

Of Fearless Hope and Grace

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Chapter 1 of 1

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He had been wandering the halls in the middle of the ball celebrating the tenth anniversary of Voldemort's defeat, bored with the attention the younger generation had been bestowing upon him, when a soft cry caught his attention. He quickly moved toward the alcove he had heard the noise coming from, unsure if it was someone needing his help. Whatever he had been expecting, what he found was the furthest thing from his mind.

On the floor was a beaten and bloody Hermione Granger. Her left eye was swollen shut, and her lip was split and bleeding. Her dress robes were torn from her body, and it seemed like the garment had been laid over her in an effort to disguise that she was lying on the ground. Severus quickly Transfigured the remnants of the robe into a blanket and covered Hermione's body, taking care not to look at her naked flesh.

"Professor?"

Severus looked at Hermione and said, "It will be fine soon, Miss Granger. I will go find assistance from someone in the ballroom."

"No!" She pushed herself up from her position and cried out at the pain shooting through her left arm. "The person who did this to me is in there. You can't leave me alone. Please! I don't trust any of them."

Unsure, Severus looked her over and looked toward the crowd. Before he had a chance to rethink his position, he scooped her up into his arms and Apparated with her to his home in Spinner's End. He placed her on the thread-bare sofa and quickly cast a diagnostic charm on her to determine the extent of her injuries. When he saw the red glow center itself low on her abdomen, he looked up at her and saw the tears in her eyes. He watched her clutch the blanket close and let out a sigh. "Miss Granger, were you raped?" When she nodded, he ran a hand over his face in an effort to collect his thoughts. After a moment, he asked, "Is there any thing I can do to help?"

"A healing potion and the use of your shower would be nice."

Severus left the room and quickly gathered supplies. He pressed the vial into Hermione's hands and said, "Drink this and most of your wounds should be healed." Once she drank it, he handed her a bundle containing an old robe, a towel, and a Calming Draught. "The bathroom is down the hall and to the left. If you need a place to stay for the night, you can sleep on the sofa."

A tense moment of silence passed, and Severus was unsure of how to fill the void. He nodded and headed to his room for the night. He lay down and listened to Hermione shuffle through his home. It was only after the sounds of movement had stopped that Severus allowed himself to fall asleep.

A few weeks later, Severus received a summons to testify in the matter of Granger v. Nott. He was surprised to learn that he was being called to testify for both parties.

On the morning of June tenth, he appeared in Courtroom Five at nine am sharp. He was called to testify for Miss Granger first. He recalled the state in which he found her as well as her state of mind. Nott's barrister, Mr Smith-Smythe, only asked one question.

"Did she tell you who the assailant was?"

"No."

"Thank you, Mister Snape."

Then Severus had to answer questions pertaining to Nott's character, including insight gained as the younger man's former Head of House, as well as Miss Granger's character. Unsure of what was happening, Severus simply answered the questions posed to him. Curious, Severus remained present for the proceedings. After all, his shop was being competently run by his hand-picked staff.

The proceeding became really interesting after lunch. It started off with a simple request from Mr Smith-Smythe to administer Veritaserum to Miss Granger.

"I am afraid that I have to refuse."

"Miss Granger, are you aware that the court can compel you to do so?"

"I am." She placed her hands on top of a file sitting in her lap and let a bland smile cross her features. "Are you aware of the instance in which I may refuse?"

After a moment, Mr Smith-Smythe said, "I would like the court to see if Miss Granger is indeed in the delicate condition she is indirectly claiming."

Miss Granger pulled out a slip of paper from the file and handed it to the bailiff. "This is a document signed by Healer Musgrave at St Mungo's stating that she cast the Gravitax Charm and the result was 'Matres Gravidae'."

Watching Mr Nott pale, Severus cleared his throat. Elphias Doge asked him, "Is there anything you feel the need to add, Mr Snape?"

Severus stood and said, "I believe I can help resolve this matter more quickly." He moved toward the front of the courtroom and said, "As you know, I was the Head of Slytherin House for many years. Upon being made Head, I had to learn the Parvulus Est Charm in case something happened to one of my charges."

Elphias nodded. "Dumbledore told me he had all his Heads learn that spell." He motioned Severus to come stand in front of Miss Granger. "Go ahead and cast the charm, my boy. The sooner this messy business is over the better."

"This will be over soon, Miss Granger." Severus concentrated on casting the barely remembered spell, he quickly touched his wand first to her abdomen, then said the incantation as he touched a scrap of parchment provided by Elphias. After a moment, what looked like ink bloomed across the parchment, announcing who the father of Hermione's unborn child was.

Elphias looked up and fixed Nott with a steely glare. "Mister Nott, I am quite disappointed in you." He turned to Hermione and asked, "What would you like to happen, young lady?"

Certain that what happened now no longer concerned him, Severus left the courtroom before he could hear Miss Granger's answer.

Severus turned toward the door as he heard the chimes announce someone's entrance to his shop. He called out, "I'm afraid that I am not open at the moment. If you would be willing to come back in an hour, I would be more than willing to attend to your needs then."

"The ad said to come to the shop an hour before it opened to set up an interview."

Remembering that he had set up the advertisement to say that, Severus left the shelves he was straightening up and moved toward the front. As soon as he approached his potential employee, he was surprised to be face to face with Hermione Granger. "Miss Granger, you are the last person I expected to enter my shop looking for employment. Last I heard, you were working in Magical Law Enforcement."

"Once news of my rape and pregnancy made the rounds, it was very hard to work at the Ministry." She shuffled her feet in an effort to be more comfortable, but appeared unsuccessful. "I saw your ad in the paper and thought it would be a good opportunity. You already know what happened, so you won't hold that against me, and from what Mandy Brocklehurst has told me, you are a fair boss."

Severus took a minute to look her over and asked, "Would your working interfere with any agreement between you and Mr Nott?"

She shook her head. "The agreement just stipulated that he acknowledged the baby as his firstborn and heir to whatever is left of his estate. I think he was hoping I would demand marriage as compensation for the rape, but I was not going to let him get his way." Severus watched her smooth a hand over her still-flat abdomen, and her eyes seemed to be far away. "I was surprised when I found out that I had conceived, but when he was doused with Veritaserum, he admitted that he had used an archaic ritual that would guarantee whoever he had had sex with that evening would conceive. He was hoping marriage to me would improve his standing."

Severus cleared his throat in an effort to remind Hermione he was still there. He wasn't sure he should be listening to her inner thoughts, not until they became better acquainted. "The Ministry's loss appears to be my gain. The position I was looking to fill was for an assistant; however, I cannot let you near my concoctions because of your pregnancy. For now, you can help the customers find what they need and handle the money."

Severus explained that the store served both Muggle and wizard alike. The Muggles enjoyed his 'botanical infusions,' and the Wizards enjoyed his potions. He showed her which bottles she should stay away from and told her if any of them broke to call either him or Mandy to clean it up. Once her pregnancy was over, she would help him brew and manufacture the items in the shop.

Hermione turned to him with tears in her eyes. "Thank you for giving me the opportunity to work for you. You won't regret it."

Hearing the bell over the door sound, he steered her toward the door and said, "Go prove it to me, Miss Granger."

Severus kept an eye on Miss Granger over the next few months. He made sure she didn't overexert herself, and when he was unable to keep watch over her, he set Mandy to be her minder. One time he overheard Hermione comment about it.

"He doesn't hover, but he's always making sure I don't over do it."

"He's like that with everyone who's worked here. He sees it as taking care of his own."

"So he sees us as family?"

"More like he's the leader of our little band of misfits."

The next time he and Mandy were alone, he asked her, "Do you and Hermione truly see yourself as misfits?"

"When the only person who treats you well is Severus Snape, you're a misfit."

After that conversation, Severus reached out to Mr Potter and the Weasleys. The message stated that Hermione needed their support, not their judgment. He noticed that her mood lifted shortly after, and he assumed that she had a larger support system than before.

In quiet moments, when he was in between brewing times and she was free of customers, he would watch her spread her hand over her ever-increasing abdomen and smile at something only she knew about. He would watch and wish that he had that. He would resume his brewing and try to understand his feelings.

What exactly was it he wanted? Was it the feeling of peace Hermione seemed to radiate these days? Or was it something else? He was fairly content with his life, and he couldn't help but feel jealous of what Hermione had found.

Severus swiped his hand across his face and chuckled to himself. He was jealous of the connection Hermione and her child had, and he wanted that. He wanted someone to love him unconditionally and without any prejudice, and it made him jealous.

When he was finished for the day, he slowly made his way to the front of the shop so he could lock up after Mandy and Hermione left. He slowed when he heard Hermione call his name. He turned in her direction and thought to himself how much pregnancy suited her. "What can I do for you, Hermione?"

She smiled prettily at him and said, "I just wanted to thank you for everything you've done for me." She lowered her voice so only he could hear her. "I know you had a hand in helping Harry and the Weasleys come to their senses, and I appreciate it." She grabbed his hand and placed it on her abdomen.

Severus panicked for a moment and asked, "What are you doing?" When Hermione ignored him, he tried to pull his hand away and was startled when she just gripped tighter and moved his hand so it spanned the upper right side of her abdomen. "Miss Granger, what is the meaning...?" He stopped speaking for a moment as he felt the light taps of Hermione's child kicking against his hand.

She smiled at him and said, "The baby and I want to thank you for making things easier for both of us when you didn't have to." After a moment, she let go of his hand and said, "He's usually more active when you're talking to me. I think he likes the sound of your voice."

Severus, unsure of what to do, dropped his hand from her abdomen. "Probably because my voice has a lower pitch and timbre than anyone else you know."

"That could be." Hermione gathered her things and moved to leave the shop. "You should stop by The Burrow on Sunday. Molly is throwing me a party for my birthday, and I would like it if you came."

"I'll try to make it, then."

"Hello, Severus! Hermione told me that we might be expecting you today."

Severus tipped his head toward Arthur in greeting and studied his surroundings. Pastel blue streamers hung from the rafters with plastic decorations in the shapes of prams, bottles and pacifiers attached to them. A table had been set aside for gifts and was piled high with baby items. "I was under the impression that this was to be a birthday party."

Arthur coughed into his hand and said, "Well, Molly thought Hermione might appreciate getting some things for the baby."

Severus arched an eyebrow at his companion and smirked when Arthur began to blush. He was about to remark upon it when he heard Hermione shout from the living room, "No means no, Ronald! Are you truly that thick?!"

Hermione came rushing into the kitchen and stopped short when she saw Severus. "I didn't know you had arrived."

Deciding that it was best not to mention what he had overheard, Severus said, "Only just."

Hermione nodded and wiped away a few tears. She looked at Arthur and said, "Tell Molly that I'm sorry I couldn't stay, but your idiot son proposed again and I need to leave or I might just hex him!"

Severus gestured to the already open gifts and said, "If you would like to wait a moment, I'll help you gather your things and escort you home."

Severus and Hermione made short work of the pile, but were unable to escape before Ron entered the kitchen followed by Harry. "I tried to stop him, Hermione."

"It's okay, Harry. Severus is going to help me get home, and I plan on trying to remember why I'm still friends with him."

Ron moved toward Hermione, but was unable to go very far after Harry grabbed the back of his shirt. He angrily tried to pull away, but Harry wasn't letting him go. "I don't know why you won't just say yes. Nott has already acknowledged the kid, and it's not like anyone else will want you!"

Severus watched as Hermione stiffened at Ron's comments. He crossed the room and grabbed the front of the young man's shirt. As the fabric crinkled under his fist, Severus quietly told him, "If I ever hear you say anything like that to her again, I will have no problem dispatching you."

He felt the shirt slacken some and saw that Harry had let go and was now standing in the doorway between the two rooms. He saw something slightly dangerous in the young man's eyes. "You've gone too far this time, Ron, and you're on your own."

Severus looked down at Ron and saw his eyes widen in horror as he comprehended the meaning behind Harry's words. He grinned savagely at the redhead's distress and said, "The last thing Hermione needs is you harassing her. She has gone through a terrible ordeal and managed to survive beautifully. If I hear you are bothering her again, you will suffer horribly." He let go of the young man's shirt and turned to Hermione. "If you aren't up to Apparating, I will be more than happy to use Side-Along."

"I don't think I'm capable of doing it on my own." She looped her arm through Severus's and waited for him to Apparate them. Once they arrived outside her flat, Hermione turned to him and pecked him on the cheek. "Thank you for your help today."

"My pleasure." Severus then Apparated back to his flat, certain that his world had shifted slightly off its axis.

After that day, something had changed in the dynamics of their relationship. Hermione was more open with her feelings; for example, she had no problem letting Severus know when he was doing something that irritated her. Severus was secretly delighted that she felt more open with him; however, he could do without the extra 'nagging'.

He took her openness to mean that she was happy with their newly discovered friendship. So he would return the favor by taking care of her at least his version of it.

"Hermione, I told you, you need to get off your feet and rest. If you can't listen to simple instructions now, how well are you going to be able to listen when I have you assisting me with the brewing?"

She would smile at him, then go do what he suggested, knowing that he only had her best interests at heart. There were times she would insist that he take a break with her, and they would talk about various topics.

Around Christmas, she asked him something that had been on her mind for some time. "Do you think I handled this whole situation well?"

Severus handed her a cup of tea, then sat down in a chair that was set adjacent to hers. He took a sip of tea from his own cup as he thought how to answer. After a moment, he asked, "Are you happy with the outcome?"

"Yes, mostly. I dislike the fact that my friendship with Ron has been irreparably damaged, and I wish my son hadn't been conceived in the manner he was; however, I am fairly content with *our* friendship and sometimes wish we had become friends sooner."

"Sometimes I find myself wishing that as well."

As they quietly sipped their tea, Severus wished that he had the courage to elaborate on his feelings, but was afraid that she would only reject him outright. He stared into the distance and was desperately afraid that she would find out the depth of his feelings and use them against him somehow. Instead of declaring his feelings, he asked, "How is he today?"

Hermione rubbed a spot on her abdomen and said, "He's getting a little tight in there." She was silent for a few moments before taking a deep breath. "Nott wants to be notified when he's born. I'm afraid that he's going to attempt to assert his parental rights and try to take him from me."

Severus lay his hand over hers and clasped her hand in his. "I promise that I will do anything I can to help you, even if it means I have to reclaim a piece of myself I would rather lose forever."

"Severus! We need your help out here!"

Severus heard the panicked edge to Mandy's voice and quickly placed Stasis Charms on what he was brewing. He set wards on his work room and grabbed the spare bag he had insisted that Hermione pack and leave at the shop in case she went into labor. He quickly made his way to the front of the shop and handed Mandy the keys. "You know the procedure to lock the shop up. I expect everything to be in its proper place when I return."

He turned to Hermione and held out a hand for her to grab onto. He noticed the fine sheen of sweat across her brow and asked, "How long has this been going on, Hermione?"

She slowly inhaled and exhaled before she answered his question. "It's been off and on all morning. It didn't get steady until an hour ago."

He led her toward the exit and said, "I thought I told you to let me know as soon as possible." He handed her some Floo Powder. "You head on to St. Mungo's. I'll be right behind you."

"You better be. You're to be the witness for both Nott and the Ministry."

Severus watched her disappear in the emerald flames and took a moment to brace himself against the brick of the fireplace. He drew in a few shaky breaths to collect himself before he departed for St. Mungo's himself.

"Hermione, it's time to begin pushing."

Watching Hermione blindly seek for his hand, Severus quickly clasped it in his own. Over the past few hours, he had decided that he was going to be there for both Hermione and her son, no matter the situation. He offered support in any way Hermione demanded of him and tried to anticipate her needs. As she pushed, he held her hand in his grasp and helped her sit up so she could push more easily. After a few good pushes, Hermione's son was born and laid upon her chest. He watched her inspect her son, and he felt a rush of love so pure, he was in awe of it.

When Hermione was finished with her initial inspection, she wrapped her son back up and held him out toward Severus. She smiled at him and said, "I would like you to be the first one to hold him, Severus."

Severus held onto her son and watched as the boy's eyes seemed to focus on him for a moment. "Hello, my boy." Severus was so fascinated that he didn't hear what Hermione asked him the first time. He tore his gaze away from the infant and asked, "Can you repeat that, Hermione?"

"I asked you if you would like to be Corbin's godfather."

Severus blinked away tears and made sure Corbin was secure in the crook of his arm before he reached out for Hermione's hand. "I would be honored."

Severus gave Hermione space for a few weeks to give her time to adjust to having an infant at home. He let her know that if she needed anything to just let him know, but that he was going to give her time to bond with her son. One afternoon, she popped through the Floo with Corbin and a bag in tow.

"Can you watch him for a few hours? Ginny was supposed to, but James managed to injure himself badly enough they had to go to St. Mungo's, and I really need a nap."

Severus relieved her of her burden and shooed her on her way. "Corbin and I can manage. Don't return until you've rested enough." He placed Corbin in the crook of his arm and watched Hermione disappear back through the Floo.

He snuggled the boy and cooed to him. When Mandy caught him a few moments later, he glared at her and said, "I'm allowed to spoil my godson."

Mandy threw up her hands in defeat. "Even if I told everyone I had ever met, the only one who would ever believe me is Hermione. Your secret's safe with me." She approached Severus to get a good look at the boy and said, "I'm glad he resembles her more than Nott." She tapped her chin and said, "I'm sure you already thought of it, but I think that extra room could be made up so Hermione could bring Corbin to the shop and we could spoil him."

Severus nodded and began slowly rocking the baby. "I agree. Let's try to have that finished before Hermione returns from her maternity leave."

Once Hermione returned to work, a new routine set in. Mandy would mind the front of the store and Severus would teach Hermione to brew while Corbin was in another room within earshot. Whenever he became too fussy, either Severus or Hermione would pick him up and bring him into the workroom where he would watch them work. Severus made sure to keep a fairly steady stream of conversation going since Corbin seemed to enjoy the sound of his voice and Hermione never minded.

When it was time for lunch, Severus would wash up then proceed to have some one-on-one time with his godson and would carry him all over the shop, pointing different things out to him. And when they were out of earshot of both women, he would whisper his feelings for the boy's mother, taking comfort that Corbin couldn't spill his secrets. Talking to the infant was strangely cathartic.

"Hermione, you should come hear this."

Hermione took off her apron and entered what had been deemed Corbin's playroom. Severus was sitting in a rocking chair with the boy on his lap. He said, "She's here now. Go on, say it."

Corbin stretched his arms out toward his mother and cried out, "Mama!"

Hermione laughed and picked up Corbin. She spun him around and said to Severus, "Those books said he wouldn't be able talk yet. My boy is so much smarter than those authors."

Corbin babbled at Hermione for a moment before he turned to Severus and stretched out his arms toward the man. "Dada!"

Severus rose from the chair and stood in front of Hermione, trying desperately to find something to say. Worried that this moment may pass him by, he decided to act. He wrapped his arms around both Hermione and Corbin and pressed his forehead to Hermione's. As he stared into her eyes, he said, "I know this may not be the best time, but I want you to know that one day I would like to be Corbin's father." He licked his lips. "I love you, Hermione. I have for some time now."

Hermione kissed him. "I was hoping you felt the same way I did. I love you, Severus."

Embracing his new family, Severus could only marvel that an act of violence more than a year ago could have led to happiness beyond anything he ever could have imagined.

THE END

Author Note: The title came from a line in a fine frenzy's "Stood Up". It was the main song I listened to when writing this.

Prompt used: Severus is haunted by the strange serenity that surrounds the once traumatised and now very pregnant Hermione Granger. Then he witnesses the unconditional love she has for her ill-gotten child and can't help but yearn for someone to love him as she does her son.