

Amans Revelare

by Aphrodite319

My spin on the Marriage Law Challenge. The Ministry is forced to decree that all over-age witches and wizards must marry in order to counteract a curse placed by Voldemort. With the help of the Amans Revelare spell, the Ministry pairs Hermione with the last person she would have expected.

The Decree

Chapter 1 of 4

My spin on the Marriage Law Challenge. The Ministry is forced to decree that all over-age witches and wizards must marry in order to counteract a curse placed by Voldemort. With the help of the Amans Revelare spell, the Ministry pairs Hermione with the last person she would have expected.

By the Order

of the

Ministry

of

Magic

All unwed witches and wizards over the age of seventeen are required to wed and move in with their chosen partner by the end of this year. Any of age witch or wizard who chooses an underage spouse must apply for a waiver by the Head of Magical Law Enforcement, as well as gain permission from the underage spouse's parents, provided that the chosen spouse is no less than sixteen and no less than one year younger than the of age party, in which case the of age witch or wizard must select another partner. All of age witches and wizards found without a chosen spouse by the 15th of December must complete the application within this pamphlet and send it in to have compatible spouses chosen for them by the Ministry of Magic.

The above decree will go into effect immediately. For your own safety, it is imperative that you wed before the New Year. Any witch or wizard who remains unwed will suffer the effects of a possibly harmful curse placed upon Decree Number 612 by You-Know-Who during the downfall of the Ministry. It should also be known that married couples must cohabitate to avoid the effects of said curse.

Signed,

Minister of Magic

Kingsley Shacklebolt

Hermione Granger lowered the purple and gold-embazoned pamphlet, eyes wide with shock.

There were whispers all around her, students all up and down the long Gryffindor table standing and craning their necks to see who else had gotten the purple pamphlet by owl just moments before, their breakfasts forgotten as their mutterings and exclamations filled the Great Hall.

"It must be a joke!"

"Come off it, who sent these?"

"Who expects us to believe this rubbish?"

"Get married? Ha! I only just turned seventeen last week!"

"Did you get one, too?" a voice whispered into Hermione's ear.

Hermione jumped and looked around. Ginny had slid unnoticed into the seat beside her.

"It must be a joke," Ginny said, echoing the students around her. Lowering her voice, she added, "Right?"

"I don't know." Hermione bit her lip and looked up at the staff table, where the teachers were all in deep, serious conversation, glancing nervously at the buzzing Great Hall every few seconds. "They seem rather worried, don't they? And it's a rather feeble joke, don't you think?"

"What sort of curse d'you think You-Know-Who could have put on a decree?" Ginny asked, frowning.

"I'm not sure I want to know," Hermione said with a sigh. "Something very nasty, I'm sure. But I wonder what this Decree Number 612...."

Her voice was drowned out by the ringing of the bell. With a terrified squeak, she jumped up and threw her bag over her shoulder.

"I'm going to be late for Potions!" she moaned.

"We're going to be late for Potions," Ginny corrected her as she, too, shouldered her bag.

They rushed out of the Great Hall, pushing through the waves of students who were still puzzling over the Ministry pamphlet. By the time they'd hurried down the stone steps and reached the door to the Potions classroom, the second bell was already ringing.

"Weasley, Granger, you're late," said the familiar, sneering voice as they entered. "Ten points from Gryffindor."

Throwing Snape's back a look of deepest loathing when he turned to write today's potion on the blackboard, Ginny flung herself into a seat at the back. Hermione joined her in tight-lipped silence; though she found herself longing to throw a diatribe at the Potions master and *Daily Prophet*-coined war hero, she had withstood his mistreatment long enough to know opening her mouth would only land them in even more trouble.

"Evil git," Ginny growled, glaring at Snape as he began to lecture them on the correct way to brew a Rejuvenation Elixir. "We were only a second late!"

The corners of Hermione's mouth twitched as she copied down Snape's words. She could remember a time, so long ago, when Ginny's brother had said almost exactly the same thing....

As Snape moved away from the blackboard to sit behind his desk and her fellow N.E.W.T. students began to bustle around and start their potions, Hermione allowed herself to wonder what her two best friends were doing at that very moment at the Auror Headquarters.

Despite her many pleadings and insistences that nothing was more important than having a full education, they had refused to return with her to complete their seventh year. She could understand why, of course: how could they turn down Kingsley's offer of becoming Aurors even without their N.E.W.T.s? What did the man who brought about the downfall of the most evil wizard of their time, and the best friend who'd helped him, need with N.E.W.T.s?

Of course, Kingsley's offer had extended to Hermione too, but she had refused. She had known she would return to Hogwarts even when she told Harry, so long ago, that she would go with him to find the Horcruxes. The idea of not returning afterward had never even crossed her mind.

She was not lost in thought for long, for today's potion was exceptionally difficult and Snape was prowling amongst the students, looking for a victim to torture, and Hermione was determined that it would not be her. Concentrating fully on her potion, she was soon even able to drive the Ministry pamphlet she'd received that morning from her mind.

At the end of the lesson, Snape passed her perfect Rejuvenation Elixir without comment. Although she was quite used to this, as he'd treated her exceptional potions the same for six years, she felt a twinge of agitation. She would have thought that being awarded the Order of Merlin, First Class for his bravery during the war would have cheered him up at least a little.

"Why is he even teaching Potions again?" Hermione wondered aloud as she and Ginny left the smoke-filled dungeon and headed toward the common room for their free period. "I would've thought he'd go back to Defense Against the Dark Arts after stepping down from the Headmastership."

"Maybe they couldn't find another Potions master after Slughorn retired again," Ginny shrugged. "So he stepped aside for a new DADA professor instead."

Somehow, Hermione didn't think so, but didn't get the chance to voice her disagreement. They'd just entered the common room, which was packed with sixth- and seventh-years, most of whom were holding the purple pamphlets and talking in serious tones. Until then, she'd managed to forget all about the decree.

"McGonagall reckons it's not a joke," a gloomy Dean Thomas told Hermione as she sat in her favorite armchair by the fire. Dean was one of the few of her fellow classmates who'd returned for their last year at Hogwarts. "I was sent to her office this morning after er accidentally spilling a Swelling Solution on a Slytherin. She seemed a bit grim, but said the decree's legit."

"This is ridiculous!" Ginny exclaimed angrily, pounding the arm of her chair with her fist. "How can they make us get married? I've only just turned seventeen, for heaven's sake! I'm not ready for marriage!"

"At least you have someone to marry," Hermione said dryly. "And let's face it, you would have probably ended up marrying Harry anyway. It's just a bit sooner than you expected."

"Why would the Ministry make up a law like this?" Dean asked. "You don't think they're still under the influence of a Death Eater, do you?"

Hermione slowly shook her head. "No. Remember what the last bit said? They're trying to counteract another decree Pius Thicknesse or rather, Lord Voldemort put into effect during his rule. I just wonder *what* this decree 612 is...."

Her voice trailed away as she stared unseeingly at a gold-and-crimson tapestry over Ginny's head. Then, jumping up, she threw her bag over her shoulder again. "I'll be in the library," she said hurriedly, before rushing out of the portrait hole. Ginny and Dean, neither of whom were strangers to her rushing off to the library, rolled their eyes and started on that day's homework.

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Hermione spent the rest of her free period searching through copies of the *Daily Prophet* dating back over the last year and a half. When the bell rang for lunch, she ignored her growling stomach and continued to flip through each issue; the desire to just *know* was gnawing at her, burning her insides, the same way it used to back in the old days when she was trying to find Nicolas Flamel, or trying to help Harry find out how to breathe underwater, or trying to find out who the Half-Blood Prince could be....

Finally, just minutes before her next Transfiguration lesson, she found it. The slightly yellowed edition was dated January first of that year. The front page was dominated by large writing:

Ministry of Magic Demands Reestablishment of Bloodlines

In a surprise move, Pius Thicknesse, Minister of Magic, signed Decree Number 612 this morning, a law decreeing that all unwed witches and wizards who have been given Blood Status are required to marry and cohabitate with another established witch or wizard by the end of this year. Thicknesse, seen below speaking before the International Confederation of Warlocks, says this change is necessary for the reestablishment of pure bloodlines hitherto sullied by Muggles, previously known as Muggle-borns, who have stolen magic from unsuspecting purebloods.

"The sooner of age witches and wizards marry and bear magical children, the sooner our society will heal from the damage done to it by the thieves previously known as Mudbloods," says Thicknesse. "If we do not make it mandatory, we fear witches and wizards will either continue to marry Muggles, thereby dirtying our bloodlines further, or end their bloodlines altogether by staying unmarried and childless. It is crucial that we revive our dwindling pureblood population, and if it must be done by force, so it shall be."

It has been hinted that there will be dire repercussions for those who either refuse to abide by the law, or who are unable to find a mate by the end of this year:

"The Ministry will know who has heeded this decree and who has not," Thicknesse added. "There have been certain spells and charms cast to ensure that everyone obeys it. And believe me, the consequences won't be pretty if you don't."

Hermione felt sick as she replaced the newspaper in its folder. Distantly, she heard the bell ring and stood, distractedly shouldering her bag and heading for the Transfiguration classroom.

It was certain, then. Voldemort had cursed the decree so that something horrible would happen to those who disobeyed it, and the newly re-formed Ministry didn't know how to lift the spell. Unmarried witches and wizards everywhere would have to wed, whether they were ready for it or not.

With a sinking sensation, Hermione realized this meant *she* would have to get married too, and she had less than two months to find a husband.

The Clock is Ticking

Chapter 2 of 4

Time is running out, and Hermione is left with no one....

All over the castle, the new Ministry decree was the sole topic of conversation. Hermione couldn't get away from it: whether she was in the common room, the Great Hall, in class, walking down the corridor, or even in the loo, she heard students whispering about it. Some were excited mostly girls with boyfriends but most were anxious. Like Hermione, many of the other of age students didn't even have a boyfriend or girlfriend, let alone someone they were prepared to marry in less than two months' time.

As such, hasty relationships were springing up everywhere; people who barely knew one another were suddenly planning their weddings. It quickly became quite normal to overhear students asking near-strangers to marry them. These were not the traditional get-down-on-one-knee sort of proposals, but rushed, desperate ones made in between classes by students who were in danger of finding themselves alone at the end of the year.

Had she not been so concerned by her own single state, Hermione might have found it amusing to see students proposing left and right as if they'd been slipped one of the Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes love potions. As it was, she was also overwhelmed by anxiety. What would happen to her if she didn't find someone to marry? Of course, the Ministry would choose someone for her but what if there wasn't anybody to pair her up with? Would the curse kill her? Do something worse to her?

Even before the decree was issued, being Harry Potter's close friend and one of the people who had helped bring Voldemort down had made Hermione very popular. Now, she could barely set foot down a corridor without a gang of boys descending upon her to ask her to marry them. The very day after the decree was made, no less than three boys, none of whom she'd ever spoken to before, had flung proposals her way. Taken aback, she'd refused every one of them.

Soon, she began to regret her refusals. As the weeks flew by and those same boys settled on other girls while Hermione remained single and increasingly worried, she knew she'd have to fill out the application. She would be stuck with someone who was even more of a stranger to her than the boys who'd been clamoring for her attention. Perhaps even someone dare she say it as old as Dumbledore had been. As that notion made bile rise in her throat, she shoved the thought to the back of her mind and busied herself with schoolwork, that time-proven method of distracting her from stress.

The end of November brought with it the first Hogsmeade visit of the year. Hermione waded through the tall drifts of snow with Ginny, the winding road leading from Hogwarts to the village entirely hidden under a white blanket.

"I'm sure you'll find someone," Ginny said bracingly as the iced rooftops of the village appeared in the distance. All around them, couples were walking down together, using the time free of homework and classes to get to know one another before their impending weddings. "You're quite good-looking, you know."

"But I don't want to be proposed to because I'm good-looking, or because I'm Harry Potter's best friend, or because the boy in question's just afraid he's going to die," Hermione said with a scowl.

"Hermione, I never would've taken you for a romantic," Ginny grinned. Then she grew serious. "This isn't the time to be picky. If you're holding out for someone who'll love you, or even appreciate your brains, you're not going to find them."

"I know," Hermione sighed. "Maybe I should've accepted that one Ravenclaw. He seemed quite nice."

"Too late now," Ginny said, shrugging. "He's engaged to Luna."

Lost in her own miserable thoughts, Hermione didn't even notice that Ginny was no longer by her side until she heard her friend's sudden exclamation of delight and the crunching of snow. Looking up, she saw her friend's hair flashing copper in the weak sunlight as she ran straight into Harry's arms.

"Why didn't you tell me you were coming?" Ginny laughed as Harry hugged her tightly.

"It was a surprise," he said. Peering over her shoulder, he called, "All right, Hermione?"

Hermione forced a smile onto her face. "Never been better," she replied. Looking around and not spotting the familiar mop of red hair, she asked, "Is Ron here?"

"He's just gone into the Three Broomsticks to wait for us," Harry said. "Come on."

Hermione followed Harry and Ginny along the main street and into the warm, crowded pub. They ordered four butterbeers and squeezed around the table where Ron waited for them.

"Bout time you three got here," Ron grumbled. "I had to save your seats."

"How are things at the Auror office?" Ginny asked, taking a sip of her butterbeer.

"We've been doing a bit of training," Harry said, "but mostly we've been helping to track down the last of the Death Eaters. We've managed to get quite a few so far."

"You should probably be concentrating more on the bit of Dark magic that's forcing people who are of age to scramble around to get married." Hermione glared severely at Harry and Ron. "Or is that not a priority?"

"Course it is," Ron said, looking down at his mug uneasily. "We've been doing all we can. Problem is, no one knows just what spell's been put on that decree. Not even Snape knows, and he's the one who told the Aurors about it."

"So who're you engaged to, Hermione?" Harry asked, eyeing her closely.

"No one." She took a long draft of butterbeer to avoid the worried look Ron and Harry exchanged across from her.

"Hermione, you really need to..." Harry began, but Ginny cut him off.

"Wait! Why doesn't Ron just marry her?" Ginny's brown eyes were bright with excitement at the idea. "You've known each other for ages anyway, and I'm sure Mum would be thrilled to have Hermione in the family!"

"Er." Ron and Harry glanced significantly at each other. "I can't," Ron said.

"Why not?" Hermione asked. The idea hadn't even occurred to before how could she not have thought of this simple solution to her problem? She'd been worrying for weeks....

"I'm... well... er... I'm going to marry someone else," Ron muttered, turning beet red and taking a hasty swig out of his mug; he choked and slobbered butterbeer all down his front.

"Well, break it off with whoever she is, then!" Ginny said impatiently. "Hermione's your friend; she's more important!"

"I can't," Ron said, turning even redder. "We're getting married tomorrow."

Hermione felt as if her very last ray of hope had died. With a deep sigh, she looked down at her half-empty mug. "Who is she?"

"You don't know her," Ron said, gaze lighting everywhere but on Hermione. "She's a year older than I am. About to become an Auror. Her name's Emily. We've actually been... er... seeing each other since summer."

Hermione nodded to show she'd heard, but her heart sank further. "Congratulations," she said, trying to make her voice sound cheerful, but she knew she'd failed when Harry reached across the table to touch her hand.

"Come on, Hermione," he said. "I'm sure you'll find someone."

"She's turned down a dozen proposals already," Ginny said, looking extremely put out by Ron's news.

"Hermione!" Ron turned to her, appalled. "You do realize how important this is, right?"

"Of course I do!" Hermione snapped, slamming down her mug. "I know very well, Ronald! I know I could end up dying or worse! Who knows what awful curse Voldemort put on that law?"

Standing, Hermione pulled on her cloak and fastened it. Without another glance back, she stalked to the door and, with a tinkle of the bell hanging over the door, disappeared into the snow that was now falling thickly from the white sky.

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Twirling her quill between her fingers and chewing on her bottom lip, Hermione stared down at the piece of parchment sitting on the desk before her. Snow was falling thick and fast outside the dormitory window, and a blast of cold wind whistled through a gap between the glass and sill. Hermione wasn't sure if it was the draft or the parchment that was making her shiver.

She knew she had to fill out the application. Everyone she knew had found someone else; she was the only student left who didn't have anyone. November was drawing to a close, and there were only eighteen days until the Ministry deadline. Only a month until the year ended....

Taking a deep, shuddering breath, Hermione dipped her quill into the inkwell and began to fill out the application.

Name: *Hermione Jean Granger*

Gender: *Female*

Occupation or School Currently Attending: *Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry*

Age: *19*

As she scratched out her age, Hermione wondered how on earth the Ministry could find her a compatible husband when they knew so little about her. She began to

suspect that their idea of "compatibility" was simply being unmarried and of age.

With a sense of great foreboding, she folded the letter and attached it to the leg of the school owl she'd brought up with her. She just knew this was going to end badly. How could it not?

Feeling even worse than before, she made her way down to the crowded, noisy common room. Ginny sat with a few of her friends in front of the fire, the last of her homework balanced on her knee.

"There you are," Ginny said brightly as Hermione sat down.

"I've just done it," Hermione said. Crookshanks leapt up onto her lap; she scratched the purring cat behind the ears.

"Done what?" Ginny asked absentmindedly as she turned back to her essay.

"Sent off the application," Hermione replied, her voice heavy.

"Oh!" Ginny looked up at her friend. "How soon will you get a response?"

"The application said I'll hear back from the Ministry the day after the deadline." Hermione pulled her own homework toward her and took out the same essay Ginny was working on.

Ginny looked at her with sympathy. "I really am sorry, Hermione," she said. "I feel awful. You're getting stuck with someone you don't even know and I'm marrying someone I ... I love." She blushed deeply and quickly returned to her essay, avoiding Hermione's gaze.

"There's no need to be sorry," Hermione said with a sigh. "I should've accepted one of those proposals. It's my fault. I guess I was just hoping... I don't know... that the Ministry would fix this before I had to get married."

"If that git brother of mine had just broken it off with that Emily girl, you wouldn't have this problem!" Ginny said, suddenly angry. She upset her ink bottle as she plunged her quill furiously into it, splattering ink all over her essay. "Damn it!"

"Here, let me." Hermione took out her wand and leaned forward. With one sweeping motion, the ink flew off the page, forming a shining black ball of liquid which landed neatly back in its bottle. "And it's not Ron's fault. I couldn't have expected him to break it off with her at the last minute. In fact, I would have been furious if he had. Imagine how *you* would have felt if Harry jilted you the night before your wedding.... Mind you, I'd hex him to pieces before you even knew."

"Well, with any luck, the Ministry will figure out how to break the curse soon," Ginny said, "and then you won't have to get married. Or at least won't have to stay married for long."

"Maybe I'll get lucky and end up with someone who's not so bad." Hermione's lips twitched into a half-smile.

"Maybe you'll even fall in love!" Ginny said with a nudge and a wink.

Doubting Ginny's words but feeling slightly better anyway, Hermione turned to her Potions essay.

The Amans Revelare

Chapter 3 of 4

A meeting in McGonagall's office turns Hermione's world upside down.

Author's Note: I just want to let you know that I will try to post once a week, as I have 14 completed chapters total, but it depends on my beta. Also, if I feel that I am catching up to myself too quickly (I'm such a slow writer!) I will have to slow down my updates. Anyway, I hope you enjoy this.

Beta's Note: She will *not* be posting once a week; it will more likely be closer to every other week once she starts school.

The weeks of waiting for the Ministry's response were even more unbearable than Hermione had expected. She found herself unusually distracted from lessons and stared off into space while the teachers lectured instead of taking her usual diligent notes. She wondered who the Ministry would foist upon her which wizard who had been as unable to find a match as she had, what man she could quite possibly be stuck with for the rest of her life. When not pondering that, she obsessed over what would happen if she couldn't find anybody at all, if the Ministry sent her a letter telling her they had been unable to pair her up with someone and she would be left on her own....

The deadline came and went. No response from the Ministry came. Hermione's performance in her classes dropped to an all-time low; on Monday she brewed the worst Essence of Insanity in the class, causing Snape to look down at her potion with a mixture of surprise and leering satisfaction in his glittering black eyes.

"A zero then, Granger," Snape said, clearing away her potion with a wave of his wand. "I suppose you aren't as perfect as you'd like to believe."

Hermione's jaw clenched in anger as he turned away, but she said nothing. Ginny made a rude hand gesture at his retreating back.

"*Why* hasn't the Ministry owled me back?" Hermione asked for the hundredth time as they made their way up to lunch. "They said the sixteenth it's the eighteenth! I have less than two weeks left!"

"Don't worry, I'm sure lots of people sent in applications and they're just a bit behind," Ginny said in an effort to console her. "It'll be there in the morning. I'm sure of it."

But it wasn't. Hermione watched anxiously at breakfast the next morning for an owl heading her way, but the only one that landed in front of her was the one carrying her morning issue of the *Daily Prophet*.

"Tomorrow, then," Ginny said, laying her hand on Hermione's arm. "They wouldn't just leave you hanging. They'd at least send you a letter if... you know... they couldn't...." Her voice trailed away at the look on Hermione's face.

"I'm going to spend my free period in the library." Hermione's voice sounded nervously high-pitched even to her own ears. "Lots of homework to do."

She stumbled out of the Great Hall, across the entrance hall, and up the Grand Staircase. She hardly knew where she was going until she nearly ran into Professor McGonagall.

"Miss Granger, *do* watch where you're going!" the headmistress exclaimed, preventing Hermione from colliding with her by throwing out her hands.

"I'm so sorry, Professor." Hermione felt dazed as she looked up at the older woman. "I wasn't watching where I was going."

"That much is evident. Fortunately, I was looking for you."

"L-looking for *me*?" Hermione asked. Her mind immediately jumped to the worst-possible conclusion: the Ministry had owed McGonagall to tell her they couldn't find anyone for Hermione, and they wanted the headmistress to tell her in person. The thought made a cold sweat break out all over her body.

"Yes, I was. Follow me, Miss Granger," McGonagall said briskly.

Hermione followed the headmistress up several staircases and down the seventh-floor corridor to the gargoyle guarding her office.

"Sugar Quill," McGonagall said, and the gargoyle leapt aside; up the spiral staircase they went, and then through the shining oak door. McGonagall walked around her desk and sat down, gesturing for Hermione to follow suit.

"Why did you need to see me, Professor?" Hermione asked nervously, looking around her as she sat down. The office looked much the same as it had when Dumbledore was headmaster: spindly little tables held smoking silver instruments; the Sorting Hat and the Sword of Gryffindor sat on shelves behind the desk. The only differences were the absence of Fawkes and his perch and the new portrait hanging behind McGonagall's head.

Hermione stopped looking around the circular office and focused on the headmistress. She'd never seen McGonagall look so uncomfortable. Clearing her throat, the older woman folded her hands on top of the desk and took a deep, steeling breath before fixing Hermione with a wary stare.

"Miss Granger, as you know, the Ministry recently passed a decree that will force all of age witches and wizards to wed before the end of the year," she began.

"Yes... because of the law Voldemort passed at the beginning of the year. There's a curse on it," Hermione said.

"Yes. You-Know-Who instated that law to purify the Wizarding community, as well as to create his own future army in the form of newborn infants raised to believe his doctrine. A new generation of brainwashed witches and wizards to serve his every whim." McGonagall gave a grim smile. "He thought the sooner it was done, the better."

Hermione nodded, wondering where McGonagall was going with this.

"The Ministry does not yet know what curse was placed on it. It is possible that it merely has a Detection Charm that would draw Death Eaters to those who did not follow the law, much like when You-Know-Who's name was Tabooed last year. Or it could be something much, much more sinister, which is what Professor Snape believes. Until we can discover the curse in question, the Ministry has decided it would be best to comply, at least for the time being."

"But," ...Hermione straightened in her chair, knowing that what she was about to propose was probably useless... "the decree only mentioned witches and wizards with Blood Status. I'm Muggle-born. Doesn't that mean I'm exempted?"

McGonagall was shaking her head even before Hermione had finished.

"No. Now that the Ministry has been re-instated, all witches and wizards have the equivalent of Blood Status that only purebloods and half-bloods had in You-Know-Who's days. You-Know-Who ordained that all Muggle-borns were not in actuality witches and wizards at all, but thieves who stole magic. Now that you are officially a witch again, I'm afraid the law pertains to you also."

Hermione sank back in her wooden chair with a deep sigh, her last hope gone. "I couldn't find anyone. I mean, I had proposals, but I... I turned them down. It was stupid of me. I know how important this is."

McGonagall nodded solemnly. "Quite understandable. Many of us were hoping a solution would present itself before it came to this. There is nothing more regretful than being forced to marry someone for reasons other than love."

There was a brief silence, then Hermione hesitantly opened her mouth again. "I... I filled out the application. I was supposed to hear back from the Ministry a few days ago, but I haven't heard anything. Does that mean....?"

"Ah." McGonagall looked uncomfortable again. She shifted in her chair and straightened a stack of parchment in front of her. "There is no need to worry, Miss Granger. A... er... match has been found for you, but there were certain... complications."

"A match has been found for me?" Hermione sat straight up. "Who? And what do you mean, 'complications'?"

McGonagall reached into the midst of a pile of letters on her desk and withdrew a sheaf of parchment. She looked down at it for a moment, then back up at Hermione.

"Before I show this to you, I must explain something," she said. "The Ministry would never, of course, pair you up with someone you wouldn't be compatible with. They are trying their best to make this situation easier for everyone."

"But how can they decide who's right for me?" Hermione blurted out, remembering what little information they'd demanded from her. "They know nothing about me!"

"There is a section in the Department of Mysteries devoted to the study of love, which is considered by many to be the most powerful magic of all," McGonagall explained. "The wizards working in this department have been in charge of matching up of age witches and wizards. They performed a complex spell on each person's application to reveal their, for lack of a better word, 'soul mate.'"

"Soul mate?" Hermione echoed, a frown forming.

"Yes, Miss Granger. Soul mate. So bear in mind when you see this that there is a very good reason for this... selection. Even if you... er... don't immediately grasp it."

Glancing down at the piece of parchment again, McGonagall slowly leaned forward and handed it to Hermione.

Once the smooth bit of paper was in her hand, Hermione took a deep breath and looked down at it.

Dear Hermione Jean Granger,

The Ministry of Magic is pleased to inform you that they have found you a suitable match in accordance with Decree Number 612-B. This person has been found compatible with you by the casting of the Amans Revelare spell. Information on this match can be found below:

Name: Severus Tobias Snape

Gender: Male

Occupation/Current School of Attendance: Potions master at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Age: 38

It is of the utmost importance that you wed and move in with the above person before the stroke of midnight on the night of the 31st of December. Kindly register with the Ministry at the time of the wedding.

Hermione lowered the parchment and stared up at Professor McGonagall, who watched her expectantly.

"You can't be serious," she said, voice flat, her hands shaking as they gripped the letter.

"I'm afraid I am, Miss Granger," Professor McGonagall replied gravely.

"Can't I request someone else?" Hermione dropped the letter on the desk as if the parchment had burned her.

"You cannot. The decision is final." McGonagall looked at Hermione with sympathy. "I know this must be a shock to you, but..."

"A shock?" Hermione's voice was pitched higher than usual. "*Ashock*? I don't understand! I thought you said 'soul mates...'"

"Yes, and apparently Professor Snape was the most suitable candidate for you," the headmistress said. "I'm sure you will find you two... er... have something in common...."

"I'm nothing like him!" Hermione hadn't even realized she'd stood up until Professor McGonagall did so too, the taller woman towering over her. "There ~~must~~ be a mistake! He's a *horrible* person, I don't understand how *anyone* could think we'd be a good match!"

"Professor Snape is not a horrible person," McGonagall said sternly. "He is merely a man who has faced a very disappointing and bitter life."

"You haven't seen him in his classes, Professor! You can't honestly think that I...that we...could possibly get... get...." Hermione couldn't even finish the sentence. Her, married to Professor Snape? The idea was unbearable, unthinkable! There *had* to be a mistake! *Snape*, the foulest, most evil teacher to ever roam the halls of Hogwarts, her *soul mate*?

She was breathing heavily, her fists clenched at her sides. It took her a moment to realize Professor McGonagall was speaking again.

"While the idea may be less than welcome, you have little choice, Miss Granger. With any luck, this arrangement will only be temporary. Now, please sit back down." Once Hermione had resumed her seat, McGonagall sat back down and continued. "I have been corresponding with the Ministry for the last few days on this subject. Obviously, the fact that Professor Snape is your Potions teacher is a problem. While I do not think Professor Snape would succumb to favoritism," ...here, Hermione scoffed rather loudly, but McGonagall chose to ignore it and raised her voice further... "a marriage between a professor and a student is unprecedented and certainly against school rules. The Ministry contacted me to gain my permission to allow the union and to explain the precarious situation to the two of you. You are not, of course, to expect this to affect your Potions grade, and..."

"I haven't agreed to it yet!" Hermione interrupted shrilly.

"Miss Granger." Professor McGonagall's eyes flashed behind her square spectacles. "I have allowed you a certain amount of leniency thus far, given the upsetting nature of the news I have just imparted to you, but I must remind you that I am still your headmistress, and I demand a certain level of respect from my students, no matter how many Dark wizards they have helped to defeat. I *do* understand how you must feel, but this is not a situation in which you have much choice. It is either accept the match the Ministry has deemed appropriate for you, or suffer the effects of the as-yet unknown curse."

Hermione was now fighting back tears as she stared down at the floor. She nodded mutely to show McGonagall she understood.

"Now." McGonagall's voice was brisk again as she sat up straight in her chair. "I expect that..."

But she was interrupted by a knock at the door. Throwing Hermione a fleeting look, she said, "Enter."

Hermione turned in her chair as the oaken door opened and a tall figure dressed in black robes entered the office. "You called for me, Headmistress?" said the familiar, sneering voice.

"Ah, yes, Severus. Do sit down."

Snape looked at Hermione, his eyes narrowed with curiosity as he sat in the empty seat beside her. She glared in return.

"What is this about?" he asked, turning to McGonagall. "I have a lesson to prepare for."

Clearing her throat, the headmistress leaned forward, picked up the letter Hermione had read minutes before, and passed it to Snape. Hermione looked resolutely away as he read it, watching the sunlight dancing on the glass case housing the Sword of Gryffindor instead.

There was a rustle of paper as Snape set the letter down. Hermione looked around to watch him; Snape's top lip was curled as he opened his mouth to speak.

"Absolutely not."

Despite her own reluctance to marry the Potions master, Hermione bristled at this, her pride stung.

"I don't find the idea particularly appealing either," she said stiffly.

"At least we are agreed on that point, Miss Granger," Snape said, his voice cool.

"Severus," McGonagall began warningly, "you know there is little choice."

"Other than the fact that Miss Granger is my student..."

"Something which can be overlooked in this circumstance, I believe," McGonagall said.

"There are innumerable reasons for why I would not want to take Miss Granger as my wife."

Hermione's pride felt more than stung at this; it was as though he'd stomped all over it.

"And I'm just *thrilled*," she said, her tone dripping with sarcasm, "at the idea of marrying my teacher, who is twenty years older than I am and a real..."

"Miss Granger!" McGonagall cut in, as if she knew exactly what Hermione had been about to call Snape.

Hermione fell silent, her arms folded over her chest as she stared at the Sorting Hat.

"And so you two would rather just let the curse take you both, then?" McGonagall asked, as if expecting them to protest at the idea.

"Yes," they replied in unison, each refusing to look at the other.

McGonagall looked dumbfounded for a moment, then pressed her lips together in a thin line. "Miss Granger, you have class in five minutes. You may go. I must speak to Professor Snape alone."

Hermione grabbed her bag and stood. She walked out of the office without another glance back, slamming the door shut behind her as she went.

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Once the echo of the slammed door had faded away and Granger's footsteps could no longer be heard on the spiral staircase outside, the headmistress spoke, her voice low and anxious.

"Severus, you know as well as I do that it must be done. Whatever your reservations may be..."

"My reservations are many," Snape said. "She is far too young for me. Far too immature. Far too full of herself and her abilities. Far too..."

"Miss Granger is twice as mature as most witches her age and much more talented than many much older than she is. In fact, Severus, in many ways she reminds me of *you* when you were a student here. She prizes learning above all else and is always striving to rise above her classmates. She's much too brilliant for her own good..."

"We are nothing alike," Snape said, affronted by the comparison.

"The Amans Revelare spell disagrees," McGonagall said with a wry smile, "and you know it is quite accurate."

Snape folded his hands together before him and looked across the desk at the headmistress.

"I am sure Miss Granger can find someone else. Someone who is a much more appropriate match."

"There is no one else. Everyone has found a partner. Perhaps you do not care what happens to yourself, Severus, but what about her? Do not allow her to suffer on your account."

"You heard Miss Granger. She wants no more to do with me than I do with her."

"A compromise *must* be made, Severus!" McGonagall's eyebrows drew together with frustration as she leaned across the desk toward him. "Would Albus have wanted Hermione Granger to..."

"Do not use Dumbledore against me," Snape snapped, standing up. Fury coursed through him as he glared down at the headmistress. "It does not matter what he would have wanted; he is not here."

He turned with a swish of his black robes and strode to the door. As he opened it, McGonagall cried out.

"Will you at least *consider* it?!"

He slammed the door behind him without replying and started down the stairs. Seething, he barely knew where he was going until he suddenly found himself in front of the door of his office. Once he was inside with the door shut firmly behind him, he began to pace the length of the dim, shadowy chamber. His robes billowed behind him, and his boots echoed on the stone floor.

He knew perfectly well that his choices were limited. It was either marry the Granger girl or suffer whatever atrocity the Dark Lord had placed on the decree. Neither option appealed to him.

Granger... His lip curled at the very thought of her. Granger, the insufferable know-it-all, always parroting passages of text books verbatim in an annoyingly smug manner. Granger, the formerly buck-toothed Gryffindor. Granger, the best friend of Harry Potter... *How* could the damned spell have named *them* soul mates?

He'd known he would be stuck with *someone*, but he had expected it to be a complete stranger. He hadn't even bothered to search for a wife when the Ministry sent out the notice, but had immediately filled out the application and sent it in. He hadn't cared who he ended up with; it would make no difference to him, not if it wasn't *her*...

Snape stopped his pacing as the memory of a red-haired young woman with green almond-shaped eyes floated to the surface of his mind. He allowed the usual mixture of guilt and grief to roll over him for a moment, then quickly employed the same technique used in Occlumency to stifle the unwanted emotions.

He stood there a moment, staring unseeingly around at the potion-filled glass jars sitting on the shelves all around the office. Now that he had mastered himself, he could think more clearly. Raising one hand, he touched his side where, under the layers of robes, there were several scars made by the fangs of a giant snake. Nagini's venom had prevented the wounds from being magically healed, resulting in the disfiguring marks, but they did not bother him. He was lucky to have even survived them.

One would think, Snape thought bitterly as his hand dropped back to his side, *that I have done enough in my lifetime for others. One would think I had repaid my debt by now.*

Again, he found himself struggling against the memory of Lily Evans for he never, ever called her Lily Potter in his thoughts. But no sooner had he banished her from his mind's eye than the face of Albus Dumbledore succeeded hers.

Cursing under his breath as he sat down behind his desk, he knew that his decision had already been made.

Engagement

Chapter 4 of 4

Snape and Hermione come to an agreement.

The first thing Hermione did after class let out was write a letter to the Ministry, entreating them to choose another wizard to be her husband. Once she had finished, she attached the letter to the leg of a brown owl and watched it swoop away and disappear over the dark trees of the Forbidden Forest. She thought grimly that it was at least worth a try.

She didn't tell Ginny or anyone else what had transpired in McGonagall's office that morning. In fact, she hardly spoke to anyone that evening, choosing instead to shut herself up in the dormitory with her homework and her thoughts. She didn't think she could bear the horrified look she knew would appear on Ginny's face the moment she told her the news. As for Harry and Ron... Hermione didn't even want to *imagine* what they would say when they found out.

She felt nauseated whenever she thought about the spell that had paired her up with the Hogwarts Potions teacher. There must be a very dark, twisted part of herself she didn't know about, she decided, if *Snape* was her soul mate. No, there had to be a mistake... or maybe they had both been spares, and the Ministry hadn't been able to find a proper match for either of them, so they were thrust together? Hermione didn't know which was worse: being paired up with Snape, or the possibility that she didn't have a soul mate at all... On second thought, as the face of Professor Snape floated across her mind, she knew which was worse.

Giving up on her homework for the night, Hermione put her half-finished Herbology homework in her bag and dressed for bed. As she climbed onto the four-poster and collapsed against the pillows, she realized with a jolt that she had Potions the very next day....

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Hermione spent the next morning and lunchtime dreading that afternoon's Double Potions. The last thing she wanted was to face Snape again after what had occurred in McGonagall's office, but she knew she couldn't just skip the class. She needed to perform exceptionally well after her abysmal performance on Monday if she had any hope of keeping her marks up. And Hermione was *not* one to let her perfect record suffer over a trifling matter like being forced to marry her teacher.

So, when the bell rang to signal the end of lunch, Hermione made her way down to the dungeons and waited outside with the rest of the N.E.W.T. class. A few minutes later, the door to the classroom swung open, and Snape called for them to enter. Hermione took her usual seat at the back of the classroom and took out her things, Ginny doing the same beside her.

Snape began his usual surveillance of the students' work, and Hermione noticed that he walked past her without even looking into her cauldron, as if she weren't there at all. Undeterred, she continued adding her ingredients and stirring feverishly, determined to make the best Memory-Freshening Potion Snape had ever seen.

By the end of the double period, she was reasonably pleased with her work as she corked a full flask of bright blue potion. The bell signalling the end of the lesson sounded just as she made her way up to Snape's desk to deliver the sample.

"Stay after," Snape muttered when she set the flask down. His lips barely moved, as if he didn't want anyone to know he'd spoken to her, and he didn't even look up from the essay he was marking.

Hermione wondered what he could possibly want with her, but she retreated back to her work station and put away her supplies slowly and with exaggerated care, letting the rest of the class leave ahead of her. When only she and Snape remained, she swung her bag over her shoulder and returned to his desk again.

"Yes, Professor?" she asked politely, secretly wishing Peeves would come along and shove him headfirst into the desk.

Snape looked around, as if making sure they were indeed alone. Folding his hands together and propping his elbows on the desk, he traced his mouth with one finger and regarded her with his steady black gaze.

"It seems we are without any other options, Granger. As unpleasant as the idea is for the both of us, we have no choice but to... marry." He said the last word with distaste.

Hermione stiffened and adjusted her bag on her shoulder. "Maybe I'd rather not," she said, chin tilted upward in defiance.

"Don't be ridiculous," Snape sneered. "You are quite fond of showing off your brain; now is a good time to use it!"

"I'm not sure I want to marry someone who speaks to me like that, *sir*," Hermione's jaw was set as she glared down at the Potions master. She'd never spoken to Snape like this before yesterday, and now she'd done it at least twice. The flash of anger in his black eyes reminded her of just why she'd never crossed him: he could be quite scary when in a temper.

"You are still my student, and I do not appreciate backtalk," he said, voice cold as ice. "And as you well know, you have no choice."

Hermione raised her chin still further. "Of course I have. I could just take whatever the curse gives me."

"I do not think you want to face that curse any more than I do," Snape said dryly. "So spare me the empty threats."

Hermione faltered; she couldn't pretend that wasn't true. As much as she would have liked to turn Snape down, she knew she couldn't.

"Maybe I don't," she conceded, "but I also don't want..."

Snape stood suddenly, and Hermione became very aware of just how much taller than her he was. He came around the desk to stand in front of her. She took a quick step back, casting him a nervous look.

"Stop wasting my time, Granger. It is either yes or no," he said impatiently. "It's either marry me or risk both our lives."

Hermione looked up at him, and grudgingly replied. "Yes, then."

Snape stared at her for a moment, and Hermione rather thought she'd surprised him; perhaps he had expected her to turn him down. But before she could discern the expression on his face, he was turning away and sitting down behind his desk again.

"Very well. I'll give you the details of the... *happy* occasion when they've been finalized." He didn't look up at her again as he returned to the half-graded essay. "You may go."

Hermione hesitated for a moment, then said, "You know, since we're going to be stuck together, maybe this would be a bit easier for *both* of us if you'd at least *try* being a little kinder to me." And with that, she hurried away from him and out of the classroom before he could open his mouth to dock House points.

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After his last class of the day ended, Snape went up to McGonagall's office to tell her she had gotten her way and he would marry the Granger girl. She was on her way out when he arrived, but told him to wait in her office and she would be back in ten minutes.

When she was gone, he stood in the middle of the circular room, arms folded over his chest as he observed the many contraptions on the tables. He'd always told Dumbledore the old man had far too many possessions; the headmaster had always replied by saying Snape had too few.

At this thought, Snape looked up at the portrait hanging behind the headmistress's desk. While the rest of the portraits were pretending to be sound asleep, this one was wide awake and watching him with curiosity.

"Good evening, Severus," said the all-too-familiar voice. "Is something bothering you?"

Snape's lip curled. "You know very well what's bothering me."

The painted Dumbledore looked over the top of his half-moon spectacles, his blue eyes cutting right through the younger man, just as the real Dumbledore's had.

"Miss Granger?" he ventured.

With an affirmative jerk of his head, Snape began to pace the office. "This is ridiculous," he hissed.

"Unprecedented. Perhaps even unwanted. But certainly not ridiculous. This is a most serious situation."

"I am aware of that." Snape paused in front of the window. The sun was already starting to sink into the dark tops of the Forbidden Forest, the sky stained crimson and gold. "But she is incredibly unsuited to me, Dumbledore."

"Have you considered that perhaps you aren't *looking* for any similarities between yourself and Miss Granger? That you are determined not to see them?"

Snape turned around and scowled at the portrait. "She is nothing like me," he stated emphatically. "She is inexcusably impertinent. This very afternoon she dared to tell me to 'be kinder' to her, as if consenting to marry her isn't kind enough!"

There was a beat of silence, then the portrait's eyebrows rose.

"Well?" Dumbledore said.

"Well what?" Snape snapped.

"Severus, there is no point in pretending you have ever been kind to Harry or his friends." Dumbledore's stern gaze was piercing him again. "Considering the circumstances you both find yourselves in, I believe Miss Granger may be right. Kindness would go far in this situation. Further, perhaps, than you could even dream."

Snape didn't understand what that was supposed to mean, but was spared having to respond when the door opened and McGonagall returned.

"Make this quick, Severus. I have a meeting with the Minister in five minutes," she said as she crossed to her desk and sat down.

"I only came to inform you that Miss Granger and I have come to a... compromise."

"Excellent!" The headmistress looked immensely relieved. "You have no idea how glad I am to hear of it. I have quite enough on my plate without worrying about you two. I have to arrange no less than twenty rooms for recently wed students, in order to comply with the cohabitation law. I assume Miss Granger will stay in your chambers?"

"Is there any other option?" Snape asked bitterly. "Seeing as how the Dark Lord's decree requires it?"

McGonagall shot him a look. "*Do* try not to make her life miserable, Severus. This is no more her fault than it is yours."

Thoroughly tired of being told how to treat his future wife, Snape turned to go.

"I have arrangements to make," he said, dread twisting in the pit of his stomach at the very thought of the impending wedding.

"Good luck," McGonagall called after him. When the door had shut behind him, the headmistress sighed and turned in her chair to face Dumbledore's portrait. "I certainly hope you're right, Albus. Frankly, I can't see the two getting along at all. I don't suppose the caster of the Amans Revelare *could* have made a mistake?"

"No, no, I'm sure there was no mistake." Dumbledore smiled sadly. "No need to worry, Minerva. They will figure it out in due time."