

# Lovegood Extermination Service

*by Rose of the West*

When Luna finds an infestation of nargles, Hermione is forced to move to her job at Hogwarts a week early, where she rekindles an old friendship. Written for and inspired by Kyria of Delphi.

## Forced Evacuation

*Chapter 1 of 14*

When Luna finds an infestation of nargles, Hermione is forced to move to her job at Hogwarts a week early, where she rekindles an old friendship. Written for and inspired by Kyria of Delphi.

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"Definitely nargles."

Luna tossed her wand at Hermione's feet and hoisted herself out of the coal cellar. She extinguished the tip of her wand and tucked it somewhere. Hermione didn't want to consider the state of Luna's attire. She was wearing an azure-colored workman's jumpsuit, and now she was covered with sooty dust. Coal had stopped being used for heat in this house a few decades ago, but apparently the cellar had gone that long without a cleaning, too.

"So what do I do?" asked Hermione. She looked up at the knots of green high up in her shade trees. Mistletoe was supposedly where the nargles nested, and there was certainly plenty of mistletoe in Hermione's yard.

"I think we should do the full extermination immediately," said Luna. "First we get rid of most of that mistletoe. I think we can move it to a nice forest where it won't hurt anyone. Many of the nargles will just follow it."

"Do we just leave the rest of them?"

"Oh, no. We need to gather the poor dears up, if you ever want your things back. There's a potion that will make them leave the house, and because the house will be under a tent, we can direct them into a soft trap that we will use to transport them to the forest. It will work perfectly."

"You're going to put a *tent* up around my house?"

"It's not uncommon when the infestation is bad. They do it in parts of America where household pests are numerous."

Hermione digested this. It sounded a bit odd, but she was desperate. Luna was the third exterminator she'd tried so far. Perhaps some crazy American procedure, done by the crazy Ravenclaw, would be the best choice. She sighed and decided. Now there were just details to worry about. "How will I get in and out?"

"In and out of where?"

"The tent." Hermione knew a moment of uncertainty. Wasn't Luna paying attention to her own conversation?

"Oh, you won't be living there at all. You need to move out." Luna brushed through her hair with her fingers and tucked the remains of a spiderweb she found into the pocket of her jumpsuit.

"Out?"

"Yes. There have been bad reactions in humans to the potion, and if you're there, it will just confuse things. You have to move out. Today would be best." She snapped her fingers and a clipboard flew into her hand. After tapping a parchment in several places with a quill and then blowing on it, Luna handed the clipboard over. "Sign next to the 'X,' please."

What could Hermione do but sign? But where would she go for—she glanced at the parchment—a month? She thought for a minute. It was late August. She only had to find a place to stay for about a week. Where would she go, by tomorrow at 6:30 am?

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Hermione looked over her fifth year lesson plans. In order to complete March, she really needed to re-read the fourth chapter of *Practical Transfiguration of Invertebrates*. She Summoned the book from her shelf, but it didn't come. Putting down the scroll in her hand, she waved her wand and Summoned the book again. It still didn't come. Then she remembered. She hadn't been able to find it in the few hours she had to pack, and had decided that the nargles must have it. She had immediately decided to use the library copy if she needed it.

She stifled a groan and then realized she was one of six people in the castle, so she groaned aloud. Minerva had been quite understanding about her coming early to Hogwarts, and had mentioned that the Defense Professor was also in residence early. The other faculty members already at the school were Trelawney, who hadn't left the castle since the night she had foretold Lord Voldemort's death, Poppy, Hagrid, and Minerva herself.

At any rate, in order to complete the very detailed agenda lists Hermione had made herself, she must finish this portion of this lesson plan tonight, so now she must go to the Library. She tightened her robe and set off, hoping Madam Pince wouldn't be too angry with her. Then she remembered. She was a teacher now, not a student, and she had access to the library whenever she needed it.

"Come on, Crookshanks," she said as she opened the door.

The sconces on the walls increased and decreased luminescence as she passed through the hallways, but she had to light her wand when she entered the library. The Transfiguration books were in the stacks farthest away from the doors. Hermione walked straight over to where her book would be found and set the ladder in just the right spot. She climbed up, and realized that the book had been miscatalogued.

Placing her right hand firmly on a shelf, she reached over with her left... and then the ladder fell to the floor, leaving her hanging for dear life. She couldn't let go without possibly injuring herself, but she wouldn't be able to hang on here all night, either. Thinking things that would not be appropriate for her fifth years' class, she took several deep breaths and saw orange fuzz out of the corner of her eye.

"Crookshanks! Go get Minerva."

She started reciting ancient runes to herself to pass the time and had gotten about half way through when she heard the library door open and saw a light bouncing along the ceiling.

"Hello?" she said. "I managed to trap myself in the Transfiguration section. If you would be so kind as to set the ladder straight..."

Just a moment later, the ladder was set up right next to her, but for some reason, Hermione couldn't move. Through fear or from hanging on for several moments, her arms and legs had frozen into position, and she couldn't seem to get to the ladder.

A voice remembered from long ago said, "Yust let yurself fall; I catch you."

"Viktor!" Hermione lost her grip on the shelf and dropped. An instant later, she discovered it was indeed Viktor Krum, holding her in his arms. "How? Why?"

"Hermynown, it *is* you. I see the kitty and think it is yur cat."

"Why are you at Hogwarts?"

"I teach Defense this year."

Hermione thought back to all the conversations she'd heard about the new Defense Against the Dark Arts professor. She'd heard much about Minerva's search in Great Britain and on the Continent, but nothing at all about who had been chosen. Viktor, of course, was quite qualified. Hermione quieted the urge to nestle into his arms and moved to stand on her own feet.

"I see your Seeker skills haven't suffered since your retirement." Good Godric, was that flirtatious? "I mean, that was an excellent catch."

"Is Seeker's job... to always catch what is precious." Rowena's crown, was he—not flirting—back?

It was time to put things back on a more professional footing. Hermione cleared her throat and reached for a bright tone. "I'd like to thank you for coming to my aid." She Summoned the book now, thinking to herself that she should have done so to begin with. "I actually have this book, but I couldn't find it when I came. I had to leave my house a bit abruptly."

"Is my pleasure, Hermynown. As Defense Professor, I patrol the Castle since I come, looking vor dangers and devenses for students."

"Well, I guess I'll see you later, then."

"This is my hope."

*A/N: Thank you so very much to Blue Artemis for beta reading and encouraging this flight of fancy.*

## The Problem with Superstars

Hermione spends a day or two learning more about the Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor.

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The next morning found Hermione standing in front of her full length mirror. She used up all the Sleakeasy potion she had on hand, getting her hair into a somewhat manageable state. Afterward, she held robes in front of herself, trying to decide which one she wanted.

The teaching robes were far too formal. She would have to change out of them after breakfast if she wanted to get anything done in the classroom. But the older robes she planned to wear while shifting furniture around didn't do anything for her figure. And what should she do about makeup? She would wear it during classes, but she never wore it in casual situations.

Why did she care anyway? She didn't need to impress anyone. She already knew the new Defense professor and he knew her. There was nothing special to worry about. She didn't need to make an impression or anything.

That decided it. She put on her school robe from seventh year and paced to her door, which she yanked open. Then she groaned and ran back to the bathroom, where she put on some lipstick. Angry with herself for such silliness, she forced herself to go down to the Great Hall.

She almost bumped into him in the doorway. "Ah, Hermyown, I didn't think yu have breakfast, so I finish, and now..."

She nodded. "I understand. I was running a bit late this morning."

"I see." His eyes glanced over her, quickly but thoroughly, and she suddenly became aware that the much-worn fabric clung to her figure in places.

She folded her arms over her chest. "I guess we'll see each other later, then."

"I look forward to this," he answered with a smile.

The rest of the day passed in a blur. Hermione decided to be glad that she had the extra week. The classroom she was moving to hadn't been used in a few years. There was quite a bit of dust to deal with. Lunch was brought to the various staff in residence as they worked, and dinner was a bit more formal. It was held at a specific hour and the conversation was general among all the staff that were present.

There was no question of what to wear the next morning. She put on a robe she could work in and tied her hair back in a neat ponytail. Then she inexplicably put on more lipstick, shrugging to herself as she left her rooms for the morning.

He wasn't there. She served herself some porridge and toast while telling herself that there was no particular "he" that she was looking for. After all, she wasn't looking for anyone in particular. She just happened to notice that the co-worker that she had missed by being late yesterday was not here today.

She lingered over her coffee for as long as she dared and then got up to leave. As she reached the door, she saw the Defense Against the Dark Arts professor walking across the hallway from the staircase. Why did she suddenly smile?

"Oh! I miss yu again!"

"Were you trying to catch me?"

"There are things I need. I should go to town to get them. Vill yu take me, show me the shops?"

"Oh, of course." She could feel her smile dimming, which was a relief to her sore cheeks. He just needed a guide around Hogsmeade. "I'd be happy to show you around."

"Is date, then?"

Her heart skipped a beat. What did he mean by that? She forced herself to mentally shrug it off. His English wasn't perfect. He probably meant "appointment." Somehow she nodded and agreed to meet him at breakfast the next morning.

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The trip to Hogsmeade, which had been such a thrill when she was fourteen, had gotten a bit stale by the time Hermione was thirty-three. Today, however, it was fun seeing it through Viktor's eyes. He'd been there before, of course, but it had been years.

He had a long list, and Hermione had a similar one. New teaching robes and the necessary stationery to complete their teaching tasks led both lists. They also needed several books each and a few other teaching materials. After that, the lists diverged a bit as both wished to obtain some small luxuries that would make living with hundreds of preteens and teenagers more bearable.

Viktor laughed at a large box Hermione obtained at Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes. "Vot is that for?"

"Oh," she answered, "I had George design this for me my first year as a teacher here. It's specially made to hold anything they produce. When I confiscate anything the students shouldn't have, I can put it in the box and it will be neutralized."

"I shall have to remember that yu haf this box. May I bring such things to yu when I find them?"

"Do," she said with a smile.

They stopped for lunch at the Three Broomsticks. "Hermyown," he said. "I wish to know. What of Veasley?"

Hermione looked down at her sandwich, suddenly not very hungry any more. "He...he..." She couldn't bring herself to say it.

"I hear about vhat happen, that yur husband vas killed. Vhat happens to him?"

She took a deep breath, and for the first time pictured it as if it was happening right before her eyes. "It was an ordinary day. He and I had an argument about his job. We'd been fighting it for months. I wanted him to get a desk job before we started a family; he didn't think there was any great danger. We kissed each other as if it didn't matter and growled our goodbyes. Before it was even lunch time, Harry came to my office. It was all over."

She leaned back in her chair and shrugged. "It wasn't a complicated case. It was the sort of thing he would have handled even if he had the so-called desk job. It just happened that the place was booby-trapped. His legs were blasted off, and he bled to death before his partner could reach him."

"I'm sorry."

"I was so angry... at Harry for sending him... at Ron for being wrong about the danger... at myself for being right..."

"Is easy to understand."

"Is it?" She took a sip of her drink. "I guess it is, but was really just one of those things, wasn't it?" A thought crossed her mind, and she shrugged again. "I never really saw it like that, before. It might have happened anyway."

"If Veasley loves yu, why doesn't he take desk job?"

"It's not that easy. We loved each other, and I loved that he had that job. He was good at it, and so clever about figuring out how to outsmart dark wizards and witches. I was proud of him. I was just so worried about raising a child without him... and now I don't have either. Right after he died, I would have given anything to have even that piece of him."

"You loff him fery much."

"I did, yes."

"And now?"

"I still do, but it's a different sort of thing. I've had to become a different person in the couple of years since, someone who wouldn't have even existed had he not gone on that case that day."

"Yes, I see."

"Anyhow, what do you think about finishing up at the candy store? I hear there are some new Chocolate Frog cards."

"This is good idea."

They got up to pay the bill and leave, but a shriek stopped them in their tracks.

"It's Viktor Krum! Mr. Krum, can I have your autograph?"

Hermione recognized the two girls as students, so she made the introductions. "Viktor, these two young ladies are Olivia and Samantha. They don't usually make so much noise in the classroom."

Viktor smiled in a way Hermione had never seen up close. It was a bit put on and didn't go all the way to his eyes, as though he were performing. "I see. Vell, ladies, what haff you for me to sign?"

Olivia pulled the neck of her blouse open. "Put it right here, please!" she said, pointing just above the visible edge of her bra.

Samantha turned and pulled her shirt up and tugged at the waistband of her jeans. "Here for me!" she said, pointing to her hip.

Hermione closed her eyes, scandalized by the behavior of her students. "I just remembered that there's something I need to get at Schrivenshaft's." She stormed out of the inn and stood there for a moment. It was nothing to her if Viktor wanted to touch those girls so intimately. Her outrage was over the fact that it was simply unprofessional for him to even consider as a teacher. She nodded to herself and stomped to the stationer's, where she bought far more red ink than she expected to need. Perhaps the memos she occasionally wrote to post in Gryffindor tower should be that color from now on.

*A/N: Thank you to Blue Artemis for beta reading!*

## Eating Humble Pie

### *Chapter 3 of 14*

Hermione realizes she may have jumped to a conclusion.

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The next couple of meetings were awkward because Hermione ignored Viktor's attempts to make conversation. It was nothing to her if the new professor wanted to get himself fired or arrested or something. It was simply better not to be involved.

Days passed. The other professors arrived, and the school year began. There was another Start-of-year feast where another group of eleven-year-olds was sorted. The same lovely meal as always was provided. Then Minerva, following Dumbledore's habit of waiting until after the meal for a speech, gave the students the same welcoming comments followed by the same directions about staying out of the Forbidden Forest and the marked portions of the school.

The only thing different about the feast was the way so many students craned their necks to get a view of the Defense professor. Hermione wasn't paying attention to that, though. She was very carefully unaware of the way he tried to catch her eye. She didn't watch the way he waved students away when they approached the staff table. She didn't look back when he smirked and looked at her. She was very carefully unaware of everything he did, except that she wasn't.

The introduction of Professor Krum was as dry as most of Minerva's speeches and lessons, but the reaction was not. The students all stood and applauded as if the wizard had just caught a seeker right in front of them. When the staff all stood and joined in, Hermione tried not to notice the way Viktor blushed and shook his head.

When the meal was over and the students were dismissed, the staff table was mobbed, but not at Hermione's end. She smiled wryly into her coffee cup for a few last sips and glanced down at the new professor, who was surrounded by students in a way that hadn't been seen since Gilderoy Lockhart had been a professor. With no one standing in her way, Hermione filed out of the hall with the students and the rest of the staff. She happened to be behind Samantha and Olivia.

"Did he sign anything for you this time?"

"Yes! See, I had a program from the European Cup of '02. He signed that for me. Tough luck that you left all your things in your trunk."

"I still don't understand why he wouldn't sign my chest the other day."

"Yeah, what kind of response is that when your fan asks you to sign their body? 'Sorry, I only sign paper things.' Seriously. What a prude"

"I know. He wouldn't even sign my shirt when I asked if that would be all right."

Both girls sighed in annoyance. Hermione stopped and looked over her shoulder. The staircase gave her a view into the hall, where the students still surrounded Viktor. She swept down the stairs, pushing through the students in her best impression of MacGonagall.

"Here, let Professor Krum go for the night. Simmons, you especially. The way you study, you're going to get a lot of comments from him on your homework. I'm sure he'll autograph that if you ask."

After some prodding and glowers from Hermione, the students all left, and she was alone with Viktor. Suddenly, she felt awkward. What should she say, now?

"T'ank yu."

"Pardon?"

"You make students leave. T'ank yu."

"Oh, you're welcome."

"Do I offend?"

"Of course not!"

"Yu seem so angry since girls ask for autograph..."

It was time to apologize. "Oh, no! I'm sorry about leaving in a huff the other day. I should have stayed and waited to see what you would do. I ought to have known that you wouldn't do anything so intimate with students."

"Vith anyone."

"Anyone?"

"I never sign such things as body, not arm or leg, even... only scrolls and books, or pictures, sometimes a quaffle."

*How could a superstar like Viktor Krum avoid signing some skin from time to time?"Go on!"*

He looked at her curiously. "Means yu do not believe me?"

He looked a little sad or hurt, but the way he gazed into her eyes was something else entirely. Suddenly, it was very important that she accept every word he ever said to her. "I believe you." Then he smiled, and she looked at the floor, trying to remember how to breathe.

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The first day of classes found Hermione standing in front of her mirror again. She used half of a new bottle of Sleakeasy to tame her hair, and she was fiddling with various hairstyles today. Fortunately, she was wearing her first-day-of-school robe. There was no worry about that end of things. However, she could do something with her hair. It was usually a big mess. She couldn't be arsed to deal with it half the time. There was always a book to read or a spell to try that was more important, but today she wanted to look nice.

After arranging it in a way that was reminiscent of the Yule Ball during her fourth year, she pulled it all out and ran the brush through it one last time. She twisted it up and viciously stuck pins in it. She couldn't look all girly and sweet. She was the Transfiguration professor, and it was her job to scare those Gryffindors into good behavior.

It was as if the day were scripted. She got to the door of the Great Hall just as Viktor was coming back out. They shrugged at each other and Hermione stepped aside as a dozen students followed him through the door and down the hall to the stairs.

She sat at lunch and looked enigmatically upon the Hufflepuffs who had just left her classroom. She had warned her fourth years that she would rate their work in O.W.L. year based upon O.W.L. standards, and they hadn't believed her. As they looked at her with trepidation now, she smiled to herself while keeping her face neutral.

"Is this seat away-available?"

She looked up and saw him. "Please, sit down." She looked at the gaggle of students standing hopefully nearby. "Go get your lunches," she said, sternly. They scattered like birds.

"They follow me everywhere."

"Perhaps it will stop after you've graded a few essays."

"If I liff so long. I get no time vor myself."

"I'm sure you know an avoidance spell or two."

"I can use on students?"

Hermione shrugged. "Not exactly, but you can set up an avoidance buffer around yourself. Harry does it whenever he leaves his house."

Viktor smiled. "Yes. I haf yust the spell. T'ank you."

Over dinner, Viktor sat near her again. "Afternoon was much better with avoidance spell."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Hermione.

"I haf question... would you be able—or villing—to help me with my English? It is long time since I am in England. I lose practice. I vish students to understand better."

"Certainly," said Hermione, "although it may or may not improve their grades."

*Thank you, again, to Blue Artemis for all your help!*

# (Sort of ) Home for the Holidays I

## Chapter 4 of 14

Hermione's house is still under a tent, but she gets to visit.

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The fall term progressed pleasantly enough. Hermione and Viktor usually sat together at meals so that he could practice his English. Under her patient tutelage, his accent receded and his grammatical forms became more proficient. He refused to use contractions, however.

"I refuse to take two perfectly good words and force them together in such a way. It is Frankenstein's monster of grammar."

Hermione smiled. "I suppose that is true, but it's so much easier to use them."

"If you say so."

Hermione was reluctant to make any more of their new friendship than it was. She found herself drawn to the vibrant wizard. Most of the staff were at least old enough to be her parents, while her parents were...well, it never paid to dwell on them. Now that she had a friend closer to her own age, Hermione realized just how lonely her life had been. Ginny summed it up neatly in a letter.

*Harry and I are so glad to hear that you've made friends with someone our age. We've been so worried about you, acting older than you were. We were worried that leaving your job at the ministry and working in that castle with old professors and older ghosts would be a bad idea, but now we see that it's working out. Your letters sound more like yourself. Obviously, Viktor is good for you.*

If one's real friends couldn't speak honestly, who could? Hermione quietly rolled the scroll back up and slid it into her bag, saying, "They're doing well and say hello." She didn't want say what the letter actually said. She was afraid that she would get too close and smother her friendship with Viktor.

As the term progressed, Hogsmeade Weekends came and went. Viktor came to visit Hermione on the Monday after the first one, his arms full of various items. "Is...er..It is as you say. May I place these items in the box you obtained from the Veasleys?"

Hermione pointed to the credenza behind her, where the box sat. "Help yourself. Open the lid gently. Sometimes a Whizzbang takes a little longer to diffuse."

He walked around her desk and took care of the items he had brought. "It is nearly full."

"Yes, it's always worst after the first weekend. I'll ask George to come for it this week."

Viktor stood next to her desk chair. They were quite close, and it wasn't a situation Hermione had considered when planning how to behave around him. Likewise, Viktor looked at her as if he was trying to think of something to say. Finally, he nodded and gave a slight bow. "I will see you at dinner, yes?"

She looked up at him, wondering why she was blushing. "Yes," she answered shyly.

He walked off, and she couldn't help noticing from where she sat how very attractive he was from behind. He'd been wearing clothes like his old Durmstrang uniform, which set off his physique perfectly.

The fall progressed quite enjoyably, with just a few awkward moments when neither seemed to know what to say. Hermione's felt herself becoming lighter and feeling younger and more cheerful again. Indeed, her only trouble was that she didn't hear much from Luna.

After sending several letters asking whether she could go back to her house for the Holiday, she finally received one in return.

*I'm afraid that there's also an infestation of nifflers. They had a burrow under the front of your house. We've had to tear up the brickwork, but I have an architect looking at how to fix it up when the nifflers are done. At any rate, the house is unlivable. You'd best stay put at Hogwarts.*

Hermione moaned as she read the letter.

"What is it?" asked Viktor.

"My house...she's torn up the brickwork in the front to deal with some nifflers. We loved that brickwork. That's where the fireplace was."

"She says she will get an architect in the letter."

"But no one is asking my opinion! What if I hate it?"

Viktor put his hand over Hermione's. Both stopped for a moment to look from their hands back to each other's eyes. He swallowed slowly and said quietly. "If you hate it so much, you can change it back. I will help you if you wish it."

She realized that he must be feeling emotional to have let his accent lapse like this. "I know. I just feel so out of control. I can't even go home and see it. She's disabled the fireplace."

"For this I can help." He let go of her hand and leaned back in his chair, quite proud of himself.

"What do you mean?"

"I stay at Hogvarts ofer Holiday, too. As soon as students leave, ve go on my broom."

Hermione felt a bit nervous at that. "I'm a horrible flyer."

"I haff a sturdy broom, perfect for two. Just dress varmly."

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On the afternoon after the Hogwarts Express left, Hermione ran through the empty hallways of the castle. She stopped for a moment. What was she feeling? It was that sense of excitement and freedom she'd had whenever she, Harry, and Ron had always had when wandering through the castle under the Invisibility Cloak.

The thought stopped her. Was she somehow being disloyal to those days? Was it wrong to feel as she did right now? She remembered something Ginny said to her. *think Ron would be glad to see you enjoying your life again. He enjoyed a good time, perhaps not as much as the twins, but he would be glad for you.* No, Ron wouldn't mind.

She ran out onto the grounds and stopped. Viktor stood there, looking over his broom. She had watched him do the same with the students' equipment before he refereed the Quidditch matches. Minerva had commented that this bit of professionalism was an important lesson for the students, and quite reassuring. Poppy noted that the injuries had decreased as the players themselves started to take their equipment more seriously.

Today he was just serious, checking it for any problems and finally smiling at her. "Everything is...what is the word...prepared. Come."

He straddled the broom and then pulled her close so that as they took off she settled into his lap. "Are you ready?"

"Yes."

They swooped and then soared high into the air, causing Hermione to shriek.

"Are you scared?" His breath was warm in her ear.

She shook her head and smiled. Turning, so he could see her, she said, "That was fun."

"Yes, it is."

Then that awkwardness came upon them again. Hermione licked her lips and waited expectantly. Viktor cleared his throat and looked past her. "I must concentrate on the flying."

Hermione nodded her head and turned. She suddenly realized how very close they were. They'd never touched since the day he'd rescued her from the lake during the second challenge of the Triwizard Tournament and the brief moment he'd held her in the library. They'd certainly never touched so closely.

She was very aware of him as his arms around her tightened or shifted to turn. He explained that their route would take them where they were unlikely to be seen by Muggles, but involved some odd turns in places. The few times that the weather was a little rough, she could feel the muscles in his legs as he guided the broom safely through. For some reason, she didn't feel nervous or afraid. She had absolute trust in Viktor. She knew he would take impeccable care of her.

They arrived at Hermione's house about an hour before sunset. Hermione groaned. "She's still got the monstrosity up."

Indeed, her house was covered by a bright yellow and blue circus tent. The neighbors must be laughing themselves silly over it. If the nargles were gone, though, why was it necessary?

"Is colorful," said Viktor with a voice that sounded choked.

Hermione was determined not to turn and look. If he was laughing, she would hex him, and then there would be trouble. Instead, she marched up her walkway and tried to open the tent flap. It was sealed shut.

She blew out the breath she'd been holding and took out her wand. "*Alohomora!*" she said.

Nothing happened.

She quickly went through every opening and unlocking spell she could think of, but nothing worked. Luna had the tent sealed tight, even to the point of being fast to the ground.

Hermione walked over to a wrought-iron chair under an oak tree and sat down dejectedly.

"Perhaps it is to keep the nifflers where she wants to catch them," said Viktor.

"I'm sure that's it, but I don't like that Luna is all over my house, making my decisions about how to take care of it."

"She is a Ravenclaw? Very smart, no?"

"Oh yes, she's brilliant, but in a frightening way sometimes. She gets wild ideas and then the cat's among the garden gnomes."

"Is this a problem?"

"Well... I suppose not really, but there's always screaming and a bit of a mess to clear up when it's over."

They walked all over the property. Hermione was reassured that her herb garden had been left entirely alone. To her pleased surprise, her flower garden had been properly winterized. "Perhaps I overreacted."

They returned to the oak tree in the front garden. Hermione turned in a full circle, looking at the treetops. "She's gotten rid of all the mistletoe, just as she said. No new nargles can nest, at least."

"All but one bit." Viktor stood right next to her.

"I don't see any."

He pointed up, and Hermione tilted her head to see. Just as she caught a glimpse of the one bunch of mistletoe high in the oak tree, Viktor leaned down and caught her lips with his. His kiss was soft and gentle, but hinted at something more. Before she was ready to stop, it ended. Viktor held her shoulders in his hands and stood at arms' length.

"Is too soon." His face was full of a question. Hermione hoped she was smart enough to have the right answer.

"I don't think so," she answered. She took a step back toward him and lifted her lips expectantly. As she waited, his hands lightly slid up along the curves of her shoulders and under her chin.

He kissed her again, and this time it was more. Without losing any gentleness, he pressed his lips to hers in a way that left her sure that he was very interested in her. When he ended it, she felt lightheaded and clung to his arms.

"I was right on that day so long ago." He led her to the chair and sat her down in it.

"Right about what?" Although the evening was mild, she felt cold without his nearness.

"I never feel this way about another witch. Never as I feel about Myown."

Looking up at him, the chill she had started to feel melted.

*A/N: Thank you to Blue Artemis for her help with this!*

# Christmas Morning

Chapter 5 of 14

Hermione finds herself explaining her complicated family.

*Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.*

The return to Hogwarts was like a dream. Viktor again held her in his lap, and Hermione was more aware than ever of the way he moved as they flew. Yet, there was something almost chaste about it as well. He walked her to her rooms and then wished her goodnight. Then he turned and went down the hallway.

"Wait!" she said.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I thought...we just...well, goodnight to you, too."

"All nights are good when you and I are in same castle."

She went into her lounge and sat down, absently petting an outraged Crookshanks. He was never happy when she went anywhere without him. He wasn't entirely happy with her now, either, but she couldn't help it. If he wasn't going to say a word, or kiss her again, what was he doing at her house? Was it just the mistletoe? But his farewell... *that* was pure romance. Perhaps he just wanted to take things slowly.

\* \* \* \* \*

She found herself watching his lips. They were strong, a man's lips, full enough for soft kisses, but not pouty. She had the chance to watch him when his mouth was in repose while they graded essays together. He never quite frowned. He looked as though he was eager to be pleased by what the students said. When he lifted his head with a smile to tell her what a particularly bright student had written, she got a glimpse of nice teeth. Teeth were very important to her; she couldn't help it. One doesn't grow up as the child of dentists without absorbing some of the family business.

When they were at meals, she watched him eat. She quickly knew what he enjoyed and what he didn't care for by the way his lips either seemed to embrace his fork or twist. She wondered which he was doing as he kissed her. She tried to recall, but she couldn't quite. It was in talking to him that she became quite smitten. He smiled so readily when she corrected a bit of his speech, and sometimes, he overpronounced a word in order to practice how the shape of his mouth affected it. She almost fainted one afternoon when he was working on the "oh" sound in "Alohomora."

Viktor never said a word about the two kisses they had shared, and Hermione was too shy and embarrassed to start that conversation. As a result, she could only stare at his lips and recall that day with a wildly beating heart. Then his eyes would lift to hers and she would have to blush and look away.

Christmas Day came, and they both were visited by owls during breakfast. Viktor received items such as warm hats and gloves from his family in Europe. Hermione received similar gifts from Molly and the Potters. Then she turned to a paper-wrapped box. *From what I hear, you may have a use for this*, said the card that came with it, in cramped but neat writing.

"It's from my father," she said with just a twinge of misgiving. "I wonder whatever he could mean."

"Doctor Granger?" asked Viktor.

"Oh, no, they don't go by Granger any more," said Hermione sadly. "Before Bill and Fleur got married, I changed their memories. They believed themselves to be Wendell and Monica Wilkins, and they moved to Australia. When I went to restore their memories after the war, they weren't interested in coming to England. They had adopted a brother and sister who were both Muggles. They said it was better to just keep their Australian family and leave it at that."

"Then it is from Doctor Wilkins?"

"No, I discovered when I modified their memories that I was adopted, too."

"So this box..."

"It's from my birth father."

Viktor's eyes became intense and sad, and he shifted his chair closer to hers. "You have magical parents, then?"

"Yes, both my parents were magical, although my mother was Muggle-born. That's why she put me up for Muggle adoption. She thought it was safer for me that way."

"Are you close?"

"My mum died a couple of years after I was born. My dad... well, he's complicated. I never know what he's going to do or say. I have a half-brother. We're very close, but holidays have been awkward since Ron died."

"Only one way to find out about Christmas gift."

"I suppose." Hermione opened the box. The first thing she noticed was a lovely quill. "Oh, how beautiful!"

"He knows you well to choose such a gift."

"He was one of the professors here for years... whatever could be in this jar?"

Hermione took it out and read the label: *Permanent Ink*. She stared at it without understanding for a moment. Then she remembered and put it back in the box quickly. "Oh!"

"What does it mean?"



She was lost in the story and didn't notice his lapse. "He made this from the ink of the squid in the lake. When the ink dries, it disappears, but it never goes away. When someone says a spell, it shows up again. It's particularly good on skin."

"He used this ink on someone's skin?"

"Several times, on people who had bullied him as a student, and one other time, on my mother."

"On your mother? He did not love her?"

"It was a prank on the bullies, actually. He was mad for her, but she married one of them. Somehow, she spent the night I was conceived with my father first. During that night, he wrote 'Property of Severus Snape' on the inside of her thigh."

"Severus Snape?" Viktor looked intently at her.

Hermione nodded, her heart sinking. Why did he have to butt in now? "He's my father."

"And he believes that this ink will now be used in similar way?"

Viktor looked angry. She could do nothing but shrug.

"Where is this person?"

"He...he went home with a witch after a wedding and has barely left her cottage since."

"This is how he lives? Seducing vitches?"

"It wasn't like that. He really loved my mother in his teenaged way, and he and his wife can't keep their hands off each other, now."

"It is not love that marks a person in such a way."

When she had first heard the story, Hermione had thought it was a funny prank. Now, through Viktor's eyes, it seemed shameful and mean. "What must you think of me and my world?" Her sinking feeling intensified.

"Come," he said.

She followed him silently to his office, where he Summoned a large book, *Flight Paths of Britain*, and pointed to a map near the front of the book. "Show me where cottage is."

Hermione pointed, and he spent several minutes flipping back and forth through the pages. He made a note or two on a piece of parchment, and then stood. "Come, we go."

After wrapping her in a warm cloak, he swirled another around himself. Then he took her elbow, gently but firmly, and reached for his broom. As before, once outside, he checked his broom thoroughly. After straddling it, he settled her on his lap and took off.

Hermione realized that he meant to visit Snape. "We can't be going there!"

"I haff things to say."

Hermione was struck with new dread. Her father was not the easiest person to get along with. Even though she was his daughter, she always felt as though she was on trial. It was one thing to sail through his Potions classes, where study and hard work would win his approval. Life, however, was difficult. Somehow she always felt as though he were watching her and silently grading her.

Now this wizard wanted to say something to Snape, and it terrified her. Would there be a wizard's duel? Would Snape sneer and tell her that her life merited no more than Troll? She knew that he never quite liked her marriage to Ron. What would he say to her bringing Viktor to his cottage?

"I'm not sure about this. We don't even know if they're home."

"Yu say that they never leave cottage."

"We won't be welcome."

"What sort of man does not welcome his own daughter?"

Now she felt some sort of need to defend Snape, and it silenced her completely. Tears sprang to her eyes as she realized that Viktor was about to find out exactly what sort of man Snape was. She would never be able to face Viktor again. She spent the rest of the ride wondering whether she should quit her job at Hogwarts and what she would do in that case. She couldn't go home; Luna wouldn't let her into the tent. Andromeda's cottage would be out after whatever fiasco played out this afternoon. Perhaps Harry and Ginny would help her. They were family, after all.

She could feel the tension in his body and the anger that lay beneath the surface. She was frightened, yet somehow she had no fear that this man would somehow hurt her. Whatever happened, Viktor would always look after her person. In less time than she expected, the broom was descending into her step-mother's front garden. Viktor carefully set the broom up by the front door and then knocked.

Severus himself opened the door. "Ah, my eldest daughter graces our family on this lovely Holiday."

Hermione felt her eyes roll. She never knew how to respond to him. Was he teasing her, or sincere? With a pang, she realized that she wished he was sincere. For some reason, this wizard's approval and good feeling...she dare not wish for love...were important to her.

"I haff things to say," said Viktor, staring firmly into the older wizard's face. He pulled out the package Hermione had received that morning.

"I see you received my gift," said Severus. "Very well, let's go to my study."

A/N: Thank you very much to Blue Artemis for beta reading and giving advice.

If you like this pairing and haven't already read Kyria of Delphi's work, do so now and send her a review.

# (Sort of ) Home for the Holidays II

## Chapter 6 of 14

Viktor faces the difficult member of Hermione's family.

*Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.*

A voice piped up from a room they passed. "It's Hermione!"

"Later, son," said Severus as he guided his guests toward a door at the end of the hallway.

Before anyone had a chance to sit down, Viktor slammed the box on Severus's desk. "Is no vay to treat vitch."

"No?"

"Is childish stunt, to mark her like animal."

"You assume I meant for the ink to be used on Hermione, then?"

"Vhat else?"

"What if she used it on you?"

Hermione stood watching as these two wizards who were so important to her carried on their conversation. Suddenly, she realized that this package was a test. Why would Snape want to test them?

Viktor hadn't yet caught on, but his stance softened slightly. "Is no matter about me. I am student of Durmstrang and player of Qvidditch. I have many scars on body from injury."

Had Viktor been regularly hurt at Durmstrang and while playing? Did any of his injuries still trouble him? Suddenly Hermione realized that she'd never bothered to find out. Perhaps she could do something for him.

"But you're determined that no one shall mark Hermione."

"She is too precious to treat in this vay."

Severus broke out into a wry smile. Then he raised his voice. "Andromeda, put the tea on! This one will do."

Viktor turned and looked at Hermione in confusion. "Vhat happens?"

Still a little bewildered, she answered, "It was a test. He set a trap for us, and I guided you right into it."

"You did just as you were supposed to do," answered Severus. "You told him everything."

"I didn't tell him that I have three little half siblings, or is it four now? It's been over a year since Beatrice was born, and I know you can't keep your hands off each other."

Now Severus smiled warmly. "Points to Gryffindor. We have just discovered that Andromeda is pregnant again."

Suddenly Hermione was lost in the awkwardness of the conversation, and she felt a bit sulky about it. "I don't understand why you feel the need to test anyone."

"I do," said Viktor, looking from Hermione to her father.

"I haven't been the most loving father, Hermione, but your happiness and wellbeing have always been very important to me. I'd heard that you'd been spending time with Krum, and I wondered what sort of wizard he was."

Viktor nodded. "Yes, if I do not get upset, then I am either superstar bighead or I do not care about Hermiown. If I get upset because of use of ink on myself, then again I am superstar bighead. But these things do not worry me. I worry about insult to Hermiown."

"You're a better man than I was."

"Is horrible thing, to mark vitch in this vay."

"I never should have invented it. It was a hollow victory at best."

"You put on vitch's leg?"

"It was the best night of my life... before I became involved with my wife, of course. I wanted to somehow force it to be the best night of Lily's life, too."

"Who is this Lily? Name sounds familiar."

"*The* name, Viktor," was the only thing Hermione could think to say.

"Lily Evans... Potter... was my greatest desire when I was young. She's Hermione's mother."

Hermione watched Viktor absorb this. He looked at her. "Then half-brother is Harry Potter?"

She could only nod. "Does that make a difference?"

"It explains much, but no difference in how I feel."

Severus sat back in his chair. "We come to the important question. How do you feel about my daughter? What are your intentions?"

Hermione gasped "Severus!"

Viktor nodded. "No, is right as father to ask such questions. I tell Hermiown that I feel for her as for no other vitch."

"What does that mean?"

"It means... when time is right, she is only wife for me."

"Are you asking me to give her to you?"

"Give'?" echoed Hermione quietly.

"Yu already giff her away when she is baby."

"Her mother did that without asking me, but you are right. I was not a good father. Are you asking for my approval then?"

"Hermynown, if she comes to me, comes as free vitch in her own right. I do not vant her otherwise."

Snape smiled at the wizard. "I think we understand each other well. I am content, then, that should the two of you marry, she will have as fair an opportunity for happiness as I have found."

A clink at the doorway announced Andromeda's arrival. Severus stood and took the tray from her. "You should have told me that it was ready, my love. I would have come for it."

"It wasn't that heavy."

"But in your condition..."

Severus laid the tray on the table and then settled his wife into an easy chair. "Severus! I'm just a few weeks along."

He was caressing his wife's cheek and kissed her forehead. "Let me care for you."

"How is it that yu treat yur vife so, but not Hermione's mother?"

Severus looked sadly at them. "I was a Death Eater in the making. At the time I thought power would win me the woman I wanted. I thought I could take what I want. She rejected all of that and rejected me. I have learned much since those days."

Andromeda spoke up, "You two will stay to dinner, of course."

Hermione was quick to say, "Oh, we hadn't considered..."

"Nonsense! This is where your family is."

"I had hoped to be back in my house."

"Oh, it will be months, at least," said Severus as he helped himself to his tea. "There's Bundimun all over the outside of your back wall. It's all got to come out and be rebuilt."

"You've been to my house?" Had Luna been giving tours and taking a fee?

Severus shrugged. "Luna wanted to get my opinion about how best to deal with it."

"Will any of my house be left standing?"

"You've always hated that kitchen. Luna's architect will straighten it all out."

"Ron and I were so happy there."

"Ron loved the house, and it was the best you could get for the money. Practically everyone in Wizarding Britain knows how you hated parts of it."

Viktor broke into a laugh. "Truth comes out."

\* \* \* \* \*

"I would never mark you as Troll."

Viktor was in the back with Teddy Lupin and Hermione's little brothers. Andromeda and Beatrice were napping, leaving Hermione and Severus alone.

"How did you know I—"

"I'm a Legilimens, my dear. Never, ever, have I been disappointed in you."

"You never liked Ron."

"You had a good marriage with him. Trying to sort through your love of his job and your desire for children made things rough. You would have got through it. I just didn't think it was as brilliant as you might have done."

"You like Viktor."

"I'm still Slytherin enough to like his connections and the way Durmstrang taught him to carry himself. The question of interest is whether you like Krum."

"I—" What did she feel? She couldn't stop smiling when she was with him, and they got on so well together. Those kisses, and the way he treated her made her feel—"I... maybe... I don't know if I can stand to be married again."

"Hermione."

Kindness didn't sit well on his face. It was a bit comical, actually. "I mean, it's just so disloyal to Ron."

"You're not me."

"Of course not."

"You don't have to spend the next twenty years of your life mourning for the love you had and punishing yourself because he died."

"I don't."

"Then why is it a problem?"

"I was so angry, that last morning. He just wouldn't do the thing I asked. I kissed him goodbye, and I told him I loved him, but we were both still mad. His last memory of

me was that fight."

"No, it wasn't."

"Yes, it was."

"No, his last memory of you was that kiss. He knew that even though you had a serious disagreement, you loved each other."

"But we were fighting!"

Severus chuckled. "Your perfect grade was ruined, you mean? Married couples argue."

"Except you and Andromeda."

He sighed. "Do you really think two Slytherins can live together without an occasional disagreement? You're not such a dunderhead."

*Thank you to Blue Artemis for all her help!*

## No Mistletoe Required

*Chapter 7 of 14*

Hermione gets to know Viktor better.

*Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.*

They were playing Wizard's Chess when Viktor and the boys came back in. "You have not killed each other," said Viktor with a smile.

"No, unless you count the drubbing I'm getting at this. Ron was always better at this sort of strategy than I am."

Severus replied, "It's because you don't concentrate on just the game. You've been looking out the window at a certain famous Quidditch player the whole time."

Hermione blushed.

"Come on lads, let's see if we can put together a bit of a snack from what your mum left in the kitchen."

"She's my gran," said Teddy.

"Yes, she is. Come along, then."

Viktor sat next to Hermione. "Yu were watching?"

"Yes."

"Then I have hope that you feel something for me?"

She nodded. She definitely felt *something*.

"I haff—have—said that when the time is right, you are the only witch I can marry. Do you feel anything like that for me?" His voice started to sound strange as he asked, "Vhen time is right, would yu consider marriage vith me?"

Her mind was full of so many things. She'd spent the last several days wondering why he'd never kissed her again. She'd just spoken more candidly with her father than at any time since the day he had told her about the circumstances of her birth. She had Viktor to thank for this opportunity to clear the air. She'd seen Viktor filled with rage, but on her behalf. She could only guess at the intensity of his feeling, and she knew what was budding within herself.

"I think... probably... yes."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Is good family."

Viktor hadn't spoken since they left Andromeda's doorstep. They were now standing on the lawn in front of the castle at Hogwarts. Hermione looked at him and said, "It's a bit of a strange family, such a mishmash with his daughter, her grandson, and their common children."

"They love you, in vay."

She thought of the warm hug Severus had given her just before they left and the way he'd whispered. "Acceptable at the very least," referring back to their conversation about grading her life. For once, she recognized it as loving teasing. She'd also truly accepted that he was as awkward showing his emotions as she was with him. She'd been able to answer. "I mean to get an Outstanding on the N.E.W.T." and he had laughed along with her. Andromeda was as she'd always been, warm and kind. She was as motherly as Hermione wanted, but somehow knew when to back off. Raising Tonks must have taught her much about young women.

Coming out of her thoughts, she answered, "Yes, I do believe they love me very much."

"It is good to have family like that. They look after us when we need them."

Hermione remembered how after she'd gotten through Ron's funeral, she'd gone back to her house and just sat in the kitchen. At some point Severus and Andromeda had come and found her there. She'd awoken in the guest bedroom of Andromeda's cottage, warm and comfortable in body. Andromeda had shoosed everyone away including herself, only coming to bring trays of foods Hermione had found herself eating.

Eventually, Hermione had started crying, and at the next meal her stepmother put the tray down and sat on the bed. She'd held Hermione for probably an hour and cried

along with her, murmuring, "I know, love; I know." Later, Hermione would realize that of all the people who might have comforted her, Andromeda was one who did indeed understand the loss of a husband. Over the next days and weeks, Hermione had cried herself out and slowly returned to the world around her. At some point, she'd regained the feeling of incompatibility around her father, and she'd left. Now she recalled the hurt look in his eyes when she'd awkwardly said her goodbye.

"You're right. In some strange way, they've been the family I need."

\* \* \* \* \*

Hermione watched Viktor wince as he came into lunch one day and remembered him mentioning injuries and scars. "Are you hurt?"

"Is old injury."

"What happened?"

"I am young Qvidditch player. I try Vronski Feint for first time in competition. I see stars as other seeker catches snitch."

"You fell hard enough to have a concussion?"

"And dislocate shoulder. Was healed, but today when student catches me off guard with hex..."

"Why don't we go to the infirmary, then, and fix it?"

He looked at her with surprise. "You take me to Mediwitch?"

"Oh, no, Poppy's here at lunch. I think I know what to do. Sometimes Ron came home hurt, you know." She realized that the memory didn't feel the same way it once had. She had learned a skill over the years, and now she could use it to help Viktor. It only made sense.

She walked him to a far corner of the Hospital Wing. He resisted taking his shirt off, but she held her ground. "I have to see it in order to know for sure that I have the right potions and spells in mind."

He finally acquiesced, and she ran her fingertips over his shoulder. She could see how he'd been hurt today, but also found another ugly scar.

"What the bludger did they do to you here?"

"Is for protecting younger student from others—you say bully?"

"Yes, they're called bullies, but how could they get away with leaving such a mark?"

"Is from professor." His lips became set and his eyes hardened. She was not going to hear any more of this story today.

Hermione sat down at that. She looked at the bottles she had gathered and busied herself with dosages. "What sort of place was Durmstrang, anyway?"

"Wery hard, but best magical education in Europe. I am prepared for anything." His eyes dared her to say otherwise.

"I imagine you are well prepared. I just wish..." She put her fingertips over his mouth so that he couldn't interrupt her and then handed him his medicines in quick succession to keep him quiet... "I wish you didn't have to be hurt. You must have suffered so much."

She gently touched his shoulder again, searching for the best spot to say the spell that would make the potions work fastest. She tapped his shoulder with her wand and said the spell. Then she watched his eyes to see if it worked. His face quickly relaxed, letting her know that it had.

She sat down and summoned a lunch for them both to eat in the infirmary and then realized that she had the bare chest of a very well-built wizard in her view. For a moment, she simply stared. Then she realized Viktor was talking to her.

She shook her head. "I'm sorry, Viktor, what were you saying?"

He chuckled in a way that made her toes curl. "I say, lunch looks better than flies you are likely to catch with your mouth open like this."

She laughed at herself a bit self-consciously as he put his shirt back on. Did he think she was some sort of idiot, or that he was like those girls who threw themselves at him because he was a Quidditch star? She ate whatever was in front of her and listened to him explain exactly what he'd done wrong in obtaining the injury she had just healed.

After they finished and sent the dishes back to the kitchen, he put his hand over hers. "T'a-Thank you," he said, clearly working to say it perfectly. His eyes were full of feeling.

"For what?"

"For healing."

"I just gave you potions and spells I got from elsewhere."

"No, Hermyown, yu giff me more. Yu show kindness to me, not to superstar. Yu show compassion, not pity for schoolboy. Yu heal me."

"I—you—you do the same for me, you know. Taking up with my father like that. No one has ever taken my side when talking to him before. Ron just avoided him as much as possible; I always have, too. And you've helped me see Ron's death differently, to grow past my grief and the rut I'd gotten into. So thank you, Viktor."

They were walking back through the infirmary, and Viktor stopped. He leaned down and kissed her. As she remarked later to Crookshanks, there wasn't a speck of mistletoe to be found. He must have kissed her because he really wanted to do it.

*A/N: Thank you to Blue Artemis for beta reading and support.*

## (Sort of) Home for the Holidays III

*Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.*

Valentine's day approached. Hermione received a letter from the Burrow and spent several minutes staring at it without opening it. She'd been waiting for a letter from Ron's family, and now that it was here, she dreaded it.

The letter sat on the table.

"Vot is this?"

"I believe it's a letter from Molly Weasley."

"Do you expect bad news?"

"No, actually, it's probably an invitation to dinner. She said ages ago that she'd write me when she was able to get the whole family together."

"And this is problem?"

"Most likely not." Hermione laughed at herself. "I do seem to borrow trouble, don't I?"

"Am I invited?"

Hermione tilted her head. "I hope so. If the whole family is there to grill me, I'd like you to be there. You handled my father so well."

"I go to remind father of duty toward daughter. Is how I plan to watch over our daughters."

"Our daughters?"

"As peautiful as their mother and yust as precious."

Hermione stared into his eyes for a moment before realizing that she was twisting Molly's letter in her hand. Happy for something to do, she finally broke the seal and scanned it. Then she groaned.

"Oh, dear. We're invited for next Sunday dinner since it's Valentine's Day. Everyone will be there, including spouses. Here's what she says about you: 'I hear Viktor Krum is at Hogwarts this year. I hope you bring him with you. I never thanked him properly for his help during the night of Bill and Fleur's wedding.' Everyone seems to know as much about my business as I do these days. It's as if there's a conversation going on behind my back." Hermione's eyes narrowed. "What do you know?"

"If your family talks about you, I know wery little."

"How did you get this job, anyway?"

"Ah, that does involve Harry Potter. He tells them to offer me job last spring and I accept."

"Why would he tell them?" Hermione asked.

\* \* \* \* \*

"They asked me who would be a good Defense professor, and Viktor came to mind," said Harry at dinner on Sunday.

For some reason, she felt the need to press her point. "But why would Viktor come to mind?"

Harry sighed and ran his hand through his hair, smoothing it down before ruffling it back up like his father.

"You do realize you're an absolute prat when you do that," said Hermione.

He kissed her cheek. "And it's your job to keep me humble."

Harry didn't speak for a minute or two, so she had to remind him. "Harry? Viktor's job?"

Harry looked with an embarrassed face at Viktor and then shrugged. "I'd just read a magazine article about his retirement, and I thought he might be interested."

"What magazine?"

"Give it a rest, Hermione, and pass the butter." Ginny's hand reached over her husband's plate. Hermione did as asked and looked at her own plate.

"And anyway, the reason we're all here is to find out about Viktor." Ginny continued.

Several pieces of silverware clinked onto plates.

"Ginny," said Percy.

"Don't tell me we all haven't wondered about it," said Ginny. "What's going on? Have you two found any broom closets that the rest of us missed?"

Hermione felt heat rush to her face. "I'm not sure now is the best time..."

"Why would Aunt Hermione look for broom closets, Mum?" asked Albus.

James said, "Sometimes boys and girls go in there to kiss."

"James!" said one the wives down the table.

Hermione could feel Viktor shaking next to her. She didn't dare look at him. After the way he acted about the ink, he must be enraged.

"Teddy said that's what all the kids do," said James.

"Who'd want to kiss a boy?" asked Roxanne. "Don't they have cooties?"

Luna was sitting halfway down the table. Perhaps Hermione could redirect the conversation. "When will my house be ready to live in, Luna?"

Luna and Charlie had been gazing at each other. Now he nodded toward Hermione and Luna turned. "What? Oh, yes, Hermione. Your house will be ready when everything is gone that keeps you from living happily within it."

Had Luna become even more obtuse? "What does that mean? Have you found something since the Bundimun on the back wall?"

Luna looked startled and then smiled. "Oh, yes, the Bundimun... well, there was a boggart or two in the attic, and I'm not sure what's under the floor in the study. I'm sure everything will come out fine by the end of the school year."

Suddenly Lily Luna burst out as though she couldn't hold it any longer. "I'm NOT going to Hogwarts if it means I have to kiss boys in broom closets. That's icky."

If anything, Viktor's shaking intensified at that, and he likewise burst out, but in a laugh. "No, Miss Potter, yu vill not do such a t'ing! I myself vill giff detention to any boy who tries."

Lily's worried face melted into a smile. "Really?"

"On my honor," answered Viktor.

"Which brings us back to the main point," said George. "Are your intentions toward our Hermione honorable?"

Hermione looked at Viktor and shook her head. "You don't have to answer—"

"Why not? I speak to father. Now I speak to brother and rest of family. When she is ready, Hermione is vitch I marry. She is only vitch for me." Looking into his face, Hermione realized that he was slightly choked up because he felt so very much for her. She blinked hard; something was in her own eyes.

"Oh, so romantic," sighed little Molly and Lucy together.

"Hermione, next time I ask ve vill be ready. When I do, vill you agree to marry me?"

Time seemed to stop, and there was a strange sound in the room. Hermione realized it was silence and that the entire family had stopped talking. All of Weasleykind was holding its breath in anticipation of her answer.

"Yes." She said it softly, but everyone heard it. They certainly saw the smile on Viktor's face.

The room erupted in gasps and cheers, but Hermione looked at Harry, whose face was contented. George and Bill started to chant, "Kiss her!"

Viktor looked at Molly with something very like mischief on his face. "Do ve need broom closet?"

All the adults looked toward Molly, who shook her head. Everyone laughed, and while they were thus occupied, Viktor leaned down and kissed Hermione. When he pulled away slightly, she said, "You knew just how to do that so there wouldn't be as much attention!"

"I too haff big family," he replied as his lips came back to hers.

\* \* \* \* \*

He kissed her again at the door of her rooms, and she held on to him a moment. "Viktor, why so many proposals? Why not just ask me once and be done with it?"

He pushed some of her hair away from her face. "Yu are very smart vitch, and library is full of books."

He kissed her again, the sort of kiss that Hermione had been starting to wonder if he ever planned to share with her. After a minute... or minutes... whenever it was that time started again... she knew without a doubt that there would be such kisses and eventually a great many other things.

"Are you saying I should look it up? Is it some sort of tradition?"

"Is good boyfriend to let yu haff the pleasure of discovering this yurself."

With one last soft kiss, he left her there.

*Thank you to Blue Artemis for all her help!*

## (Sort of) Home for the Holidays IV

### Chapter 9 of 14

Hermione spends the Easter Holiday rearranging things.

*Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.*

"After the young woman accepts the third proposal, the young man goes to her parents' house and speaks to her father."

Hermione looked up from the book and thought about it. The Bulgarian traditions were very interesting, and she could see that this courtship was not exactly as the book described, but certainly influenced by Bulgarian traditions. *Viktor's already been to Severus's house and told him he wouldn't be asking for my hand. I wonder how the rest of this will play out.*

As she sat there on the first afternoon of the Easter Holiday, she happened to see a snapshot that was fixed to the wall next to the fireplace. It was a picture of Ron and her on a roller coaster. She walked over and took it off the wall. Ron had loved the amusement park. Sometimes, the way he got excited about Muggle things was just like Arthur. After his first roller coaster, he was hooked. Eventually they went on every one in England. He'd told her that it was the next best thing to flying on a broom.

With a smile, she moved to put the picture back and then saw the rest of the room for the first time in months. It was full of pictures of herself and Ron. After his death, she'd been eager for a reason not to stay in that cottage. She'd got the job at Hogwarts and left everything behind. Then she'd felt naked, and raided her photo albums.

With enough photographs and sticking charms, she had managed to turn her lounge into a sort of shrine to Ron.

She went over to the bookcase and took out a photo album. After a few minutes, she found the correct page and put the picture back in, next to two others taken at the same park. As she paged through the book, she realized that there was one missing from a vacation they'd taken in the lake district. She spotted it next to the door to the hallway and retrieved it. On the wall nearby was a picture from the same vacation, so she removed that one too.

They were all over her suite. There were engagement pictures, more vacation pictures, pictures of the various weddings they went to, and all sorts of candid shots. On her bedside table, she discovered two pictures. She quickly put away the official photograph from their wedding, but she couldn't quite place the other one.

She and Ron had their faces close together and looked like they were blowing kisses to the camera. In the background was something that looked, for all the world, like sheets. She smiled fondly as she remembered. It was the first night they had made love. Ron had been terribly inept, which answered the one nagging question she'd had about Lavender. He'd been eager to learn, though, often asking whether she enjoyed things. He'd learned rather more quickly than in Charms and Potions class put together.

With a bit of a blush, she realized that she was wondering what it would be like with Viktor. Would he be as eager to learn about her as Ron had been? Something in her tummy fluttered at the thought of learning all about Viktor. Then her tummy twisted at the thought that she hadn't been as diligent about learning as Ron had been. She would do better the next time.

If there was a next time. Viktor was in the habit of visiting her in her classroom or walking her to her lounge. He continued to kiss her goodnight, and his kisses set fire to her. If their kisses got much more passionate, they *would* need to look for a broom closet. He didn't seem interested in a bed, although Hermione was pretty sure she had made it clear that he would be welcome in hers. He would look through her open door and stay carefully outside.

She sighed. They would be going to her house in a few days. Neville had suggested several plants that she could add to her herb garden, so they were going to work in her garden for a day. Neville had gone out earlier in the week and set everything up. Luna had been non-committal about the house itself. Hermione wondered if she would ever get back into it.

She finished putting all the pictures away and put the photograph albums back on their shelves. She had kept out a picture of Ron and herself with Ginny and Harry at their wedding. It was a sweet, chummy shot of them all as friends more than as lovers. Resolving to find a nice frame for it, she placed it on the mantelpiece and looked around. The rooms looked clean now, if a little empty. She felt fresh and ready to fill her life with something new.

Viktor smiled at her when she came out of the school on the morning they had arranged for going to her house. They might have arranged a Portkey or even Apparated, but Hermione had asked to ride with Viktor on his broom. He had agreed eagerly, and now as he pulled her into his lap, the way he held her was not quite as chaste as the first time they had taken this ride.

She had tried to ask once what he was looking for, what change would need to occur before the final proposal. She was starting to get anxious. He only rarely mentioned the marriage that seemed to be inevitable, even if some of his kisses left her hot and eager. There must be some way she could speed things along; perhaps the answer was in the book she was reading.

They arrived and the circus tent was still there, looking as garish and obnoxious as ever. Hermione tried a half-hearted "*Alohomora!*" aimed at the opening and wasn't surprised when there was no effect whatsoever. Shrugging in resignation, she reached for Viktor's hand. Together they walked around the tented house to the back garden.

"Is much vork," he observed.

"That's an understatement."

The whole garden had been dug up, and markers were set out in various places. All of her old plants were in various tubs and planters no doubt raided from the garden shed, while there were quite a few flats filled with this year's annuals and a few perennials Neville had thought she might want to try.

Under the gazing ball there was a long scroll with a note from Neville. *So sorry about the mess, it read. Luna dealt with an infestation of puffskeins near your mud room, but before they left they managed to start some sort of war between an animal that seemed to be a type of vole and your garden gnomes. There was nothing to do but dig everything up and lay it out again.* The rest of the scroll contained a map and directions for all the types of plants.

Hermione walked along the edge of the garden and lined up the map with the markers. "He's made it far easier than I needed it, but I don't understand this map at all. If I follow it, the main path won't match up with the back door."

"Longbottom vill know best vay, no?"

Hermione shrugged. "Well, yes, his layouts have gotten high reviews from his peers. He's got a real knack for putting things just the way they'll give the best yields."

"Ve do his vay, then. Can always put in short path to connect to door."

"You're right." She smiled and went to the shed to get the various tools they needed. It would take all day to get everything planted.

They worked well together, and things went more quickly than Hermione expected. It appeared that while dealing with the voles and gnomes, they had simply tilled the entire garden. Hermione set the plants where Neville indicated, filling in with mulch. Viktor spread the gravel to create the garden paths. At some point in time, a couple of Hogwarts House elves laid out lunch on a picnic blanket.

While they ran the sprinklers on the last bed, Viktor looked at Hermione and started to laugh.

"What?"

"There is moss in yur hair."

"Can you take care of it?"

He shook his head. "In truth, is peautiful. Yu are garden fairy."

She barely had time to smile before he leaned down and kissed her. She leaned up into his arms, and for a few minutes, time ceased. It couldn't be much longer, she told herself. If he didn't ask again, soon, she would.

He walked her to her rooms that evening and glanced inside as he always did.

"Is different."

She turned and saw the bare walls.

"Oh, it was time to put all those old pictures away. I guess I need to redecorate."

She looked into his face. It was similar to pictures of him just after catching a game-winning snitch. Not necessarily happy, but satisfied and content. She could only wonder



what that meant as she watched him walk down the hall in his very well-fit clothing.

*A/N: Thank you, once again, to Blue Artemis for beta reading!*

## Some of the Waiting Ends

*Chapter 10 of 14*

Hermione has a very important conversation with the men in her life.

*Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.*

It was the last day of the Easter Holiday, and Hermione was going over her notes for classes. She would be taking the students on an exhaustive review over the next few weeks before finals, and the O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. students would receive special attention. The fifth years wouldn't know what hit them in this coming week, but hopefully the seventh years would remember.

She was aware of a student standing in front of her desk, but she was in the middle of writing a note to herself. She held up her left hand in a signal to wait as she finished. When she looked up, she saw Teddy Lupin. For some reason, it was odd to see him, but she smiled and greeted him anyway.

"I'm pretty sure you'll do brilliantly on the second year's final, but I'd be happy to help you with whatever you like."

"Oh, I'm not here for that," he said seriously. "I was told to give you this."

He handed her a scroll that was thick parchment sealed with a perfumed wax. "Thank you," she said to empty air. She caught a glimpse of his trainers as he turned from her door into the hall. Only then did she realize why it was strange to see him. She happened to know for a fact that he had gone home over this holiday. He'd taken a letter for her to Severus. Honestly, there was something the matter with her family and friends.

Or she was just overly suspicious. She'd been thrown off balance this whole year due to Luna's presence in her house. Oddly enough, however, the cobwebby feeling in her head had receded. The whole reason she had asked for Luna's help was a fear that nargles were real and had infested her life. Since her house had been tented, Hermione's memory had improved. Her overall energy had increased, too.

She remembered that there was a scroll in her hand. The mark on the wax looked like a versal K, but perhaps she was looking at it from the wrong angle. Viktor had certainly never used anything so... formal... before. She carefully slipped the seal, trying to keep it intact, but it broke as she opened the letter, emitting a floral scent within the room.

*Dear Miss Granger,*

*There is something I wish to discuss with you. Could you come to the dock at the lake?*

*Sincerely,*

*Viktor*

What was this? All he had to do was pop his head into her office, as they both did several times a week. He didn't need to use formal stationery, and what was Teddy doing at Hogwarts a day before the return of the Hogwarts Express?

The note beckoned to her. Viktor was waiting. She stood up and saw that she was wearing a robe for working around the classroom. This wouldn't do. If he was going to summon her so formally, she was going to dress for an occasion.

She went into her closet and found a dress that she knew she looked good in. It wasn't very fancy, but it would be equal to almost any occasion. As had too often been habit this school year, she groaned at the door to the hallway and ran back to her bathroom, where she put on lipstick and the tiniest amount of perfume.

\* \* \* \* \*

He was standing on the dock, facing the doors of the school. She waved and he waved back. Glancing around, Hermione saw Harry down the drive. Standing near Harry, but not facing him, were Severus and Teddy. That answered that question. She really was too suspicious about everything.

But her attention was for Viktor. As she got closer to him, she saw he was wearing good robes. She was glad to have changed her own dress. Looking around one last time she realized. *This is it.* What had precipitated it? Why would he pick this spot?

The part of her that had learned to embrace being off balance this past year told her to relax. *Viktor is brilliant, and clever, and oh, so handsome. He's got it figured out. Let him handle it.*

It finally occurred to her. He'd handled screaming fans who were students. He'd handled Severus. He'd handled Molly and George and Ginny. He'd handled everything. She thought wryly that he'd even handled her upon occasion. He'd done brilliantly. She just needed to follow the plan he'd no doubt put in place.

"Hermyown." His face had the same sort of smile she knew was on her own face. "If yu stand... here," he said, guiding her to the spot, "yu will be yust where yu vere at time I first see yu."

"You saw me here?"

"Do yu remember?"

"How could you have seen *me*?" The whole school had been standing on the dock.

"Yu are standing next to redhead who vorks so hard to get my attention. Yu seem not to care. It makes me curious."

"Is that why you started paying attention to me?"

"Yu surprise me. I haff come to expect somet'ing different from girls in England. I find out all I can. I am enchanted by vitch so smart she sees vizard, not superstar."

"You're more than a superstar to me, Viktor. You're brilliant, and brave, and you fit my world so well--"

"I haff fallen in loff vith yu Hermyown. Yu are only vitch for me."

To her surprise, he knelt before her and cleared his throat. Then he spoke slowly, with practiced pronunciation. "Her-my-own-nee, I love you very much. Will you marry me?"

This wasn't anything like what happened before. For all its sweetness, her romance with Ron was nothing like this. This was no drifting into something that seemed inevitable. It wasn't--what was she thinking? It was time to take the step she'd been thinking about and longing for all winter and spring.

"Yes, Viktor. I love you very much. I'll marry you." Putting her hands on either side of his face, she leaned down and kissed him. Saying something she didn't understand, he put his arms around her waist and stood up, lifting her in the process.

There was some sort of uproar on the driveway, but Hermione wasn't sure what it was. She only knew that Viktor was kissing her, and she wanted it to go on and on.

\* \* \* \* \*

"She says yes," said a jubilant Viktor when they joined Severus and Teddy.

"I gathered," answered Snape.

"You were kissing," said Teddy.

"Yes, people do that when they like each other," answered Hermione.

"It's bad enough when the fifth and sixth years do it. It's weird when grownups do it," said the boy with a shrug.

Hermione looked from the boy to her father and back until she was seized by a huge hug. "It's brilliant, absolutely brilliant," said Harry.

After he let her go, Hermione looked at them all. "Why are you all here?"

"After third proposal comes meeting vith family. Ve go to Hogsmeade for dinner."

"You said you weren't going to ask." Hermione looked among them as they started walking.

"I am not, but now are many plans to make."

What did that mean? Hermione thought it over as they made the short walk and placed their orders. "I can't believe that after refusing to ask for my hand you're going to negotiate a bride price."

Snape snorted. "As if there could be livestock exchanged for you? No, your love-struck swain is trying to rush the wedding. We're discussing your schedule."

Hermione took a deep breath. "Well, we should wait at least until finals are over, and what about my house? Luna has stopped responding to my Owls."

Harry cleared his throat. "I've been over there, and she's been putting everything back together. It will be ready when you need it."

Viktor put his arm around Hermione's shoulders. "I say ve vait no later than veek after exams."

She looked at Severus and Harry. "Can we do that?"

Teddy piped up. "Gran says she can help you with your dress and things."

"Did she really say that?" Hermione looked at her father. "Where is Andromeda?"

"She's been quite tired with this pregnancy, and Beatrice is at a difficult stage. Molly is staying with her today and helping with the little ones. Yet she's determined to fulfill the role of mother of the bride, if that is your wish."

Hermione felt very loved as she looked around the table and back at Severus. "If that is what she would like to do, I would like it very much."

*A/N: Thank you to beta reader Blue Artemis!*

## A Season of Preparation

*Chapter 11 of 14*

Hermione and Viktor prepare for the end of the school year and the rest of their lives, while Andromeda prepares for a wedding.

*Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.*

The first day after the Holiday was perfectly normal, but the second day was a bit odd. Classes were mostly the same as ever, but as the students walked in and out of the classroom, the girls glared at Hermione. She was going to remark upon it at dinner, but Viktor took her hand and leaned close.

"Young vitches are upset."

"They've been giving me angry looks all day. Do you know why?"

Minerva leaned behind Professor Sprout's chair. "Isn't it obvious?"

Both Hermione and Viktor shook their heads.

"What could we have done to make the girls so angry?" asked Hermione.

Professor Flitwick looked over. "It's as plain as the ring on your finger. Up 'til now, Viktor has been quite the eligible bachelor, you know."

The rest of the table laughed at the look on Hermione's face.

After Hermione and Viktor's engagement was fully acknowledged, time in the classroom dragged. Whether it was due to the lovely weather or the length of the school year, things were dreary. The students spent much of the time looking out the windows. For a full day, she masked the windows so that one could not see outside, but then the students looked stupidly at her as their minds obviously wandered. She had to admit defeat and fix the windows.

Every day there was a request from a magazine or newspaper for details about the wedding. Some were quite insulting, asking Hermione how she had caught one of the greatest Quidditch players ever known. One or two simply asked for information about the wedding. Those she forwarded to her father, begging for help. Severus's sent a note in response, waxing eloquently about his wife's skill in dealing with the press. Hermione rolled her eyes, but was grateful she didn't have to deal with it.

Planning a wedding should have helped the time pass, but it only added to the stress.. Yet here Andromeda proved to be worth her weight in gold. Hermione was already fond of her stepmother, but she fell in love with her all over again during the spring. Early on, there were Owls containing pictures of floral arrangements or swatches of color arrangements. House elves would arrive with soups or pastries to taste. They would stare carefully at Hermione to gauge her response and then disappear.

Every time Hermione read in a bridal magazine or book that there was some detail that needed to be considered, she sent a panicked Owl to Andromeda. Within hours, a return Owl always came, filled with soothing words and suggestions that had already been worked out. Hermione's only task was to select her favorite from two or three choices she would have loved.

The only thing Andromeda failed at, if it could be called failure, was the wedding dress. She'd made agreements with Gladrags and Madam Malkin's to have dresses sent to Hogwarts. During the last week in April and first week in May, Hermione would receive a courier box every other day. The most beautiful dress robes, gowns and frocks were in the boxes, and Hermione thought they were all amazing. Yet none of them was what she pictured when she imagined standing next to Viktor in his dress robes. She picked the best of the lot, and hoped Andromeda wouldn't know how disappointed she was. It was a gorgeous dress, after all, and Hermione knew she would be lovely. It just wasn't *the* dress.

None of that mattered when she spent time with Viktor. The only time of day that didn't drag endlessly were the few precious hours they spent together. They spent sunny afternoons walking together by the lake until it was time for dinner. Although a few of the young witches still frowned, most students waved and giggled at them.

They ate dinner together, conscious of people watching them frequently. Afterwards, they went to one of their offices or the other, grading essays and assisting students that came to their classrooms. Afterwards, they walked through the hallways, patrolling for students who were in the wrong places as the various curfews went into effect. They ended at Hermione's door, where Viktor would kiss her until she was sure her shoes had melted.

"Why don't you come in?" she asked. "You know I want you to."

"I wait so many years, what is few more weeks?"

"You know I'm not inexperienced."

Viktor shrugged. "Nor I, but I wish for no chance of students catching us or of interruption for school emergency."

"Won't that be the case next year, anyway?"

"Next year such things exist, but not when we first come together. I wish for first time together after we belong to each other completely, when we have time to learn full mystery of love for each other. First time will be magic." He pressed his forehead to hers as he whispered the last bit.

There was some validity to that position, but it was hard to just kiss him on his way. "Good night, then, Viktor. I can promise that I'll be thinking of you."

His response was a sultry chuckle. "And I of you, love. I think long into night of you."

\* \* \* \* \*

Luna finally responded to Hermione's frantic letters. *The house is coming back together nicely. I understand that you will have a true honeymoon, spending a month touring Europe and meeting Viktor's family. I can guarantee that the house will be waiting for you the day you get back.*

"When we get back?" Hermione shrieked loudly enough for many students to hear.

Viktor picked up the letter. "Ah, is perfect."

"I wanted to be married from my cottage! All of my plans were with that in mind."

"No, bride is married from father's house. We all agreed on that, even when Potter suggests it be from his house."

"When did this happen?"

"When we eat after you accept proposal."

She thought back to that day, and vaguely remembered some small spat between Severus, Teddy, and Harry while she had been daydreaming. She hadn't been so forgetful since... well it had been a long while. Perhaps she could be excused, given the events of that day.

"So I'm to be married from my father's house?"

"Is tradition."

"Yes, I recall."

\* \* \* \* \*

Final exams, that last hurdle to cross before the wedding, eventually came. Hermione enjoyed proctoring exams, watching the students like a hawk as they wrote out their answers. Sometimes they looked at ceilings, as though the answers might be written there, and occasionally they looked at her and frowned, as though hoping the answer would scroll across her forehead.

Hermione and Viktor stayed up late at night, grading exams so they would be done long before the wedding. It might therefore have been weariness, or it might have been exhaustion. At any rate, on the last morning, Hermione was proctoring a second year charms exam. Ernest Montague was working hard on his exam, occasionally looking up and mouthing words to himself. Hermione walked past him, not noticing that he was starting to swish his wand as he did so.

She heard Viktor yell her name and turned in curiosity. Then she felt strangely light, and then the world went dark.

\* \* \* \* \*

The bread smelled so good. She took a deep breath of it, and then her stomach growled. She opened her eyes and realized that she was in the room designated as hers in Andromeda's cottage. She sat up and thought about it. She had no idea how she got here, or indeed anything beyond that instant in the Great Hall of Hogwarts.

Some clothes were laid out, waiting for her. She got up, put them on, and made her way downstairs. The smell of baking bread got stronger and stronger, until she thought Andromeda could hear her stomach growling.

As she walked into the kitchen, she saw that Andromeda was wrist deep in dough, while the children stood at the other end of the table and watched. Another woman stood near Andromeda, and the two witches appeared to be in deep discussion.

Suddenly Beatrix piped up. "Hermione is awake!"

Andromeda suddenly straightened up and wiped her hands on a damp towel so that she could hug her. Hermione was amazed to see just how enormous Andromeda was. The children crowded around, too, wanting hugs, making Hermine feel very loved.

"Hermione, this is Viktor's mum. She's showing me how to make the bread."

Hermione was pulled into a warm hug. "Yust call me Mama, dear."

"All right," said Hermione, who was being drowned out by the shouting little ones.

"Quiet, children," said Andromeda, "I told you that you could stay here just until Hermione woke up. Now you must go play while the grown-ups talk."

"I want to talk!" said the little girl.

"It's just wedding stuff, Bea," said Teddy.

"You can tell me everything later," said Hermione.

"Can we have cookies, mum?" asked little Evan

"You may each have one," said Andromeda with a smile.

When the children left, Andromeda returned to her dough. "This is the bread made by the mother of the bride three days before the wedding. Anya is showing me how it's done."

"Furst is good enough," said Viktor's mum.

"Perhaps," answered Andromeda, "but I want it perfect for Hermione and Viktor's day. Hermione, she added, "The remains of breakfast are under that towel over there. Help yourself. The kettle has been warm all along, so either coffee or tea is also ready."

"Thank you, Andromeda," answered Hermione. "How did I get here?"

"Your father was at the school for O.W.L.s, you may recall, and when he saw the spell hit you, he insisted on bringing you here, and you had a nice long sleep of two nights. Then Anya came, and we're finishing your plans." The bread went into the oven at that point, with Anya declaring it was indeed perfect.

Severus wandered in and, after greeting Hermione, looked at his wife in concern. "You're not overstraining yourself, are you?" He looked at Hermione. "It's twins, you know."

Hermione shook her head. "I didn't realize. I wouldn't have asked for so much help."

Andromeda pulled out a chair and worked herself into it. "Nonsense," she said. "It was pure pleasure for me to work on your wedding, and I promised the Healers that I would put my feet up afterwards until the babies come. But a daughter doesn't get married every day, and I'm determined that we shall do things right."

"Should you be resting?" Hermione was worried, now.

"I'll rest here, and we'll have a bit of tea while the bread bakes, and after it comes out, we'll go into the lounge. Severus is sure to make me so comfortable there that I'll need to move every ten minutes."

"It's just to take care of you," said Severus.

"What you can do for me right now, Severus, is get that notebook that has all my pictures and swatches in it."

*A/N: I had intended this story to be completely posted by now, but for some reason, this one chapter kicked my butt. I apologize for making everyone wait.*

*As you've probably noticed, this story is dedicated to our dear Kyria of Delphi, who's been quite ill all spring and summer. Please if you have a moment, send her your kind wishes or prayers.*

*Thank you, everyone, for reading, and for your kind reviews. Thanks, especially, to Blue Artemis, for being my beta reader and my companion in all of this.*

## Beautiful Morning

*Chapter 12 of 14*

Hermione prepares for a wedding.

*Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling.*

Hermione woke early on her wedding day. Andromeda had bustled her off to bed early the night before, claiming that she wanted her to be a well-rested bride. Yet sleep was elusive, and Hermione woke several times in the night, looking at her clock and sighing in annoyance. So once she realized she wasn't getting back to sleep and it seemed to be late enough, she simply got up.

She took her time showering, using special soaps and shampoos that would help her enjoy her special day without becoming too fatigued. After a leisurely breakfast in her bathrobe, she walked up to her bedroom and opened a wardrobe that she hadn't touched since she had come to the house the other day. The dress she was going to wear today was behind the door.

She opened the door and saw two dresses. There was the one they had decided upon, and next to it was ~~her~~ *her* dress, the dress that she had dreamed of: The feel of the silk, the slim lines of it, the way the sleeves fanned out from her elbows, and the way it laced up the front. It was perfection. Why hadn't Andromeda sent it to try on? Perhaps she'd only found it recently and had forgotten to mention it in all the last minute planning they'd done over the past few days.

It had been so busy that Hermione had only seen Viktor once in all that time. He'd brought the last of her exams along with his, and they'd finished their grading together. Then they had strolled through Andromeda's garden, admiring it and getting ideas for their own at Hermione's house while stopping occasionally to make more physical promises to each other.

"Just a few more days," he'd murmured into her hair.

"I can't believe it's finally going to happen, and yet, I can't wait," she had replied, holding him as tightly as she could.

Now today, she put on this lovely dress and thought to herself that in a few short hours, she and Viktor would be together forever. It fit almost perfectly, and the ties would adjust to accommodate the differences. There was a knock on the door, and then it opened.

"Harry and Ginny will be here soon. I was wondering if you wanted help with your dress--"

Andromeda stopped short and got the strangest look on her face.

"I'm so grateful that you kept looking. This one is perfect! How did you know?"

Andromeda leaned against the doorjamb. "I didn't. I forgot it was in there. That's my debutante dress."

"You were presented to the Wizengamot?"

Andromeda shook her head. "No, I ran away from home, and it ended up being my wedding dress when I married Ted."

Hermione looked in the cheval glass and picked at the silk. "Would you rather I not wear it?"

Andromeda crossed the room and hugged her. "No, dear, I'm honored that you would wear a dress that holds such happy memories for me."

Hermione hugged her back, but then was distracted by something in the hallway. Harry looked in the door of the bedroom and whistled under his breath. "That bad?" asked Hermione.

"You know better," he said, coming in to give her a hug and a kiss. "I definitely have something to work with when I'm asking him for money."

"What? I thought we said no bartering!"

"This is different. He's going to pay to get into the room where we have you locked up. That reminds me; I need one of your shoes."

"Harry! I'm not doing this."

"You must!" laughed Andromeda, "It's tradition."

"She needs her hair done! Get out!" Ginny wedged her way through the door past Harry and then elbowed him out of the room. "Mind you get a good price for her. If she doesn't want the money, I do. We need to repaint and furnish Lily's room. She's a little girl, not some sort of Quidditch sprog."

Harry laughed and went down the stairs while Ginny sat Hermione down in a chair. Andromeda offered to help, but Ginny said, "Mum told me to make you sit down and watch. She also said to ask if you remembered."

"She means my own wedding day," Andromeda laughed. "I was so pathetic with my own hair. I am still, truth be told."

"It looks fine now," said Ginny, who was spraying Sleakeasy's potion with one hand and brushing with the other.

"It doesn't need to be fancy today. I'm only taking part in what happens here at home, and then it's straight upstairs until the babies are born."

Hermione turned, making Ginny groan. "You're not coming to the wedding?"

"I'm sorry, but the Healers don't want me to. Severus and the children will be there to celebrate your day. I'll get to see Viktor's face when he first sees you. That's the most romantic bit, anyway."

Hermione felt a bit wistful. "You did all this work, and you won't be able to enjoy it?"

There was a sudden noise from downstairs. Ginny went to the window and looked. "Oh, no! Viktor and his brother are here! His family will be here any minute. Harry," she said more loudly, "we need more time. I still have to finish her hair before we do the veil."

Harry knocked on the door quietly to show that he had heard.

"What now?" Hermione asked, somewhat confused.

Andromeda laughed. "It's a charming tradition, actually. Harry is going to demand a handsome payment for Viktor to come in. There will be some bargaining, and the payment will be placed in your shoe. Then Harry will let Viktor in and Viktor will place the shoe on your foot."

There was a great deal of shouting and laughter downstairs. Hermione was somewhat annoyed to miss all the fun conversations. Then Ginny tugged a bit of her hair and gave her something else to be annoyed about. Then there was a lot of pounding on the stairs as part of the group came up.

"Not so fast," said Harry calmly. "I guarantee you want to see what's in that room, but you're going to have to pay. I hope you came prepared."

Viktor said something quietly that Hermione couldn't hear and there was a clink of coins. "That's an insult!" said Harry. "Hermione, you might want to consider climbing out the window if that's the best he can do."

"Is this how it is?" Viktor said.

There was another clink of money and Harry made a loud sound of annoyance. "If that's the best you can do, mate, I'm not sure she should come out."

"Vhat am I to think, Potter?" Viktor said. "Yu are one who helps me get job. Maybe you are trying to get rid of her."

There was a collective gasp, and Hermione looked up at Ginny, who was now applying Hermione's make up. "Was this all a set up?"

Ginny put the eyeliner away and then put her hands on her hips. "Would it make a difference if it was?" When Hermione didn't answer, she turned back and looked through the various choices for lip color. "You know Harry. It would kill him to keep a secret like that. Minerva really did ask him if he had any ideas for a Defense professor, and Harry really had been reading some magazine article about Viktor's retirement. Several of us asked each other how it might affect you, but then we shrugged and decided to let nature take its course."

Hermione smiled. "Nature has been very accommodating, lately." Then she ducked as Ginny tried to put her veil on her.

"That's one," said Andromeda. It was a Bulgarian tradition that three attempts must be made to place the bride's veil on her head, and Hermione wanted to honor that.

Ginny tried to put the veil on her again, and Hermione ducked it once more. Andromeda got up and walked Hermione over to the cheval glass. Then she kissed Hermione and helped Ginny settle the veil properly. They fastened it on her head with a wreath of roses. "Viktor sent these. He said they're from the town where his family lives. Oh! Now look at yourself."

Hermione looked in the mirror and suddenly couldn't breathe.

"That looks like me, but I've never looked like this."

"He won't take his eyes off you all day, and neither will anyone else."

Suddenly, there was a loud whistle from the hallway. "I'm glad Ginny and I got married before this," said Harry. "You've set the bar pretty high for other blokes, Krum."

There was a knock on the door, and Harry said, "Let him in. He's earned the right."

The door opened, and there was Viktor. She'd seen him before, many times and on many different occasions. Today, he looked amazing in his dress robes. She could stand and look at him for hours. She was conscious of Andromeda and Ginny sighing romantically behind her. Severus cleared his throat out in the hallway, and the spell was broken.

"If you vould sit, I haff your shoe," said Viktor.

Ginny turned the chair they'd been using to help Hermione get ready, and she sat down. Viktor knelt down and lifted the hem of the dress. There was a scroll in the shoe. "This is for you," he said, handing her the parchment as he gently fitted the shoe onto her foot.

Hemione read it, and then looked at him. "This can't be real."

"Is real."

"It must be half your holdings!"

"Precisely. In vault in name of Hermione Granger-Krum. Just as paper says."

"But, Viktor!"

"I hold nothing back from you."

*A/N: I'm trying to base some of this on what little I've been able to find out about Bulgarian wedding traditions. If I've messed up horribly, I apologize.*

*As always, this goes out with love to Kyria of Delphi, and I couldn't do it without the help and beta reading of Blue Artemis.*

## Beautiful Day

*Chapter 13 of 14*

A new phase of life begins.

*Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.*

Hermione became aware of the fact that several people had crowded into her bedroom and that others were taking pictures. Severus and Harry had moved into the room to stand next to their wives as Viktor's parents had also come in to watch Viktor put her shoe on her foot. Viktor helped Hermione stand up, and then he lifted her veil from her face and kissed her.

There was a tumult of cheers, laughter, chatter, and hugging until Andromeda's voice was heard. "If you would all come downstairs, I have some things laid out in the dining room for you all. You might want a snack before the Portkey."

After some light refreshments, there was folk dancing in the front garden. Everyone danced in a circle around a sort of maypole. The children ran back and forth amongst the dancers, laughing and singing, and then around the maypole.

Someone shouted, and everyone moved toward the maypole, taking hold of the ribbons or the pole itself. It shimmered blue, and an instant later everyone was standing just outside the gates of Hogwarts, which were open and covered in festive greenery and flowers. The dancing continued up the drive of the school.

Hermione became aware that her father was hurrying toward her just as they reached the school, where a small crowd of people was waiting. She realized that he hadn't been among those who used the Portkey.

"Where were you?" she asked.

"I wanted to make sure Andromeda was resting in bed before I left. She was going to try to clear everything up herself. I reassured her the elves have it well in hand. Don't you worry; she laid out a celebration for them too. Trust me. They're being very well compensated for all their work this week. The goblins are snickering at your stepmother over it."

"I just don't want to take advantage of them."

"The goblins think the House elves are taking shameless advantage of us." Severus looked up at the castle and back at her. "Look. There's a very special wedding gift for you, just on the step."

Hermione's parents were standing there, smiling and waving. Viktor suddenly appeared by her side and led her up to them. They both hugged her tightly and spoke at the same time. "Hermione! We're so glad to come to your wedding!"

These people were not the Monica and Wendell Wilkins she remembered from her last visit to Australia. They were the Rose and Hugo Granger she grew up with.

"I don't understand," she said, looking from Viktor to Severus, who was standing right behind her.

"There was just a vestige of memory charm that you hadn't removed. I had to look pretty hard to find it."

Rose put her arm around Hermione. "We had a nice visit with Severus and Viktor, here, and somehow they made us remember what our family here in England was like. Of course we wanted to come."

Hermione looked around for the brother and sister she had barely met while in Australia before. "Where are Becky and Micky?"

Hugo spoke this time. "They're visiting with Aunt Gert today. They know about you of course because they met you, but we haven't explained any of this to them." He gestured to indicate all of Hogwarts.

Severus stepped back. "We've explained everything they need to do as parents of the bride."

"But you and Andromeda..."

"We've had the joy of helping you to prepare for today, but they helped you to prepare all through your childhood."

"But..."

"It's time for your mother to help you get ready, and then your father will walk you into the Great Hall." Severus leaned down and spoke into her ear. "You're beautiful, and I'm proud of you." He kissed her cheek and then leaned back up. She tried to see some emotion in his face, but other than a bit of a twitch around his mouth, he looked as impassive as he usually did.

Rose guided her into the little room where Hermione, Ron, Harry, and the others had waited before being sorted. Ginny came to freshen up her makeup and checked her hair and veil. There was the sound of milling crowds as everyone went into the Great Hall to take their seats. Hermione couldn't help being reminded of her first day at Hogwarts yet again.

Everything was quickly ready, and Hugo looked through the door. "Are you ready?"

"Yes." The moment had finally come.

Harry offered an arm to Rose and led her away. Ginny followed them and peeked through the door of the Great Hall. Now it was just Hermione and Hugo. They waited just by the door until Ginny turned and said, "Wait until I get all the way up there."

Hugo took her hand and walked her just up to the doorway. Then he stopped. "I was told to remind you to step in with your right foot first," he said. "It's good luck."

Hermione smiled and laughed. "Thank you, dad."

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the House ghosts, hovering near the door of the room she had just left, just as they had done so many years ago. Nearly Headless Nick was saluting and the Fat Friar was waving. The Gray Lady and the Baron looked cool but not unkind.

There was a rustling in the Great Hall as everyone stood to see her. Because this had been so much like her very first day at Hogwarts, she half expected to see the stool and the Sorting Hat. Instead she saw Viktor. He was so handsome in his dress robes. He wore the starched shirt and bow tie as though they were what he always wore, and he stood tall and proud. As their eyes met, a huge smile crossed his face. She wouldn't be surprised if the same smile was on her own lips.

She lifted her right foot and took the first step.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hours later, they snuck into a back room of the school and clasped hands around a small bouquet, a replica of the flowers she had carried and tossed just a few minutes ago. The ribbon glowed and they were soon in an empty alleyway that Hermione didn't know.

"Where are we?" Hermione asked.

Viktor smiled and put his hand at her back. "Come, our hotel is just around the way."

The concierge handed Viktor a room key as they walked into the lobby. "All is as you requested, Mr. Krum."

Viktor smiled. "Thank you." He handed something to the other man and an instant later, they were in the elevator.

"Viktor, where are we?"

"Just wait." He tapped her nose. "I show you."

The doors of the elevator opened, and Viktor led her to a door nearby. He opened it but stopped her as she tried to walk through. She was about to ask why when he scooped her into his arms and carried her through the doorway.

"Is tradition, no?"

Their faces were very close together. "So is this," she answered, sliding her hand along his cheek and giving him a long kiss. He set her down gently and continued the kiss, pulling her close and then closer yet.

"Ah, loff, now we are alone, and we belong together."

Hermione shivered. "I feel like I've been waiting my whole life for this."

"I know I wait just as long. Do you wish to eat?" There was a table with covered trays near a large window.

Hermione shook her head. "I just ate something a little while ago. Unless you'd rather."

Viktor shook his head, too. "I jyst vant this." He leaned down and kissed her again.

"Just that?" Hermione asked when the kiss ended. She fingered the ends of his tie and gently tugged at them.

"Is beginning," he said with a smile that contained a bit of a leer. "Is beginning of vhat I vant."

This time as they kissed, Hermione tugged at the tie and unbuttoned his shirt. She slid her hands under his shirt and over his chest. It was just as she remembered on the day she had looked with such interest in the Hospital Wing. Now she gasped in pleasure as she realized he was doing exactly the same thing to her.

The ties of her dress were undone, and it had been pushed from her shoulders as his hands had explored. When they came up for air, her dress pooled around her feet. She pushed his shirt and robes over his shoulders and behind him onto the floor.

They looked at each other, a little in surprise at being undressed so quickly, a little in curiosity, and very much with desire. Viktor nodded to himself and lifted her up again, setting her on the bed. "Is time for loff," he whispered.

She could do little more than breathe out, "Oh, yes..." as his mouth met hers again.

\* \* \* \* \*

There was no clock to tell them what time it was when they decided that it might be nice to eat after all. Viktor Summoned the champagne and glasses to the bed, but Hermione was a little hungrier and went over to investigate what was under the covers. She filled a plate with crackers, cheese and fruit and then turned back toward the bed.

Before she took a single step, she stopped short. "I do believe that's the Eiffel Tower. Viktor, are we in Paris?"

He came behind her and handed her a glass. "Yes, loff, ve honeymoon in City of Light."

"I--I don't believe it."

"Yu doubt me?"

"Oh, no! What I mean is that Paris is considered the most romantic of cities. You are the most amazing husband to bring me here."

"For most amazing vife."

They sipped from their glasses and looked out the window. "Ve stay here for veek. Then we go to Sofia and from there to visit family."

"Sofia sounds like a lovely city."

"Is lovely city, and means visdom. Perhaps they name city for Hermyown."

She laughed at that. "Of course they didn't. That city is centuries old."

"Is right. Yu are far too young and peautiful."

Hermione's tummy growled, and she blushed and looked toward the plate she'd put together. "Do you suppose it's time to eat?"

Viktor nodded and gently tugged her toward the bed. "Bring plate with yu. We eat, and then is time for loff again."

*A/N: I'm so very sorry that this chapter took such a long time in coming. I don't like to write long author notes, but this is an exception. I hope you will forgive me for stepping out of character for a moment.*

*This story was inspired by a comment made by Kyria of Delphi to Blue Artemis during a conversation between the three of us this past spring. As many of you know, Kyria was at that time struggling with cancer treatment. I began writing it because parts of the story sprung into my head quite quickly and mostly because I thought it would be a good idea to give Kyria something interesting and new to read as she went through her treatment.*

*I didn't quite finish the story in time, as we lost Kyria on the twenty-second of September. We miss her dearly. She did read as far as the engagement, and she found ways to let me know she was enjoying the story. I think, based on conversations we've had, that she would have enjoyed this wedding and wedding night.*

*In the midst of all this, I was hospitalized for a week with pulmonary embolisms in mid-September, and I've found it hard to pick up the pieces of my various projects. It seems that my capacity to multi-task is greatly diminished lately.*

*Thank you all for bearing with me as I finish this. There's one more chapter, and I hope it lives up to the lovely reviews left for the story thus far.*

*As always, Blue Artemis has been as much a companion in this project as a beta reader. It literally would not have happened without her. I'm very grateful to her for everything.*

## (Truly) Home for the Holidays

*Chapter 14 of 14*

Our story ends with Hermione in a place she can call home, at last. Hermione, Viktor, and a cast of many.

*The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.*

"I don't understand why we have to walk this last bit," said Hermione petulantly. "You'd think they'd offer a better welcome home from a long trip than this."



"After long broom ride, this is good for us." Viktor smiled good-naturedly as he took her hand and guided her down the path. "Luna says is to see house in best light."

"Seeing the house at all and not that ridiculous tent is all I...oh, look at that."

Hermione's cottage was completely obscured by the Knight Bus standing in front of it. The entire population of a small town appeared to be milling around, but as they approached, it turned out to be family and friends.

"They're here!" someone shouted, and everyone cheered and hooted out their greetings.

Hermione's mouth twitched until she couldn't help smiling. Harry was the first to seize her in a hug, followed by Ginny and all the Weasleys. Severus and a more slender Andromeda came next. Hermione couldn't see around all the people who claimed her attention, but from the sound of it, Viktor was similarly engaged.

"We have another sister!" Beatrix told Hermione excitedly. She pulled her over to the pram where the twins lay. "Aren't they beautiful? Papa said our sister's name is Eileen for our gran, and mum said our new brother is Regulus."

Hermione looked at the sleeping babies and raised her eyes to see Viktor watching her. They exchanged a secret communication, and then she turned back to her sister. "They are delightful, just as babies should be."

Finally, Luna came out from around the bus. "Everyone is sorry it took so long," she said, "but we think it will be worth it."

"What are you talking about?" asked Hermione. "You were just supposed to get rid of the nargles."

"Did you find all your things?"

Actually, Hermione had. "Well, everything showed up among the things I had at Hogwarts, when it came down to it."

"So the nargles are gone, aren't they?"

Suddenly, Hermione was suspicious. She tilted her head and looked at Luna with narrowed eyes. "Do they really exist?"

"Your things were missing, weren't they? And now that the extermination is complete, they've all reappeared, haven't they?"

"Well..."

"Call it what you like. I call it nargles," said Luna matter-of-factly.

"What about the other things?"

"Everything that was keeping you from a happy life in your home is now gone."

There was some fundamental truth in Luna's words that was just beyond Hermione's ability to process it while standing there with so many people around; she would sort it out when she and Viktor were alone. Glancing at him and seeing the way he looked at her, she realized it might be a while after she and Viktor were alone. Perhaps they could continue the honeymoon just a bit.

"Well, do you mean to keep me meters away from my doorstep indefinitely? When can I enter my own house?"

Charlie Weasley showed up next to Luna. "Is everyone ready?" he asked. After the crowd shouted, "Yes!" he said, "Stan, move the Knight Bus!"

The bus shifted into gear with its usual round of odd sounds and lurches. Suddenly it was gone with a loud sound, but Hermione didn't notice. She was too busy looking at the structure in front of her.

It wasn't the house she'd lived in with Ron.

Well, the general shape was the same, but instead of the house she'd shared with her husband...her first husband, that was...this was a home similar to a stone cottage she and Harry had seen while trying to find Horcruxes. "Harry, was this your doing?"

"Not exactly, love," he answered. "I admit I participated."

"Who was involved in this?" She looked a bit suspiciously at her husband. "Were you in on this?"

He shook his head. "I merely take job, with hope of perhaps becoming friends with Myown again."

"Then how did it happen?"

Andromeda stepped forward. "Come see what's been done inside, dear. Perhaps we can put it all together for you."

The door was opened, and everyone cheered when Viktor carried her over the threshold, something he'd done at every hotel and home they'd stayed in since the wedding. Hermione was getting quite used to it, and took advantage of the opportunity to kiss him during the process, which invoked more cheers.

The interior of the house was the same and yet different. There was a wonderful fireplace just where the old one had been, but it was shaped completely differently, and now it was stone instead of brick. Each of the rooms had been changed somewhat, because doors and windows had moved to accommodate the changes to the outside of the house.

The kitchen was the best room of all. Hermione had always admired her stepmother's kitchen, and now hers was very similar, down to newer models of the same appliances. "This is amazing," she whispered as she sat down at the table with her husband, Harry and Ginny, and Severus, and Andromeda. "So how did it happen?"

"You contacted Luna. That was absolutely the first thing that happened," Harry stated unequivocally.

"Didn't Viktor get the job at Hogwarts, first?" Hermione asked teasingly.

"Well, yes, but that was unrelated to the house at the time. Viktor had the job, and then you asked Luna to do something about the nargles. She discovered why you were losing things and you made the arrangement for the extermination."

"Yes, I do recall that bit."

"Well, when we heard about it, it seemed like a good time to make a few changes. I remembered that house you fell in love with and wondered if something could be done."

"And Severus and I heard that your home was under a tent and offered to do something about the kitchen," said Andromeda.

"Molly and Arthur offered to help, too, and when we realized that we'd be moving the back door, we contacted Neville about the garden."

"You did all of this behind my back?" Hermione said. "That's quite a lot, and extremely invasive."

"We only made changes to things we'd already known you liked."

"How could you be sure I'd want a stone cottage?"

"We back to that other one three times, Hermione. You said it was too much of a risk to go anywhere twice, and yet we went there again."

"I suppose that's true."

"And we all knew the things you found lacking in this house before," said Severus with a smirk.

"We can change it if you don't like it," said Viktor close to her ear.

Hermione knew it was time to give in. "All right then," she said. "I suppose a great many thank yous are in order."

The afternoon and evening progressed with a great many hugs and kisses. Food appeared, no doubt Andromeda's and Molly's doing. Children played, grown ups watched them as they chatted. Hermione and Viktor walked all over their garden and the downstairs of their house, admiring the way things had been done and planning one or two small adjustments.

Finally, everyone went home, and it was time to investigate the upstairs. Hand in hand they walked up, but after Hermione indicated which room she thought would be theirs, Viktor swept her up into his arms one last time. A song came to mind as she put her arm around his neck.

"What are you humming, loff?"

"Hm? Oh, just this Muggle song I heard once."

"What is it called?"

"'Fall and I Will Catch You.' The singer's called Kristian Leontiou."

"At the end, you start thinking about the beginning?", he risked, eying his wife with the sly smile he reserved only for her.

Hermione laughed. "More like: "All beginnings should come from an ending like this."

Viktor stepped over the threshold. The room had been charmed so that candles would light as soon as they did so, but they didn't notice, being absorbed in each other.

*fin*

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*Author's Note: I'm sorry this took so long to finish. I knew exactly how everything happened in this chapter, even down to the Wizarding version of Extreme Makeover-Home Edition, but somehow I'd lost the ability to say it. I finally found the words this week.*

*Thank you to Kyria of Delphi for a lovely friendship and the inspiration for this tale. I'm still drinking the tea you sent me a year ago and thinking of you.*

*Thank you to beta reader Blue Artemis for taking this journey with me.*

*Thank you also to an FFN author named Intervigillium for giving me the very end of this story.*

*Finally, thank you dear readers, for travelling this journey with me. Your kind words and thoughts as we all have mourned Kyria have helped immeasurably.*