

Changed Plans

by *debjunk*

Because of bad press, Hermione leaves her job at the Ministry and goes to work for Severus. Will they realize that great things can come from adversity?

One

Chapter 1 of 8

Because of bad press, Hermione leaves her job at the Ministry and goes to work for Severus. Will they realize that great things can come from adversity?

Chapter 1

Hermione walked quickly down Knockturn Alley, her head down. She knew her destination and came to it as quickly as possible. No one looked at her nor spoke to her as she moved, as this street was not the place for idle conversation or recognizing a neighbor. Finally, she arrived at her destination. She glanced up at the shop's marquis: *Severus Snape's Solutions*. Looking down at the newspaper in her hand, she grimaced. She knew he would be unbearable and that most of what he said would be right, but at this point in time, he was the only one she could turn to for help. She only hoped he would agree to her proposition. With a sigh, she opened the door, ignoring the bell tinkling as she did, and entered the shop.

Severus Snape looked up from his brewing as the witch entered his back room. Hermione smiled at him as their eyes met. Severus frowned.

"Your smile is fake. You know you don't need to pretend with me; I know you are upset. Do not try to hide it. What brings you here?"

"Have you seen the *Prophet* today?"

Severus glanced at the paper in her hand. "Yes," he answered. "I see they are at it again."

"I've resigned my job at the Ministry," Hermione stated with a slight lift of her chin.

"Then you are letting them win," Severus stated grimly.

Hermione slammed the paper onto a nearby table. "No, I am not!" Her lips thinned as she glared at the paper beneath her fist. "I will not let them win."

She expected his voice to be harsh, but it was soft when he replied. "Then why did you resign?"

The warmth in his voice tore down her defenses until a tear fell down her cheek. "I can't go anywhere or do anything without the press following me. I'm a liability at the Ministry. My boss was sympathetic, but this has been going on for months now. It's not going to let up. I had to leave."

Severus finished stirring his brew, folded his arms in front of him and studied her carefully. "So, what will you do?" he asked.

Hermione cleared her throat and looked down at her hands. "I was thinking I could work here with you."

Severus arched an eyebrow.

"Wait, hear me out," Hermione said as she motioned toward him. "You are always here in the back room, brewing. You could use someone out front so you wouldn't be disturbed by people coming in and out. I could take care of customers, and you could brew without interruption."

"I believe it would be very interruptive to have a gaggle of reporters swarming around here looking for the... what is it they're calling you... black-hearted temptress?"

She frowned. "That was last week. Now I'm the 'man-eater'." Grimacing, she tapped her fingers on the desk. "No one seems to remember that he was the one caught in bed with someone other than his wife."

"But you were the heartless one, divorcing him within a week. His mother said so."

"That's the nicest thing she's said."

"Which brings us back to my question. How will you avoid bringing a gaggle of press along with you every day to work?"

"This is Knockturn alley. No one would think to look for me here."

"Yes, because only the lowest of the low exist here," Severus said dryly.

"Severus, I didn't..."

He waived his hand to stop her. "I know what you meant," he replied shortly.

"I think in time you can get enough business to move to Diagon Alley. I want to help you do that."

"Despite my being cleared, the only people who trust my products are those who populate this street."

"Change the name of your product. No one needs to know it's you who makes it."

"No! I shouldn't have to hide my name to do what I love!" Severus growled.

"You're right, you shouldn't. And I should be able to go where I like without being accosted by reporters, but the world isn't like that. We have to do what we need to survive."

"There are some things which I refuse to do."

Hermione shrugged. "Then we'll find another way."

"I don't recall agreeing to your help."

"Severus, we've always worked well together before." Her eyes pled with him. She watched as he stared at her for the longest time.

"I still wonder why I agreed to collaborate with you on that first project years ago," Severus uttered.

Hermione smiled fondly in recollection. "So do I. Who knew we'd work together so well? You know you're not just a work partner. You're a good friend." She tilted her head and looked at him with an amused look. "Who would have thought, Severus Snape has a good friend. Inconceivable."

Severus scowled at her, but there was no anger in his glare. "Believe it or not, Hermione, I do have some friends."

"And I'm one of them. Now will you let me help you?"

Finally he said gruffly, "I'm sure I'll regret this soon enough, but you may start tomorrow."

Her smile was radiant. "Thank you! I promise you won't be sorry! I'll see you in the morning."

She turned and left, not hearing him mutter under his breath, "What have I done?"

A/N: This was a gift for madamsnape for the 2011 exchange. Her prompt was: Hermione changed her life plans (career/travel/location/up to you) because of someone important in her life (doesn't matter who) and she is beginning to resent it. Snape comes along... can he convince her that sometimes things do happen for a reason? EWE

Super duper thanks to slytherinlaurel, beta extraordinare, who whipped through this puppy like a madwoman for me. Love you hon!

Two

Chapter 2 of 8

Because of bad press, Hermione leaves her job at the Ministry and goes to work for Severus. Will they realize that great things can come from adversity?

CHAPTER 2

Hermione arrived early the next morning, smiling and ignoring Severus' scowling at her cheery disposition.

"Good morning!" she almost sang.

"Hermione, no one is that chipper in the morning."

Hermione shrugged. "I am. I'll just get settled in front. Don't worry about anything. If I need your advice, I'll come back and ask."

Severus was about to say something when she disappeared into the front part of the store. He shook his head before taking a few ingredients down from the shelves and beginning to brew.

Hermione settled in up-front. There was a nice desk towards the back of the store with a plush office chair. Orders could be taken and filled from that spot. Hermione settled into the chair and looked around. The shop was quite familiar as she had been frequenting it for seven years now. She'd garnered Severus' help with a particularly difficult case at the Ministry, and to her great surprise, she'd found him to be quite different from the dragon of a professor she remembered. Since then, she'd come to Severus with many issues, and they had become friends.

Hermione's musings were quickly pushed away as the bell over the door rang. An elderly woman, who more closely resembled a character from *The Wizard of Oz* than a real witch, came slowly in. She was bent over and used a cane to walk. Making her way to Hermione's desk, the woman sneered.

"Where's Severus? I need my potion."

Hermione smiled. "I'm his new assistant. I'll be more than happy to get it for you. What's your name?"

The woman screeched and started to yell. "My name?! Severus knows my name. Now tell him to get out here now and give me my potion!"

Before Hermione had a chance to respond, Severus swept through the curtain that separated his lab with the store holding a small vial.

"Here you are," he said calmly. "That should last until next month. I'll see you then."

The old woman grunted and slammed two galleons down onto Hermione's desk. Glaring at Hermione, she turned and slowly stalked out of the store. Once she was safely out of earshot, Severus turned to Hermione.

"One thing to remember about our clientele, Hermione: never ask them their names." With that, Severus disappeared through the curtain, leaving Hermione to stare after him.

The day literally dragged by. Few people came into the shop, and Hermione was beginning to realize why Severus didn't already employ an assistant. He simply didn't need one. A few orders came in via owl, and Hermione packed them up quickly and sent them off to what she suspected were fake addresses. That, however, was all the activity that came through for the day. At closing, she went into the back room and looked at Severus, who was furiously stirring a cauldron. Waiting until he seemed to have completed his task, she began when he looked up at her.

"Severus, is it always this slow?"

"Yes. Most of my business is done via owl shipments."

Hermione's eyebrows knit together. "How do you survive?"

Severus huffed. "The price of my orders make up for the lack of quantity."

"Yes, but think of how much better you could be doing if you catered to more of the population."

"Hermione..." Severus ground out. "We went over that yesterday. I will not compromise my products' name just to be accepted."

"I know, I know. It's just that..."

"Hermione!" Severus said with finality.

Hermione scowled at him. She'd long ago learned not to be offended by his gruffness. She usually found his attitude comical these days, but today, it just irritated her. "Fine!" she retorted. "You won't hear another word about it from me!" She turned and stormed out before Severus had an opportunity to tell her how perfect her solution was.

In the front of the shop, she fumed as she gathered her purse to leave. This wasn't over. Severus needed help, and she was going to give him help, whether he liked it or not. She looked around the small shop, taking in the rows of potions packing the thin shelves that lined the walls. It was unjust for him to have to suffer for everyone else's bigotry. Something had to be done. With a determined look, Hermione vowed to herself that she'd have an answer soon. Swinging her bag over her shoulder, she yelled to the back room, "Good night, Severus. I'll see you tomorrow."

She smiled slightly when she heard the grunt he gave in response. The man was almost endearing in his predictability for being gruff.

The next morning came quickly, and Hermione entered the shop with a bright outlook. She meandered to the back of the shop and greeted Severus. His customary scowl was her only reply.

"Would you like something to eat?" she asked him. "Maybe a muffin or toast with some tea will improve your morning disposition?"

Severus looked up at her and then quickly back down to the cauldron he was filling with ingredients. "That would be welcome," he said.

"All right, then, I'll be right back."

Ten minutes later she was back with a large platter of toast and jams and two steaming cups of tea. Severus moved to an empty table and motioned for her to place the small feast there so they could enjoy it.

"Where did you come upon all this?" Severus asked as he took a piece of toast and began to spread currant jam liberally upon it.

"Have you heard of the Floo network?" Hermione asked saucily. "It's just a second to get back to my flat and whip up a decent breakfast."

Severus gave her a measured look. "No press was waiting at your fireplace, eager to find out who you were with all night?"

Hermione frowned. "Very funny." She pulled *The Daily Prophet* from her robes and placed it on the table between them. "I was going to wait until after breakfast to look at this, but it seems she's at it again."

Severus opened the paper and read the headline aloud.

"Gryffindor Princess a Spoiled Brat!" He huffed as he took a bite of toast.

"Wonderful," Hermione said in disgust. "You might as well read it aloud. Perhaps I can gather some perspective from sharing this with someone instead of steaming alone in my flat at her lies."

Severus nodded and began. "Gryffindor princess, Hermione Granger, war hero and best friend of the 'Boy who Lived', is not the sweet, angelic, goodie-two-shoes she's led us to believe. According to a close source, Granger's ex-mother-in-law...Molly Weasley, the young woman throws tantrums at the drop of a hat."

Severus continued. "My Ron loves his Quidditch," reports Mrs. Weasley. "Of course you all know that. He's a superstar. Well, Hermione would never support him. She would hardly ever go to his matches, always complaining about the time taken out of her schedule. She never supported her husband. It usually ended up with her stomping out of the room in a huff, screaming that she wanted to do something-or-other and that he was keeping her from it."

Hermione choked on her toast. Severus looked up with concern. Hermione was taking large breaths to calm herself. She could feel her blood boiling within her, and the urge to throw the whole platter of breakfast across the room was so great, she was having trouble controlling herself.

"All right?" Severus asked as she fought to calm down.

"I trusted that woman! I opened up to her as if she were my own mother!" She looked down and swallowed hard. "I loved her like my own mother," she said quietly.

"Hermione..."

She lifted her head quickly. "Do you want to know the truth of that story? That 'tantrum' happened once, just before we split up. She claims I never went to his games. I never missed one! Never! But no one seems to remember that. No. This game, however, was right during the time I had a huge audit due the next day. I had been running behind on my work because Ron insisted I take off to accompany him to the Cannons/Falcons game. If I didn't finish the audit by that night, my job was going to be in jeopardy. You would have thought I'd stabbed Ron through the heart telling him I couldn't attend his precious game! Did I stomp out of the room? Yes, I did! Was it childish? Probably, but his actions were even more childish. He accused me of loving my job more than him! I didn't... I couldn't... I..."

She felt a hand on her shoulder and looked up to see Severus had risen and was standing next to her, leaning forward with a look of concern on his face. "Hermione, let it out. You've had it bottled up inside you for months now. Just let it out."

Her carefully constructed dam of emotions broke, and the tears she'd denied herself since her divorce fully consumed her. She buried her head in her hands and cried. "Why must she lie to make her son look good? He's a celebrity. Everyone loves him anyway. Why does she have to make me look like a heartless wench?"

Severus stooped down and rubbed her back. "She has grown used to the media attention and thrives on it. She isn't doing this for Weasley; she's doing it for herself. If she doesn't come up with lies to say about you, she will not have the attention."

She lifted her head and looked into Severus' eyes. "I trusted her. She's twisted everything I've ever said to her into a trashy news story."

"The press will eventually lose interest. She will be left with nothing then."

"What if they don't?"

"Well, a judicial curse or carefully placed potion will silence her for good."

Hermione pulled back and giggled. "Don't you dare, Severus Snape. She's not worth getting in trouble with the law."

"I'm always in trouble with the law, remember? My shop is located in Knockturn Alley because no one wants to be associated with a criminal and all that claptrap."

"Still, I wouldn't want you to be in trouble because of some sense of chivalry and revenge on the woman who is out to destroy me."

"You take away all my fun," Severus said sarcastically.

Hermione smiled, but her cheeriness was short-lived. Her face fell as her mind drifted to Ron and their last conversation together.

"He said I never loved him—that I only was with him because everyone expected that of us," she told Severus quietly.

"Is that true?" Severus asked.

"I loved Ron."

"I don't doubt that, but was it the love of a man and woman, or that of a dear friend?"

She opened her mouth to respond, but closed it rapidly. Looking away, Hermione thought hard. Her eyes closed as she recalled Ron's proposal to her. She had been happy, but not ecstatic, as a bride-to-be should.

"I loved him like that once," she confessed. "A long time ago. Right after the war." Her eyes met Severus'. "He was right, though. I'm just realizing, he was right. By the time he asked me to marry him, we'd become very comfortable. There were things about Ron that I didn't like, but I just figured that was part of any relationship."

Severus nodded.

"But those things... they were too much for me. In the end, we were so very different, and our commonalities disappeared without a cause to fight against. I don't think I ever realized that until just now." She hid her face in her hands again. "What did I do? I should have never agreed to marry him!"

"Hermione," Severus offered. He moved his hand to her shoulder and grasped her firmly until she looked up at him. "Never regret what you gave fully. You may not have loved him as completely as you thought, but you gave of yourself to him. You spent years trying to make it work." His jaw tightened. "And he rewarded you by sleeping with anyone he could find."

Hermione looked to Severus gratefully. "Thank you," she answered quietly. "I wouldn't have thought..."

Severus frowned and stood up quickly. "You wouldn't have thought what? That someone as inexperienced as I would have anything to say on the subject of love?"

"No, no, it's not that!" Hermione replied quickly.

"Then what did you mean?" he snarled.

"Severus, I know very little of your love life except for your love of Lily Potter. I wasn't implying that you're inexperienced.... Are you...? I guess it doesn't matter.... I just meant that you are so direct and matter-of-fact all the time. I wasn't expecting the depth of your concern toward a problem that hardly affects you. Oh, I'm not explaining myself right. I just was surprised that..."

"Stop now, before you hurt yourself," Severus said sarcastically.

Hermione frowned to herself. "I only meant that I wasn't expecting you to comfort me with my petty problems."

"I am your friend. Why wouldn't I want to help with your so-called 'petty' problems?"

"I... I just..." Hermione looked down into her lap.

Severus' tone lightened somewhat. "I believe I understand what you are trying to say with all those half-sentences. Really, Granger, you do get tongue-tied when you're embarrassed, don't you?"

"I... Just forget it." She looked away crossly.

"I misunderstood what you said before. I am just joking now," Severus replied as an explanation for his actions.

Hermione looked back at him. "And you're back to your clipped directness again. See what I mean?"

"I suppose," Severus conceded. His gaze sent a shiver down her spine.

"Thank you again," Hermione said as she smiled at Severus. "You have a way of making me see things differently, things as they should be." She trailed off and stood. "I should get to the front--could have a customer at any minute."

"Not likely," Severus grumbled as he turned and went back to his cauldron. "Have at it anyway," he said in dismissal.

Hermione felt a bit let down as she went to the front of the store. She wondered why that was.

A/N: Sorry this has taken a while to post. Was on vacation. Hope you are all enjoying this. Many thanks to slytherinlaurel for the beta work.

Three

Chapter 3 of 8

Because of bad press, Hermione leaves her job at the Ministry and goes to work for Severus. Will they realize that great things can come from adversity?

Chapter 3

It took a week before Hermione figured out what to do. She'd been organizing the shelves and dusting the vials when the idea came to her.

"Oh, I can't believe I didn't think of that sooner!"

She hurried over to the desk and grabbed some parchment and a quill.

"It was right there all along! I don't know why I didn't remember him! I need to take a day off or something because it seems that all of this stress with the paper is becoming too much for me."

The curtain opened, and Severus poked his head through it. "Who are you talking to?" he asked.

Hermione looked up with wild eyes. "Oh! No one! Sometimes when I get a good idea, I talk to myself. Sorry!"

Severus eyed her curiously. "What good idea are you blabbering on about?"

"It's just something for Ginny. Don't mind me!" She laughed nervously and waved him away with her hand. "Really, boring stuff. You wouldn't want to know the inner workings of her relationship with Harry, now, would you?"

Severus cringed. "No, no, I wouldn't. Ahem, carry on then." He quickly disappeared back to his lab.

Hermione sighed in relief. "Good going, Granger," she said to herself quietly. "A little secrecy is definitely in order."

She penned a quick note, which for Hermione was only two feet of parchment. Bounding up, she grabbed a shipping box and went to the shelves, selecting twenty different potions and placing them in the box. Packing and sealing it carefully, she attached her message to it and took it to the delivery owl. Grabbing two treats, she fed the owl.

"I'm not sure how far you go to some of your deliveries, but this one will take you some time, as it's quite a bit away. Please deliver this to Viktor Krum, Bulgaria."

The owl hooted at her, took the string-wrapped parcel in its talons and flew off. Hermione watched the owl soar into the sky.

"I hope this works," she mused to herself. She smiled, turned, and made her way back into the lab.

"Severus, would you like some lunch?" she asked.

Severus looked up quickly. His eyes narrowed at her. "Why are you smiling like that? You are hiding something."

"Who, me?" Hermione protested, making a mental note to look more serious. "I'm not hiding anything. I just wanted to know if you were hungry."

Severus cleared his throat and looked down into his cauldron. After a minute he answered her. "I am not."

Hermione giggled. "It took you that long to figure that out?"

Severus didn't look up. "I will take my lunch later. Thank you for the offer."

She became serious then. "Are you upset with me?"

"No! I'm... I'm just very busy."

Tilting her head a little, she regarded him thoughtfully. "Oh. Ok, then. Well, I'm going to grab a quick lunch. I'll be back soon, ok? Are you sure you don't want me to pick something up for you for later?"

"I'm fine," Severus replied in a clipped tone.

Sighing, she turned to leave. "All right, then," she said over her shoulder as she left the room. Her eyebrows knit together as she grabbed her purse and left the store.

Severus was acting oddly. He'd been a bit aloof all week. She'd brought breakfast for them every day, and he'd accepted gracefully, but had always been reserved and quiet while they ate. Every offer for lunch had been rebuffed just like this one. She was at a loss. His behavior was typical of the Severus Snape most people knew, but Hermione had found him to be much more open with her because of their past working relationship.

She'd learned to see beyond his gruff exterior into the man that he truly was. They'd been friends now since before she'd married Ron. Hermione had been shocked that the harsh man who had insulted her so often in her youth had become one of her closest friends. She'd learned to read his moods, and his approach to his dealings with her had softened considerably. His current turn back to Mr. Unapproachable frustrated her.

As she made her way to Diagon Alley and some lunch, Hermione hoped that he would get over whatever was bothering him. She missed the talks they always had.

Turning the corner, she found herself back in civilization. An elderly witch eyed her as she emerged from Knockturn Alley. The look on the witch's face told Hermione that the old woman thought she'd been up to no good. She sighed. What did she expect, coming from Knockturn Alley? Anyone emerging from there would be looked at in an equally harsh light. Unfortunately, things went pear-shaped from there. The woman pointed at her and cried aloud to anyone who would hear her.

"There she is! The Hussy of Gryffindor! She's a dark witch, I tell you!"

Hermione looked at the woman with wide eyes and began to shake her head, but it was too late. Everyone in the vicinity rushed over to her and began to yell.

"Liar!"

"Spoiled brat!"

"Black heart!"

Hermione stepped back quickly, trying to get around the crowd, however, there was no escape, and they kept getting closer and closer. She was being backed into a corner. Quickly, she tried to Apparate, but everyone was too close. They were grabbing at her and pulling on her clothes, spitting harsh words and epithets at her. Grabbing her wand, she cast a quick Protego spell, repelling the crowd so she could run far enough away to Apparate to the safety of the shop.

"Stupid, asinine, people!" she cursed loudly when she appeared in the apothecary. "Why can't they find something better to do with themselves instead of accosting me?"

Severus emerged quickly from the back lab, concern on his face. "What happened?" he asked quickly.

Hermione looked at him crossly. "Some old woman pointed me out coming from Diagon Alley, and I was mobbed by a group of harpies! Honestly, I don't know how I could be labeled a whore and a frigid ice princess in the same breath!"

"Are you all right?"

She nodded. "Yes, but they surrounded me so quickly, I couldn't Apparate away. I had to use a shield so I could get far enough away to escape."

Severus frowned. "Did they hurt you?"

"Not really, although they were grabbing at me. The nerve of some people, thinking they can put their hands all over you just because they read about you in the paper."

"Yes, that's why I don't go out much."

Hermione looked to Severus. "They still attack you when you go out?"

Severus gave her a quick nod. "It's mostly glares and epithets, and usually only one person at a time, but it certainly becomes tiresome after years of abuse."

"I'm sorry, Severus. I didn't realize it was that hard for you still."

"No matter." Severus went to his desk and pulled out the bottom drawer. He removed a small box and carried it over to Hermione.

"I meant to give this to you the other day, but I forgot," he said as a way of explanation as he extended his hand with the box in it.

"Oh, thank you," Hermione said in puzzlement. She took the box and opened it. Inside was a necklace with a small jade phoenix on it.

"Severus, this is beautiful! Thank you."

"It's a Portkey," he explained. "Not your average Portkey, as it is not made of garbage. It will transport you directly here if you ever are in danger like you were today. You won't have to worry about finding space for Apparition with this."

Hermione's eyes filled with gratitude as she flung her arms around Severus. "Thank you so much! Severus, it's beautiful and practical all in one!"

Severus' arms went around her, and she felt comforted at once. Too soon he was awkwardly pushing her away from him and clearing his throat.

"Very well, then. I have potions to brew. I'll be in the back if you need me."

She watched him sadly as he abruptly turned and, in a swish of robes, billowed back to his work area. She wished she could have a little more of that hug from him. It had felt like home.

Hermione turned as the bell over the door rang. She immediately recognized Draco Malfoy as he gave her an incredulous look.

"Granger! So, this is where you've disappeared to?"

Hermione smiled at him. Draco Malfoy was another surprise in her life. He worked for the Ministry and even though they didn't work for the same department, they'd struck up a friendship. It had started when out of the blue the pompous, proud Malfoy had apologized for treating her so horribly in school. She'd just about fainted. Ron had told her he was up to no good, but Hermione had found that their friendship had benefited the both of them. She cherished it quite dearly.

"Draco! What are you doing here?"

"Do you think these golden locks flow so beautifully on their own?" he asked her with an impish grin as he pointed to his hair.

"Severus makes your hair products?" she cried.

"Of course. I would trust my hair to no one else."

Hermione giggled. "That's kind of funny, considering the state of Severus' hair."

"There is nothing wrong with my hair!" Severus bellowed from behind her.

Hermione turned in mortification. "... I just meant..."

"Slave over a cauldron night and day and you may, now and then, forget to hit the shower after a long days work."

"I'm sorry, Severus. I was just... Your hair is fine. I just meant before, at school. It was... well, you know..." She looked away, her cheeks red in embarrassment.

"I know... what?"

"Severus," she pleaded.

"No, finish your sentence. This will be good."

"Limp," she said tersely.

"Limp?"

Hermione nodded.

Draco chuckled. "She's a diplomat, Severus. She'd never tell you the full truth. Your hair was a solid mass of grease, and you know it."

Severus moved to within centimeters of Hermione. "All the better to keep the hordes of women away, no?"

Hermione's eyes grew wide. "You... you did that on purpose?"

"Relationships of any kind are a liability when one is a spy. The fewer who got close to me, the safer everyone was. Who would want to get close to an ugly, greasy, slime-ball?"

"But you're not ugly," Hermione said softly.

Severus arched an eyebrow. "You're not going to argue about being a greasy, slime-ball?"

Hermione stood her ground. She'd learned long ago not to be intimidated by Severus. "Heavens no! That was definitely an accurate description of you during our school days. Wasn't it, Draco?"

Draco bent low with laughter. "Oh, she's got you there, Severus."

Severus straightened. "Yes, I find Miss Granger gives as well as she gets nowadays. Much better than she was as a student, always waving her hand in the air, crying to be noticed."

"I'd watch her if I were you. She's got a strong right hook," Draco advised.

"Does she, now?" Severus arched an eyebrow at her. "I've got your products in the back, Draco. I'll just go retrieve them."

As he disappeared, Hermione turned to Draco. "How have you been?" she asked.

Draco shrugged. "Oh, you know. About the same. Flocked by the women, hated by the men. What can an Adonis like me do?"

Hermione giggled. She knew Draco was only half joking. He was the envy of most men because of his good looks. He never lacked a lady on his arm. He also never made promises he couldn't keep, unlike her ex-husband who also never had the same woman on his arm as of late.

Draco looked at her seriously. "I was sorry to hear you'd resigned your position. Now I have no one to torment."

Hermione shook her head. "You're terrible, Draco."

"Are you ok, though?" Draco asked with concern. He reached out and took her arm in comfort.

She nodded, looking up at him and smiling. "I'm tough. A few harsh words aren't going to send me into hiding."

"You could have fooled me."

"I'm just trying to keep a low profile."

"I'm here if you need me."

At that point, Severus returned. The look he gave Draco was utterly mutinous as he held out the small bag to him with his hair products. His eye lingered on Draco's hand which was still on Hermione's arm before he glared at the younger man once again.

"Here you go," Severus said, shoving the bag into Draco's chest. "Best be on your way. You wouldn't want those lovely blonde tresses to go limp, now, would you?"

Draco caught the bag with both hands and looked curiously at Severus. "No," he said in puzzlement. "I suppose I wouldn't." With a nod to Hermione, he turned and left the small shop.

Hermione turned to Severus. "You were a bit short with Draco, weren't you?"

Severus sneered at her. "Don't you have work to do?" he demanded before stalking back to his lab.

Hermione gaped after him. She wasn't quite sure what to think of his actions just now. She'd never seen him be rude to Draco before. He'd been acting strangely all week, though. Pursing her lips, she decided to find out just what was wrong with him. Marching back to his lab, she was surprised to see him sitting on a bench next to his cauldron, his head in his hands. She went over to him and sat down next to him.

"Care to tell me what that was all about?" she asked without preamble.

"Leave it, Hermione."

"I will not," she said indignantly. "You have been a bear all week, and I've never seen you act so rudely to Draco. Whatever has gotten into you? Have I done something that has upset you?"

Severus removed his hands from his face and stared down at the floor for a long time. Hermione waited, letting him sort his words.

"You're right," he stated finally. "I was short with Draco. I have had little sleep this week. My mind will not stop racing whenever I lie down, and then I have... disturbing dreams."

Hermione placed an arm on his shoulder. "I'm sorry. You should have said something. I have bad dreams a lot, too."

Severus nodded, but didn't look at her. "You have done nothing, Hermione. I didn't mean to make you feel as if you had."

"These dreams, what are they about?"

"I'd rather not discuss them. Suffice it to say that they have me waking up and not being able to get back to sleep."

"Have you tried Dreamless Sleep?"

He gave a quick nod. "Only when I need a full night's sleep. I don't like taking sleep aids."

Hermione rubbed his shoulder absentmindedly. "I do the same. I know it's not supposed to be addicting, but I don't want to become dependent on something to make me sleep."

Abruptly Severus stood, disengaging her hand. "I should get back to work. I have already ruined this draught by letting it simmer too long."

Hermione eyed Severus in amazement. "Wow," she commented.

"Wow what?" he asked grumpily.

"I'm surprised. I thought you never made mistakes in the lab."

"Everyone makes mistakes, Hermione."

"I know, but you are so skilled at what you do. I just assumed you never let things like that happen."

Severus smirked then. "Sorry to make you realize I am human."

Hermione shrugged. "You'll always be Superman to me." She left him staring after her, an amazed look on his face.

Four

Chapter 4 of 8

Because of bad press, Hermione leaves her job at the Ministry and goes to work for Severus. Will they realize that great things can come from adversity?

Chapter 4

Four days later, Severus had gone to get supplies, and Hermione was up on a ladder, putting vials onto the shelves when Draco returned. He rushed in, startling Hermione, who wobbled at the top of her ladder. Grasping the ladder tightly, she glared at Draco.

"Goodness! You almost made me fall!"

"Sorry, Hermione. I'm just excited is all."

Hermione descended the ladder and turned back to Draco. "What's so exciting?" she asked curiously.

"I figured out what you need to do, Hermione. You know, to get the press off your back."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "What? What is it you've come up with?"

"Don't scoff until you've heard it. It's brilliant! You need to show yourself, and not just you. Show the world you don't care what Molly Weasley says, you're a vibrant woman who can get the man she wants."

Hermione chewed her lower lip. "I see where you're going, but I'm lacking one thing... the man I want."

Draco opened his arms wide and smiled. "At your service, my lady."

Hermione scoffed. "Draco! You know I love you to death, but really, we'd never work."

Draco's face fell. "You've wounded me, truly."

Hermione slapped his arm and shook her head. "Besides, you like being seen with multiple women. For this to work, we'd need to date exclusively... for *months*."

Draco frowned. "You think it would take that long?"

Hermione nodded. "If we're just seen once, then I'm the lady killer, or you're just taking advantage of the situation. If we're seen for a week, we're just trying to show off. We'd have to go for months for the press to tire of us and think that the whole thing is serious, especially given your track record. When's the last time you've been out with a woman twice?"

Draco shrugged. "I can't recall, if you must know."

Smiling, Hermione continued. "Thank you, though. You don't know how much it means to me that you were willing to parade around as a romantic interest just to stop the paper from making me into a harpy."

Draco smiled with her and pulled her close. "I just hate seeing you hiding out here," he answered as he hugged her.

"I like it here," Hermione said into his coat.

A dark voice came from the doorway. "Draco, a word outside?"

Hermione pulled back and saw a furious Severus Snape glaring at Draco. "Severus! When did you come in?" she asked with a smile, trying to get Severus to calm his fury,

but Severus just glared at her and turned, leaving the shop, obviously expecting Draco to follow suit.

"Oh man, he's got it bad for you," Draco muttered as he moved away from Hermione.

"What?" Hermione cried in surprise.

"You mean you haven't noticed? He's like an overprotective bear whenever I get near you. He looked as if he's about to murder me, just because I was giving you a friendly hug. He's probably going to tear me apart and advise me that you're not to be touched because I'm nothing but a Casanova."

Hermione stared at him in shock. "... you really think so?"

"I've known Severus for as long as I can remember. He fancies you. I just know it."

Hermione was speechless as Draco nodded to her and left the shop to suffer his fate from the irate man awaiting him.

Hermione watched him go and thought about what he'd said. Could Severus possibly fancy her? That would explain some of his actions this last little while. She raced to the door and waved her wand. An extendable ear appeared from nowhere. She attached it to the door and listened to the conversation on the other side of it. Unfortunately, Severus must have cast a Muffliato spell, because she couldn't hear a thing. Oh, the ability to change into a fly would be so welcome right now. She huffed and went back to the ladder. She'd ask Severus about his outburst when he was done.

"Draco, she already had a man who threw her over for a million other women. She does not need that from you. She trusts you!" Severus said bitterly.

"Severus, you're blowing this all out of proportion. If you like her so much, why don't you do something about it?" Draco retorted.

Severus snorted. "Surely, you don't think..."

"It's obvious. Whenever I get near her, you go all caveman and snarl at me. Honestly, I don't think she'd mind you asking her out."

"She has more important things on her mind."

"You are probably one of those things."

"That's impossible."

"Why?"

Severus shook his head. "She cared for Weasley. She's just getting over that. Her mind isn't looking for someone to occupy her time."

"Severus, you can change that! Make her see that leaving Weasley was the best thing she ever did because it opened the door for the two of you!"

Scoffing, Severus shook his head. "She doesn't see me like that."

Draco moved closer to his friend. "Because you won't let her see you like that. You're her friend already. She talked about you all the time at work. I think she just needs to realize she has feelings for you, too."

Severus stared at Draco for a while. "Perhaps you're right," he agreed finally.

"Of course I'm right. Look at my track record."

"I am not interested in a one night stand."

Draco patted Severus' shoulder. "No, no, of course not. But honestly, you need to do something, or you're going to lose her."

Severus pulled away and scowled. "What about you?"

"She laughed in my face!"

"Smart girl."

Draco shook his head. "All right, I've had enough abuse from the two of you. I'm heading home. Big date tonight."

Severus rolled his eyes.

"Just remember what I said!" Draco admonished before he Apparated away, leaving Severus frowning after him.

Severus entered the shop after his talk with Draco. Hermione eyed him curiously.

"Don't you have potions to label?" he asked gruffly as he made his way to his lab.

Hermione frowned, slammed the bottle she was shelving down onto the ladder, and descended it quickly. She marched into Severus' lab and folded her arms in front of her.

"Would you mind telling me what that was all about?"

"I have things to do, Hermione. I don't have time to gossip right now."

She stormed over to him as anger filled her. "We have addressed this before, Severus Snape, and I won't be appeased until I get a good explanation from you. Why have you been so horrible to Draco these last times he's been in the shop?"

Severus sighed and stared into his cauldron. "I heard a rumor and foolishly believed it. I accused Draco of doing what I'd heard before getting his side of the story. He explained, and I realized I'd jumped to conclusions. May I get back to work now?"

"Did this have something to do with me?" Hermione asked, not letting him off the hook quite so quickly.

Severus glanced up at her, and then back to his cauldron. "Not really. It had more to do with me than anything."

Hermione relaxed. "Ok. I'm sorry I intruded. It's really not my business, but Draco thought this had something to do with me."

"Hermione, I've already explained it. I've fallen behind, and I need to get this potion done so it can be bottled and shipped."

"All right. I'm sorry. I'll be up front if you need me." Hermione stared at him for a moment. He didn't look up at her at all. She shook her head and left, wondering just what it

was he was keeping from her.

Five

Chapter 5 of 8

Because of bad press, Hermione leaves her job at the Ministry and goes to work for Severus. Will they realize that great things can come from adversity?

Chapter 5

The next day started much as all the others previously had with Severus and Hermione sharing breakfast. Severus was grumpy before tea as usual. It was, however, the conversation at breakfast that surprised Hermione.

"I know you've badgered me endlessly about joining you for lunch each day, and thus far I've been unable to do so. I do have some time today, so if you are agreeable..."

"To lunch?"

Severus gave a slight tip of his head in agreement.

Hermione beamed at him. "I'd love it if you joined me for lunch, Severus!"

So, unbeknownst to Hermione Granger, her courting had begun.

Lunch consisted of a Floo back to Hermione's apartment. They decided that anything on Knockturn Alley was a bit too dismal, and Diagon Alley was quite out of the question at this time. Severus was put to work making a salad, and soon Hermione had some turkey sandwiches ready to go. They gathered everything to the table and sat across from each other, munching on sandwiches and salad.

Severus was the first to break the amiable silence that had been surrounding them as they ate. "The Prophet today was filled with pictures of your ex and a very buxom blonde. It made me wonder if most of her brain cells had been trapped in her chest."

Hermione gaped at him before giggling. "I have to admit, I thought that too!" she agreed.

"Hermione, doesn't it bother you seeing him like that?"

Hermione looked down at her salad and fiddled with a grape tomato. "It did. You remember how devastated I was when I found him with that woman. Honestly, though, it's been long enough that I'm very used to it." She shook her head. "I would have never thought of him as a player before, but he certainly has proven me wrong."

"Do you think it's some kind of early mid-life crisis?"

Hermione laughed. "He's twenty-five. It's a little *too* early for a mid-life crisis. He's always craved attention...always wanted to be the hero. He was jealous of Harry for a time, but I had thought he'd grown up. He's always searched for recognition, and this is his way to draw attention to himself without being tagged with Harry or me."

"You deserve better than him, you know that, right?"

Hermione looked up at Severus. He was looking at her with such intensity it caused her to blush. "Yes, of course I know that. However, Molly has made sure that no man ever looks at me with any form of attraction. All they will see is a gold digger."

"Those who get to know you will see Molly for the liar she is."

Hermione gave a strangled laugh. "No one will want to get near enough to know me with all that bad press. All they want to do is point and shout."

"You are much more than a gold digger to me, Hermione."

Her eyes met his, and she saw sincerity in them. Her mind flashed back to what Draco had said about him fancying her. Right at this moment she could believe that, the way he was looking at her.

She cleared her throat nervously. "I know that, Severus, but you have known me for years."

He scowled and looked back to his plate. "They just need to give you a chance," he grumbled.

Hermione exhaled the breath she had not realized she'd been holding. She admitted to herself that she was disappointed that he hadn't stated anything more about possible affection toward her. Ever since Draco had said something the day before, she had mulled it over and found she would be quite welcoming of attentions from Severus Snape. It had seemed he was about to divulge something. Had her response made him question her interest in him?

"We should get back to the shop, Hermione," Severus said, breaking her out of her reverie.

"Oh, oh, yes. Yes, we should," she stuttered.

Severus raised an eyebrow at her as he extended his hand for her to take. She placed her hand in his and felt as if it belonged there. Not taking her eyes off his, she stood as he held her hand. They stared into one another's eyes for several seconds before Severus moved. To her surprise, he raised her hand to his lips and gave her the faintest of kisses on it.

"Back to work, my lady," he said as he pulled her along to the fireplace. Entering first, he gave her a smoldering look before Flooing back to the shop. Hermione staggered back, her hand on her chest. Never before had she felt something so intense from such a simple gesture. She sighed to herself. She hoped she was reading Severus right, because she would be crushed if he wasn't interested.

Nothing was said of their lunch once they both got back to the shop, and Hermione was beginning to wonder if it all had been an overactive imagination on her part. She wandered into the back room at closing.

"Everything is closed up front," she advised Severus.

He looked up at her and nodded. The intense look was back in his eyes, but her hope that he would confess an attraction to her was lost with his next statement.

"I will see you tomorrow, then."

Hermione gave him a puzzled look. If she were younger, she'd have probably stamped her foot in frustration, but she kept her cool.

"Tomorrow, yes. Good night." She turned and exited the lab, leaving a smirking Severus Snape behind her.

Hermione was up on the ladder once again. It seemed that the only potions Severus brewed as of late were stored in the highest places in the store. Probably because they were the most dangerous that he brewed.

"Hermione, what are you doing up there?" Severus boomed below her.

She jumped at his voice, not realizing he had snuck up on her. Gripping the ladder for dear life, she scowled down at him.

"Come down this instant!" Severus demanded.

"You about made me fall!" She railed as she descended the ladder.

An arched eyebrow met her at the bottom of the ladder. "Allow me to show you something," Severus said.

He extracted his wand. "This item allows a witch or wizard to channel their magic so that they may use it to accomplish things without Muggle means such as... ladders."

Hermione's eyes narrowed. "I understand that, but these potions can't come in contact directly with magic or they could cause this entire shop to explode."

Severus' eyebrows furrowed. He went behind the far counter and pulled a box from underneath it. "Did it not occur to you to use these?" he asked. "The interior keeps any magic from entering." He placed a vial into the box and closed the lid. With a flick of his wand, he sent the box whizzing to the top shelf.

"Those are magic-blocking boxes? Why didn't you tell me? I had no idea that they had that ability. I've just been storing regular potions in them."

Severus glanced at her. "I'm sorry I didn't mention it. I thought you knew."

"I've never seen anything like those."

"Another thing the great know-it-all doesn't know?"

She stuck her tongue out at him as she drew near. Pulling a box out, she felt the interior of the box. "I can feel the difference!"

Severus snatched her hand out of the box. He held it and examined it carefully. "You must be careful never to put your whole hand into the box, Hermione. It can cut off the flow of your magic, which could lead to headaches or passing out. Prolonged exposure can cause a ripple in your magic large enough that you would lose your powers." His eyes met hers. He folded her palm up and grasped her hand within his gently. "I wouldn't want you hurt."

"I'll be more careful," she muttered, unable to break his gaze.

"Please do."

Was he getting closer?

"I would never forgive myself if something happened to you," Severus continued.

Oh, yes, he was getting closer. Hermione caught her breath. She moved ever-so-slightly closer to him. "You would never let anything happen to me. I know that. I trust you," she explained.

He was almost to her lips now. She closed her eyes, anticipating his kiss. She knew he was going to do it. She could read it in his eyes, and just the thought of his lips on hers was sending shivers up and down her spine.

The shop bell clanged, its jarring sound breaking the moment and causing Severus to back up a few paces. Hermione opened her eyes and looked to the door, a frown set on her face. Severus turned and proceeded to help their customer, motioning him into the lab before him. The man wasn't back there long. When he exited, Hermione turned expectantly to the doorway, but Severus never came through.

Pouting, she took a magic-blocking box and began to fill it with potions, glancing up at the doorway every few seconds as she worked. She didn't know whether to go back there and make him give her that kiss or not. Perhaps he'd had second thoughts and was embarrassed by his actions. Perhaps, once again, she'd imagined the whole thing. Ultimately, she decided to just let it be. Severus Snape was not the type to be pushed into anything. She would wait and see what his next move would be.

A/N: Not sure why life goes by so quickly. This should have been posted days ago! Hope you enjoy this chapter. Thanks, slytherinlaurel, for the beta.

Six

Chapter 6 of 8

Because of bad press, Hermione leaves her job at the Ministry and goes to work for Severus. Will they realize that great things can come from adversity?

Two days had gone by, and no more advances had taken place. Oh, he'd looked at her as if he wanted to undress her with his eyes. He'd come close to her, held her hand off and on, but nothing more ever came of it. Hermione Granger was going insane.

She did know one thing now that she didn't know before. He was attracted to her. The looks, the caressing of her hands, the things he said. He was carefully seducing her, and she knew it.

"You do realize, Hermione, if you worked back in the lab with me, I'd get nothing done."

"Weasley was a fool to let such a rare gem slip through his fingers."

"If you hadn't found your ex-husband in that precarious position, you'd still be with the lout, and I would be a very lonely man."

Flirting. The man had been flirting shamelessly with her for the past two days, and she'd drunk every word up to the point that she ached for him. She narrowed her eyes, understanding coming to her.

It's some Slytherin form of courtship. He's trying to make me want him so much that I would never say no to his advances if they ever do come along. He'd better hurry, though, or I'll just jump him myself."

At that point in her daydreaming, Severus glided from the back room.

"Will you join me for dinner tonight at my home?" he asked. His eyebrow arched as he awaited her answer.

Oh, how she wanted to say no, just to see what he would do or say, but her subconscious beat her to it. She found herself accepting with a broad grin. Severus gave a slight nod and disappeared back into his lab. Merlin, he was sexy when he billowed.

Dinner was perfect. He'd cooked, and she was happy to say everything was delicious. They sat down to a candlelit dinner of steak and garlic mashed potatoes. The conversation was intense as they discussed the latest Potions almanac and its findings on ragweed as an intensifier in healing draughts.

"Honestly, Severus, I find it hard to believe that something that causes allergic reactions in many could be used to heal."

Severus scoffed. "It's a topical balm, so the ragweed won't affect the lungs as it usually does."

The debate had gone on for well over an hour, and the two had moved from the table to the sofa, where they sat next to one another, their eyes excited with the debate. At long last, Hermione ceded Severus' point.

"I'm sure the findings are right, but Severus, you have to admit that further study is needed."

Severus eyed her with respect. "I do believe that, Hermione. Until more research is done, these findings will not be fully conclusive."

Hermione smiled at him. "I always love debating with you, Severus. It awakens a part of my mind that usually doesn't get used with any of my other friends."

"I enjoy hearing your opinions on these matters also," Severus agreed. He moved closer and grasped her hand.

Hermione looked down at her hand and then up into his eyes. That intense look was back again, and she smiled warmly at him.

"Hermione... I..."

A furious tapping made him break off. He glowered at the window, where a black owl was tapping crazily.

"Merlin, can one not get peace in their own home!" he raged. Turning back to Hermione, Severus calmed himself. "Excuse me a moment," he offered as he stood.

Opening the window, he let the owl in.

"Zenthro, is that you?" Hermione exclaimed.

Severus was removing the parchment from the owl, who had turned his head and hooted at Hermione. "You know this bird?"

"Yes! It's..."

"Viktor Krum's." Severus finished as he read the name of the sender. "Whatever could he want?"

Opening the parchment, Severus read a few lines, then his eyes rose to Hermione. "You did this?"

Hermione blushed. "I just wanted you to have a chance, Severus."

Severus' face hardened to the passionless wall that had been so prevalent when she had been his student. She hadn't seen such a closed look on him in years. "I specifically told you to stay out of this, Hermione." Within two seconds he had crumpled up the letter and flung it to the floor. He strode over to her, rage filling his eyes. His voice was steady, although you could hear the anger in it. "I explained that I didn't want to sell myself short. I asked you to stay out of this."

Hermione stood to defend herself. "But Severus, Viktor owns his own company."

"Yes, a sell out! Cover my name with his, and no one will be the wiser," he raged. "Why, Hermione? Why must you always be the do-gooder? Why must you always try to fix things that don't need fixing? First it was that ridiculous charade with the house-elves while you were a student. Then it was your bleeding-heart tactics with the centaurs. And your husband... he was a project too, wasn't he? Do you not understand that some people don't want or need your help?"

"But... I specifically told Viktor..."

"Why did you tell him anything? This is my work, and I will sell it as my work!" He was nose to nose with her now.

"He uses the creator's name! He..."

"Get out!"

"Severus, I was just trying to help!"

Severus took her arm, spun her around, and pushed her toward the door. "You wonder why Weasley took solace in another woman's arms? He probably was just trying to escape the harpy he'd married!"

Hermione stopped dead. She turned to Severus, her eyes filled with hurt. She couldn't believe he'd said such a thing to her. Not after she'd opened her heart to him and bore her soul about her relationship with Ron. Turning toward Severus, she raised her hands up and pushed him.

"How dare you! How could you say that to me? I trusted you! Ron was *never* a project! How could you say such horrible things, Severus Snape? I thought you cared about me!"

She pushed him again, glaring at him in fury. "I was trying to help you. If you'd read that letter completely, you'd see that Viktor's company labels each potion with the name of the Potions master who created it. If he sent you a letter, then he's offering the same deal to you! Why must you be so hateful? Why must you tear down everything that has been building between us?"

Tears were now streaming down her face. Severus moved forward, but she backed away from him. "Don't!" she cried. "If I'm such a thorn in your side, you won't have to deal with me any more! You won't need to worry about me meddling in your business ever again. I quit! I will never cross your path again purposely for as long as I live!"

Storming out, she Apparated away as soon as her feet hit the sidewalk. She appeared in her flat, great sobs escaping her as she let her emotions boil to the surface. Hermione crumpled to the floor and wept.

It only took half an hour before Severus was knocking on her door. By that time her fit of crying was over, and Hermione was sitting on her couch, staring off into space trying not to remember the horrible fight that had just happened. The knock surprised her somewhat. She hadn't thought Severus Snape was the kind to come begging.

"Hermione?"

She stared at her fireplace.

"Hermione, please open the door."

Tears started again.

"Please, Hermione. I overreacted, I'm sorry."

She mustered all her strength to say only three words. "Go away, Severus." She felt dead inside. She really didn't care if she ever spoke to Severus Snape again. In fact, she was so despondent that hiding away in her flat indefinitely was sounding like a good plan. She just wished everything and everyone would be quiet.

"Hermione, please let me in."

Standing, she pointed her wand at the door, electrifying it to shock Severus when he knocked again. She heard him yell in surprise as the mild shock coursed through his body.

"Leave me alone, Severus," she said, almost to herself, but loud enough for him to hear it through the door. Turning, she made her way to her bedroom, where she closed the door quietly behind her. Sleep would be welcome, if it ever came.

Seven

Chapter 7 of 8

Because of bad press, Hermione leaves her job at the Ministry and goes to work for Severus. Will they realize that great things can come from adversity?

Chapter 7

Hermione tried to shut her eyes against the light, but like an impatient child it kept at her until she finally awoke fully. She glanced at the clock. She'd slept for only an hour all night. She'd cried, stared into space, rehashed events, and just mulled, but the thing she was looking for...sleep...had eluded her.

Sitting up, she rubbed her eyes. Her shoulders slumped. She had nowhere to be. She sunk back onto the bed. No, this wouldn't do at all. She had survived walking in on her husband of six years in an intimate moment with his whore, she would not let Severus Snape get the best of her. Rising again, she felt the depressive thoughts flow over her anyway. This was so much worse than her discovery of Ron, and she couldn't place why.

She remembered her admission to Severus that she hadn't loved Ron the way she should have. Could all this anger and depression be because she truly loved Severus? Her head hurt just thinking about it. She rose and went into the bathroom, rubbing her temple to ease the pounding within her skull. She hoped a shower would keep her mind off Severus. Unfortunately, the pounding water only made her think of his pounding on her door. She scrubbed quickly and shut the water off. "Enough!"

She dressed swiftly, throwing her jumper over her head in exasperation. She needed to talk to Severus, even if this was the last time she ever talked to him.

She touched the dragon necklace Portkey he'd given her and within seconds she was standing within the shop. The interior was dark; the place was obviously closed. Hermione went back into the lab. He hadn't been here yet. She wondered at that, as he never closed down the shop. What if he'd done something stupid? Worry filled her. She turned and with a pop, she was gone.

Appearing in front of Severus' home, she found the wards were down and his front door ajar. She knocked, but no sound came from within the house. Pushing the door open, the smell of alcohol assaulted her nose.

"Severus?" she called out. He didn't answer.

Hermione anxiously made her way into the sitting room. She found Severus there, his head draped over the back of the sofa, one leg stretched across it, the other one straight ahead, his arms akimbo.

"Severus?" she asked apprehensively.

"Uhhh," Severus muttered.

"Oh, thank Merlin you're all right," Hermione said as she stooped beside his sprawled out form.

"I ruin everything," he said in a slurred voice. "Should never open my mouth. It's filled with venom. Didn't need that stupid snake to bite me to fill me with it." He turned to

Hermione and pointed a finger into her chest. "I know you can't be here, so you must be a vision. A beautiful vision, but I digress... I'm filled with venom. I should just... disappear." He waved his hand in the air. "Then I won't hurt anybody. Why do I always hurt the ones I love, Hermione-vision? I don't mean to. I just spit out that venom, and then they know what I'm filled with, and they never talk to me again."

"Severus, I'm talking to you." Hermione replied.

"See?! You can't be real. She would not be talking to me. She wouldn't forgive me." He got closer, and Hermione could smell the Firewhiskey on his breath. "Lily never forgave me either. Lily was right; I'm evil. You should run, Vision. Just go and be with real-Hermione or else I'll hurt you, too."

"Where's your sober-up, Severus?"

"Bathroom, right-hand drawer, why? You think I'm drunk? I'm not drunk?" he slurred.

"Of course not. I'll just be right back."

Hermione's mind raced as she made her way to the bathroom. He hadn't meant it, obviously. He was beating himself up about it right now. But he had a point. He could be venomous at times. Could she handle that? Did she even want to now that she'd been on the receiving end of his ire? She didn't have an answer to that. Not yet, at least. The next little while and what Severus said would determine that for her.

Returning to his side, she held out the potion. He scowled at it.

"I said I'm not drunk!"

"Drink the potion, Severus," Hermione demanded.

"Oh, Merlin, you're real. Only the real Hermione would take such a tone."

"Drink this so we can have a decent conversation... please," Hermione dictated.

"Yes, ma'am." He grabbed the potion and downed it in one swig. The effect was immediate. The slack jawed expression was gone. A look of sheer grief filled him before he looked away.

"Not only have I treated you abominably, now you have seen me at my most foolish," he muttered.

"Severus, can we talk?"

"Hermione, you were right. I'm not a good friend. I'm not a good anything. You're best to move on and leave me to my ugliness."

"Look, I know you were upset with me, but what you said..."

"Was unforgivable, I know." Severus looked down in his lap. "I know," he whispered.

Hermione reached out and pulled his chin until he was looking at her again. "I was going to say 'uncalled for'."

He pulled out of her grasp and returned his gaze to his lap. "I read Krum's letter after you left. You were right. He's giving me full rights to the labeling, and he is only taking 20% of the profit. He states that his business is flourishing, and he wants to make sure his Potions masters feel they're of worth." Severus gave a short, gruff chuckle. "Actually, I couldn't have asked for anything more perfect, and I owe it to you."

Hermione sniffed. "Perhaps if you'd read the whole letter instead of flying off the handle, we wouldn't be in this predicament." Her shoulders slumped. "Look, what you said yesterday... part of it... was true."

His gaze shot to hers. "What do you mean?"

"When you accused me of being a do-gooder." Hermione, too, looked down into her lap. "I can't help myself, sometimes. I just hate seeing people suffering unjustly."

"I am sorry that I said what I did," Severus told her. "I was just angry. I said things I never meant to say to you."

"Deep down you think it, or you'd not have said it. Do you really think that Ron..." She choked up and couldn't go on.

He looked up then. "I think Ron is the biggest fool on the Earth to have let you go. To not spend his time with you but to go elsewhere just because of his celebrity is the most foul thing a man can do. If you were mine, I would treasure every minute with you."

"Do you mean it?" she asked tentatively.

"It doesn't matter. What I said to you was unforgivable."

"Severus, do you think me to be the type who holds a grudge? I don't like that you exploded at me. Not one bit. I should have told you what I was doing from the start, and I'm sorry for not doing that. Perhaps if I had explained Viktor's business before suggesting you submit your potions to him, you would have been open to that suggestion. You were so adamant, though, I took it upon myself and went behind your back. It won't happen again. Ever." She took his hand.

"As for what you did," she continued, "I can't have you be cruel like that to me again. I understand anger; I understand fighting, but I won't have you throwing slurs at me because you're trying to wound me. If you are going to be like that, we can just forget about any possible romance between the two of us. It won't work out."

His head snapped up, and he stared at her. "You mean after what I said, you are willing to move forward with a relationship?"

"That was what you were going to ask me before the owl knocked at your window, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but..."

"Then ask me."

"Hermione..."

"Ask me, Severus, please," she whispered.

"Would you consider deepening our relationship? I find the more I am with you, the more I am... falling in love with you."

"Severus, I'm falling in love with you, too. I was so hurt by what you said that it felt like I couldn't breathe."

"Hermione, I promise you I won't use such tactics against you in the future. I will not let the venom within me poison you ever again."

She smiled then. "You are more than just venom, you know. Please, let's just put this behind us."

His eyes filled with warmth and gratitude. "You are worth more than any treasure imaginable," he said before pulling her to him and kissing her.

Hermione's heart soared. Severus' lips covered hers, and his tongue finally pressed her for entrance. Soon they were entangled in each other's arms, enjoying one another in a new way. Hermione groaned with the movement of Severus' lips. His kisses became even more insistent with her moans. At long last she pulled away.

"Your Slytherin tactics worked," she said breathlessly.

Severus arched an eyebrow at her. "Whatever do you mean?"

"I know you were trying to drive me crazy this last week. You wanted me so off kilter that I would just fall into your arms when you suggested we get together." She poked him in the chest. "Don't think I didn't know what you were doing."

"I swear... I am innocent."

Hermione tilted her head. "No, sir. You are as guilty as they come. Nonetheless, your little trick worked."

"You haven't fallen into my arms just yet," Severus replied.

Hermione threw herself into Severus' lap and put her arms around him. His arms embraced her as she leaned back. "Is that better?" she asked coyly.

Severus smiled then. "Ah, my plan has finally brought me my hearts desire." His smile deepened. "I see, though, that you will be hard to fool, my lady."

She kissed him on the nose. "Don't forget it, either."

Further conversation was impossible for Severus had once again pulled her to him and occupied her mouth in much better ways than conversation.

A/N: Geez, sorry for the delay. Am not quite sure how it became September so quickly. Thanks for reading, and thanks to slytherinlaurel for the beta work.

Eight

Chapter 8 of 8

Because of bad press, Hermione leaves her job at the Ministry and goes to work for Severus. Will they realize that great things can come from adversity?

Chapter 8

Severus wrapped his arms around Hermione and pulled her close. "Are you sure about this?"

She pulled back from him slightly to look into his eyes. "We can't stay hidden from the world forever. I don't think this will be an enjoyable time, but hopefully once the press sees us enough, they'll find somewhere else to focus their cameras."

"If you insist. We can wait, you know."

"No, let's do it now."

It had been two months since the rollercoaster weekend when they had admitted their love for one another. Severus' potions business with Viktor Krum was building nicely, and both Hermione and Severus thought that he might actually be able to open a small storefront on Diagon Alley within a year. More customers outside of his dark clientele had been ordering his products via owl post, and more people were actually coming in to purchase as well.

Things had been going along swimmingly, and Hermione was tired of hiding. She wanted to announce to the world that she had found love and thumb her nose at anyone who dared write anything negative about it. The plan to alert the world included dinner at a cafe in Diagon Alley.

Severus took her hand and pulled her close. His arm went around her. "You're sure?" he asked a final time.

"Yes, let's go."

In a swirl, they Apparated away.

No one noticed them at first. Their anonymity didn't last long, however. Several couples along the street started pointing. Then a woman shouted. Before long, a small gathering was following the couple as they made their way down the street. From nowhere, cameras began to flash and questions were shouted out. Hermione and Severus kept their heads down as they made their way to the small cafe. When they got to the entrance of the cafe, they stopped and faced the crowd.

"Not that it's any of your business," Severus began, "but Hermione Granger and I are engaged to be married. Despite all that you have read in the papers, Hermione is a beautiful, loving woman, and I will have no more bad press published about her. If you know me at all, you know my past. I am not a man to be trifled with. Both Dumbledore and Voldemort learned that the hard way."

Hermione's mouth dropped open before she was abruptly turned in Severus' arms and whisked into the cafe. Camera flashbulbs went off furiously as the couple disappeared from view. She was still gaping at Severus in surprise as they were led to their seats in the back of the restaurant. As they settled in, sitting next to one another in the cozy booth, Severus looked at her sharply.

"What?"

"I... I'm shocked. I can't believe you brought up Dumbledore."

Severus reached out and grasped Hermione's hand. "I know that many people feel I am a murderer, despite the evidence that has come out in my favor. As you are always so quick to point out, the Slytherin in me has a tendency to use things to my advantage. I saw an advantage, and I took it. I would imagine that even Molly Weasley's ranting will not receive any more credibility after a direct threat from a former Death Eater."

Hermione's eyes filled with tears. Severus frowned. "I did not mean to upset you."

"It's not that," she said with a sniff. "I know how all of that bothers you deep down. You saying that back there just shows me once again how much you love me. I know you wouldn't throw your reputation at the mercy of the press unless you loved me."

"Of course, asking you to marry me had no bearing on how much I loved or didn't love you?" he asked with an arched brow.

Hermione giggled. "I knew you loved me; it's just nice to have that reinforced, especially in such a meaningful way."

Severus grasped her hand and moved in closer to her. "Hermione, I thank Merlin every day that you walked in on Weasley. I fully believe that things happen for a reason. That day, when you came to me so distraught about your husband's philandering, I knew, deep down, that I cared for you more than I should admit."

Hermione squeezed Severus' hand. He held up his free one to stop her from saying anything. "Your quitting the Ministry was our chance, Hermione, although neither one of us realized it at the time. I am not a man to let a chance slip by. Neither am I a man to see the woman I love be tormented by lies and gossip. They may call me what they may, but I will not let them besmirch your name ever again."

"What if they do?"

"A few poisoned rats, sent by untraceable owl should scare them well enough."

Hermione shook her head. "You are extremely diabolical when you want to be, aren't you?"

He smirked then. "I learned from the best."

"Voldemort?"

"No, Dumbledore."

Hermione threw her head back and laughed. Shaking her head she looked into his eyes. "I love you, Severus."

"And I, you, my lady."

He leaned forward and captured her mouth. Severus pulled her close, making Hermione's heart soar as his lips worshipped her. Their kiss deepened as Hermione felt lightheaded with his affections.

"Severus!" she managed to gasp between his onslaughts. "We're in a public place!"

Severus leaned in and whispered in her ear. "I want everyone to know how much I love you, Hermione."

"Yes, but... We... You..." She looked down, her cheeks bright red.

With a wave of his wand, Severus cast a Notice-me-not spell and pulled his fiancé back into his arms. "You are most delightful when you are embarrassed," he replied before continuing where they had left off.

Hermione knew anymore complaints would be useless. She didn't really want to complain anyway. Severus had been right. Things did happen for a reason. Had she not walked in on her ex-husband, she'd have never known just how fantastic Severus Snape was, and that would have been a tragedy. But Hermione didn't believe in tragedies. She was an optimist, and felt everyone deserved a happy ending. Butterflies raced through her as she understood she'd finally found hers.

The End

A/N: Thanks again to slytherinlaurel for the beta. That's it, folks. Sorry it's taken way too long for updates. I'm handing out wet noodles for anyone who would like to beat me. I hope you enjoyed this at any rate.