from his reading and thoughts.

He looked up and twisted the pasta around on his fork while he appeared to be thinking of the answer to her question. 'It appears to be going well for the time being. We may have to begin the testing again because I don't think that this batch is going to work out. I think we might have to tweak the quantities again one last time, and hopefully the next lot of tests will go well.'

'I was thinking the same thing myself this afternoon,' she said with a smile. 'I started going over the figures again when I got home from teaching, but I got hungry, and thought I'd wait for you to come up before I continued with it.'

Snape nodded. 'I think it might be best if we leave it until tomorrow to start finalizing the theoretical side of the potion,' he said, rubbing a hand over his eyes wearily. 'I am finished for the day.'

'I'll come down to the lab and help you tidy up after dinner,' she said, twisting some pasta around her fork and taking a mouthful.

Snape nodded with a slight smile and waved a hand over the newspaper so that it found its way into the bin. They finished up their dinner quickly and did the dishes together before heading down to the lab. Snape immediately put the potion on stasis and stored it away on the shelf near the back of the room while Hermione went about the task of scrubbing the knives and stirring rods.

After the lab was cleaned, Hermione led the way up to their bathroom and turned the taps on in the bath to fill the large claw-footed tub. Snape was in the bedroom, sitting on the edge of the bed slowly removing his boots when she walked in, and she went over to sit with him, waving her wand at the faucet so that it would switch off when the bath was full enough.

'You seem a little quiet today,' she said softly, reaching up to brush his hair back from his face. 'What is bothering you?'

'This potion is going very... slowly,' he said, looking down at his hands, back slightly hunched and head bowed forward. 'I am feeling a little discouraged by our lack of progress over the past few months. I had hoped that this potion would be much like the brain regeneration potion.'

'I had been rather hopeful about this myself,' she admitted, rubbing his back lightly. 'I know you're feeling demotivated, but we are so much closer than anyone has been before. We are going to figure it out. We just have a few things we need to tweak, and then brewing will be coming along much better.'

'You're rather a lot more optimistic than I am,' he said, looking at her with fondness in his eyes.

'I usually am,' she replied, leaning in to steal a kiss. 'Now, let's go take a bath and go to bed. I'm tired, and if we're going to get started on refining our theoretical work, we're going to need to get plenty of sleep tonight.'

He agreed and led the way, both of them pulling their clothing off before sliding into the hot water. After their bath, they put on pyjamas and clambered into bed, falling asleep to the sound of the grandfather clock in the hallway outside, ticking time away.

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Diagon Alley, London: 29th March, 2010

Snape walked along the cobblestone street, his pace brisk as he made his way to the apothecary. He was going there to pick up a special order and also buy more of the ingredients they had in stock for their current project. They had finally recalculated the potion and figured out all of the small kinks in their theoretical quantities and methods, and discovered that they had overcalculated how much unicorn blood would be required to make the potion, and therefore, also how much time it would take to brew a complete potion.

From their last calculations, it appeared that the potion would take approximately two weeks to brew in the cauldron both with and without supervision, and it would require to rest in the containers that the potion was transferred into for about a week afterwards to mature. From what they could tell, the potion would only have a shelf life of approximately one month after the one week of maturation to be used before it was rendered useless.

They anticipated this being a problem. The potion required only one dosage and would need to be administered at a very particular time of the month for the werewolves in question. And as the potion in question was already in high demand, both he and Hermione did not think they would ever have much excess potion to dispose of.

He was brought out of his silent musings when he arrived outside the door to the apothecary. He entered, the doorbell ringing loudly as he did so, and saw that the front desk was unattended. He collected a shopping basket from beside the front door and began to walk along the shelves, picking up ingredients they would need and inspecting them thoroughly to ensure he was taking only the freshest ingredients that were there.

When he returned to the front counter, the shopkeeper had returned once more and immediately nodded at Snape. He watched as the man ducked below the counter and started to rummage under it for potions ingredients. He brought up a parcel and placed it on the bench. Assuming that it was his special order of monkshood, Snape put through the rest of his purchases and paid the man, all without actually saying anything, and left the shop.

He carried the paper bag with him back along the street towards the Apparation point, and from there, Apparated to St. Mungo's.

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St. Mungo's, London: 29th May, 2010

Snape walked straight to the lift and caught it to the floor that the Longbottoms would be on. He had yet to visit his friends since Hermione and he had returned from their honeymoon, and so he felt as though he had to make an appearance at some point. He vaguely recalled a time when making social calls on people was not something that he did regularly. He sometimes missed those uncomplicated days when he was free to be as antisocial as he liked. These days, that kind of reclusive behaviour would reflect badly on Hermione as well, and he could not do that to his new wife.

He knocked briefly on the doorframe before entering the Longbottoms' room and walking immediately to his usual seat between the two of them.

'Good afternoon,' he said, greeting both of them.

'It's good to see you, Severus,' Alice said, reaching over and giving his arm a squeeze. 'How was the honeymoon? And how is that lovely wife of yours?'

Frank took off his glasses and put down his book. 'Yes, tell us all about it,' he said, turning his attention on Snape.

'The honeymoon was more or less what anyone might have expected it to be. It was relaxing and peaceful. We enjoyed spending time together,' he answered, looking down at his hands. 'Hermione led me to believe she enjoyed her time there.'

'Where did you end up going?' Alice asked.

'I took her to Spain. We went to Granada, in the Andalucia province,' he replied. 'It was very pretty there.'

'Oh! What a beautiful idea!' Alice exclaimed excitedly. 'I'll bet Hermione loved it. I hear it is such a beautiful, culturally and historically rich country. I hope one day Frank and I will be able to go there.'

'Maybe when you are both finally released from here, the two of you could stay in our holiday home over there? Hermione and I would be glad to let you stay there for as long as you would like,' Snape offered.

'Your holiday home?' Frank asked. 'I didn't know you owned property over there. When did you come by it?'

'Albus gave it to me shortly before the first fall of the Dark Lord,' he replied. 'He thought it would be a nice retreat for me when I found myself under a great deal of pressure. It was ideal for many years. It gave me the opportunity to leave London whenever I felt like it.'

'A very generous gift, indeed,' Frank said with a nod. 'We would love to visit your home some time, when we are finally allowed out of here. Unfortunately, our physiotherapy, even with magical stimulation, is still a slow process after so many years dormant.'

'Hermione mentioned a project that the two of you were working on the last time she visited before the wedding,' Alice said, changing the subject quickly. It was obvious she was still uncomfortable talking about the number of years they had been inactive. 'How is your progress going with that?'

Snape frowned immediately at the mention of their slow-going project. 'It is, as you can imagine, very slow going. We had hoped that things would have progressed a lot further than this; however, we are still persisting. I might as well tell you now, as I am certain Hermione would not mind you knowing, we are working on a cure for Lycanthropy.'

Alice looked surprised. 'I wasn't aware that it was something so serious and important as that,' she said, looking apologetic. 'I would have asked sooner if I'd known.'

Snape waved her off. 'The two of you have plenty enough to worry about without having to concern yourselves with our potions,' he replied.

'This is a very serious endeavour the two of you are undertaking,' Frank said, looking at Snape seriously. 'Which reminds me, have you had many other success stories from the potion you used to heal Alice and me?'

Snape smirked at that. 'Actually, there have been quite a few reported cases of recovery from Berlin and from the US. We are still brewing more of the potion to make deliveries to the next lot of affected populations. In fact, along with working on our Lycanthropy project, Hermione is going to be starting a brew this afternoon to send off to Hong Kong.'

'That's very exciting!' Alice exclaimed with a bright smile. 'And it's simply amazing that there are two Potions experts in one family. You both work together so well, and we're very happy for you.'

'I thank you, Alice,' Snape said inclining his head courteously.

The three of them sat there chatting idly for a few more minutes until Neville arrived, and Snape noticed that it was getting quite late in the afternoon. He excused himself politely and went down to the lobby before Apparating back to Diagon Alley. There was something he wanted to get for his wife.

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Greenwich, Ipswich: 29th March, 2010

The steam coming off the potion she was working on was causing the small curly hairs at the back of Hermione's neck to frizz horribly. The rest of her hair was pulled back and piled atop her head in a loose bun, thankfully undisturbed by the heat in the lab. She had been working on the brain regeneration potion from the moment Snape had left to collect some of their pre-ordered potions ingredients from the Apothecary a few hours before.

She had begun to wonder what had happened to him after the first two hours, but soon gave up and had to focus her attention on her base. After giving her brew a few sharp stirs anti-clockwise, she went to the sink to thoroughly clean the stirring rod before returning to sit on one of the stools so she could supervise her potion as it simmered.

Though they had come to a bit of a standstill as far as the attempts at recreating their theory work on the Lycanthropy cure in potion form went, Hermione felt they were not necessarily behind on their progress. No one else in the Potions world had even attempted, much less succeeded, in coming up with an original potion that would theoretically cure the mutated Lycanthropic gene. They were already as close as anyone had ever gotten, and that was an achievement in itself.

But she knew as well as anyone else that Severus Snape would not settle for anything less than perfect and completed.

Come to think of it, neither would she. They had finally come to something of a consensus that morning on the changes they would need to make to the procedure in order to recreate a more completed potion, and when Snape finally got home, they were going to begin brewing again. And if that attempt failed, they would simply go back to their notes and try yet again until they finally got it right.

Hermione was brought out of her musings by the crack of Apparation just upstairs in the front hall. She smiled and jumped off her stool, taking the stairs two at a time so that she could greet her husband and unburden him of the potion ingredients he went out to purchase.

She was greeted by the sight of her husband looking slightly irate, with one arm fully occupied with holding onto the large brown paper bag that contained their potions ingredients, and much to her surprise, a pet carrier in his other hand. She took the paper bag from him and placed it on the floor in the hallway, and crossed her arms over her chest and looked at him curiously.

He bent down and put the cage on the floor before kneeling beside it and unlatching the cage door. 'I know you lost your half-Kneazle shortly after you lost your parents,' he said, looking up at her with apology in his eyes. 'I don't want to remind you of things you'd rather not think about, but I thought that this little one could be a new companion for you.'

And, as if knowing it was being talked about, a tiny Kneazle kitten all fluffy and black crept out of the carrier and hesitantly slunk out of hiding. He had white socks on his front paws, and one of his ears perked up while the other remained flattened out, and had large inquisitive green eyes. Hermione smiled brightly at Snape and knelt down, putting a hand out towards the kitten to let it smell her. It slowly walked towards her and sniffed at her fingers, and deciding that it liked her smell, immediately jumped at Hermione. She hastily caught and hugged the kitten to her chest.

'I think he likes you,' Snape said with a small smile. 'What will you name him?'

Hermione paused to think for a moment, and smiled when she thought of the perfect name for her new pet. 'He looks like a Markl to me,' she said, leaning towards her husband and giving him a kiss.

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To be continued.

Chapter 19: Experimenting With Science

Chapter 19 of 20

In collaborating to find a cure for a magical condition that is thought to be irreversible, Potions mistress Granger and Potions master Snape discover the beauty of science and the lasting companionship of love. Written for WriterMerrin and based loosely on the life of Marie Curie.

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Hugs and chocolate go to DHLane for all of her help as my beta.

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It is my earnest desire that some of you should carry on this scientific work and keep for your ambition the determination to make a permanent contribution to science

Marie Curie.

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Greenwich, Ipswich: 5th April, 2010

'Damn it all to hell!' Snape cursed, tossing down his stirring rod and immediately storming out of the lab and up the stairs, not even pausing to look at Hermione who gazed after him in surprise, shocked by his sudden outburst.

She went over to his workspace and picked up the rod, cleaning it and looking into the cauldron Snape had been using. Inside, the potion was black as night, and she could see from the glass slides with some of the blood samples he had been testing with that there was no change. She used the microscope they had acquired to more thoroughly inspect the slides and could see exactly why her husband was in such a state of irritation. The potion had been a failure, and they would have to start a new brew and yet again alter their potion method.

She put a spell over the area of the bench where the potion was sitting and went upstairs to find her husband. When she reached the top of the staircase, she closed the door and was immediately greeted by Markl. Her little black Kneazle wound himself around her legs, rubbing up against her jeans. She bent down and picked him up, cradling him to her as she walked through the first floor of the house. She didn't find Snape anywhere downstairs, so she went up to the next floor and found him sitting sullenly in his armchair next to the window.

She entered the room and walked over to join him, plopping Markl into his lap and sitting on the ledge of the windowsill.

'I know you're frustrated, but we still have plenty of time our whole lives, in fact, to make this potion a success. I am just as disappointed as you that it didn't work out this time around, but Severus, we've only really done three proper trials. There will be many more to come,' she said, reaching out to brush his hair behind his ear.

'I know my frustration seems ridiculous,' he said, idly scratching Markl behind the ear as he petted him, and the little kitten purred. 'I grow impatient. It is something very important to me, and to you. I hate to see us fail.'

'We haven't failed yet,' she said seriously, putting her hand on Snape's chin and tilting his face up to look at hers. 'We will simply try again. I will not just give up on this project because of a few little hiccoughs.'

He sighed heavily and nodded, dislodging her hand. 'I will try again with you, make no mistake of that, Hermione,' he said quietly. 'You know I have something of a temper on me from time to time. I lose it occasionally.'

Hermione chuckled softly. 'I know you lose your temper,' she replied, leaning forwards to kiss him on the forehead. 'I also know you try your very hardest not to.'

He offered her a small smile, picked up Markl from his lap and placed him back on the chair after he pulled himself into a standing position. He grabbed Hermione's hand and led the way back down to the lab so they could clean up his workspace and keep a sample of their failed potion. Hermione was given the task of bottling and labelling the samples while Snape manually scrubbed the used cauldron.

When they were finished with that, they bottled their brain regeneration potion that Hermione had been working on. It was labelled it so they could send it by owl post the next day to the various hospitals it was required for. When they had finished cleaning up that cauldron, the pair returned upstairs to find that the sun had already gone down, and it was almost 7 o'clock at night.

Hermione sent Snape upstairs to bathe while she headed to the kitchen and started to find things with which to make dinner. She settled on bacon and corn chowder with fresh-baked chilli and rosemary cornbread and immediately set to work on it. After 40 minutes, the kitchen was filled with the aromas of the cornbread as it cooled on the bench in its pan, and the chowder as it bubbled away on the stove. Snape entered the kitchen and inhaled deeply before smiling at her in gratitude.

'Thank you, pet. It smells delicious. I detect rosemary,' he said, walking over to join her in front of the pot on the stove. 'A very American-inspired meal.'

'It's a very southern dish,' she replied, whipping out her wand and tapping the pot so that some of the corn, bacon and potato would blend and thicken the soup.

Snape went over to attend to the cornbread, turning it out of the pan and slicing it up so that they could eat it paired together. He set the table and directed Hermione into a chair before proceeding to ladle the soup into bowls and send them floating to the table while he carried over the cornbread himself. She smiled to herself. He was still as chivalrous as ever, even after the usual probationary polite stage most couples went through in their relationships. But then again, Snape was not exactly the most conventional or even normal man around.

'Thank you for making us this beautiful meal,' he said, raising his glass of pumpkin juice to her in a salute.

Hermione raised her own glass, and they touched them together lightly before beginning to eat. They ate in companionable silence, both too engrossed in their own thoughts to be offended by the other. It was the beauty of being in a relationship with Severus Snape, as far as Hermione was concerned. He didn't mind it when she used her brain, unlike many of her schoolmates at Hogwarts, and through her primary education in the Muggle world. He actually liked being involved with an intelligent woman and was not intimidated by her accomplishments, like most men were, because he was just as accomplished, if not more so, himself.

After she finished eating, the two cleared the table, and Snape set about washing the dishes while Hermione made her way up to the bathroom to take a shower. When she got there, however, she realised her hair was exceptionally dirty from working all day and that her muscles ached slightly. She drew a bath instead and slid into the hot water, hissing as the pleasant sensation of her muscles relaxing went through her. After about 15 minutes, she heard a knock on the doorframe and looked up to see her husband standing in the doorway, admiring her relaxed form.

'I apologise for my overreaction earlier,' he said, strolling in and seating himself on the edge of the bathtub, his shirtsleeves rolled to his elbows.

'Apology accepted,' she replied, reaching a wet, soapy finger up to tap the pointed end of his long nose. 'Now, could you possibly wash my back for me?'

He smirked at her and picked up her rough sponge, lathering it up with body wash and applying it to her back. He washed and conditioned her hair for her also, massaging her scalp as he did so with his long, dexterous fingers. After he was finished, she stepped into the shower to rinse off and emptied the bath before grabbing a fluffy towel to dry off with, allowing her husband to lead her to bed for other "scientific observations and experiments" or so he said.

Hermione didn't care a whit what he called it and willingly allowed their night to turn to more amorous distractions, the Lycanthropy potion the furthest thing from their minds.

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Newtown, Reading: April 10th, 2010

Hermione grasped Snape's hand and tugged him along behind her. He was being slightly petulant about having to visit with the Potters that afternoon, although she could relate somewhat they had made some progress with their Lycanthropy brewing project, and she was as loathe as he to tear away from it. However, she had already agreed a week beforehand that she would be bringing Snape by with her for dinner at the Potter household, and it would have been rude to her friends to withdraw their acceptance now.

They trudged together up the Potters' backyard, heading towards the house as Hermione usually did. Snape beside her, felt a little uncomfortable with the idea of simply Apparating into their backyard, but she then explained to him that if they didn't, Harry would most likely take it the wrong way and feel insulted.

And so, Snape had reluctantly agreed to the outing, and Hermione had laid out his nice black trousers and a green shirt and told him to be ready to leave for their house by five in the evening. She knocked briefly on the back door, and let herself in as usual, tugging her husband through despite his almost shyness. She saw that Ginny was bustling around the kitchen cooking.

'We're here!' Hermione announced, releasing Snape's hand and walking over to embrace her friend.

Ginny beamed at the two of them and first hugged Hermione, and even went over to hug Snape, who received it a little stiffly, but did not otherwise reject the familiarity.

'I am so glad the two of you could make it,' she said, ushering Snape through the kitchen and into the hall. 'Harry is down the end of the hall and to the left in the sitting room with the kids. You go and make yourself at home down there while we girls gossip for a little while.'

Hermione chuckled at the sight of her husband being bossed around by one of her best friends in the exact same manner that Molly Weasley was fond of. She allowed Ginny to pour her a glass of champagne, and she sipped at the bubbly liquid slowly as she sat at a stool beside the kitchen benches and listening to Ginny talk about the kids and Harry and his work at the Ministry. This was followed by gossip about Ron, Lavender, and the next impending addition to their family. Hermione could barely keep up, but she smiled, feeling relaxed and happy.

'... And Lavender didn't want anyone to know whether it was going to be a girl or a boy, but you know how Ron is sometimes,' the younger woman said with a grin. 'He can be really thick and forgetful. So naturally he told Harry and all of the rest of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement all about how proud he was that 'Lav' was finally giving him a son.'

'Giving him a son? I didn't realise that children were considered marital gifts these days,' Hermione said with a laugh.

'Well, you know as well as I do that Ron wasn't exactly born articulate. Nor did he develop it as we grew up,' Ginny said, taking a sip of her own champagne.

Hermione almost snorted the bubbly she was drinking then, and she had a small coughing fit before regaining her composure. She summoned a napkin for herself and wiped her mouth, dabbing around her eyes. The two women chatted together for a little while longer before Ginny announced that she was finished with her preparation, and she would have to let it cook on its own for a while. They walked down the hall to where the children and men were, and they were both surprised to find Snape sitting on the floor with Albus on his lap as he read to the boy.

'Well, if that isn't a sign that he wants kids, I don't know what is,' Ginny said, just loud enough for both of the men to hear her from the doorway.

Snape looked up at them, slightly startled. Hermione thought it was strange that Snape would be more comfortable reading with Albus while only Harry and the other two children were around. Shaking her head and smiling, she walked into the room and immediately went to give Harry a hug, followed by James, who jumped into her arms. She walked over to Lily's crib in the corner and saw that the little girl was asleep.

James put his finger up to his lips and made a shushing sound. 'We has to be quiet while Lily is sleeping,' he whispered. 'Mummy and Daddy said that I'm a good big brother, and that it's my job to make sure she doesn't get waked up.'

Hermione nodded and walked back to rejoin her friends who giggled at James and the way he was taking his older brotherly duties so seriously. She placed James back on the floor, and he scrambled off to his colouring book and crayons again, so she joined her husband on the floor and leant her head on his shoulder.

'What are we reading here?' she asked, although she already knew the answer.

'*The Tales of Beedle the Bard*' Snape said, frowning slightly. 'We're reading "Babbity Rabbity and her Cackling Stump" this evening, aren't we, Albus?'

Albus nodded and grinned at her. 'Unker Sev'us knows how to tell it really good!' he exclaimed excitedly.

Hermione's eyes went wide, and Snape shrugged. Apparently he had a soft spot for children that she never would have been able to imagine for herself if she hadn't seen it. Snape looked at her nervously from the corner of his eye, and she shook her head and smiled, leaning up to place a kiss on his cheek before nudging him to continue with the story.

A little while later, Ginny came into the room after returning to the kitchen and announced that dinner was ready. They were all ushered into the dining room and saw that the table was set beautifully, and the food was spread out on platters in the middle. There were buttered beans, mashed potato, corn on the cob, sweet baby carrots, roasted marinated chicken legs, and pork belly with crispy skin. Hermione could almost see Snape's mouth watering.

They took their seats at the table, Albus insisting on sitting next to Snape, opposite Hermione.

'So, we hear you have been having a little trouble with your Lycanthropy cure,' Harry said conversationally. 'Severus, don't worry about Hermione telling us too much about the potion - she made us both swear oaths before she told us even a little bit about it. We won't tell a soul.'

Snape nodded, but not before shooting Hermione a look of surprise. 'Well, it has been difficult to get the potion to do as we wrote in theory. Much of it is merely timing that we have been unable to get exactly perfect, or even the number of stirs or how long we must leave it to mature,' he explained.

'I never was very good at perfect timing with potions, so I guess I kind of understand. It is never perfect unless it's timed well,' Harry said with a grin. 'Not much of a comparison, I know.'

Snape smirked. 'Not really, no,' he said simply, as he served himself some food. 'It is a complicated process, but as Hermione has pointed out to me, we are the most intellectually equipped to do this, so we must continue.'

Hermione put her hand on his arm and gave it a squeeze. 'And continue we shall,' she said with a smile she directed at him first, and then her two friends across from them.

They slipped into companionable silence as everyone around the table ate. Ginny finished her food quickly and summoned a bottle of breast milk she had pumped earlier in the day for Lily. She fed the little girl, and as Hermione watched, she felt a pang of motherliness. Being around the Potters always tended to make her like children and feel as clucky as a mother hen.

Dinner finished, and Hermione helped Ginny clear the table. Meanwhile, Harry and Snape herded the children back into the sitting room, the former having been given the task of burping the baby. Hermione set herself to washing the dishes as Ginny put all of the leftovers into containers and into the refrigerator. When she was finished, the younger witch tapped her on the shoulder and showed her the tray of chocolate mousse she had prepared in dessert glasses.

'Do you think the boys might be up for a little dessert?' Ginny said, waggling her eyebrows suggestively.

'I think you might be dangerous, Gin,' Hermione replied before turning around to rummage through the cutlery drawer, pulling out half a dozen teaspoons.

The two women returned to the sitting room with the desserts and found the boys in similar positions, as they had been before dinner. Hermione took a glass of mousse over to her husband and little Albus, pulling the younger Potter boy into her lap so she could help him eat it. Ginny left another glass beside her for her to eat when she was ready, and she could see that Snape was actually enjoying himself in a social situation for once.

A little while later, when they were all full and relaxed, Hermione decided it was about time for them to leave. She turned to Snape who apparently returned the sentiment, for all he did was nod.

'Harry, Ginny, it's been such a nice night, but I'm afraid it's time for us to take our leave,' she said with a smile. 'The boys are tired, and we wouldn't want to overstay our welcome.'

'You're always welcome here,' Harry said, as they all got up and stretched out their legs.

Hermione carried the sleeping Albus, who had been napping with his head on her lap, over to the lounge where James was fast asleep also. Snape took her hand, and the adults made their way to the back door through the kitchen. Hermione hugged her two friends, and Snape shook hands with Harry before accepting another hug from Ginny awkwardly.

Holding hands, the pair walked towards the far end of the yard, and from there, they Apparated home together.

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To be continued.

Chapter 20: Science, Full Circle

Chapter 20 of 20

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Thanks must go to DHLane for her help with the beta-ing of this chapter.

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Radium is not to enrich anyone. It is an element; it is for all people Marie Curie.

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Greenwich, Ipswich: 16th May, 2010

A drop of sweat ran down the back of his neck, soaking into his collar. His hair, despite being pulled back with a leather thong, was getting drenched. The beginnings of summer were starting to show signs that it was going to be a hot one. Spring had been relatively warm for their part of the world, when usually it was dreary and wet. Snape frowned and placed his stirring rod into the final cauldron he was brewing with.

He and Hermione had set up seven cauldrons with which to brew their Lycanthropy potion, and each had slightly different timing, measurements, and stirring techniques. All of them were in holding with their original research and recipe, but they had to try a few different ways in order to achieve results. Hermione had left him briefly to make them some tea up in the kitchen, and he had been tasked with watching the potions as they bubbled away.

He heard the door open at the top of the stairs and then footsteps before Hermione appeared bearing two steaming mugs of tea.

He accepted the mug from her gratefully, taking a sip of the brew. 'Thank you, pet. It's just what I needed,' he said, sitting down on the stool beside the bench.

Hermione summoned another stool over to them and took a seat herself, craning her neck to look over all of the potions. 'This looks promising,' she said with a smile. 'There are already two of them that look about the right colour and consistency.'

'It will be a few more hours until we are able to test the results on the samples we have, but we may have finally hit the nail on the head,' Snape said, his dark eyes alight with something akin to excitement.

'We still have to add the unicorn blood though,' Hermione pointed out. 'That may yet alter some of the other potions, and perhaps, spoil the ones that look like they have promise right now.'

'In an hour we shall see,' Snape said, reaching over to brush a loose curl out of her eyes and tuck it behind her ear.

As the hour passed slowly, the sand in the timer trickling down at an almost glacial pace, Snape paced the lab, unable to remain seated. His nerves were on edge, and he could barely even think straight for worry that this time they would manage to fail again seven times. He looked over to where Hermione was doodling on a piece of parchment, possible names and designs for the label. He thought she was being a little too hasty with those sorts of things, but was reluctant to interrupt her. She was very single-minded when she wanted to be.

As the hour drew to a close, he went to the storeroom to collect the final ingredient for the potion the purifying agent that, in theory, would ultimately destroy the remnants of the mutation in the human gene.

Hermione had already set up the instruments they would be using to add and stir the blood into the potion by the time he returned with the flask full of the silver liquid. She carefully measured out the amount of blood they would need for each of the cauldrons into seven small measuring glasses while Snape set to work on carefully stirring it into each of the cauldrons. When they were finished, she lowered the temperature on all of the cauldrons simultaneously, and they went to stand close and examine the results.

Snape dipped a ladle into the first cauldron in the line and lifted the liquid up for inspection, pouring a small amount of it into an empty glass vial. It was a dark, smoky colour with flecks of silver through it. He frowned in frustration. The unicorn blood had not combined itself with the rest of the potion. It was useless. He poured the sample down the sink and set that cauldron aside. He would deal with the remnants later.

Hermione showed him the results of the second cauldron, which were similar silver flecks spiralling through a thick, red-brown liquid that looked almost sickly. It was not at all the consistency or colour they were looking for.

'There are still five more cauldrons,' she said, putting a comforting hand on his shoulder. 'Do not despair just yet.'

He nodded and refocused on the task at hand. He arrived at the fifth cauldron along, lifted out some of the serum and poured it into a flask. The colour was clear amber, and it was like water. Perfect. He held it up to a light to examine it closer. The blood had fully combined with the rest of the mixture, and it shimmered a golden colour when he tilted it in a different direction. He turned to Hermione and touched her shoulder gently to get her attention.

'I think we might have hit upon something here,' he said, not taking his eyes away from the potion.

She stopped what she was doing and turned around to look at the vial he was holding up. 'Oh! It's beautiful,' she exclaimed, taking the vial from him when he offered it. She wafted her hand towards her nose to smell it. 'It's like caramel! I think you're right, Severus. This looks like it might be perfect.'

Snape nodded with excitement in his eyes. 'I want to get excited about this, but we must examine the other two before we continue in this vein. Either of the other two may have produced similar results,' he said.

Hermione nodded in agreement, and they went back to work. Of the last two potions, only one seemed to be almost the correct colour and consistency, and it was slightly darker than the amber colour they were looking for. Snape collected a sample of both the fifth and seventh potion and moved those two cauldrons aside. Meanwhile Hermione set about to the task of bottling samples of the potions that were not useable and recording all of their results.

They cleaned the lab thoroughly and put away all of the tools and cauldrons once they were clean before setting up their microscope on the cleared bench space. Without having to even speak, Hermione collected the potion samples while Snape went into the storeroom to collect the werewolf blood samples and some glass slides for them to view under the microscope.

Using an eyedropper tool, Snape carefully put a drop of the blood, and with another, put a drop of the second potion sample onto it. He had doubts about it being the correct one and wanted to get it out of the way before testing the other. He placed it under the microscopic lens and gestured for Hermione to take a look before him. She moved over and peered down at to see the results. She pulled back, frowned and shook her head.

'The mutated werewolf cells are rejecting the potion,' she said solemnly.

'It was a bit of a long shot with that one, but at least we know for certain now,' Snape said, patting her shoulder comfortingly. 'Come now, we must test the next one.'

Hermione cleared away that slide and filed it away with their other failed test slides while Snape organised the next one, sliding it into place with the blood and the amber potion beneath the lens. He moved to look at it first and could barely contain his excitement when he watched as the tiny black specimens that clustered around the regular human blood cell was attacked by the large amber-gold cells of the potion and were dissolved away into nothingness. His stomach began to creep up his throat; he was almost sick with joy.

Wordlessly, he gestured for Hermione to stand where he had been so that she could look into the microscope and see what he had just seen. Not a moment later, she whooped aloud, moving away from the equipment and jumping at him, wrapping her arms around his neck. Snape caught her and lifted her up into the embrace, allowing her to wrap her legs around him. She peppered kisses all over his face and beamed the most beautiful smile of rapture at him.

'We finally did it!' she exclaimed jubilantly.

'That we did,' he said with a wide smile, unable to stop himself from laughing as he held his brilliant, beautiful wife against him. They had finally achieved another of their life goals.

After a few more minutes of embracing and celebration, Snape set her back down on her feet and they calmed themselves so they could continue with their work. After all, even though they had already achieved success with this sample, they still had many more samples and even werewolves to test the potion on before it would be confirmed as 100% successful, but they were hopeful. This was a positive step in the right direction and their first success after months of labouring in their free time.

'We still have much testing to do,' he said simply by way of explanation.

Hermione nodded in agreement, and the two of them set aside their moment of joy to continue with their important work, eager to prove that they had successfully brewed a cure for Lycanthropy. Snape hoped that Remus Lupin knew how hard they had worked to find the cure and that he was pleased, even if they had found it too late for him to make use of.

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Camden, London: 20th May, 2010

Hermione stared out across her class as they silently brewed their Draught of Living Death potions for that week's practical section of their assessment. She could see most of them were struggling to some extent and could remember back to her sixth year and how horridly jealous she had been that Harry, who was average in Potions at best, had managed to brew a better draught than even she. She smiled as she remembered why he had it had been Snape's fault in the end. He hadn't been careful about where he had left his old school textbooks, and when Harry had gotten a hold of it, well, of course he had been reckless.

She shook herself from her reminiscence and stood at the front desk, deciding to do the rounds so she could watch her students work and also assist them if need be. Unlike Snape when he had taught at Hogwarts, she was a strict but fair teacher. She desired order above all in her classroom, but was not averse to giving aid and council when she knew a student needed extra encouragement.

Pleased that most of the students appeared to be on the right track despite their struggles, she returned to her desk. She would have been very disappointed indeed if her tertiary level students were not able to make a potion that was originally introduced in their sixth-year curriculum at Hogwarts and other magical schools.

Opening her notebook to a fresh page, she took out a quill and pot of ink and dipped the end in, her hand poised over the paper to write.

She and Snape had done extensive testing of their potion over the past few days, and with only a few more tests left to do, it was left to Hermione to organise the paperwork. They had a few things they needed to discuss with one another, such as how they were going to approach getting funding to create and supply the potion worldwide and organise patenting rights.

She began writing her to-do list so that when she left the college in the afternoon, she would be on top of everything. When the clock struck twelve, she stood from her desk and cleared her throat.

'Everyone, please clean up your area and store your potions with a stasis charm cast over them on the shelf at the back of the room,' she announced. 'You may continue with your potions in the next class, and don't forget to study for your Potions finals in two weeks time. After that, you will be receiving your results approximately one month into the summer break.'

The stools scraped against the stone of the floor, and there was a bustle as all of the students hurried to clean their workspaces and leave. When the last student walked through the door, Hermione gathered together all of her paperwork and placed it inside her briefcase before leaving the classroom. As she was walking down the hallway to leave the building and heading towards the Apparation point, one of her colleagues stepped out of another classroom and spun around, catching a glance of her and smiling.

'Ah, Professor Snape,' the man exclaimed. 'I was hoping I would catch you.'

Hermione, feeling put on the spot, gave him a small polite smile and a nod. 'What can I do for you, Professor Mason?'

'Well, all of the rest of us in the Potions community were wondering when you and that husband of yours would be coming out with the next big breakthrough,' he said, chuckling. 'It's been a while since your last potion was publicly released.'

She offered a small shrug. 'We have been very busy working on something important, but as to whether we will be making anything public any time soon is another matter,' she replied.

Mason eyebrows rose at her. 'I suppose that means I won't be able to convince you to say what it is you are working on, then hey?' he said.

'It's strictly confidential between my husband and me, ' she answered. 'You will simply have to be as patient as everyone else in regards to news about our project.'

Mason looked slightly affronted by her brusqueness. 'I suppose the two of you are hoping to add a few more awards to your already substantial collection. I'll bet you'll be wanting to put a couple of Order of Nimues up next to your Order of Merlins,' he said, sounding a little snide.

'Neither of us is doing extensive work and research in our own time for personal gain,' Hermione said, starting to get irritated with Mason. 'It is also entirely up to the Ministry for Medical Sciences to decide who is worthy of such a prestigious award. They don't just hand those out to anyone who has the good fortune to stumble across a new potion.'

'Of course,' Mason replied, looking at the ground uncomfortably. 'Well, I will let you get on your way...'

'Good day, sir,' she said briskly before turning on her heel and continuing on her way out of the building.

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Greenwich, Ipswich: 20th May, 2010

Snape was startled from his thoughts by the loud, angry crack of Apparation from just up the stairs.

He had been expecting Hermione home twenty minutes before, but had been quickly consumed by his work once more and had barely noticed the time since. Looking up from the microscope when he heard the door to the lab open at the top of the stairs, he watched as his irate wife stomped down to him, her expression a mixture of annoyance and disgust. As he knew he was not guilty of doing anything to anger her, Snape assumed that her ire was directed at someone or something else.

'Sweetling, I thought you'd be home earlier,' he said, removing his dragon hide gloves and walking over to give her a peck on the cheek and a tight hug. 'I did a fair bit more testing on the samples St. Mungo's and the Ministry gave over to us, and we've had only positive results.'

Her annoyance seemed to melt away the moment his arms wound around her. 'That is wonderful news,' she said, resting her head against his shoulder.

'Were your students really that horrible today, or was the Dean of the college trying to pester you again?' he asked, leading her over to the workbench and guiding her to sit on a stool.

'Neither, actually,' she answered with a heavy sigh. 'I did not see the Dean today, and it looks as though all of my first-year class will be passing this semester at the very least there might even be a few distinctions.'

'What had you in such a foul mood when you arrived home?'

'One of my colleagues he teaches the second and third year classes,' she answered. 'You might know him. He's an arrogant, nosey git by the name of William Mason. He's a tall chap with brown hair and the most obscenely enormous moustache known to man.'

'I recall meeting him at a convention once probably even the one we attended last year,' he said, frowning in thought. He found it hard to believe he couldn't remember such a remarkable-sounding growth of facial hair.

'It doesn't matter now, anyway,' she said, closing her eyes and pinching the bridge of her nose. 'He was just pestering me about our work, trying to get gossip to sell to the *Daily Prophet*, no doubt. He seems rather jealous of our success.'

'And so he should be,' Snape said, leaning in to kiss his wife soundly on the lips. 'We are quite remarkable, aren't we?'

She giggled at that and smiled for the first time since arriving home that afternoon. 'You sweet talker,' she teased. 'I was working on a list during class today. We have a fair bit of paperwork to start filling out for this potion. And I was thinking instead of charging for distribution, we should apply for Ministry and external funding for the potion, and start a rehabilitation project to help magical folk affected by the mutation to re-enter wizarding society.'

'Do you ever let your mind take a break?' he asked, astounded that she had come up with so much in the few hours she was in London.

'That can wait until I am old and no longer have a use for it,' she replied. 'I want to take advantage of it while I am still young enough to remember what I had for breakfast.'

'Ambition is going to be the end of us, I swear it,' Snape said with a smile. 'When all of this business with the Lycanthropy cure is wrapped-up, what say we go on a little holiday during the summer?'

He could see the cogs turning in her head as she considered his proposal carefully. 'Oh, alright,' she replied. 'We could use a holiday after this.'

Snape smiled, and the two of them set to work drafting a list for their next steps on the road to their potion's completion.

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To be continued.