# Dragons in the Dungeon

*by MsTree*

This story is a sequel to Velvet Song's "Damsels and Dragons". Severus apparently
has not conquered the curse after all, or is there something else going on?

## Chapter One

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**Disclaimer:** Harry Potter and associated characters belong to JKR. All else belongs to me.

**Author's Note:** This is the sequel to **Velvet Song's** "Damsels and Dragons", which she allowed me to complete in her stead last year. I want to thank her for encouraging
me to write this story, and **noybate** for being my beta. The story is complete, and I am hoping to post a chapter a week.

**Chapter One**

The wind rushed out over the hills, splitting itself in two to wind around obstacles in its path and, flowing back together on the other side, created eddies and currents that
swept up dead leaves and light twigs to dance along before dropping them back to the ground in a different place from where they lay before.

The black dragon sat perched on the highest point of the wind's current obstacle and watched the leaves and twigs in their dance. Spreading his wings wide, he toppled off
the Astronomy Tower to soar, allowing the wind to catch him up under his wings, and joined in the dance.

Anyone watching—and there could not have been many, as it was after midnight and all within should have been in their beds—would have seen a large black shadow
cross over the moon in its fullness and then dive, disappearing into the dark forest on the outskirts of the wide lawn that spread in front of the darkened castle.

However, there were at least two pairs of eyes watching the flight of the black dragon. One pair of eyes, yellow in colour, belonged to the brown and grey wolf who stood in
the shadows at the edge of the forest, waiting. The other pair, black in colour, belonged to the half-giant who stood in the doorway of his hut, the light from his fireplace
spilling out from behind him.

He sighed deeply—a combination of awe, delight, and sorrow—at the sight of the dragon soaring across the moon above him. "Merlin luv ye, Perfessor," he whispered.
"Perfessor Lupin's waitin' fer ye ta come an' play wi' 'im. I 'ope 'ermione's not watchin', too. It'd break 'er 'eart, it would, after all she's done fer ye." Shaking his head
forlornly, he stepped back into the hut and closed the door.

Meanwhile, in the castle, alone in her bed, a young witch tossed, turned, and twitched, as if she were also soaring in the wind. Suddenly, her eyes blinked open, and she
sat up. "Severus?" She scrambled out of bed, pulling on a dressing gown as she pulled back her window curtains and pushed opened the window. "Severus!" she yelled,
desperately seeking the black dragon. Her only answer: the howl of a wolf hunting in the Forbidden Forest. "Oh, Severus," Hermione whispered into the wind.

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Severus wandered into the Great Hall for breakfast the next morning, sat next to Hermione as had become his habit, and nodded sparingly to the other teachers at the

table. He had a splitting headache, and his body felt like someone had *Crucio'd* him while he slept.

Hagrid grinned at him from the end of the single table used by the teachers in the summer and winked as if they shared a secret. "Did ye 'ave a nice flight, Perfessor?" the half-giant asked with a big smile. "Ye and Perfessor Lupin must've 'ad quite the night."

"What the devil are you rattling on about, Hagrid?" Severus snarled. "I wasn't flying anywhere last night. I was in my own bed."

"But— but— I saw ye," Hagrid stuttered. "Ye was flyin' 'cross the moon. I watched ye come from the 'Stronomy Tower meself when I left Fang out ta do his bizness."

"And I'm telling you—" Severus was interrupted by Minerva's suddenly solemn voice.

"Severus? Is what Hagrid's saying true?" Her questions rang out over a suddenly silent table. "Did you turn back into a dragon last night?" The other teachers looked over the table at him in confusion. Hadn't they just gone through this?

Before Severus could answer the Headmistress' questions, Remus limped his way into the Great Hall. "Good morning, everyone," he whispered hoarsely. "Sorry about my voice. Seems I did some extra howling last night." He grinned, then winced in pain. "Hermione, could I trouble you for a painkiller after breakfast?"

Hermione smiled wanly at the Transfiguration instructor. "I'll join you in that," she said. "I'm not feeling so great myself."

Severus took a good look at the young Potions mistress. Her eyes were sunken in her head, and she had dark circles under her eyes as if she'd had little sleep. "Did you stay up all night watching for the dolt?" he asked crossly. "Remus is a big boy. I'm sure he's used to taking care of himself."

"No," she snapped. "I stayed up all night watching out my window for you!"

"For me?" Severus was aghast. "I assure you, Madam Granger, I spent the night in my bed *in my room*, in the dungeons. There was no need for you to look for me outside your window."

"You know," Remus said with some hesitation, "while I don't always remember what I'm doing when I'm a wolf, even with the Wolfsbane—"

"Well, spit it out, man!" Severus snarled. "Some of us don't have all morning."

"Now, that's harsh," Harry protested from his place across the table. "He's obviously had a hard night, and there's still two more nights of the full moon to go."

"Mr Potter, I am fully aware of how many nights it takes for the moon to turn full," Severus said with a sneer. "You need not try to lecture *me*."

"Enough, both of you," Minerva said, scowling at the verbal duelling. "Remus, did something happen last night?" She turned to the werewolf courteously.

Remus cleared his throat. "As I was saying," he said with a wry look at Severus's scowl, "I may not remember everything, but I had the distinct impression that a dragon flew over my head last night. That's *not* something I would forget in a hurry. Not after eight years of living with a dragon in the Forbidden Forest."

Severus sputtered into his coffee. "That's preposterous!" he said. "We beat the curse. I'm human again, and I'm going to stay human. *Me*, a dragon again," he muttered into his cup.

"It's not so preposterous," Hermione said suddenly. "I *felt* you in my head, just like last time." Everyone at the table stared at her in astonishment.

"Hermione, are you sure?" Lucius asked suddenly. "You weren't dreaming all this?" Narcissa placed her hand on his arm and squeezed it tight.

"I'm sure, Lucius," Hermione reassured him. "I was wide awake the rest of the night after I woke up, and I felt Severus in the back of my mind. Of course, he didn't talk to me, but I felt him there." She nodded emphatically.

Severus sat at the table, seemingly lost in thought as he listened to the conversation around him. Hermione was definitely showing signs of a lack of sleep; his head and body ached fiercely—he could probably use a pain-killer potion himself—and Remus and that dolt, Hagrid, had obviously seen *something*. Was there a small chance that —? He shook his head in denial, then groaned as his headache worsened.

Minerva frowned at the groan. "Severus, are you quite all right?" she asked with evident concern. "Did you need something?"

"A headache potion wouldn't go amiss just now, Minerva," he answered. "As to the accusations…" He scowled as Remus and Hagrid started blustering. "They might—I say *might*—have some basis in fact, if only because Hermione is stating the very same thing. I cannot say where I was last night if I was not in my bed, but I am certain I was not flying around the Forbidden Forest as a dragon. Other than that, I cannot say."

Reaching over, he covered Hermione's hand with his own, stroking it gently. "I do know," he continued, "that I have missed the feeling of having Hermione in the back of my head as much as she apparently has missed me. If she was *not* dreaming last night, then something serious must have happened."

# Chapter Two

*Chapter 2 of 14*

This story is a sequel to Velvet Song's "Damsels and Dragons". Severus apparently has not conquered the curse after
all, or is there something else going on?

**Chapter 2**

Minerva narrowed her eyes at him. "If you think that, then we need to get together and decide what we have to do next. The three of you," she nodded at Severus, Hermione, and Remus, "go and take your headache and painkiller potions." She glared at Hermione. "I would also suggest something to help you stay awake, Professor Granger."

Hermione jolted, her head having begun to sag with weariness. "Of course, Headmistress," she agreed. "Right after breakfast."

"Right then," the headmistress said. "I suggest we meet in the staff room one half hour after breakfast so we can figure out what, exactly, is going on here." She picked up her tea cup. "Well, what are you waiting for? Let's eat."

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Minerva took her customary seat at the head of the table in the staff room and watched as the few teachers who remained at Hogwarts for the summer came in and took their seats. Harry and Neville sat together at the far end, as far away from Severus as they could get, she noticed. Severus took the seat usually reserved for Minerva's deputy, and Hermione sat down next to him while Remus took the seat on her other side. Lucius sighed over the usurpation of his regular seat and slid into the chair opposite. Narcissa sat next to him and smiled at the way Severus unwittingly held Hermione's hand. Draco, Susan, Poppy, and Hagrid rounded out the roster of teachers and took their customary places...Draco and Susan next to Narcissa, and Poppy sat down next to Remus. Hagrid sat at the end of the table so as not to block anyone's view.

"Now that we are all here..." Minerva began.

"Shouldn't Professor Binns be here as well?" Neville interrupted. "He's been here a long time and..."

"Binns is good for nothing but putting people to sleep over the Goblin Wars," Severus snarled. "This really doesn't concern him, so just leave him be." Neville, chastened, slumped back in his chair.

"Severus, that was uncalled for," Minerva scolded. "While I agree that Professor Binns doesn't need to be involved, Professor Longbottom has a right to express his ideas and opinions without censure."

"My apologies, Minerva, Longbottom." Severus nodded his head at each of them. "I am frustrated at the idea that people think I've become a dragon again. However, I will attempt to control my vitriol."

"That's all I ask," Minerva said. "Professor Longbottom, do you concur?"

Neville swallowed nervously and gripped Harry's hand. "Yes, Headmistress," he squeaked. "That's fine."

"Good." The headmistress rubbed her hands together briskly. "The first thing we need to do is see if you retain any memories of last night, Severus. Would you object to Legilimency being used?"

Severus thought for a moment. "I am so used to Occluding when the Dark Lord...What, woman?" he objected when Hermione elbowed him in the ribs.

"We don't call him that anymore," she reminded him. "Use his real name: Tom Riddle or just plain Riddle."

"*Just Plain Riddle*?" Severus snorted while the rest of the staff chuckled, chortled or howled their laughter. "How very apt. Very well. 'Just Plain Riddle' it is." Surreptitiously, or so he thought, Severus wiped tears of laughter from his eyes. However, Minerva noticed and smiled inwardly at the sight of her old friend relaxed enough to actually enjoy laughing.

"As I was saying," Severus continued as the laughter died down. "I am so used to Occluding when 'Just Plain Riddle'..." He scowled at the sniggers coming from the opposite end of the table. "*Tom* Riddle would use Legilimency so often to ensure he was hearing the truth I am not sure I won't automatically Occlude now." He glanced at Lucius. "Perhaps if it were done by someone I fully trust..."

"I would gladly try," Lucius said. "If nothing else, we would find out if your Occlumency skills are still up to par." He stood and walked over to the hearth. "Why don't we try this over here? Away from the children." He sniggered at the outraged expressions on the faces of Harry and Neville. Draco smirked until he noticed his father had included him in the comment, then pouted. Susan patted his hand in commiseration.

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Severus pulled his chair around the table while Lucius did the same. They sat facing one another, and Severus shifted nervously. He was trusting one of his oldest friends to look into his mind and wasn't sure he liked it.

Lucius noticed his nervousness and spoke softly. "Just relax," he whispered. "Think of going to bed last night and what happened afterwards. I won't look any deeper than that."

Severus nodded and took a deep breath, closing his eyes in order to marshal his thoughts. When he was ready, he opened his eyes, and looking into Lucius' eyes, he nodded.

"*Legilimens*!"

*Severus put down his book and gave a small yawn. "Good night, Hermione," he said, nodding to the young woman sharing the couch, and exited the staff room. As he took the stairs down into the dungeons, he heard the first howls of that blasted werewolf crying at the almost full moon and frowned. How Minerva even got permission for the werewolf to teach at the school once more was a mystery to him.*

*At the door to his quarters, Severus quickly took down his wards and stepped inside. Once the door was closed and secure, he slipped out of his outer robes and hung them on the hook at the side of the door. He yawned once more and lazily stretched his arms over his head, and then, drawing his wand, he lit the wood laid in his hearth with a quiet Incendio.*

*As the room began to warm, he removed his frock coat and laid it out over the back of his easy chair. Sitting down on the chair, he removed his boots and slipped on a pair of backless slippers laying on the floor next to him. "Accio nightshirt," he called and caught the article of clothing as it came flying to him from the bedroom. He spread the nightshirt out over the arm of the chair to give it a chance to warm while he unbuttoned his shirt and removed it from his body. Shivering a little, he silently cast an additional warming charm on the nightshirt, then pulled it over his head and onto his arms. As he stood up, Severus wiggled a little, causing the nightshirt to fall into place.*

*Shuffling into his bathroom, Severus washed his face and hands, and brushed his teeth. After relieving himself, he quickly removed his trousers and tossed them into the hamper to be cleaned along with the dirty shirt he had carried in with him. Once finished, he left the bathroom and wandered back into the sitting room. After making sure everything was secure, he moved to the bedroom, where the house-elf on duty had already turned down his bed and placed the warming charms on the sheets.*

*Slipping in between the warm sheets, he yawned again and pulled the top sheet, blanket, and duvet up and over himself. "Nox," he said as he placed his wand on the*

*bedside table. Once the lights were doused, he fell asleep easily.*

Lucius pulled out of Severus' mind and frowned. "Well, as interesting as that was," he said, "I think we need to move ahead a bit faster. What do you say, Severus?"

"Is something wrong, Lucius?" Minerva asked from her place at the staff table. "What exactly did you see?"

"A wizard going to bed, Headmistress," Lucius answered. "Just a tired wizard going to bed. Well, Severus? It's up to you. May I go deeper and look into your subconscious thoughts last night?"

"As I usually don't remember my dreams, I can see no harm," Severus said. "I might even see something interesting myself. Merlin, I never knew I was so pedestrian when getting ready for bed."

Lucius laughed. "Most of us are," he said. "Most of us are. Prepare yourself, my friend. *Legilimens*!" He dived back into the slate-coloured eyes in front of him, bypassing the memories of Severus' bedtime routine and delving into his friend's subconscious. "Don't fight me," he reminded Severus as the other wizard started putting up his usual Occluding walls. "We need to know what happened last night, remember?"

Severus sighed and relaxed into the back of his chair, his eyes still open and focused on Lucius' grey ones. "I'm trying," he muttered, clenching his teeth. "Old habits aren't easy to get rid of." With a visible effort, he banished the walls and allowed Lucius to enter his inner mind.

*A soft laugh. Hermione, her smile lighting up the room, wearing nothing as she lay on the rug in front of the fire. Kisses soft as cotton wool covering his face. Watching her face as he forced her up into an orgasm with nothing but his fingers down below and his mouth on her breasts. Stroking one another softly. Lying in bed, holding her after much satisfying sex. Falling asleep with Hermione in his arms. Feeling like he could stay there forever.*

Lucius blinked, breaking eye contact. "Well...," he began and cleared his throat. "Ahem. Yes. That was interesting, but not what we're looking for."

"I rather enjoyed it," Severus drawled with a smirk. "It's too bad I couldn't remember something like that this morning. I might have felt better."

"Are you finished, Lucius?" Minerva asked. "Did you find anything?"

"Nothing pertaining to the matter at hand, Minerva," he reassured her. "I want to discuss this dream of yours with you later, however," he muttered to Severus, who smirked once more.

"What do you remember when you woke up this morning, Severus?" Narcissa asked casually. "Were you still in bed?"

Severus frowned as he looked back on the morning. "I was," he said slowly, "but my nightshirt was on the floor. I distinctly remember putting it on last night." He looked over at the staff table and met Hermione's eyes. "I suppose I may have grown too warm and removed it in my sleep," he added.

Minerva sighed. "If you can't remember anything from last night, is it possible you were sleepwalking? After all, you used to do so as a boy, but I'd thought you had grown out of it." She frowned in remembrance. "I can't remember the last time, but I know it was before you left school. Poppy?"

"That's about right, Minerva," the school matron said. She looked up at the ceiling as if it could help her to remember. "I don't recall any mention of sleepwalking when Severus came back as a professor."

"Hmmm." Minerva looked over at the two wizards. "Why don't you rejoin us here at the table?" she asked. "I have a few more ideas we can toss around."

Severus and Lucius exchanged glances then moved the chairs back to their original positions at the table and sat down. Hermione reached over and patted Severus' knee in sympathy. He caught at her hand and held it under the table while Minerva looked through an ancient book she had brought with her to the staff room.

"This book," she said absently, "was originally written some five hundred years ago. This is a later copy, but I've compared it to the original, and they're identical."

"What's it about, Minerva?" Hermione asked, straining to get a look at the title. "Will it help us here and now?"

Minerva held up the book so all those present could see the title: *Animagi and Their Formation*. "There's a passage in here that talks about a witch who was cursed into a rabbit. When the curse was finally broken, it was discovered that she had become an Animagus with a rabbit form."

Severus sputtered. "You think I've become a *dragon*?" he asked in disbelief. "It's not enough that I might have started sleepwalking again. Now you've got me becoming a dragon as well." He started to get up and storm out, but Hermione's hand clenched on his leg.

"Please hear Minerva out," she said quietly, her brown eyes pooling with tears. "We're just trying to help you."

Severus huffed but settled back down on his chair. "Please continue, Headmistress," he said with a touch of sarcasm and a slight nod. "I'm all ears."

Minerva glared at him stonily. "Hmmph," she said. "You're something, all right." She turned back to the rest of the staff. "But to continue, the book lists some spells that we could try. They were developed to determine if someone *might* be an Animagus, albeit an unknowing one."

Remus held up a finger. "Would this be the Revelius Animagi spell, Minerva?"

She nodded. "It's similar. I believe it might possibly be the origin of the modern-day spell. Severus, would you allow us to test you and see?"

He sighed deeply. "I suppose I won't have a moment's peace until I do, will I?" He shook his head in resignation. "What do I have to do?"

"Go stand over by the hearth," Minerva said eagerly. "Then we can..."

"Wait!" Susan cried out. "If this spell reveals an Animagus form, won't he be too big for the room? I mean..." Her voice trailed off as the others looked at her.

"'E'd be a dragon agin, won't 'e?" Hagrid spoke up. "That'd break walls, fer sure."

Remus rolled his eyes. "Hagrid, the Revelius Animagi spell simply shows a shadow form if the wizard it's cast on is an Animagus. He won't actually *become* a dragon."

"Oh," the half-giant said with a blush. "Sorry, Perfessors."

Minerva waved her hand in dismissal. "That's quite all right, Hagrid. I suppose it did need to be explained. Remus, would you care to cast the modern-day spell?"

"Right you are, Headmistress." He got to his feet with alacrity. "Severus, if you'd stand over by the hearth, please." He grinned in anticipation.

"I believe you're enjoying this a bit too much, Lupin," Severus grumbled as he stood up and moved over to the hearth. "Make this quick, would you? I have better things to do this afternoon."

"Right you are, then," Remus said. Giving a complicated flourish with his wand as he pointed it at Severus, he chanted, "*Revelio Animagus*."

Severus smirked as nothing happened beyond a few sparks from the end of the wand. "Are you sure you have the proper spell, Lupin?" he taunted. "Perhaps you should

try it on Minerva to be sure."

"Go right ahead, Remus," Minerva said with a glare at the smirking wizard. "Prove to the man that the spell works."

Remus quickly repeated the gestures with his wand, this time pointing it at Minerva, and chanted the incantation once more. Suddenly, Minerva was outlined with a pale blue light, and the lifelike shadow of a tabby cat with spectacle markings glowed in front of her. She smirked at Severus and said, "I believe it works well enough."

He sighed deeply and straightened to his full height. "Very well, Minerva. Since the werewolf wasn't successful, you may try your antique spell."

Minerva cleared her throat and stood up. Consulting the book laying open on the table, she raised her wand and made a complicated gesture, incanting, *Ostendo sum Animagus*!" Lowering her wand, she glared at Severus, who stood unchanged and smirking. "You're not cooperating, Severus," she accused.

"I have stood here as you requested, Minerva," he answered. "It's not my fault your spell work is faulty and your foolish wand-waving ineffective. Now, if you will excuse me?" He made a move for the door.

"Stop right where you are, Severus Snape!" Minerva ordered. "We are *not* finished!"

Severus turned to the headmistress and sneered. "I believe I am *quite* finished, Minerva. Your foolish wand-waving and spells have proven nothing. As I told you before, *I am not a dragon*!" His final roar could have rivaled Athair's at his angriest, but Minerva just blinked.

"I'm afraid I'll have to agree with you," she finally conceded. "You are not an Animagus, but there is definitely something going on with you. Please, Severus, will you sit down so we can discuss this as rational human beings?"

Severus glanced at Hermione, who looked at him pleadingly, then towards Lucius and Narcissa, who made gestures of concern. Sighing dramatically, he moved towards his chair. "Very well, Minerva," he said as he sat down. "Let's get this over with. We now know that I am most emphatically not a dragon, so what else is there to discuss?"

"You remember nothing of last night?" Poppy asked softly. "Isn't that unusual for you? I-I mean, even as a boy, when you walked in your sleep, there was some awareness."

"I remember *nothing*," Severus said with a sneer. "I went to bed as usual and woke up as usual. The only *unusual* thing I noticed this morning was my nightshirt on the floor when it should have been on me."

"So you took it off sometime during the night, then," Lucius said. "That would imply that you were cognizant of something even if you don't remember. Whatever it is, however, was not retained in your subconscious mind."

"Which means?" Remus asked. When Severus stared at him, he grinned. "I don't always remember what happens when I'm a wolf, remember? It might be the same if you're changing into a dragon."

Hermione gasped. "The moon!" she cried. "Last night was the first night of the full moon!"

Turning to Severus, she grasped his hands. "If that's it, you'll change again tonight and tomorrow night when the moon rises."

"Not possible," Severus argued. "If that were the case, why didn't it happen last month?"

"Because you were still a dragon last month, old boy," Lucius drawled. "You've only been human again for three weeks *After* last month's full moon."

Severus shook his head in frustration. "What you're saying is I've become some sort of *were-dragon*?" he asked. "That's impossible!" He glared at Hagrid who had started to speak, and the half-giant subsided back into his chair. "If it's true," Severus conceded, "when the full moon rises tonight, I should change once more. Since I apparently changed in my sleep, someone should probably stay with me to keep watch."

"An excellent idea," Minerva stated firmly. "Those of us not in your quarters will watch from the grounds outside. Hermione, I would ask that you watch from your window. Being directly opposite the Forbidden Forest, you should have a good view from there."

Hermione nodded her head numbly as Minerva briskly continued, "Remus, you won't be any good to us tonight." The werewolf grinned. "Hagrid, I doubt very much if Severus would want you in his quarters." The half-giant wriggled in his seat in embarrassment as Severus muttered, "Indubitably."

"Narcissa, Susan, and Poppy are out," the headmistress continued, "as am I since we are female, which leaves Lucius, Draco, Harry, and Neville. Who would you prefer be your watchdog this evening, Severus?" She rubbed her hands briskly as she finished summing up.

"If those four are my only choices for a night-time companion," Severus said with a sneer, "I would definitely not want Potter or Longbottom. I prefer some stimulating conversation in the evenings."

"Hey!" Harry protested. "I can be stimulating. Just ask Neville."

Neville blushed at the unwitting innuendo. "Uh, let's not," he choked out.

As it dawned on Harry what he had said, a blush spread up his cheeks as well. "Um, sorry, Nev," he apologized. "I got carried away."

Severus sneered at the pair while laughing at them in his head. "If it's all the same to you, I would prefer to have Lucius attend this watch party with me. It's a total waste of time, but we can have a stimulating conversation, and I believe I still have some excellent Firewhisky left." He glared at Lucius. "Even though persons unnamed decided my Hundred Year Reserve was best used for Scrimgeour."

Minerva reached over and slapped Severus' arm. "That was *my* Hundred Year Reserve we used for Scrimgeour," she scolded. "As I understand it, Mr Phelps still has your bottle. You'll need to take that up with him." She glared at him until he subsided with a murmured apology. "Right then, Lucius, you'll stay with Severus tonight. I think you should try to recreate last evening as much as possible. Yes, Severus, that means going to bed and sleeping. Lucius doesn't mind staying awake, do you?" She turned to the blond wizard who gave her a formal bow from his chair.

"Not in the pursuit of science, my dear Minerva," he crooned. "I would be *most* happy to remain awake and observe Severus' night-time habits." He smirked at Severus' groan of protest.

# Chapter Three

This story is a sequel to Velvet Song's "Damsels and Dragons". Severus apparently has not conquered the curse after all, or is there something else going on?

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For those coming to this particular series for the first time, I might recommend you read the first part before continuing on. The first part, written by **Velvet Song**, may be found on the TPP archive here: http://www.thepetulantpoetess.com/viewstory.php?sid=18337. The second part, written by me, will be found on the TPP archive here: http://www.thepetulantpoetess.com/viewstory.php?sid=19501. This may lead to less confusion later in this story.

**Chapter 3**

"I will say this only one more time, Miss Parkinson. The Last Will and Testament of Severus Snape will not be overturned by this office. Is that clear?"

Pansy Parkinson gritted her teeth as she stared at the officious man seated behind the desk in the Ministry Office of Last Wills and Testaments. His continued refusal to overturn her former head of house's will was irritating at best and infuriating at worst, but she never let her irritation show.

"Perhaps, Mr Bowles, you might actually explain your reasoning to me," she said, smiling through her teeth and wondering if she could get away with hexing the man. "After all, you've shown me no justification as to why, when it's been proven that Mr Snape wasn't killed by Voldemort after all, his will should not be overturned on the grounds that he is actually alive. The Pensieve evidence shows..."

"Overturned? Overturned!" The little man was actually sputtering with anger, Pansy thought with relish. "Pensieved evidence is not admissible and never has been. The last will and testament was proven when Miss Hermione Granger...the only beneficiary, mind you...stepped foot on the grounds of Hogwarts last year to become an instructor. It's magic, don't you know. If Severus Snape were alive, that would never have happened. Therefore, *this* Severus Snape is an impostor seeking to diddle Miss Granger out of her fortune."

"You have no proof of that," Pansy said, holding in her resentment. "Professor Snape has just spent the last eight years as a dragon. The Wizengamot..."

"Those old fools in the Wizengamot will believe almost anything, even a Pensieve," Bowles snarled. "I, for one, do not believe Severus Snape was a dragon. It's physically impossible. A curse? Bah! The dragon that lived at Hogwarts just decided to fly away somewhere and this... this impostor is taking advantage of the situation." He held up a hand to forestall Pansy's protests. "No, Miss Parkinson. The decision of this office is final. The will stands as entered. Good day."

"But..." Pansy started to protest.

"*Good day, Miss Parkinson.*" Bowles waved his wand, and the door to the office swung open, an invitation for Pansy to exit the office.

"This isn't finished, Mr Bowles," she exclaimed as she stalked out. "I'll take this case to the Wizengamot if I have to."

"I don't care if Harry Potter himself comes in here. The Wizengamot listens to *my* recommendations," Bowles countered with a sneer. "I doubt very much if you'll get far with *them*." He waved his wand once more, and the door slammed shut, barely missing Pansy's heels as she exited.

Once the door was closed and secure, Bowles turned to the painted screen in the corner of his office. "She's gone," he said. "You can come out now."

The screen moved aside and a wizard stepped out. He had clearly been eavesdropping on the conversation between Bowles and Pansy and looked pleased. "Very good, Albert," the strange wizard said, "but I wouldn't rest on my laurels yet. Miss Parkinson is a very determined witch and a Slytherin as well. She'll be back."

"Maybe so," Bowles said, preening a little under the other's praise. "She'll get no further on than she got today. Severus Snape is good and dead. This impostor she claims is Snape will not get his hands on Miss Granger's inheritance. It's possible the entire staff of Hogwarts is in on this to gain extra funds."

"A possibility, of course," the other wizard mused. "After all, the staff is riddled with Death Eaters and their sycophants."

"Here now," Bowles protested. "I wouldn't call two-thirds of the Golden Trio 'Death Eater sycophants'. Harry Potter teaches at Hogwarts as well as Miss Granger."

The wizard made a calming motion. "You're quite correct," he said calmly. "It is possible that Mr Potter and Miss Granger have been led astray by their Gryffindor honour. No doubt they truly believe the Malfoys have really renounced the Dark Arts and their Master. More fools, they."

"That's a bit harsh, now, isn't it?" Bowles protested. "We don't really know what's going on up to the school now, do we?"

"Not yet, but we soon will," the wizard said. "*Obliviate!*" He swept out of the office while Bowles frowned. What exactly was he doing? Oh right, looking at some new wills that had just come in that morning.

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Later that evening, Lucius and Severus sat in his quarters, each of them sipping from a glass of Firewhisky. The fire leapt in the grate, warming the room generously while the two wizards discussed events from the last eight years and rehashed the memories Lucius had pulled from Severus' subconscious earlier that day. Eventually, Lucius glanced at the chronometer above the mantel and, setting his glass down on the side table, stretched widely.

"Almost midnight, Severus," he said, hiding a yawn behind his hand. "The moon will be rising soon. Best you get to bed now."

"Yes, *Mum*," Severus said with a sneer. "Are you sure you don't want to tuck me in and tell me a story as well?"

Lucius merely smiled at the sarcasm. "If you think it would help," he said calmly. "I might remember a few stories from when Draco was a boy."

Severus snarled at his friend, his temper fraying fast. "I believe I can get myself to bed, Lucius, thank you very much. This asinine idea of the headmistress' that I could be walking in my sleep..."

"It's more that you might be influenced by the moon into becoming Athair again," Lucius pointed out.

Severus made a scoffing noise. "Ridiculous," he said. "The curse has been broken. There is no way I could be a dragon again. I refuse to believe that."

"That may be, but something happened to you last night and..."

"Yes, yes, I know." Severus waved away his friend's protests. "Hagrid saw what he thought was a dragon. The man is dragon mad. You do know about the dragon he smuggled into the school fifteen years ago?"

Lucius nodded. "I do, indeed. Draco's letters home were full of Hagrid's audacity for quite a while after. *Especially* since he also had to serve that farce of a detention in the Forbidden Forest. But you must remember Remus also said he saw something."

"No," Severus corrected him. "The werewolf said he *felt* something. He saw nothing and, as he himself said, does not remember everything that happens to him in his wolf form. Not even with the Wolfsbane." He cut off any more protests with a wave of his hand. "I'm going to bed now. I would suggest you lay off the Firewhisky for the rest of the night if you intend to stay awake. Me? I'm ready to get a good night's sleep and forget all about this situation come morning."

Lucius banked the fire while Severus headed for the bathroom, presumably to get cleaned up and ready for bed. Shortly afterwards, Severus came out of the bathroom in his nightshirt. "Good night, Lucius. I'm sure we'll both laugh about this in the morning." He poked a thumb at the door behind him. "It's all yours if you need it. G'night."

"Night, Severus," Lucius replied as he settled back onto the couch. "I'll be right here if you need me."

Severus snorted. "Not bloody likely," he said as he entered the bedroom. "Enjoy what's left of the night. *I* might just sleep in tomorrow. *Nox.*"

The candles in the sitting room all extinguished themselves with gentle puffs of air, the smoke from the wicks drifting lazily upwards, leaving only the fire in the hearth to light the room. "Impressive, Severus," Lucius muttered to himself, laying his head against the back of the couch. "Very impressive."

A short time later, Lucius came out of a light doze with a start. Wondering what had awakened him, he listened closely to the sounds of the castle. From within Severus' bedroom, he heard the squeaking of bedsprings, and then Severus appeared at the door sans his nightshirt, or indeed any clothing at all.

"A bit chilly this evening, Severus," Lucius quipped. "Shouldn't you at least wear slippers?" Severus ignored the comment, and Lucius realized his friend's eyes were blank and glassy. "Severus?"

The other wizard continued to ignore him as he passed through the outer door and into the dungeon corridor. Grabbing his cloak, Lucius quickly followed. Once in the corridor, he looked both ways just in time to see Severus begin to climb the staircase to the upper levels.

Cursing under his breath and struggling to get his cloak situated properly, Lucius could do nothing but follow as Severus, unfazed by the cold air, continued his trek upward. They made a strange picture as they crossed the Entrance Hall and started up the steps to the upper floors. Lucius couldn't help but wonder just where this journey would end up. Was the bloody wizard going to Hermione's rooms?

That question was quickly answered as Severus passed the door to Hermione's quarters and began his ascent up the winding stairs to the Astronomy Tower. *Bloody hell*, Lucius thought, *is he dreaming of Dumbledore now?*

Lucius remained behind in the gallery as Severus stepped out onto the observation deck of the tower. He remained vigilant, however, and poised to act if need be should the other wizard decide to throw himself off in emulation of the late headmaster. However, as the light of the full moon bathed the naked wizard, Severus began to change.

His skin began to turn black as horns grew from his head and wings sprouted from his back. His toes and fingers became talons, and the way his muscles moved and twisted under his skin made Lucius sick to watch. He couldn't turn away though as Severus fully morphed into an eleven-metre-tall dragon.

With a wild cry, Athair lifted his wings and plunged from the tower towards the ground only to be lifted up by the harsh Scottish wind. Up he soared until all that could be seen was his outline against the moon. Rushing onto the observation deck, Lucius stood at the very edge and watched as his friend soared out over the Forbidden Forest and dived into its depths.

"Lucius?" Minerva called from the bottom of the tower. "Did you see?"

He waved down to her and yelled above the noise of the wind, "I did indeed, Minerva. We need to talk." Turning around, he all but ran down Hermione, who had rushed up the stairs to the tower as soon as she had seen the dragon shape cross the moon.

"He changed, didn't he?" she cried, clutching at Lucius' cloak. "What did we do wrong?"

"Hermione, take it easy." Lucius gently untangled her fingers from the front of his cloak and held them firmly. "We didn't do anything wrong."

"Are you sure?" Hermione's eyes strayed to the edge of the observation deck. "Then why did he change back to Athair? That wasn't supposed to happen, Lucius."

Lucius gripped her smaller hands a little tighter. "I don't know, Hermione," he replied, looking out over the grounds of the school. "I really don't know." He turned to look at her again, taking a deep breath. "I *do* know, however, that we brought him back once. I'm sure you can do it again."

# Chapter Four

*Chapter 4 of 14*

This story is a sequel to Velvet Song's "Damsels and Dragons". Severus apparently has not conquered the curse after all, or is there something else going on?

**Disclaimer:** Harry Potter and associated characters belong to JKR. All else belongs to me.

## Chapter 4

The staff were just sitting down to lunch when Severus billowed into the Great Hall. Hands on hips, he looked straight at Lucius, who motioned him to hurry up to the table as the house-elves were preparing to serve the meal. Glaring at his friend, Severus took his customary seat between Lucius and Hermione. Then, abruptly, he yawned, which started a chain reaction of yawns up and down the table. Once Minerva had finished her yawning and shook her head to clear it, he smirked at them all.

Taking a couple slices of the roasted chicken, he passed the platter to Lucius, asking, "I *know* I said I would sleep late this morning, but did you have to take me at my word? I have never slept this late that I can remember without my being ill. You could have at least awakened me for breakfast."

"I left your quarters the same time you did, my friend," Lucius answered. Then he smirked at Severus. "At least *I* was fully dressed when I did. Can't say the same for you."

Severus glared at him. "What the devil are you babbling about, man?" he demanded. "I spent the night..."

"Apparently flitting around the Forbidden Forest as a dragon," Minerva interrupted. "We all saw you, Severus." She indicated the other teachers, who all, except for Remus, nodded in agreement.

"Well," he drawled. "I didn't actually see you, but I certainly *heard* you." He grinned at Severus. "I guess we were playing our old game of 'hide and seek' again."

"Impossible!" Severus snarled. "I was in bed. Tell them, Lucius." He turned to his friend, who could only shake his head.

"About moonrise, I heard a noise from your room," Lucius said with a frown. "When I looked up, you were coming out of the bedroom naked as the day you were born. I made a comment about putting on some slippers at least, but you didn't answer." He paused to take a sip of his wine.

"When you wandered out into the dungeon corridor...naked, I might add...I followed." He stopped again when Severus made a scoffing sound.

"I assure you, Lucius, I do not wander the castle naked. Awake *or* asleep." Severus shook his head in disbelief. "Perhaps you fell asleep and were dreaming. Should I use *Legilimency* on you?"

"He wasn't dreaming, Severus," Hermione assured him, placing her hand on his. "We all saw you fly from the top of the Astronomy Tower." She didn't flinch when he glared at her, but removed her hand just the same.

"Continue your fairy tale, if you please," he said to Lucius, turning away from the hurt he saw in Hermione's eyes.

"Well, I followed you up to the Astronomy Tower," Lucius continued. He grinned at Severus. "At first, I thought your state of dishabille had something to do with Hermione since you were headed in her direction." There was a general gasp of astonishment from the rest of the table, but Lucius ignored it. "Then you started up the stairs to the Astronomy Tower and went out onto the observation deck. Once the moonlight hit you, you started to change." He shook his head with astonishment. "I've never seen anything like it."

"Now I know you were dreaming," Severus sneered. "Me? Become a dragon in the moonlight? Preposterous!"

"I wasn't dreaming," Lucius insisted. "I know what I saw, Severus. Once you finished changing, you dived off the tower, and the wind lifted you up into the sky. The last I saw of you was when you disappeared into the Forbidden Forest."

Severus looked at the rest of the table. "You all believe this tarradiddle?" Most of those seated at the table nodded, but would not meet his eyes. Minerva, however, spoke up authoritatively.

"We all saw you fly off the tower, Severus," she said, confirming Lucius' story. You were a dragon. Lucius saw you change, and Hermione was right behind him on the tower stairs. You *became* Athair again."

Severus looked at Hermione. "You wouldn't lie to me?" he said plaintively. "Tell me the truth, Hermione, please?"

Hermione swallowed nervously. "We all took copies of our memories and put them into the Pensieve," she said hesitantly. "I didn't think you would actually believe us until you saw it for yourself. Will you look?" She pointed at the lower portion of the Great Hall where a Pensieve sat in isolated splendour on a table. "It's all there for you to see. All you have to do is look."

Severus stood up from the table, then looked down at her. "Will you look with me?" he all but whispered. "I think I need a friendly face while I'm in there."

Hermione smiled sadly and stood, taking his hand. "Of course, I'll look with you," she reassured him. "Come on. You, of all people, should know it won't hurt."

"Physically, no," he muttered as he followed her up to the Pensieve. Taking a quick breath, he looked at Hermione, and at her nod, they both looked into the Pensieve.

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Severus pulled himself out of the Pensieve, his hand clenched so tightly around Hermione's that his knuckles were white. His complexion, never very tanned, was even paler than usual. He made no protest as Hermione pulled him back to the High Table and made him sit down in his seat once more. In fact, he said nothing at all as the other instructors sat quietly and watched him.

With a deep sigh, Severus shook his head and sat straighter in his chair, finally releasing Hermione's hand. Looking out over the table, he could see Hermione in his peripheral vision, shaking out her hand to restart the circulation he had inadvertently cut off with his vice-like grip. He winced inwardly at the pain she must have endured and admired the strength she must have had not to complain about the tightness of his hold.

"What am I going to do now?" he half-muttered to himself. Only Lucius and Hermione heard him and exchanged concerned glances behind his back. Severus looked down the table at Minerva, who sat in the head position. "What do we do now?" he asked her. "This can't continue. I've only just now started living again." His plaintive plea had everyone else squirming in their seats in embarrassment.

"Well," Minerva said, "I don't think you're a were-dragon, if that's what you're worried about." She sounded confident in her opinion, although her face did not reflect that confidence. "Since you did not become Athair until you were actually out in the moonlight..." She hesitated. "I don't recall anything that says a were-being would have to actually be out in the moonlight in order to change. Remus, you shift whenever the moon is full no matter where you are, don't you?"

Remus shifted uncomfortably in his chair under the regard of his peers. "That's correct, Minerva," he replied, running a finger inside his suddenly tight collar. "I could be in the darkest dungeons or even in a cave and still shift into a wolf when the moon rises. There's no controlling it."

"Severus can't control it either," Hermione pointed out. "He's asleep when it happens. Maybe Athair is still part of him and takes over when he's asleep. It doesn't have to be

the moon that's causing the change, but Athair himself."

"That's ridiculous!" Severus sneered.

"Is it?" Lucius asked. "We've seen many strange sights in our lives, Severus. Who's to say this isn't one more?"

"You're saying I have a split personality where my other self is a dragon?" Severus said sarcastically. "What's next? Appointments with a Muggle psychiatrist? I'd be locked up for sure, and wouldn't the Ministry love that!"

"Is it such a bad thing, Perfessor?" Hagrid asked. "Ya got wings an' kin fly! Wish I could."

"Hagrid, if I could give you this curse, I surely would," Severus said. "You are more than welcome to it. I already know how to fly without a broom. I certainly don't need wings to do so."

"But your other half breathes fire," Harry said, grinning. "Just think how handy that could be for the Samhain and Beltane bonfires." His quip lightened the tension in the other instructors, but Severus drew himself up angrily.

"Mr Potter, if I could take points from Gryffindor, right now your house would be so far in the hole, it would never climb out," he threatened. "I, for one, do not appreciate your unsubtle attempts at humour."

Harry had the good sense to look abashed and hung his head. "Sorry, sir," he apologised. "I was just trying to lighten things up a little."

"Thank you, Harry," Minerva said in reassurance. "You tried and it helped some, but we really need to do something about Severus' problem. We can't have a dragon appearing in school when the students are here." She held up a hand to forestall Severus' interruption. "I know you protected the school as a dragon, Severus, but you were conscious at the time. You yourself admit you were asleep the last two nights and don't remember a thing. We can't have that during the school year."

"I understand that, Minerva," Severus replied. "We have two weeks before the start of term..."

"Perhaps you need to stay awake tonight on the Astronomy Tower and see what happens," Hermione said suddenly. The other instructors stared at her. "Think about it. If the moonlight affects him, he would change into Athair anyway. So, stay awake and see what happens. If you don't change, we can surmise that Athair has control of your subconscious mind and can't take control if you aren't asleep."

"I would have to sleep sometime, Hermione," Severus said with a grimace. "I can't stay awake the rest of my life, or it won't be a long one at all."

"I realise that," Hermione answered. "Just for tonight, though, since it's the last night of the full moon for this month. Maybe Athair likes the moonlight so he can see his prey better." She paused and nibbled nervously on her lower lip. "By the way, did you feel me last night?"

"I'm sorry?" Severus shook his head in denial. "I didn't feel anything last night. I was asleep."

"I just wondered," Hermione explained. "Both last night and the night before, I could feel you again in the back of my mind. I couldn't communicate with you, but I did feel you." She looked crestfallen. "I suppose Athair could have suppressed your mind so deeply you might not have felt me at all."

Severus took her hand and held it tightly. "If I could feel you at all..." he began, only to be cut off by Lucius.

"All well and good," he said, "but we need to decide who's going to stay up with you so you don't fall asleep. I think, as your oldest friend, I should do it."

"That won't work, Lucius," Narcissa said in disagreement. "You were on the Astronomy Tower all night and most of this morning watching for Severus to come back safely. Even with a nap this afternoon, I won't have you risking your health by staying up another night."

Minerva held up a hand for silence as the others started in with their own ideas. "We'll take turns," she said. "Two hours each, and that way everyone gets some sleep tonight. Well, all but Severus, of course." She looked at him apologetically. "I'm sorry, Severus."

"Quite all right, Minerva," he replied. "Hermione does have a good idea. I can put up with Potter and Longbottom for at least two hours if it will help solve this puzzle."

"Then it's settled," Minerva said, quelling any arguments by picking up her fork. "I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm hungry."

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Just before lunch was finished, an barn owl approached the table bearing a message. Dropping down in front of Severus, she offered her leg. After untying the letter from her leg, Severus offered her a bite of leftover roast chicken. The owl hooted her thanks, gulped down the chicken and flew off while Severus unrolled the scroll she had carried.

*Professor Snape (and Hermione),*

*I don't know what's going on, but Bowles, who heads the Ministry Office of Last Wills and Testaments, refuses to overturn your will. He would not listen to any of my arguments yesterday, and today, when I tried to speak with him again, he did not even remember what we had talked about yesterday. In fact, he denied that I had even been in his office yesterday and refuses to give me another appointment.*

*I am not sure, but I think he might have been Obliviated, especially since he seems to remember everything from before I arrived and after I left. Why someone would want to make a Ministry official forget his meeting with me, I don't know, but I thought I had better warn you to be careful. Something is not right here, but I will get to the bottom of it.*

*Sincerely,*

*Pansy Parkinson, MC*

# Chapter Five

This story is a sequel to Velvet Song's "Damsels and Dragons". Severus apparently has not conquered the curse after all, or is there something else going on?

**Chapter 5**

It was almost one o'clock in the morning, and Hermione was starting to nod off over the book she was reading. Severus glanced up at the younger witch and grimaced. Looking at the clock on his wall, he realised that Draco was not due to keep him company for at least another hour. Sighing deeply, he bookmarked the potions journal he was reading.

"Hermione," he said, causing the young woman to start in her seat and blink rapidly. "If the book in your hands is so boring, why do we not discuss what has happened and what is happening instead."

Hermione blinked some more and shook her head rapidly, trying to wake herself up. "What did you want to talk about?" she asked. "I'm sure as Athair you probably knew everything that was happening." She smiled uneasily. "It certainly felt like it, anyway."

"I apologise if my presence in your mind caused you any problems," Severus said uneasily. "I was totally caught up in the fact that there was actually someone in this benighted place that I could talk to."

"Lucius and Narcissa..." Hermione began.

Severus cut her off abruptly. "Lucius and Narcissa, yes, and Draco too, knew of the Dark Lord's...my apologies...Tom Riddle's propensities and figured out early on that I was actually the dragon they named Athair." He looked up at the ceiling of his rooms, visibly marshalling his thoughts. "After the final battle, I stayed hidden for almost four years until Minerva actively started to recruit you to return and teach potions. Lucius would often come into the forest and tell me what was happening.

"Once I understood that Minerva was serious about your return, I showed myself and began my visible protection of the school. While I did not begrudge Mr Weasley's studies of me, I was most pleased when he finally left me to myself. Before..." Severus stopped and cleared his throat. "Before the final battle, I had a premonition that I might not survive, and if I did, it would not be as a human being. The Malfoys and I made our plans in secret and swore wand oaths not to reveal them to another soul until the monster known as Voldemort was fully destroyed."

"Lucius, Narcissa, and Draco destroyed Voldemort's wand," Hermione said. "They disarmed him and snapped the wand. Once they had done so, it was like his mind snapped as well. Harry managed to destroy him..." Her voice trailed off as she remembered the horrors of the day. "I don't think Harry has really been the same since."

Severus nodded in understanding. "Taking a life, even a justified killing, rips at a wizard's soul. Harry is lucky that he only had to take one life...Voldemort's. In time, if he does not have to kill again, his soul will heal. There will always be the guilt, but not as much pain."

Hermione looked at him. "You *do* understand." She smiled. "I think Neville has helped a lot in the last eight years. Shortly after the final battle, he and Harry hooked up and have been together ever since. They're happy."

"What about you, Hermione?" Severus asked gently. "Have you been happy?"

"When I worked for the Ministry?" Hermione replied. "Not really. It felt like I was banging my head against a brick wall every day. Here at Hogwarts? Definitely. I feel like this is where I belong. Teaching the art of Potions to students...albeit most of them dunderheads."

Severus' laugh rang throughout the room. "Now you know why I was in a bad mood most of the time," he said. "It wasn't just an act, Hermione. Sometimes I was definitely frustrated with the lack of brains in the average student. Then, there was you..." His voice trailed off.

"Go on." Hermione encouraged him. "What were you going to say?"

"Only that you were the most exasperating, annoying, frustrating, irksome..."

Hermione's eyes lit up with humour. "Why don't you say what you *really* mean, Severus?"

Severus smirked in return. "You were a vexing know-it-all with horrible hair and an overbite," he said. "Every time you waved that hand of yours in the air, I wanted to hex it off. I was trying to teach dunderheads who knew you would answer my questions and didn't bother to study because of it. I wanted at least one of the others to understand and answer correctly without your help."

Hermione slumped back into her chair. "I'm sorry."

"For what? Being yourself?" Severus leaned back into his own chair and steepled his long fingers under his chin. "Hermione, you presented a challenge to me."

"A challenge?"

"Yes. How to get you to leave off answering my questions and yet still be the top student in my classes." Severus paused and took a breath. "You don't know how much I wished I could reward your efforts, but my duties..."

"As a Death Eater, I know." Hermione leaned forward and placed a hand on his knee. "You couldn't show favouritism to a Muggle-born student without it getting back to Voldemort and jeopardising your position. Truly, I understand."

She leaned back into her chair again and smiled. "You did encourage me in a way, you know," she said.

Severus blinked. "And how did I do that?" he asked.

"You made me strive to do my best in your classes if only to earn your approbation. Now, in another two years, I hope to have gained my Potions mastery." She smiled at his startled look. "I have three of the required potions and a year of hands-on experience so far. I'm still working on a potion that doesn't seem to want to pull together, but I'm sure I'll get there in the end, and I have tons of ideas that I want to try."

Severus smirked at her. "You sound like me when I was starting out. Eager and so full of ideas. If you need a sponsor, I would be most happy to volunteer." Then his face fell. "That is, if we can ever get my death and life straightened out."

"Trust in Pansy," Hermione said. "You know, I never thought I'd say that about someone from Slytherin House, but since the end of the war, she and I have really started to

communicate. I've found we're not so different after all, and she told me she feels the same way."

"Then the war did accomplish something," Severus said, looking to his door. "Draco's arrived. Shall I see you to your room before he and I start our two hours together?"

"Thanks, but I can see myself out." With that, Hermione stood up and retrieved her cloak. "G'night, Severus," she said as she passed Draco in the doorway and turned toward the stairs.

"G'night, Hermione," Severus murmured softly.

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The next morning, after breakfast (and a sleepless night for our Potions master), Hermione was on the way to her Potions lab to work on the obdurate potion when she was pulled into an empty classroom. Her wand was in her hand before she realised that it was Severus who had hold of her arm. His nod of approbation for the speed with which she had responded warmed her all over.

Moving quickly, Severus warded the room and cast Silencing Charms at the door and windows. "I apologise, Hermione, for being so precipitous," he said. "I thought of something last evening that I needed to speak with you about."

"You didn't mention it while I was there," Hermione replied. "Why is that?"

"Because I didn't think of it until after you left, silly girl." Severus smirked. "Draco was looking at some of the books in my bookcases and that got me to thinking..."

"About the library at Marbh-clah!" Hermione exclaimed. She rapped the side of her head with her knuckles. "Why didn't I think of that?"

Severus smirked. "Which just proves the illustrious Hermione Granger does not know everything," he teased. "The problem is that I cannot access the library without you."

"Why not?" Hermione asked. "It's your home."

"No, Hermione," he corrected her. "It's *your* home. At least until we manage to get that damnable will overturned."

Hermione looked at him, curious. "I don't understand," she said. "How can it be *my* home when you're actually alive?"

"I was declared dead after the final battle if you will remember," Severus explained while Hermione nodded her head. "The actual declaration of my death by the Wizengamot activated my will and sealed the estate and my property against anybody except my legal heirs.

"As the last of the Prince line, I had no legal heirs except those I designated in my will. I made you my sole heir with the stipulation that you not be told any of this..."

"Until I returned to Hogwarts," Hermione interrupted. "But I still don't understand, Severus. It's the *Prince* family manor. You're a Prince."

"But I am officially dead, you see," Severus said, pacing off and then back. "The wards will no longer work for me because I *am* considered to be dead. While the committee that came to Hogwarts to speak with me allowed that I am alive and am actually who I say I am, until the entire Wizengamot declares that I am actually alive and overturns that blasted will, the wards on the house consider you the sole owner."

"And Pansy is having problems with Bowles," Hermione said, finally understanding the problem. "He's the one who has to bring the information to the Wizengamot, isn't he?"

"Yes." Severus nodded. "As the head of the Office of Last Wills and Testaments, Bowles is the only one with the authority to ask the Wizengamot for a ruling. Miss Parkinson can request a hearing before the Wizengamot, but if Bowles states that the will is perfectly valid, then the Wizengamot will rule in his favour."

"Then we have to get him to recognise the fact that you're alive," Hermione argued, her eyes bright with ideas. "We can..."

"We can do nothing, Hermione," Severus said gently. "Bowles will not listen to you or me without irrefutable proof that I am who I say I am. For all he knows, I am an impostor and party to a fraud you might be perpetrating."

"That's ridiculous!" she blustered. "Why would *I*, your legal heir, be considered to be doing something fraudulent? Just because I want to break the will and return *your* belongings to you?"

Severus sighed. "It's the way these people think, Hermione. Most of them, were they to become the heirs to a major family estate, would not even think twice about giving it up. In fact, they just might hex a true heir just to hold onto what they've gained."

"Jackasses," Hermione said with a snort. "They're all just jackasses. I'm glad I quit my job when I did. I also have more empathy for Percy now that I've had a taste of the bureaucracy that's the Ministry."

Severus covered his mouth with a hand, but Hermione still saw the glint of a smile in his eyes. "You agree with me," she said, not hiding her own smile. "Admit it."

"Oh, very well. I will admit the Ministry is populated with jackasses, but we mustn't tell them that. It would be an insult to the four-legged variety everywhere."

Hermione snorted with laughter. "Oh, I have to agree with you there," she said, then her mien sobered. "Can you pass through the wards of the estate if I'm with you?" she asked. At his nod, she started planning. "Okay, we'll Apparate to Marbh-clah and I'll get you through the wards. Once we're there, we can start researching in the library." She rubbed her hands together briskly in anticipation. "I've got to admit, I really want a look at that library."

Severus looked confused. "I would have thought you'd already done that," he said. "After all, you have been to the estate, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes, I spent a few hours there, but I didn't go near the library." Hermione turned red with embarrassment. "I had planned to spend the night, but then I realised who Perseus Evans had to be and came back to Hogwarts to confront Lucius and Narcissa. I've not been back since."

"Ah," Severus said with some satisfaction. "Then you are definitely in for a treat."

# Chapter Six

*Chapter 6 of 14*

This story is a sequel to Velvet Song's "Damsels and Dragons". Severus apparently has not conquered the curse after all, or is there something else going on?

## Chapter 6

Hermione and Severus Apparated to just outside the gates of Marbh-clah early the next morning after informing Minerva of their destination. She, in turn, made sure that none of the other summer residents of the school followed them.

Hermione moved forward towards the gates of the manor with all due caution. She was not sure just what would happen this time when the true owner just happened to be with her. Severus held back, allowing her to approach the gates alone. To her surprise, the gates opened at her touch, but clanged shut as Severus approached.

"Well, that answers one question," he said, standing just outside the gates.

"What's that?" Hermione asked, not touching the grillwork just in case.

"The manor recognises you as its rightful occupant, and *I'm* the interloper," he all but snarled. "Not exactly how I am used to being welcomed home."

"I-I'm sorry, Severus," Hermione stammered. "How exactly do I do this? Do I need my wand?"

"It's not your fault; it's mine and that blasted will," Severus said. "You'll need to open the gates and formally invite me in. No foolish wand-waving necessary."

Hermione hesitantly reached out and touched the gates, which swung open once more. Pausing a moment to think, she finally decided a curtsey, even though she wore jeans and trainers, would be formal enough. "Please, Master Snape, welcome to your...I mean, my home. Won't you come in?"

Severus smirked at her curtsey and the wording of her invitation. "Thank you, Miss Granger. It would be a pleasure," he answered, giving her a courtly bow.

She held her breath as he stepped through the gates, then breathed out in relief as nothing more happened. When Severus was clearly inside the wards of the manor, the gates shut once again, locking them inside and the rest of the world out.

"What would happen if Harry or one of the others tried to get through?" Hermione asked, peering closely at the sigils and wards woven into the gate.

"As the manor is secret kept, with Lucius being the Secret-Keeper, no one would ever see it without knowing the address," Snape explained. "And even Lucius would not be able to come beyond the gates without a specific invitation. An alarm sounds in the house whenever someone touches the gate, so anyone inside would be apprised of visitors, expected or unexpected."

"What if they managed to remove the wards?" Hermione cautiously reached out to touch one of the sigils, but Severus held her hand back.

"The wards have held on this place for over seven hundred years, Hermione," he said. "They are renewed every hundred years by the then master of the manor. As my grandfather renewed the wards only sixty years ago, we have time before they will have to be done again."

"And hopefully, the manor will belong to you again by that time," Hermione said softly, her hand dropping to her side.

"We can certainly hope so," he retorted, then turned towards the house. "Now, I believe we have a library to raid."

Hermione grinned. "I like that expression," she said with a giggle. "That's what it feels like every time I enter a library. I want to *raid* the books."

Severus snorted with suppressed laughter, his eyes sparkling with humour. "We at least have that much in common," he said, making a deep obeisance towards the door of the manor. "Shall we?" With a hearty laugh, Hermione curtsied deeply once again and led the way up the path to the manor.

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Marigold met the witch and wizard at the door, smiling from ear to ear. "Welcome back, Miss Hermione," she said, then looked at Severus, her smile growing even wider if that were possible. "Marigold welcomes Master Severus home."

Severus hemmed and cleared his throat, although his voice was harsh as he answered. "Thank you, Marigold. It feels good to be home. How have things been?"

"Marigold tells Master Severus when Master Severus is being dragon, Marigold look after everything," the house-elf said. "Marigold look after everything like promised."

"Marigold?" Hermione interrupted. "Can I ask you a question?"

"Miss Hermione always ask questions of Marigold," the house-elf answered. "Miss Hermione owns Marigold."

"Oh, no..." Hermione trailed off as Severus cleared his throat and shook his head at her. "Sorry. Marigold, the wards won't recognise Severus anymore. Is there any way you can fix that so he can come and go without me?"

"Oh, no, Miss Hermione." Marigold bowed so low, her forehead touched the floor. "Only Prince can change manor wards. Ministry say no more Prince anymore. Marigold can not. Miss Hermione can not. Miss Hermione is not Prince family, only live in manor. Only Prince family can change wards. Marigold most sorry." The house-elf looked around for something to punish herself with, her eyes brimming with tears because she could not fulfil such a simple request.

"You've done nothing wrong, Marigold," Severus told her, all but holding the house-elf still by sheer force. "Hermione and I will manage for the time being and hope the Ministry comes to their senses soon."

"Oh," Hermione said suddenly, causing the house-elf and her erstwhile master to look over at her. "I almost forgot." She quickly pulled her beaded bag around and opened it, peering into the depths intently. "I know it's in here someplace," she muttered, rooting around with her free hand. "Aha! I knew it!"

Pulling the manor's copy of *Curses Ancient and Moderne* from her bag, she presented it to Marigold, who clasped it to her chest tightly. "I promised I'd return it when we were finished," Hermione said. "Here you go."

"Marigold thanks you, Miss Hermione," the house-elf all but sobbed. "Marigold will return book to library. Is Master Severus and Miss Hermione hungry?" She looked expectantly between the two of them, perhaps hoping one or the other would say yes.

"I'm afraid we ate breakfast before we left Hogwarts," Severus gently told the elf, who looked crestfallen at the news. "However, as we will be working in the library most of the day..." Marigold perked up. "If you could be sure to see that we are kept supplied with tea, as well as lunch and dinner, it would be greatly appreciated."

Marigold nodded her head vigorously. "Marigold can do that," she exclaimed. "Oh, yes, she can. Marigold makes sure Master Severus and Miss Hermione has food and tea. Oh, yes!" With a pop, the house-elf disappeared, possibly to the kitchens. Hermione hoped she would return the book to the library first.

Severus smiled fondly. "It takes so little to make her happy," he mused. "Always has." He started down a side corridor, and Hermione made haste to follow.

"How long has she served your family?" Hermione asked, panting as she tried to keep up with his long strides.

Noticing this, Severus slowed his pace and allowed her to catch up. "I'm not sure," he said. "She was here when I inherited from my grandfather, so it's been at least thirty years."

"Thirty years?" Hermione was aghast as she did the math. "Thirty years ago, you would have still been a student at Hogwarts."

"I was a sixth-year at the time," Severus answered. "As the last of the Prince line, the manor and its contents became mine the moment my grandfather passed." He stopped and stared off into space, frowning. "My mother had died the winter before, but it would not have gone to her."

"Because she was a woman?" Hermione whispered.

"No." Severus scowled. "My grandfather magically disinherited her when she became pregnant out of wedlock by a man old enough to be *her* grandfather."

"Albus Dumbledore."

Severus instantly snarled at her. "How did you know that?" he demanded, grabbing her by the arms. "How did you know?"

Hermione winced at the pressure from his hands. "Lucius... Lucius showed the Wizengamot the memories during the trial to exonerate you," she hastily explained. "Severus, you're hurting me!" She jerked out of his hold when his attention momentarily lapsed and straightened her sweater. "It was the only way he could think of to explain why you killed Dumbledore."

"Lucius and I will have to have a talk when you and I return to Hogwarts," he sneered. "For now, the library is this way." He set off once more at a brisk pace, forcing Hermione to all but jog to keep up.

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Later that evening, Marigold entered the library and tutted over the dinner trays that sat, uneaten, on the table by the fireplace. With a snap of her fingers, she sent the trays back to the kitchen, then went on the hunt for Hermione and Severus. Hearing voices from the rear of the enormous room, she followed the sounds to find Severus on a ladder and Hermione sitting at the large table, surrounded by books.

Hermione ran her hands through the snarls in her hair, evidence that she had done so several times during the day. "We've found several angles to follow, Severus, but I still believe..."

"There is an answer here somewhere," he interrupted, holding up another book. "Here, this one is disarmed. What is it, Marigold?"

The house-elf put her hands on her hips as Hermione glanced over at her. "You is forgetting to eats dinner," Marigold scolded. "Is not good you not eat, Master Severus. You too thin. Marigold make more dinner. You eat."

Severus blinked and looked down at Hermione. "It's not all that late, is it?" he asked in confusion. "We've only been here a few hours."

Hermione picked up her wand and cast a tempus spell. "Uh-oh," she said. "Severus, we've been at this for almost twelve hours." She slumped back in her chair and smiled at Marigold. "I'm sorry, Marigold. We lost all track of time."

"Miss Hermione as bad as Master Severus," the house-elf snorted. "Lose nose in books and lose time. Marigold make more dinner." She pointed at Hermione. "You eat. Books still there when done."

Marigold snapped her fingers, and two more trays appeared in a cleared spot on the table. "Master Severus eat now," she insisted as Severus climbed down the ladder with the book he had disarmed. "Book wait."

"Very well, Marigold," he said, laying the book on the table as Hermione strained to catch a glimpse of the title.

"No." The little house-elf all but stamped her foot. "Miss Hermione eat. *Now*!"

Severus smirked as he pulled out a chair and sat down. Pulling a tray over to his side of the table, he told Hermione, "You'd best do as she says, Hermione. Marigold practically rules the roost here at Marbh-clah."

Hermione sighed and pushed the books away in order to reach her tray. "Yes, Severus," she answered. "Thank you for reminding us, Marigold."

"Marigold come later," she said with a smile. "Remind Master Severus and Miss Hermione go to bed. Books still here in morning."

"That would be most helpful," Severus said dryly. "Thank you."

# Chapter Seven

*Chapter 7 of 14*

This story is a sequel to Velvet Song's "Damsels and Dragons". Severus apparently has not conquered the curse after all, or is there something else going on?

**Chapter 7**

Draco pushed away from the table in the staff room, a pile of books forgotten in front of him. He leaned back in his chair and stretched, yawning loudly. Harry grunted at him from over his own stack of books while Neville echoed the yawn.

"Draco, where are your manners?" Narcissa scolded. "Cover your mouth when you yawn." She put aside the book she was reading and picked up another. "If you're finished with those books, would you go look for your father? He should have been back by now."

Draco sat forward in his chair. "Of course, Mother. Right away." With that, he stood up and headed for the door.

"Malfoy?" Harry called just as he reached for the handle.

"What, Potter?" Draco turned back to the room and looked at his schoolyard nemesis, who sat with his glasses in one hand while he rubbed his eyes with the other.

"If you see Minerva and Susan, would you let them know we're only about halfway through these books?" Harry asked. "I really don't believe we'll find anything in the Restricted Section, but don't tell them that."

"You never know," Neville piped up. "We might find something. There're corners of that library that I doubt anyone but Madam Pince has seen."

"And Hermione," Harry said with a laugh and a nudge into his partner's ribs.

"Right," Neville agreed, grinning. "And Hermione."

"Well," Draco drawled. "I agree about the number of books. I really doubt we'll get through all these today. If I see them, I'll let them know."

"Thanks, mate." Harry picked up the next book in his pile.

"Not a problem," Draco said, finally pushing through the door and into the corridor.

The hair on the nape of his neck bristling, Draco stopped just short of the dungeons stairwell and looked around. A faint shuffling sound met his ears from the Entrance Hall, but he saw nothing. "*Finite Incantatem*," he said, flicking his wand towards the sound.

"Heh, what's that?" Filch asked, sticking his head around the open door to the Great Hall. "What are you messing with now, Professor Malfoy?" He moved further out into the Entrance Hall, and Draco saw he carried a broom.

"Sorry, Filch," he said. "Thought I heard something out here." Shrugging, he continued, "Must've been my imagination. Too much reading today."

Filch tsked in his teeth. "Be worth it to help Professor Snape," he said. "Wish I could help." He shrugged. "Wishing don't make things come true. Not for me, anyway. Come on, Mrs Norris. We got floors to sweep." The cat following, Filch moved back into the great hall while Draco started down the stairs to the dungeons.

"That's odd," he muttered to himself as he noticed a cushioning charm on the stairs. "Who cast this?" Further on, he found a small smear of blood on the banister along with a strand of whitish blonde hair. "Father?" he called, to be answered by a groan from the foot of the stairs.

Draco practically raced down the rest of the stairs, almost falling over an unconscious Lucius in his haste. "Father!" he shouted. "Father, what happened?"

"Professor Malfoy?" Filch's voice echoed down the stairwell. "Everything alright?"

"Filch!" Draco yelled, stabilising his father's head and neck with a quick immobilising charm. "Get Poppy! My father's hurt!"

"Right away, sir!" Draco heard Filch's footsteps move away from the staircase. Shortly, Poppy raced down the stairs, followed closely by Narcissa and Susan.

"Oh, Merlin," Narcissa moaned. "Lucius, are you alright? Speak to me, darling."

"Narcissa, stay back," Poppy snarled, casting some quick diagnostic charms. "You're not helping matters." Swiftly, she conjured a stretcher and set it down next to Lucius's unresponsive body. "Draco, help me get him on the stretcher so we can get him up to the hospital wing."

"Is he going to be okay?" Susan asked, her arm around her mother-in-law's waist, the two witches supporting one another.

"Yes. Yes," Poppy said shortly, her mind on the patient. "He just has a concussion and bruising. A night on the ward will help immensely."

Narcissa let out a sigh of relief as she and Susan moved clear, allowing Poppy to move Lucius upstairs on the stretcher. Draco stepped back, giving his wife and mother the chance to go first, before he too climbed the stairs to the ground floor and then up to the mediwitch's domain.

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Lucius groaned as he moved to turn over, only to realise he was not in his own bed. Opening his eyes, he saw the anxious faces of his family, as well as the headmistress, staring down at him.

"What happened?" he asked, moving to sit up, only to groan and fall back onto his pillow. "My head." He placed a hand on the side of his head as if to make sure it was still attached. "How did I end up here?"

"You're lucky Draco went looking for you," Poppy said briskly as she pushed through the curtains with a potion vial and a pot of salve. "Nothing's broken. Here." She handed him the vial. "This will help with your aches."

"Whose brewing?" Lucius asked as he accepted help from Narcissa to sit up. "Hermione's?"

"Severus," Poppy answered. "He wanted to feel useful, so he's started brewing the potions I'll need for the school year. Drink it down."

"At least I know it won't kill me," the blond wizard grumbled. He quickly swallowed the vial of potion, then frowned. "What did he do to this? It tastes good." Lucius regarded the vial in his hand with interest.

Poppy snorted. "The daft fool decided he didn't like the taste of the potions I made him take while he was recovering so he's started experimenting with flavours." She indicated the vial. "That's one of his first successes." She handed Narcissa the salve. "This will help with the bruising. Let's get your shirt off."

"I always knew you had a soft spot for me," Lucius teased. "But really, Poppy, my wife is standing right here."

"Oh, hush, you," Minerva said finally. Lucius looked up in time to see her wipe her eyes. "I'd thought we'd lost you at first. Filch was hard to understand, he was that upset. Luckily, Harry kept his head and got me while Narcissa went after you."

"He's well and fine," Poppy reassured the Headmistress as well as Narcissa. She finished pulling Lucius's shirt up and hissed. "Here, get this off completely," she ordered, reaching for her wand. "Minerva, you'll want to see this."

"See what, Poppy?" Minerva moved to the head of the bed where she would have a good view of Lucius's back. "Oh, my!" she exclaimed. There, between Lucius's shoulder blades, were two perfect handprints.

Poppy performed some more diagnostics. "At least we know Filch didn't do this," she said. "There's magic in these bruises. Someone used a strengthening charm when he pushed you."

"I felt something as I was walking downstairs," Lucius confessed. "I barely managed to cast a non-verbal cushioning charm before I hit the first steps."

"It kept you from being killed outright," Poppy confirmed. "But who'd want to push you downstairs?"

"Minerva? You here? Harry said there'd been trouble." Remus stepped out of the fireplace, brushing soot from his robes. "Everything all right?"

"Lucius was pushed downstairs," Minerva said, bustling up to the werewolf. "Did you smell anything strange when you came in?"

Remus took a moment to consider. "Not that I was aware of," he said with deliberation. "I came in and met Harry and Neville in the Entrance Hall. They told me you were up here so I used the Floo in the staff room and up I came. Want me to sniff around a little?"

"Probably a moot point," Minerva said with a sniff. "Winky!"

The little house-elf popped into view. "Headmistress call Winky?"

"Yes," Minerva said briskly. "Would you ask your fellow house-elves if they saw anything or anybody strange in the entrance hall this afternoon? Professor Malfoy was shoved down the stairs..."

The house-elf drew a deep breath. "Professor-father Malfoy, Professor-mother Malfoy, or Professor-son Malfoy?" she asked fearfully.

"Um." Minerva hesitated, trying not to smile at the names the house-elves had for the Malfoy family. "Professor-father Malfoy."

"Professor-father Malfoy good to house-elves. Winky ask." The house-elf vanished only to shortly return. "No see stranger in Entrance Hall today," she said. "Caretaker in Great Hall, fixing floor so house-elves can polish tonight. That all."

"Thank you, Winky," Minerva said, dismissing the house-elf, who vanished back to the kitchens. "How did he or she get in and out without someone seeing or hearing them?" she muttered to herself.

"Was that a rhetorical question, Minerva?" Remus asked. "If not, I'll go check out the Entrance Hall if you wish."

"No, Remus," Minerva told him. "If the house-elves didn't see or hear anything strange, I fully doubt you'll find anything." She moved off, back towards the bed where Narcissa was spreading bruise paste on the worst of Lucius's injuries. "Go change your clothes, if you would. We'll be meeting in the staff room as soon as we can. I want to know what you found out from your meetings with Bill Weasley and Thaddeus Phelps." She blushed slightly as she mentioned the older wizard's name.

"Oho," Remus teased. "Minerva's got a bit of a crush. He's married, you know."

"Get on with you," she retorted with a flick of her hand. "Go change. We'll meet in the staff room shortly." Minerva watched as the werewolf used the Floo.

"Remus Lupin's rooms," he called and whooshed away, only to return in an agitated state. "Minerva!" he gasped, looking stricken.

"Remus?" Minerva clutched him by the arm. "What's wrong? Poppy!" She manoeuvred the younger wizard over to a chair. "Poppy! Oh, there you are."

"What's happened to Remus?" Poppy said. "He sounded fine just a bit ago."

"The Wolfsbane," Remus gasped. "All my Wolfsbane. Destroyed. Every bit of it."

"Destroyed?" Draco asked, having wandered over on his father's orders to find out what was happening. "How?"

"Someone entered my rooms," Remus snarled. "Whoever it was managed to get past my wards and smashed my entire supply of Wolfsbane. I found the bottles smashed on the floor and the glass all mixed in with the potion." He looked at Minerva, the pain evident in his eyes. "Hermione made me enough to last for six months, 'til the Christmas hols. Now what'll I do?"

"We'll ask her to make more," Minerva said briskly. "Let the house-elves clean the mess up, and let's get down to the staff room. We need to find out what's going on here. Poppy, can Lucius get up and join us?"

"I'll be right there, Minerva," Lucius answered for the mediwitch. "Just let me get my clothes back on."

"Good. Staff meeting in five minutes," the Headmistress ordered as she left the hospital wing, Remus and Draco on her heels.

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"Right, then," Minerva sighed as she ticked off the last complaint of damage to personal possessions. "Has anybody checked Hermione's or Severus's quarters for damage?"

"Hermione's got so many wards and sigils on her doors...both her personal quarters and the potions lab...that I really doubt anyone could get in without her," Harry said with a laugh. "Though they do show signs someone tried." He and Neville shared an uneasy look.

"Severus's wards are, shall we say, challenging," Lucius drawled. "He's got the same wards as Marbh-clah on his door."

"What's that mean, exactly?" Minerva asked. "Is it dangerous for anyone living in the castle?"

Lucius laughed. "Not at all, Minerva," he quickly reassured her. "It just means that nobody can get into Severus's quarters without a personal invitation from him. In fact, I would wager you could go down there right now and...even knowing where the door is located...you wouldn't find his rooms at all."

"Interesting," Harry mused, his curiosity piqued. "How's that work?"

"It's really old magic," Susan spoke up. "I've only seen it mentioned in some older reference books that Professor Flitwick allowed me to borrow once, but I've never heard of any modern instances of it being used. I'd love..."

"Yes, I'm sure that's all very interesting," Minerva interrupted her Charms professor. "But it doesn't pertain to the question at hand. Who or what did this, and how did they get into the castle without tripping any alarms?"

Remus cleared his throat with a loud 'ahem'. "If I might make a suggestion?" he said when everyone at the table looked over towards him. "Harry, do you still have the map?"

"Map?" Draco looked up in interest. "What map?"

Harry ignored the other wizard as he pulled a piece of old parchment out of his robe's inner pocket. "Yeah, right here," he said. "Luckily, this guy ignored the old parchment sitting on my desk." He grinned as he pulled out his wand and pointed it at the parchment. "I solemnly swear that I am up to no good."

"I always knew you'd admit it one day, Potter," Draco said with a teasing grin. "What?" Astonishment crossed his face as the parchment opened out and became a map of Hogwarts and its grounds. "Where'd you get that?"

Draco and the other instructors gathered around Remus and Harry, exclaiming at the magnitude of charm work it must have taken to produce such an artefact.

"Look!" Susan said, pointing at the staff room. "It shows all of us here." She looked about quizzically. "But... it doesn't show the house-elves. Why not?"

"We were kids when we made this," Remus said. "I doubt any of us even thought of the house-elves. James and Sirius just wanted to know where the teachers were so we could sneak out if we wanted to."

"You made this as a student?" Lucius said, touching the edge of the parchment. He pulled his finger back quickly when Remus hissed. "Sorry. If Riddle had known about this map..." He shuddered, and the rest of the room fell silent as everyone contemplated the hideous idea.

"Yes, well," Minerva said, straightening her shoulders. "Does the map show anybody else on the grounds? Anybody who doesn't belong here," she quickly amended.

Harry and Remus looked over the map carefully. "No," Harry finally said. "It's just us. Whoever it was...if there actually was someone...they're long gone*Mischief Managed*!"

"What d'ya mean?" Draco asked, irked, as the parchment cleared and shrank. Harry tucked it back into his pocket.*If there actually was someone*?"

"Indeed," Minerva said. "Everyone in the castle today has been with someone else with the exception of Remus." She looked over at the werewolf. "My apologies, Remus. I know you were in London meeting with Bill Weasley and Thaddeus Phelps, not running around Hogwarts and destroying your own Wolfsbane potion."

"Not to mention my back-up supply cupboard," Poppy said as she entered the staff room. Sitting down with a sigh, she looked at the Headmistress. "Add it to your list, Minerva. I've just come from looking into the hospital back-up supply cupboard because I knew there was some spare Wolfsbane there. Everything's been totally destroyed. Hermione and Severus are going to have to work double-time when they get back in order for me to have enough supplies to even get through the first month of school." She shook her head sadly. "Someone has been extremely busy, and I know it wasn't one of us."

"Indeed," Minerva answered, her agreement all too evident. "Whoever this was must've moved fast. It's possible that Lucius's push down the stairs might have been the last action taken before our miscreant left the castle."

"What do we do now?" Neville asked, his voice shaky with trepidation.

"We clean up the messes," Minerva assured everyone, "and continue our research to help Severus. That's what we do now. Oh," she continued as the others stood and started out of the room. "We also keep an eye out for a stranger. I'll tell the house-elves myself."

# Chapter Eight

*Chapter 8 of 14*

This story is a sequel to Velvet Song's "Damsels and Dragons". Severus apparently has not conquered the curse after all, or is there something else going on?

**Disclaimer:** All the characters mentioned from the Harry Potter books belong to JKR. All other characters mentioned in these pages belong to Velvet Song or myself. No monies changed hands during the writing of this story.

**Author's Notes:** This is the sequel to Velvet Song's "Damsels and Dragons" which she allowed me to complete and post to this archive. If you have not read the first story, I strongly encourage you to do so to avoid any confusion while reading this story. The first chapters by Velvet Song can be found here: http://www.thepetulantpoetess.com/viewstory.php?sid=18337, and my concluding chapters can be found here: http://www.thepetulantpoetess.com/viewstory.php?sid=19501.

Thanks to **noybate** for the prompt beta.

**Chapter 8**

"Here's another one disarmed, as it were," Severus said with a sardonic laugh as he passed a book to Hermione. "Are you making any headway?"

Hermione looked up from her perusal of*Curses Dark and Light: What I Learned from the Wizards of Tibet*and frowned. "This one is a piece of Thestral dung," she said, closing the book and pushing it firmly away. "It's supposedly written in 1735, but reads like it was written yesterday. Too anachronistic." She reached for a copy of *The Animagus Unveiled*. "This, on the other hand, is too simplistic. It reads almost like a bedtime story. Did your family keep every book they'd ever got their hands on?"

Severus shook with silent laughter. "Where do you think I got it from, witch?" he was finally able to answer. "It's a Prince family trait." His gaze turned sober as he looked over the books stacked on the table and bundled on the shelves of the huge room. "If the Dark...excuse me...Tom Riddle had ever seen this..." He reached for another book. "Some of these books were actually printed on some of the first Wizarding printing presses. They predate Muggle printing presses by some two hundred years."

"They're not all Dark," Hermione pointed out. "If only there were some way we could index them so we didn't have to search the entire library." She sighed in frustration just as Marigold came in, a tray of steaming mugs following her.

"Marigold brings hot chocolate for Master Severus and Miss Hermione," the house-elf said, placing the tray firmly on the table. "Is almost midnight. Time for master and miss to be in beds. Not still looking at dusty old books." She crossed her arms over her chest and stared frostily at Severus.

Hermione picked up a mug of the steaming beverage and hid her smile behind the rim as Severus drew himself up to his full height. "I am perfectly capable of telling the time, Marigold," he started to say.

"Not when Master Severus is looking at dusty old books," Marigold retorted. "Marigold many times puts Master Severus to beds. Marigold do again if has to."

Severus sputtered. "Now see here, you interfering little..."

"Severus," Hermione gasped. "She's only doing what we told her to do." She looked at the house-elf who, rather than cringing, was standing her ground and staring at Severus. "I'm sorry, Marigold. We lost track of time as usual. I'm sure you're probably used to that."

"Marigold know all about losing time," the house-elf said. "Master Severus say Marigold must remind. Marigold reminds. Is time for beds. Books still there in morning."

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose. "All right, we'll go to bed." He picked up the other mug of chocolate and took a sip, watching Marigold out of the corner of his eye. "But," he said as the house-elf reached for a book on the table, "the books stay where they are."

Marigold drew her hands back as if they were burned. "Marigold just puts..."

"Marigold leaves this room as is," Severus retorted. "Or would Marigold prefer clothes?"

The house-elf, affronted, drew herself up. "Master Severus not threaten Marigold. Books stay on table." She turned to leave the library. "Master Severus room is ready. Miss Hermione room is ready. Goes to beds now!" Marigold vanished as soon as she stepped foot in the corridor, the tray and mugs vanishing as well, even from Severus and Hermione's hands.

Hermione gasped as her mug vanished. "I was enjoying my drink, Severus," she scolded. "Why'd you have to do that? And to threaten the poor thing."

Severus snorted. "That *poor thing*, as you call her, is probably the actual mistress of this house, or as close as the place has had to a mistress since my grandmother died." He wiped an infinitesimal speck of dust off the cover of the book in front of him. "I really appreciate what she does for me. Remember, she was the only one who could hear me before you came back to Hogwarts. Without her, I could have easily gone insane."

He held up his hand as Hermione started to speak. "However," he continued, "I will not be treated as if I were a recalcitrant child, and she needs to learn this."

"We did ask her to remind us," Hermione said gently, stacking books in neat piles. She looked over at the wizard, now wiping his eyes sleepily. "We're both tired and crusty..."

"I'm not crusty," Severus protested, rolling his shoulders. "I don't get crusty."

"Fine," Hermione retorted. "But we *are* tired. It's been a long day. We can get a fresh start in the morning."

"Fine!"

**§§§§§§§**

At the top of the stairs, Hermione hesitated. The last time she'd been to the manor, Marigold had given her Severus' old bedroom...the master suite. She wasn't sure just what room Marigold had intended for her on this visit and didn't want to make the mistake of taking the same room if the house-elf had fixed up another room for her.

Severus pulled up behind her, barely avoiding a collision. "Why'd you stop?" he asked grumpily.

"Which room am I in?" Hermione asked, indicating the master suite. "This is where I was supposed to sleep the last time I was here, but it's actually your room."

"You take it," Severus said. "I'll find the guest room and sleep there."

"No, it's your room," Hermione quickly protested. "I'll find the guest room."

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose again and sighed. "Miss Granger," he said. "You are the nominal owner of this house. As such, the master suite is yours. I'll find the guest room."

"You said it, I'm the *nominal* owner," Hermione argued. "It's your room. I'll sleep in the guest room." She jumped as Marigold materialised in front of them.

"Boths sleep in Master Severus room," Marigold said. "Then no mores arguings."

"We weren't arguing," Severus said. "We were having a discussion."

Marigold waved her hand. "Is arguing. Marigold know difference. Sleeps in same room."

"There's only one bed," Hermione protested. "Why don't you show me where the guest room..."

"There two bed," Marigold said, snapping her fingers. "Sleeps in same room. Marigold finds Miss Hermione nightgown. Master Severus nightshirt in wardrobe." The house-elf vanished as Hermione peeked around the edge of the door.

Angled against the wall opposite the original bed was its identical twin. Both beds were half the width of the original, leading Hermione to believe that Marigold had simply divided the bed in half and would put it back together once she and Severus returned to Hogwarts. Looking at Severus, she shrugged and entered the room, quickly followed by a yawning Severus.

An old-fashioned flannel nightgown lay across the twinned bed, and Hermione held it up to measure its length. To her surprise, it looked as if it would fit perfectly, and she looked to Severus for an explanation.

"That looks like one of my grandmother's," he said softly. "As I remember, she was about your size."

"It certainly looks warm," Hermione agreed. "Er, would you care to use the bathroom first?"

"Ladies first," Severus said with a bow. "I can wait until you finish."

"Thank you," Hermione said and hastily entered the bathroom, shutting the door tight. Once she'd cleaned up and slipped into the deliciously soft flannel gown, she exited the bathroom only to find Severus already in bed. "Aren't you going to get cleaned up?" she asked hesitantly.

"Just waiting on you," he said, sitting up and swinging his feet to the floor. "I believe Marigold has cast warming charms on the sheets. They feel very comfortable." He

moved past her to the bathroom door. "I'll just be a few minutes."

Hermione waited until he'd shut the bathroom door before practically hurling herself into the other bed. She fumbled with the sheets, trying to be in bed before Severus had a chance to finish up in the bathroom, and managed it just as the door opened.

He raised an eyebrow at the sight of Hermione sitting up in her bed, but said nothing as he moved towards his own.

"Good night, Severus," Hermione called softly as she lay down.

"Good night, Hermione," he answered as he got into his own bed. "*Nox!*"

§§§§§§§

It seemed like Hermione had hardly gone to sleep before a slight sound awakened her. Confused, she glanced around the room, her eyes falling on the door as Severus opened it...a very naked Severus, at that...and turned right into the corridor rather than left towards the stairs. She frowned, wondering where he was going, then her eyes widened as she remembered Lucius' description from two nights before. Scrambling out of her bed, she raced out the door into the corridor, only to discover Marigold scolding a vaguely curious Severus.

"Master Severus bes in beds," the house-elf scolded, her finger wagging in front of his nose. "Nots in halls, in beds." She reached for his hand, only to have him pull it away and growl, the noise distinctly feral.

Fearing the sleepwalking wizard might hurt the little being, Hermione had to think fast. "Athair," she called out quietly. Severus turned, staring at her and giving her an idea of what might have actually happened. "Athair, Severus is tired. His body hasn't had any rest in almost two days. If you try to fly, you'll hurt both of you. You don't want that, do you?"

Severus gave a low sounding yowl and then purred as he reached out and touched Hermione's tousled hair. She shivered, then stood very still as the tall wizard bent over and sniffed the curls he held, then 'whiffed' in pleasure. Hermione felt the slight puff of air move over her face as she smiled softly.

"Please let Severus rest," she begged. "He really needs the sleep. I want to help you, but I can't if you hurt both of you. Please?" Taking Severus' hand...or should it be Athair's paw, she thought irreverently...Hermione led him back into the master suite.

He resisted when Hermione tried to pull him towards his own bed. Instead, he sniffed the air and pulled her towards her bed. Tumbling her onto the mattress, he flopped down beside her and purred once more before tucking himself close in behind her and holding her down with an arm and a leg.

Hermione lay still until she felt his even breathing, indicating that the dragon had allowed Severus to return to his normal sleeping state, but when she tried to move away, his arm tightened around her possessively. With a sigh, Hermione decided to wait him out and lay there until darkness claimed her.

§§§§§§§

"What the devil?" Severus' surprised tones had Hermione sitting straight up in bed, blinking in confusion. "Miss Granger! What is the meaning of this?" He looked around, then down at himself. "Oh!"

Hermione scrambled from the bed as Severus sought to cover himself with the sheets. "Severus, are you okay?" she asked. "How do you feel? Do you remember anything?"

"Miss Granger! Hermione!" Severus tried to stem the barrage of questions. When Hermione quietened down, he looked at her solemnly. "Miss Granger... Hermione... I must apologise..." he said hesitantly. "I do not normally crawl into a witch's bed without permission. Please forgive me. I'm not exactly sure how this happened."

"It's alright, Severus." Hermione was quick to reassure him. "I do."

"And?" he prompted. "I presume it has something to do with that blasted dragon."

Hermione sighed. "Yes and no," she said.

"Well, which is it?" he said peevishly. "Yes, it has to do with Athair, or no, it does not."

"Athair took over again last night," Hermione said quickly. "You didn't transform, and I don't think the moon phases have anything to do with it, and you didn't hurt Marigold, and I managed to talk Athair into letting you sleep, but he wouldn't go back to your bed and insisted he had to be in mine and wouldn't let me go even after you fell asleep and..."

Severus held up his hand in a 'stop' gesture. "Hermione, slow down," he said. "What do you mean *'didn't hurt Marigold'*? What exactly did I do last evening?"

"Well-l-l." Hermione bit her lower lip as she watched him from beneath her eyelashes. "I woke up just as you were going out the door. When you turned right instead of left, it dawned on me that maybe you were sleepwalking again." She paused.

Severus made a 'continue' gesture. "Go on," he encouraged.

"When I ran out of the room, I found Marigold confronting you, but it wasn't you, it was Athair."

"I see."

"Marigold was scolding Athair...I think she thought it was you...and trying to make him... er... you go back to bed. You growled at her, and I thought you might actually hit her, so I distracted you by calling you Athair." She glanced over at the naked man sitting in her bed, but he made no moves, just waited. "Er... when you responded to the name, I realised what had happened and asked him... you... to please let yourself rest because you hadn't really slept in two days. He... uh... oh, this is so confusing!"

"I totally agree," Severus said with a smirk. "I take it the dragon agreed to your pleas and re-entered the room?" Hermione nodded. "Then what? He decided this was the better bed?"

"I don't know," she all but wailed. "He wouldn't let me put you in your bed; he just insisted that we both sleep in mine, and he wouldn't let me go even after he fell asleep. Severus, I am so sorry."

"What's done is done," the wizard reassured her. "He didn't hurt you, did he?"

Hermione shook her head. "No," she said. "He just wouldn't let me go."

"Understandable," Severus said. "A beautiful witch in his arms. I probably wouldn't have let go, either." Hermione blushed. "You take a shower first," he suggested, "while I try to find my nightshirt so I can get out of this blasted bed without embarrassing both of us." He smirked at her. "Although I believe you got quite the eyeful last night. Am I correct?"

Hermione gasped and, grabbing her clothes, ran towards the bathroom. She could hear Severus moving around the bedroom while she got cleaned up and brushed out her hair. Once back in the bedroom, she gestured the now gowned Severus into the bathroom. "It's all yours," she said.

"It always has been," he joked. "I believe Marigold is fixing breakfast. I'm sure you know where the breakfast room is?"

"I'll find it," the flustered witch said. "Enjoy your shower."

§§§§§§§

Severus came downstairs and found Hermione sipping from a cup of tea, a used plate in front of her. At the sight of him, she smiled and gestured towards an empty chair. "Marigold will be back in a minute," she said. "Would you like some tea?"

"I'd prefer coffee, if you don't mind," Severus said, picking up his cup. Steam rolled from the bowl as he cradled it in his hand. "Ah, thank you, Marigold."

The little house-elf placed herself at his elbow. "Master Severus walk in sleep again," Marigold scolded. "Master Severus growls at Marigold. Marigold doing job taking care of Master Severus. Why Master Severus growl at Marigold?"

"It wasn't me," Severus told the house-elf. "It was the dragon I seem to be sharing this body with. I take it he didn't hurt you?"

"Marigold not hurt," she answered. "Marigold just confused. Curse broken. Why dragon still with Master Severus?"

"I think I know," Hermione said, causing both wizard and house-elf to stare at her. "We won't find the answer here though. Not if what I suspect is true."

"Why not?" Severus snapped. "Marbh-clah has probably the most extensive magical library in the British Isles outside of the British Wizarding Library." He looked down at the plate of food now in front of him. "Thank you, Marigold. Well, Miss Granger?"

"What happened to Hermione?" she asked, trying to tease him out of his mood. "You usually call me Hermione."

Severus huffed as he sipped his coffee. "Very well, Hermione. Explain yourself."

"I'm not sure I can," Hermione said. "Not until I can get to London and confirm my suspicions. But I don't think we'll find the answers in a *magical* library."

He choked on a mouthful of scrambled eggs. "You want to go to a *Muggle* library?" Severus gasped when he could speak again. "Why ever for?"

"Does the Wizarding world have psychiatrists?" Hermione asked.

"No. Just why do you need a psychiatrist, and what does it have to do with me?" He set down his fork and stared at the witch across the table from him.

"I didn't think so," Hermione said smugly. "I want to look up some of my parents' old friends and see if they can answer some questions. Or tell me who can," she finished on a rush as Severus opened his mouth to speak. "I think I know what's wrong, but I really would like to have confirmation first before I tell anyone, even you."

"Very well," Severus conceded. "We'll leave for London this morning."

"Um," Hermione hesitated, biting her lower lip. "I think I need to go alone. My parents' friends don't know I'm a witch."

Severus stared at her. "You intend to go alone? Without me?"

"I need to get the information," she said. "If you're with me, there's no guarantee I'll get what I need. Not without a lot of questions."

"I see." Severus finished the coffee in his cup and pushed both it and the plate away from him. "Then I will see you back at Hogwarts?"

"Of course." Hermione breathed a sigh of relief. "Just as soon as I can get back there. Would you tell Minerva where I am?"

"I will," he said gravely, getting up from the chair. "Marigold!"

"Master Severus call Marigold?" The house-elf appeared at his side, delighted to be of service.

"Indeed." Severus looked down at the house-elf. "It seems you may replace the books in the library. Miss Granger and I will be leaving this morning." He glanced back at Hermione, his eyes dark with suppressed ire. "Miss Granger is of the mind that we will not find what we need here after all."

Marigold hopped up and down in anger. "Master Severus have big library," she said indignantly. "Why not find here?"

"There're no Muggle books here," Hermione said gently, but the house-elf would not listen.

"Perfectly good Wizard books," she said. "No need Muggle books."

"Marigold, enough!" Severus snapped. "Hermione will do as she thinks best. She is not insulting the library or the manor."

Marigold stared at him, tears pooling in her oversized eyes. Then she bowed deeply. "Yes, Master Severus. Is Marigold needed?"

"No," he said. "I believe we are done. Hermione?"

The young witch nodded. "I've finished my breakfast, Severus. Thank you."

"Then come. I believe you need to go to London, and I need to return to Hogwarts."

# Chapter Nine

*Chapter 9 of 14*

This story is a sequel to Velvet Song's "Damsels and Dragons". Severus apparently has not conquered the curse after
all, or is there something else going on?

**Chapter 9**

Severus Apparated to the gates of the school only to find that, sometime in the last twenty-four hours, the wards had been changed. *What the hell?* he thought as he felt the shock that meant he was not to be admitted without another teacher present. '*What's been happening here?* His questions were answered a few minutes later when Minerva came charging up to the gate, Lucius and Remus in close pursuit.

"Severus, is that you?" she asked, eyeing him suspiciously through the bars of the gate.

"Have you gone daft, woman?" Severus snarled. "Of course it's me. What's going on here?"

"Now, now, old boy, don't take that tone," Lucius drawled. "Just a precautionary measure."

Remus muscled his way past the other wizard. "Can you prove you're who you say you are?" he asked. "Tell us something only the four of us would know."

"I know if you don't let me in, I'll let Athair have you, you mangy cur," Severus said sharply. Then he paused, thinking over his words. "Did I actually say that?" he muttered, half to himself.

Minerva made an adjustment to the wards and swung open the gates. "You certainly did say that," she answered, smiling at the shock on his face. "Where's Hermione?"

"In London," he answered shortly. "I'll answer all questions once everyone is together. And no, Minerva, I don't know how long she'll be." He moved down the path to the castle, his robes billowing out behind him, while the gates clanged shut behind him. "I take it you'll have to let Hermione in as well once she arrives?"

"Yes, but then I'll key the wards to her as well," Minerva said. "We've a great deal to discuss, you and I."

Severus stopped in his tracks, causing the others to have to stop or crash into him. "What are you talking about, Minerva? I've done nothing that I'm aware of." He watched her warily. "Has this something to do with the wards at the gate?"

"Yes and no," Minerva said, waving him on like a recalcitrant schoolboy. "We think we had an intruder. There were some incidents yesterday, and I...Severus! Where are you going?" Hiking up her robes, she took off after the running wizard, practically mowing down Remus and Lucius in her hurry.

The two wizards looked at one another. "After you," Lucius said with a bow. Remus grinned and began to run after the Headmistress. Lucius looked to the sky with a 'why me?' gesture and followed at a jog.

**§§§§§§§**

"Severus?" Minerva gasped for breath as she caught up with the younger wizard in the entrance hall. "Whatever is the matter?"

He paused, his foot on the first step to the upper floors. "Were the wards to Hermione's Potions lab breached?" he asked, his attention more on the staircase than the Headmistress.

"No," she assured him. "We checked that along with the wards to her quarters. They were tampered with but not breached. Yours, on the other hand..."

Severus swung on her. "If the person who was here even found my quarters, he or she would have to be a wizard of great power," he sneered.

"Exactly," Minerva agreed. "I *know* where your quarters should be, and even *I* couldn't find them. That's one of the things we need to discuss."

"I'll not discuss family secrets with you, Minerva," Severus said as he started up the stairs. "For one thing, I can't. For another, even if I could, I wouldn't. Now, I need to see to the projects Hermione and I have brewing in the lab. If you'll excuse me?"

"We're having a staff meeting as soon as Hermione gets back," Minerva called up to the wizard just disappearing around the first landing. "You'll be there or answer to me." She dropped to the first step of the staircase and sat there, her hands on her knees. "Why do I even bother?" she asked rhetorically.

Lucius joined her on the step. "Because you care about him," he answered, placing a hand on top of hers and patting it. "It's probably your strongest as well as your weakest point, Minerva. You care about your people."

Minerva looked at him from the corner of her eye. "You've certainly mellowed out in the past few years," she commented. "I don't believe I've ever heard you say that to anyone."

"Not out loud anyway," Lucius said with a smile. "And if you tell anyone, I'll simply deny it."

"Of course you will." Minerva smiled back. "You're a Slytherin through and through."

"And you're a Gryffindor, but I won't hold that against you," he teased, standing up. "That step needs a cushion if it's going to be used as a seat," he groaned, holding his back. Reaching down, he helped Minerva to her feet.

"Thank you, Lucius," she said, then nodded her head up the stairs. "Look after him, will you? I wouldn't put it past him to try and sneak out just to avoid the meeting." She glanced over at Remus, who stood in the doorway of the staff room. "I suppose we should continue our research. Remus, will you be ready to report on your meetings yesterday?"

"Not that I found out anything new," Remus answered, "but I'll give a report anyway."

"That's all I ask," she said, sounding tired all of a sudden. "I've a bit of paperwork in my office to be done before school starts. Might as well get to it." She turned to go upstairs, but paused and turned around. "Lucius, do you know what magic Severus was talking about?"

"I would imagine it has to do with the Prince side of his family," Lucius said, nodding to himself. "Some of the old family magics are such that witches and wizards are oath-sworn not to reveal them. He probably can't talk about it, and I doubt Hermione would know anymore than I do unless Severus told her."

Minerva sighed. "If that's the case, Hermione will be oath-sworn not to reveal it as well." She turned and started up the staircase once again. "I'll see you later, then."

Lucius started to follow her up the stairs, his mission to check on Severus. "Indeed. We shall meet later."

§§§§§§§

Hermione, having been met at the gates and given the same tests and explanations, was more concerned about her potions than the intruder, although he or she did warrant some concern. Once she knew there had been no unauthorised access to the potions lab and Severus had reassured her on the state of the potions, she was more than happy to join the others in the staff room for the meeting.

"Severus said you went to London this morning," Minerva said, opening the meeting. "May I ask why?"

"I thought of something last night and had to find a psychiatrist," Hermione answered, putting her now shabby beaded bag on the table. "I figured..."

"Wait," Draco interrupted. "What's a sigh-ky-at-rist?"

Harry snickered. "It's more a who than a what," he answered for Hermione. "It's a Muggle healer who specialises in diseases of the mind."

"Finally gone around the bend then, eh, Granger," Draco sniggered. "Ow!" He rubbed the arm his wife had rapped with the back of her hand. "Okay, I'm sorry." He grinned at Hermione. "No hard feelings?"

"I didn't go for me," Hermione explained to the group. "I just needed some questions answered. I also went to St. Mungo's." She reached into her bag and pulled out two large books. Holding them up, one by one, so everyone could see the titles, *Treatment of Multiple Personality Disorder* written by a Muggle named Bennett G. Braun, M.D.* and *In Two Minds* by Simone Duexesprit, she continued, "Athair made another appearance last night. I thought to check out the popular theories."

She laughed. "Doctor MacGyver is an old friend of my parents and told me to study this book," she held up the Muggle book, "as part of my 'research'. The mind-healers at St. Mungo's wanted to put me into the Janus Thickey ward until I convinced them I was serious. I did resort to some name-dropping to convince them." She blushed deeply.

"Whose names did you drop?" Lucius asked, decidedly curious about the books.

"Um," Hermione said hesitantly. "Harry Potter, Lucius Malfoy, Minerva McGonagall, Severus Snape..." Her voice trailed off as the room got quiet. "What? They're all respected names, well most of them anyway." She looked at Severus. "It got me what I wanted: the name of this book." She held up the second book. "I've glanced through them both and came to the conclusion that Doctor Braun's book is practically useless in the magical world. Healer Duexesprit's book is little better."

"Severus is *not* a were-dragon." She glared at Harry and Neville, who had the temerity to giggle. "He's also *not* an Animagus, as was proven by your spells." She nodded at Minerva. "And. while manifesting Athair, he *is* capable of communication, or at least understanding the spoken word." She held up her hand at the questions flying fast and furious. "Please let me finish." She placed the books face up on the table.

"These books are not the answer." She laid her palm on the covers.

"Never thought I'd hear the Gryffindor bookworm admit that," Draco whispered to his father, who smiled.

Hermione glared at the interruption. "Remus, I'm sorry your trip to London wasn't necessary."

"Quite all right," he said. "I enjoyed the day out."

"I'm not insane," Severus protested indignantly.

"I never said you were," Hermione retorted. "What you *are* is a man sharing his body with a dragon."

"That's impossible!" Poppy interjected. "It can't happen."

"I think it has happened," Hermione said. "Severus spent eight years as a dragon. I believe this left an imprint on his mind and body. When Marigold spoke to him last night, he practically ignored her. When I addressed him as Athair, he responded *as an extremely intelligent dragon would.* Athair doesn't need the full moon to manifest; he just needs Severus to be asleep so he can come out. It's not a true multiple personality disorder, but then Severus is a wizard. Muggle medical information wouldn't be of any help."

"Then why the Muggle book?" Minerva asked. "We certainly can't use Muggle medicine on Severus."

"Definitely not," Severus muttered, crossing his arms over his chest.

"What we need to do," Hermione said, ignoring Minerva's question, "is find a way to have Severus and Athair work together. Both books tend to stress the fact that combining the two psyches seems to repair the mind. Severus?" The wizard in question looked over at her. "Somehow, you need to be able to allow Athair out while you're awake."

"Out of the question," he muttered. "I prefer to keep my mind to myself, if you don't mind."

"Then Athair will continue to manifest while you sleep," Hermione said emphatically. "After a while, both of you will be so tired you'll make yourselves ill."

"Well, we *certainly* don't want that," he said sarcastically. "I still say no."

"Hermione?" Lucius raised a hand in question. "You said Athair will manifest once Severus goes to sleep?"

"Yes, as far as I can conjecture."

"And he is capable of communication?"

"Somewhat. He doesn't verbalise." Hermione looked confused.

Lucius grinned at Severus. "Then I suggest we talk to Athair. He might be more amenable to allowing Severus to manifest from time to time."

Severus scowled as the rest of the occupants of the room broke into scattered laughter. "I don't find that the least bit funny, Lucius."

"Then allow us to try and help you," Minerva said. "I, for one, certainly don't want you to make yourself ill, and Athair is a rather decent sort...for a dragon."

"I'll think about it." With that, Severus stood up and walked out, black robes billowing behind him.

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* *Treatment of Multiple Personality Disorder*, edited by Bennett G. Braun, M.D.; copyright 1986; American Psychiatric Press, Inc. is a real book. I took the information cited from Google Books. However, I have not read the book, and the theory Hermione discusses might not be mentioned in there. I just needed the name of a Muggle book for comparison to the Wizarding book, whose title and author I made up.

# Chapter Ten

This story is a sequel to Velvet Song's "Damsels and Dragons". Severus apparently has not conquered the curse after all, or is there something else going on?

**Disclaimer:** All the characters mentioned from the Harry Potter books belong to JKR. All other characters mentioned in these pages belong to Velvet Song or myself. No monies changed hands during the writing of this story.

**Author's Notes:** This is the sequel to Velvet Song's "Damsels and Dragons" which she allowed me to complete and post to this archive. If you have not read the first story, I strongly encourage you to do so to avoid any confusion while reading this story. The first chapters by Velvet Song can be found here: http://www.thepetulantpoetess.com/viewstory.php?sid=18337, and my concluding chapters can be found here: http://www.thepetulantpoetess.com/viewstory.php?sid=19501.

Thanks to **noybate** for the prompt beta.

**Chapter 10**

The staff room echoed from the sound of its door slamming shut behind the irate wizard. Remus shuddered, then jokingly said, "I'd hate to meet Athair in the forest after that."

"Don't say that, Remus," Hermione scolded. She scooped up the two books and returned them to her bag. "It's not a laughing matter."

"No, it isn't," Poppy said. "Hermione, I'd like to read those books if you don't mind. I still say it's not possible, but you've put the idea into my head."

"Of course, Poppy." She dug the books back out of her bag and slid them across the table to the mediwitch. "It's about the only theory I can come up with that sounds even halfway plausible." Glancing apprehensively at the door, she continued, "Severus isn't insane. We all know that. But he could be driven to insanity if he and his Athair-mind don't work together."

Lucius snorted. "Athair-mind. I like it."

Narcissa looked at her husband. "I have to agree with Hermione," she said. "This is a serious matter, Lucius. Our friend needs our help."

"I, too, must agree," said Minerva from her seat at the head of the table. "The problem, as I see it, is getting Severus to agree." She eyed Hermione, who shifted nervously in her chair. "Since we know Severus isn't an Animagus, nor is he a were-dragon..." She shifted her look to Remus. "...as he did not apparently need the full moon to manifest Athair's personality traits. Er... I forgot to ask. Did he transform?" She looked back at Hermione, whose face was extremely red.

"Um, no," Hermione answered. "Marigold had stopped him in the corridor. I think he was headed for the tower, though." She stopped and shook her head. "Athair's intelligent enough to know he can't fit into a human-sized corridor or room. I think that's why he kept going to the Astronomy Tower."

"Yeah, but why wait three weeks to come back?" Harry asked. "If he were actually still a dragon, wouldn't Athair have come back that first night Severus went to sleep?"

"I think I can answer that," Poppy said, looking up from the two books where she was comparing passages. "The amount of force necessary to return Severus to human was almost unbearable to him. Imagine what it would have felt like to Athair. The Athair personality would have needed time to recuperate and regroup." She closed the books. "I'll take these upstairs with me if I might?" Hermione nodded.

"Good. I am beginning to come round to your viewpoint, Hermione. Athair was created by splintering Severus' mind and body by sheer power. He remained a dragon for eight years without any chance of returning to human until you returned to Hogwarts. By the way, when he's in his dragon persona, can you feel him at all?"

Hermione started at the non sequitur, then nodded her head. "Yes," she told Poppy, smiling. "I *can* feel him in the back of my mind when the Athair personality is in charge." Then she frowned. "But I can't feel the Severus personality at all. I wonder why?"

"I believe I know," Susan said. "When he was Athair, the only way he could communicate was mind-to-mind." She looked at Poppy, who nodded in agreement. "You said the only ones who could actually hear him were the house-elf...Marigold, is it?...and yourself. Severus doesn't need to communicate mind-to-mind." She smiled at her reasoning as Poppy nodded in approval.

"Yes," Lucius mused, stroking the head of his cane. "Severus mentioned not being able to feel you anymore when he first came to. He seemed rather...how do I put this?...sad, yes sad, to put it bluntly."

"Maybe yeh could, yeh know, tell Perfessor Snape yeh kin hear Athair still," Hagrid said simply. As he'd remained quiet for most of the meeting, the other teachers had almost forgotten he was there. "After all," the half-giant continued, "if'n the Perfessor is sad 'bout not hearin' ar 'Mione, then maybe he'll want teh git Athair back just so's he kin." He sighed hugely, ruffling stray papers laying on the table. "I'd like teh see Athair back meself."

Harry laid his hand on Hagrid's arm. "You do know Athair's not a pet, don't you, Hagrid?" He glanced nervously at Hermione, who sat lost in thought. "Even if Snape learned to control the changes, he wouldn't appreciate being considered as such."

"I know that, Harry," Hagrid replied. "He jist looks so purty flyin' cross the sky."

"You know, that just may work," Hermione said suddenly. She rose swiftly from her chair and ran to the door. "I need to find Severus and talk to him. Thanks, Hagrid." She turned and blew the half-giant a kiss before she raced from the room.

Hagrid looked down at Harry. "What'd I say?"

§§§§§§§

Hermione practically flew up the stairs to her potions lab in search of Severus. When she did not find him checking the potions in the process of brewing or starting the medicinal potions Poppy would need for the coming school year, she checked her quarters. She and Severus had begun the pleasant habit of spending evenings together talking or even just reading in companionable silence.

When a quick check of her sitting room showed no morose wizard, Hermione took a chance and climbed the winding staircase to the Astronomy Tower. There, she found

Severus leaning on the parapet of the observation deck, staring out over the grounds of the school towards the Forbidden Forest.

"Severus?" she called softly. "Can we talk?"

He turned to her and sneered. "If it's about your ridiculous theory, then no," he snarled. "Go away." He turned back to the edge.

"Severus, I can feel Athair," Hermione said, determined to have this conversation. "When he manifests, I can feel him. Can't you feel me? I miss that closeness."

Severus sighed and turned around, sliding down the wall until he sat on the floor of the tower's observation deck, his knees drawn up to his chest. Putting his hands to his face, he shuddered then shook his head. "Yes," he admitted, half to himself. "I miss the closeness as well. But I can't feel you. Not like this. And I refuse to go back to being a dragon." He looked up at Hermione.

"Then work with us," Hermione urged, sitting on the floor in front of him. "You and Athair need to come to some sort of compromise. Severus, if you don't, I truly fear for your mind." She put a hand on his knee in commiseration.

Severus looked down at Hermione's smaller hand and placed his much larger hand on top. "I'm not sure I know how to compromise," he said. "If ever I did, it was lost to me years ago. Athair was forced on me. I endured it for eight long years. Now I find that I can't even sleep without that blasted dragon coming back to life.

"Hermione, my mind is the only thing I have that's even mine anymore." He looked at her desperately. "To give up even a part of that to a dragon..."

"An extremely intelligent dragon," Hermione countered. "Don't you even read your own books?" She smiled at him teasingly.

Severus snorted. "I didn't write that blasted book," he said. "I just told Marigold to find any books in the library that had to do with dragons so you'd know what you were working with."

"Well," Hermione said, settling more comfortably onto the floor, her hands in her lap. "When I read *Dragons In-depth*, I discovered that Athair was, or is, a rare subspecies of the Hebridean Black dragon."

Severus snorted. "Makes sense, I suppose."

Hermione smiled. "There are three types of Hebridean Blacks: Mist, Cloud, and Shadow. Shadow dragons are the rarest of the three. I also read that they're crafty and conniving, but not prone to taking risks. Does that sound familiar to you?"

"Sounds like Athair would have been sorted into Slytherin, if Hogwarts accepted dragons as students." Severus mouth quirked upward in a semblance of a smile, then frowned again. "Are you trying to tell me something?"

"No," Hermione answered. "I'm just trying to acquaint you with your alter ego. Shall I continue?"

"Go on." He leaned his head back against the low wall. "You might as well tell me everything about my other half."

Hermione laughed. She couldn't help herself. "Well, then," she said. "According to the book, Shadow dragons have their own language of communication as well as speaking a language common to all dragon species. About fifteen percent of all hatchlings can communicate with any intelligent creature."

"That leaves out about ninety-nine percent of witches and wizards then," Severus said sarcastically. "No wonder I had to wait for you."

"Why, Severus," Hermione said with a blush. "Was that a compliment?"

"Just get on with it, witch," he growled.

"Okay, Athair's only defensive weapon is his breath. A Shadow dragon can blow a six by five metre toxic cloud and, depending on the toxicity, a person can be temporarily blinded or paralysed. If the cloud is extremely toxic, then the blindness or paralysis can be permanent, and perhaps even cause permanent brain damage or death."

"Wouldn't have hurt Hagrid then, would it?"

Hermione swatted at his hands, still resting on his knees. "That's not very nice," she scolded. "Behave yourself.

"Athair's offensive weapons are the manipulation and creation of shadows. He can appear and disappear at will...a skill you've demonstrated many times...and use his invisibility to confuse his opponents. But, according to the book, Athair's greatest weapon is the ability to fade into the Shadow World. In other words, he's not just invisible, he's almost non-existent and undetectable by any spell."

Severus thought for a moment. "It would seem that Riddle chose his curse well, then."

"Actually..." Hermione bit her lip as she pondered her next words. "According to his test subject, the curse just turned someone into a dragon. Where the person was determined the type of dragon."

"Indeed."

"Well, Mr. Coombs was imprisoned in Cornwall, and he said he became a Cornish dragon when the curse was tested on him."

"So it was just my luck to be here, in Scotland, when Riddle cast his curse. My, how did I get so lucky?" Severus sneered at her.

Angry now, Hermione got to her feet. "At least you were able to take advantage of Athair's abilities, Severus Snape, rather than being locked up on a Preserve somewhere," she scolded the wizard, her hands on her hips. "You can at least be grateful for that."

She turned to go, but threw one last comment over her shoulder. "*If you finally decide to compromise with Athair, don't ask me to referee unless you really mean it. I happen to like your dragon half better than the human half at the moment.*"

Severus threw out a hand and caught the hem of her robes as she move towards the stairs. "Hermione," he croaked. "Please?"

"Please what, Severus?" she retorted, turning back to him. "Please just let me be? Gladly."

"No." Severus looked up at her, pain evident in his eyes. "Please don't leave me here by myself. I didn't ask for this, but if I must, I will deal with it, but *not* by myself. I can't do this alone."

"Oh, Severus." Hermione knelt on the stone floor in front of Severus. "I want to help you, but you have to help yourself first. You and Athair have to learn to cooperate with one another, or you'll end up killing each other. Nobody wants that, least of all me."

"I know," he croaked. "I'll try, Hermione. Truly I will. But the dragon has to try as well. I'm almost afraid to sleep, not knowing where I'll end up in the morning or what shape I'll be in. Hermione, I'm so tired. I'm not sure how much longer I can keep this up."

"Then open your mind," Hermione said. "Try to talk to Athair while you're awake. If it feels like he's sleeping, then try to wake him up." She smiled at her phrasing. "Gently, of course."

Severus snorted. "Of course, I'll wake a sleeping dragon with a blast from my wand," he said with undue sarcasm. "I think I'll return to my quarters for now and perhaps meditate. Will you let me know if you feel Athair in your mind?"

"Of course I will," Hermione said as she scrambled to her feet. Holding out her hand, she offered to help him up as well.

Severus waved off her helping hand. "I am quite capable of rising on my own, Miss Granger," he said. As he got to his feet, Hermione laughed. "What is it now?" He looked behind him. "Am I growing a dragon tail?"

"I just realised something," she said. "You tend to address me as 'Miss Granger' when you're put out or annoyed with me and 'Hermione' when you're not. It's a fair barometer of your feelings as far as I can tell."

"Humph," Severus snorted as he cautiously moved past her to the stairs. "Perhaps it's more to the point that I am not sure just what to call you. Perhaps I should stick with 'Granger'. But then again, it might not be my choice if what you suspect is true."

Hermione gaped at him. "What are you talking about?" she asked, following him down the stairs.

"If I truly am sharing my mind with a blasted dragon, he might have other plans," Severus said. "After all, it was his idea to share your bed last night, not mine."

Unfortunately, Harry and Neville were passing the bottom of the stairs at that particular time. Neville grinned while Harry goggled at the couple. "Who was in your bed last night, Hermione?" Harry asked grumpily. "Do I have to call someone out for a duel to protect your honour?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Harry," Hermione snapped. "Athair slept in my bed last night, that's all. You certainly wouldn't want to duel a dragon, would you?"

"Duel a dragon?" Harry snorted with laughter. "I wouldn't want to duel Snape either."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Potter," Severus said drily. "I appreciate your candour."

"Ahem." Harry cleared his throat. "Sorry about that, sir. I forgot myself."

"Yes," Snape mused. "I seem to recall a lot of that during your schooldays." He stared at Harry and Neville as he asked pointedly, "Were you going somewhere definite or just loitering in the corridors again?"

Neville flushed and grabbed Harry's arm, dragging him down the corridor. "W-we w-were on our w-way to our quarters, s-sir," he stammered as the two younger wizards disappeared around the next corner.

"Indeed."

# Chapter Eleven

*Chapter 11 of 14*

This story is a sequel to Velvet Song's "Damsels and Dragons". Severus apparently has not conquered the curse after all, or is there something else going on?

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Thanks to **noybate** for the prompt beta.

**Chapter 11**

Later that night, Severus lay in his bed, in the half state between waking and sleeping. As he lay there, he felt a tickle at the back of his mind which forced him from his drowsing state. "*Is that you, dragon*?" he thought to himself.

"*I am called Athair.*"

"*I am called Severus...*"

"*I know what my human body is called.*"

"*What exactly do you want, Athair?*"

"*Female friend called Hermione. She speaks to me.*"

"*Hermione is a good friend of mine as well. Perhaps we could work together?*"

"*I am listening.*"

**§§§§§§§**

"We can't go wandering the corridors of Hogwarts in the altogether," Severus said, struggling to pull on his trousers after getting out of bed.

"*Why?*"

"It's just not done in polite society." Severus looked around for a shirt but, not seeing one handy, opted for his dressing gown.

"*Why do you place cloth on your body? It hampers the wings*"

"*I* don't have wings," Severus snorted. "And as you're using my body right now, neither do you. Therefore, we will wear trousers and a dressing gown to visit Hermione."

"*When we used my body, there was no cloth to hamper my wings. I removed it before leaving your den*"

"And left me to wander the halls in my nakedness," Severus snarled. "Or so I was informed by a rather entertained Lucius."

"*Is this Lucius your clutch mate?*" Athair's questions were relentless, almost like a child learning about the world for the first time.

"No, he's a friend." Severus picked up his wand and slid it into the holster strapped to his left arm.

"*Friends are companions?*"

"Yes. Some people are better friends than others."

"*Hermione is a good friend.*" Athair sounded confident.

"Agreed." Severus peered out his door into the corridor. Seeing no one in sight, he slipped out of his quarters and up the stairs. "Be quiet now, or we'll have the whole castle in our business."

"*Where is Hermione?*" the dragon asked petulantly. "*When do we see her again?*"

"Shhh!" Severus reached the top of the stairs and peered into the entrance hall. "We've still got some stairs to climb. Now be quiet and let me listen."

"*I will listen,*" Athair insisted. "*I can hear much better than you*"

"Can you do that through my ears, though?" Severus asked.

"*Yes.*" Severus felt his hearing sharpen considerably. "*Do you hear that?*"

A thump came from the bottom of the stairs to the Astronomy Tower. Just how Severus knew it was the Astronomy Tower was something he would think about later. Right now, he had other concerns. "That came from near Hermione's quarters," he told Athair.

"*Let me out!*" the dragon screamed. "*Hermione's in trouble!*"

Without conscious thought, Severus allowed Athair to take control of their shared body. He felt his muscles elongate and strengthen as the dragon shot up the staircase and down the corridor towards the Astronomy Tower.

§§§§§§§

Hermione, awakened from a sound sleep, sat up in her bed. In the back of her mind, she could sense the familiar and welcome feeling of Athair. Smiling, she slipped out of bed and pulled on a dressing gown, intending to go to Severus' quarters and talk to them.

When she opened her door, someone grabbed her by the arm and threw her into the opposite wall of the corridor. Her back hit the stone with a thump, followed by her head. Half unconscious, she struggled to see her assailant, but could see nothing.

Touching her wand through the fabric of the gown's pocket, Hermione muttered, "*Finite...*", but her spell was interrupted by the sound of pounding feet. Her assailant, from the sound of his footsteps, apparently whisked up the stairs to the Astronomy Tower as Severus came racing around the corner from the staircase.

"Hermione!" he shouted. "Are you all right?"

Hermione winced as she tried to stand up. Perhaps it was because she hit her head, but Severus' voice sounded like it was echoing. "I'm fine," she said, wavering onto her feet. "What are you doing here?"

"*Helping my friend Hermione.*"

"Athair?" Hermione looked at Severus. "Is that you?"

"*Yes. I use the body of friend Severus to help my good friend Hermione*"

"Severus?" Hermione stared at his eyes. "Are you awake?"

"Don't ask stupid questions," he snarled. "Of course I'm awake. So is that damned dragon."

"Interesting." She held open the door to her sitting room. "Come in, and we'll talk about all of this."

"Including the fact that someone attacked you," Severus growled. "I don't like that at all. Minerva assured me the wards had all been changed."

Athair growled as well, sounding deep and menacing even to Severus' ears. "*I do not like this, either. If I could fly, I could find who attacked Hermione.*"

"Not now," Severus hissed.

"What's that?" Hermione asked, waving over the now steaming teapot. She levitated it over to the coffee table, then sat down in her armchair. "Did you say something, Severus?"

"Talking to Athair," he said, sitting on the sofa. He took the cup of tea she handed him. "He wants to go looking for your assailant."

"Thank you, Athair," she said, nodding in Severus' direction. "But I would imagine he's long gone by now." She took a sip of her tea before adding, "I took the opportunity of calling Minerva. She'll be here as soon as she's dressed."

Severus' eyes widened. "Oh!" he said, taking in his dressing gown. "Hermione, would you please...?"

Her eyes sparkled with suppressed humour. "Where's your wand?"

Severus held up the sleeve of his dressing gown. "If you mean the wand I got from Ollivander years ago, it's in my arm holster. If you mean the other one, it's where it belongs," he quipped. "If I could use transfiguration as well as you, I wouldn't have to ask."

"*What is* transfiguration?" Athair asked, his mental voice full of confusion.

Hermione laughed. "It's changing something from one thing to another," she answered. "In this case, changing Severus' dressing gown to robes."

"If you would get on with it," the wizard in question muttered, "rather than giving the dragon a private magic lesson."

"Of course, Severus." Pulling her wand from her pocket, she quickly transfigured Severus' dressing gown to a set of his normal robes, then did the same to her dressing gown, resulting in the both of them being fully dressed.

"Thank you," he said as Athair grumbled, "*More cloth!*"

"*Hush, you. I'm not meeting with the headmistress in just my dressing gown*" Severus thought his reprimand to the dragon. "*It's not seemly.*"

"*Is this* headmistress *your clan matriarch*?" Athair asked.

Hermione giggled. "I think you could call her that," she said to Severus' surprise.

"You heard him?" he asked. "Have you been hearing our conversation right along?" He thought of some of the comments he had made and breathed a sigh of relief to know it was nothing too personal.

"*Only if I want her to*" Athair commented at the same time Hermione said, "That was only the second or third time tonight."

"The second or third time *tonight*?" Severus asked. "Have you been hearing Athair before this?"

"I'd like to know that as well," Minerva said as she passed through the Floo into Hermione's sitting room. "What is so important that it couldn't wait until morning, Hermione?"

Athair, or was it Severus, growled. In a voice much deeper than his normal tones, Severus snarled, "Hermione was attacked. The person ran up the stairs. Severus would not let me follow."

Minerva's empty teacup clattered to the table as Hermione paused in the act of pouring out the tea. "Athair?" she gasped, looking from Severus to Hermione and back. "Is that *you*?"

"Yes," said Severus/Athair, and again his voice echoed as wizard and dragon tried to speak at once. Severus shook his head and snarled, "Do you *mind*, dragon?" He listened for a moment. "Thank you. Hermione, did you see who it was?"

She shook her head. "I think he was using an invisibility spell. It certainly wasn't a cloak." She paused. "At least I don't think it was."

"What do you mean, dear?" Minerva asked, keeping one eye on the struggle between Severus and his alter ego. "Couldn't it have been a cloak?"

"No, he grabbed me, Minerva," Hermione answered, rubbing the back of her head. "I think I would have at least seen his hand if he were wearing a cloak."

"I'll ask the questions, if you don't mind," Severus snapped suddenly. Minerva and Hermione looked at him curiously. "The dragon is trying to push me to get his own way," he explained, running a hand through his hair. "I think I know which questions to ask."

"Be that as it may," Minerva said. "We need to check the wards. I can't see how someone from the outside could have gotten past them."

"He went up," Severus pointed out. "Mightn't he have used a broom? Or did you change those wards as well?"

Minerva groaned. "I don't think any of us thought of that," she said. "It'll have to be addressed as soon as possible.

"Hermione, I don't want you staying here by yourself tonight. I can see if Harry..."

"Athair and I will stay," Severus said. "Nobody will be getting past us the rest of the night." He settled back against the cushions of the sofa. "This should make a decent bed."

Minerva looked dubious. "It's your choice, Hermione. I can still get Harry and Neville."

Hermione looked at Severus while he sneered at the headmistress' idea. "I think I would feel safer with Severus and Athair," she finally said. "But thank you all the same."

Minerva nodded. "Right then. I'll call a staff meeting directly after breakfast. Get some sleep, you two... er... three. I need you wide awake come morning."

§§§§§§§

After a restless night on the bed Hermione transfigured from her sofa, Severus...and Athair...were stiff and tired. Bidding their hostess adieu until breakfast, Severus removed himself to his quarters in order to shower, shave, and change his clothes.

"*Why do you scrape your face?*" the dragon asked, watching through Severus' eyes as he shaved.

"I prefer to be beardless," the wizard replied shortly. "It doesn't itch as much as the beard stubble does."

"*Does this scraping hurt?*"

Severus winced as he nicked his chin. "When I'm distracted by dunderheaded questions," he snapped. "Would you be quiet so I can concentrate?" When no comment came from the dragon, Severus asked, "Athair?"

"*You asked that I remain silent*"

"At least let me know you're still there," Severus said. "I was afraid you'd buried yourself again."

"*I...*"

"You, what?" Severus rinsed his face, then reached for a towel.

"*I wish to fly again, friend Severus. May we?*"

Severus was nonplussed. "We are expected upstairs for breakfast, and Minerva has called a staff meeting. If you can wait, I am agreeable to flying after dinner this evening."

"*That would be acceptable.*"

"Good." Reaching for his fresh robes, Severus finished dressing. "I, too, am looking forward to flying again," he admitted. "Hermione is certain that if we learn to cooperate, we'll both be better off."

"*I am willing if you ar*e"

"Indeed."

§§§§§§§

Breakfast was generally a quiet meal as everyone tried to wake up and come to terms with the new day. That morning, however, the news that Athair was awake and sharing Severus' mind was the talk of the table until the morning mail arrived.

Severus quickly *Incendio'd* the recent batch of letters from admiring witches...not to mention a few wizards...and looked around the table. From her scowling, Minerva looked to be reading the latest missive from the Ministry; Lucius was reading that month's edition of *The Quibbler*, while Narcissa had the morning edition of*The Daily Prophet*; Remus had the latest issue of *Transfiguration Today*, and Harry was sharing his copy of*Which Broomstick* with Draco while the two of them discussed their Houses' chances at the Quidditch Cup for the next year. Hermione was frowning over a letter on pink parchment. She quickly finished reading and returned the letter to its envelope before sighing.

"Is everything all right, Hermione?" Severus asked softly, drawing the attention of everyone at their end of the table.

"Hmm? Oh, yes," she answered, tapping her finger on the letter. "It's from Gabrielle...and Ron, too, I suppose."

"Weasley?" Severus was confused. "I thought you were engaged to him. At least, before the end of the war..."

"After the war, we decided we were better off as friends," Hermione answered as Harry snorted in agreement. "We were spending too much time arguing rather than working together."

"*I know this word: engaged.*" Athair said happily. "*You were to be mated*"

"Yes," Hermione admitted. She smiled at the curious faces staring at her. "Athair was talking to me," she explained.

"I must admit it's rather disconcerting," Minerva said. "I had problems when you would talk to Severus...although I understood why...but it's like there's an invisible person sitting at the table that only you can see or hear." Severus cleared his throat. "And now Severus, as well."

"So long as he doesn't dangle me upside down again," Remus muttered into his journal, proving to everyone he was listening as well.

"Stay out of our business and we won't," Severus said with a smirk, remembering the last time he had done just that.

Minerva cleared her throat and began gathering her post together. "If everyone is finished eating, I'd like to meet in the staff room in thirty minutes. As you've no doubt realised by now, Athair has joined our ranks, and we have other things to discuss as well." She rose from the table, the men standing politely, and sailed from the Great Hall.

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# Chapter Twelve

*Chapter 12 of 14*

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**Chapter 12**

Minerva rapped the table with her knuckles, bringing silence to the room and everyone's attention on her. "Does anyone know where Hagrid is?" she asked, noting the Care of Magical Creatures teacher's absence. "He wasn't at breakfast either," she noted.

"*Friend Hagrid is missing?*" Athair asked Severus.

"*Apparently so*," the wizard thought back. "Minerva," he said aloud. "Perhaps someone should check on the man, considering we had an unwelcome visitor last evening."

She pursed her lips. "I would have to agree," she said. "Perhaps you and Lucius? Is that agreeable?"

"Quite." He looked over at his friend, who nodded in agreement. "We'll check his hut. If he's not there, he's probably in the Forbidden Forest, so we'll need to involve the centaurs."

"Ask Firenze," Hermione said. "He'll be more amiable than Bane since he's an instructor here."

"That would be a given," Severus said as the two men got to their feet. "We'll send a Patronus when we find something."

"Just tell Athair," Hermione said. "He can tell me faster than you could send a Patronus."

"***Yes! I want to help find friend Hagrid!***

Severus winced. "You don't have to shout," he told his alter ego. "I can hear you quite well."

"*My apologies, friend Severus.*"

Athair sounded more smug than contrite, but Severus didn't argue with him. As he and Lucius went out the door, he could feel his hearing sharpen as well as his eyesight. "*Excellent idea,*" he thought to the dragon. "*Thank you for thinking of it*"

"*You're welcome. Will we have to fly as well?*"

Severus thought about it on the way to Hagrid's hut. "*We might,*" he finally admitted. "*Let's see what we find here first*"

Lucius paused with his hand on the latch to the door. "Are you coming?" he asked as Severus lagged several feet behind.

"We're coming," Severus said. "We were discussing strategy."

Lucius shook his head. "I need to get used to the fact that there are now two of you living in your head."

"Indeed," Severus said. "So do we."

§§§§§§§

Inside Hagrid's hut, the fire had been extinguished, and with the only light coming from the door, it was difficult to see. What wasn't so difficult to see was the huge body laying in the middle of the floor.

"Athair, tell Hermione we need Poppy," Severus shouted as he raced forward, Lucius not far behind.

"*Done!*" Athair replied. "*Hermione wants to know if friend Hagrid is okay*"

Severus struggled to turn the body over. Athair added an influx of strength and suddenly the half-giant lay on his back. Laying his fingers against Hagrid's throat, Severus felt for a pulse while Lucius checked out the rest of the hut.

"I've got a pulse," he said, breathing out a sigh of relief. He'd never let the larger man know it, but Severus respected his acumen with magical creatures, if not his enthusiasm.

"*I told Hermione,*" Athair passed on to him. "*They are on their way.*"

"Very good. Lucius?" Severus looked at the other wizard. "Poppy's on her way. Did you find anything?"

Lucius looked up from the results of the spells he had cast. "Someone used a great deal of power here last night," he said. "So far, I've found three *Stupefy* and two *Incarcerous*. I'd say Hagrid put up quite the fight."

"And we wouldn't have heard a thing," Severus snarled. "This place is too far from the castle."

"*I would not have heard either,*" Athair said with a touch of pain to his mental voice. "*I was too far away as well!*"

Severus felt the pain and winced. "We cannot expect to do everything," he reassured the dragon. "Remember, we're still getting used to one another."

"*This is true,*" the dragon agreed as Poppy, Minerva, and Hermione crowded through the door.

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"As far as I can tell, Hagrid will be fine," Poppy reassured the witches and wizards crowded around the doors of the hospital wing. "He needs to rest, but he should be up and around by tomorrow."

"Thank you, Poppy," Minerva said, breathing a sigh of relief. She turned to the other teachers and clapped her hands. "Let's go back and finish our meeting, why don't we?" she said, starting to move towards the stairs.

"Minerva?" Poppy called. When the Headmistress turned around, she pointed to the doors of the hospital wing. "Hagrid's awake, and there's plenty of room. Why not hold the meeting here so we all can attend?"

"An excellent idea," Lucius pointed out. "Perhaps he can tell us what happened last night."

Minerva nodded in agreement. "All right, everyone. Go inside and take a seat. Winky!"

The little house-elf appeared, her Hogwarts tea towel freshly washed and ironed. "Headmistress call Winky?"

"Yes, I did," Minerva said. "Would you go and fetch me the papers I left on the table in the staff room? Just a moment," She turned and looked into the hospital wing. "Does anyone else need anything from the staff room?"

"I'll need my bag," Hermione piped up. "Oh, and the letter from Gabrielle, if you would, please."

"I'd started the minute notes," Lucius said. "I'll need those."

Minerva nodded. "Anything else?" When no one else spoke up, she nodded at the house-elf. "I guess that's everything."

"Winky get right away." Seconds later, the house-elf was back, her hands filled with papers, and Hermione's bag hanging from her arm. "Here are things from staff room, Headmistress. Winky fetch anything else?"

"Yeah," came a hoarse voice from the bed nearest one of the large windows. "If'n one of you's could find me Fang an' make sure 'e gits fed?" Hagrid struggled to sit up. "'E's been out there mos' o' the night. Must be starvin' by now."

"Winky get others to help," the little creature said, bobbing her head. "We find Master Hagrid's Fang for him."

Hagrid slumped back into his bed. "Thankee," he said with a sigh. "That'll ease me mind."

"All right, everyone," Minerva said as Winky disappeared. "Let's find our seats and get this meeting started." She moved forward, her hand outstretched. "Hermione, here's

your bag and the letter you wanted. Lucius, here are your notes. Find a table. Poppy, you need to sit down as well." Marshalling her forces, Minerva observed the room and nodded. "Excellent. Let us begin."

§§§§§§§

"Now, I believe we've covered almost everything," Minerva said an hour later. "Hagrid, you're sure you didn't see your assailant?"

"No, 'Eadmistress, ma'am." Hagrid was miserable that he had failed his employer. "I let Fang out like alwus. Next I knew, somebody was throwing 'exes me way. Din't 'ear nothin' neither."

"That fits with what Hermione and Severus said about Hermione's attacker last night," Lucius pointed out. "Nothing seen or heard."

"That's not quite true," Hermione interjected. "I did hear someone running away."

"Audible but not visual," Susan murmured. When everyone looked at her, she blushed. "Sorry," she apologised. "I was trying to think of where I had seen that before. It's a powerful Invisibility Charm, and I know I read something about it not too long ago."

"Keep thinking, dear," Minerva said. "Severus, did you or Athair hear or see anything last night?"

Severus closed his eyes, his mind communing with Athair. When he opened them, there was fury flashing in his dark pupils. "We heard the thump of Hermione hitting the wall," he said. "Unfortunately, we were more concerned about Hermione's state of being than listening for intruders." He struggled visibly to retain control.

"Severus would not let me pursue the male," Athair spoke, surprising everyone but Hermione, who had heard him last night. "He ran up to the high place. I heard him."

Severus forcibly wrenched back control from the dragon. "*He* may have heard something, but *I* most assuredly did not. Whoever the intruder was, he was no longer in the school."

"That's it!" Susan shouted, her exclamation drawing the attention of everyone in the room. "It's a spell developed by the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures."

"My dear, are you sure?" Minerva asked, picking up the Ministry letter she had received at breakfast.

"Uh-huh. It was in last quarter's edition of *Challenges in Charming*." Susan was so excited, she was bouncing in her seat. "I can't remember just who wrote the article, but the author talked about how it would revolutionise the observation and cataloguing of many magical creatures because the person casting the spell can't be seen or smelt, even if the observer was upwind of the subject." She paused, obviously trying to remember the rest of the article. "The only limitation was that the observer had to be careful not to make any noise and had to watch where he or she stepped because they were invisible, not weightless."

"Wonderful," Minerva said. "At least we know our assailant must have read the article."

"More than that, Minerva," Susan was quick to point out. "Whoever it is has to work for the Ministry, because the spell wasn't included in the article. He had to have gotten it directly from the Ministry because they're the only ones using it at the moment."

Minerva held the letter close to her chin in contemplation. "Perhaps someone associated with the Department itself?" She perched her eyeglasses on her nose and snapped the letter open. "This is from Amos Diggory. Please listen before you make any comments."

*Minerva McGonagall*

*Headmistress*

*Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry*

*Dear Headmistress,*

*It has come to my attention that the dragon living in the Forbidden Forest for the previous eight years is still in residence. As it was thought that the animal would cause no harm, the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures determined nothing need be done at the time other than sending in an observer.*

*After a significant amount of time and observations, Mr Charles Weasley, a noted expert on dragons, determined the dragon in your Forbidden Forest to be an extremely rare subspecies of the Hebridean Black known as a Shadow. Further research has shown that this dragon could indeed be harmful to the students who attend your school.*

*Therefore, it is the determination of the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures that said dragon be removed from the school grounds and placed in a reserve located in the Welsh countryside.*

*I will be arriving tomorrow morning to meet with you and determine the best way to facilitate the removal of said dragon before the school year begins on September the first.*

*Yours,*

*Amos Diggory*

*Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures*

"Why that pompous old fool!" Lucius sputtered. "Just who does he think he is?"

"Apparently the person charged with removing Athair from the school grounds," Minerva said evenly. "There is just one problem."

"He'll have to find Athair first," Hermione said with a wink, looking at Severus.

The wizard in question smirked. "I believe the book you read stated that Shadow dragons cannot be found if they don't wish to be."

"And Athair has the best hiding place of all," Draco said. "If he doesn't do anything to draw attention to himself..."

"Quite."

§§§§§§§

"I also have a letter," Hermione spoke up, "and it's going to happen sooner than Mr Diggory's visit."

"How do you mean?" Minerva asked as she folded up the letter from the Ministry.

Hermione picked up the pink envelope she had received at breakfast and weighed it in her hand before looking at Harry and Neville. "It's from Gabrielle," she said finally.

"Which means it's also from Ron. She's asking if they might come to tea this afternoon."

"I don't see why not," the headmistress said. "Mr Weasley and his wife are always welcome here."

"She's asking that the guests include Harry, Neville, and..." Hermione paused, weighing her words. "... and Severus."

He blinked. "Mrs Weasley is asking *me* to attend your tea party?"

"Mm-hmm," Hermione hummed, looking up from the letter. "I'm trying to read between the lines here, but I think they want your advice."

"Mr Weasley and I have never been on the best of terms, Hermione," Severus said. "Why the devil should we start now?"

"I said I was just guessing, Severus," Hermione retorted. "Shall I tell her you'll be there?"

"Yes, yes, I'll be there." Severus waved away the slight suggestion that he might not attend.

"Good. Harry? Neville?"

The partners looked at one another then back to Hermione. "We'll be there," Harry answered for both of them. He grinned at Severus. "If only to protect Ron from being hexed by Snape."

"Send your note, dear," Minerva said. "Be sure you explain about the extra precautions as well. In the meantime, we need to ward the school against brooms landing as well. Lucius, Remus? If you'll come with me?"

Lucius stood and made a formal bow to the headmistress. "I am yours to command," he quipped.

Not to be outdone, Remus also stood. Instead of bowing however, he curtsied, causing gales of laughter to ripple through the room. "Always delighted to be of service," he said and grinned broadly.

Minerva hid a smile behind the bustle of picking up her notes and papers. "Hagrid, I expect you to follow Poppy's orders," she instructed the half-giant, still laying in the hospital bed. "I want you on your feet when Amos Diggory comes snooping around tomorrow."

"Is that wise, Minerva?" Severus asked. "I don't want to find myself whisked away to some dragon reserve in Wales."

"*This is my home*!" Athair asserted. "*I am not leaving*!"

"I fully agree with you, dragon," Severus said. "Perhaps, if Hagrid is feeling up to it, he might leave this afternoon and go to visit his brother *On the other side of the forest*."

Minerva eyed Hagrid. "That might be for the best," she said, considering the pros and cons. "Poppy? Would Hagrid be up to a trip by this afternoon?"

"I believe so," Poppy said, smiling at Hagrid. "What do you say, Rubeus?"

"If'n it'll 'elp Athair, I'll go ter see Grawp," he answered. "Mind you, though, I expect ter be told wot 'appens while I'm gone."

"Agreed," Minerva said solemnly. "We'll get you started on your way this afternoon." She clapped her hands briskly. "All right, people, let's get started. We've a lot to do before morning."

# Chapter Thirteen

*Chapter 13 of 14*

This story is a sequel to Velvet Song's "Damsels and Dragons". Severus apparently has not conquered the curse after all, or is there something else going on?

**Disclaimer:** All the characters mentioned from the Harry Potter books belong to JKR. All other characters mentioned in these pages belong to Velvet Song or myself. No monies changed hands during the writing of this story.

**Author's Notes:** This is the sequel to Velvet Song's "Damsels and Dragons" which she allowed me to complete and post to this archive. If you have not read the first story, I strongly encourage you to do so in order to avoid any confusion while reading this story. The first chapters by Velvet Song can be found here: http://www.thepetulantpoetess.com/viewstory.php?sid=18337, and my concluding chapters can be found here: http://www.thepetulantpoetess.com/viewstory.php?sid=19501.

Gabrielle's French vocabulary comes from four years of college French classes taken some forty years ago along with the aid of Google Translate to jog the memory.

Thanks to **noybate** for the prompt beta.

**Chapter 13**

"You hov all thees extra securitee," Gabrielle remarked as Harry and Neville met her and Ron at the gates of the school. "Why ees that?"

"We've had a bit of trouble the last few days," Harry said with a shrug. "We figured this was better until we figured out what's going on." He shook Ron's offered hand. "Good to see you, mate."

"Yeah, me too," Ron said, looking around. "The old place still looks the same. How're you doing, Neville?" He offered his hand to the other wizard.

"Quite well, considering," Neville answered, shaking hands firmly. "Are you still in business with your brothers?" The four of them turned and started towards the castle.

"Yeah," Ron said. "That's part of the reason Gaby and I are in Hogsmeade."

"Do tell," Harry said. "What're Fred and George up to now?"

Ron laughed. "I'll tell you later during tea. A hint, though? It involves Snape."

"That should be interesting," Neville said with a laugh. "I can't wait to hear this."

§§§§§§§

"You 'ave such *un logement charmant*, 'ermione," Gabrielle said, accepting a cup of tea from her hostess. "Zee view. *C'est spectaculaire*."

Hermione blushed. "Thank you, Gabrielle. I like it." She offered a plate of biscuits to the other woman. "The house-elves made these from a recipe I got from my mother. They've always been my favourites."

"*Merci*."

"So, Weasley, what brings you to Hogwarts?" Severus asked, accepting a cup of tea and some of the biscuits. "I thought you were working with those two miscreants you call brothers."

"I am," Ron answered, spraying crumbs. "Say, Hermione, these are really good." Gabrielle nudged him as he took a sip of tea. "I'm getting to it," he said. "Give me a chance."

"Getting to what, Ron?" Harry asked. "Thanks, Hermione." He sat back with his own cup and looked at his best friend.

Ron opened his mouth to speak, but Gabrielle interrupted excitedly before he could get a word out. "*Sommes enceintes*! We're pregnant!" she squealed.

Hermione choked on her tea at the announcement. "Congratulations!" she squealed in turn, setting down her cup and hugging the younger witch.

"Yeah, Ron, congrats," Harry said, shaking Ron's hand. "You've been trying long enough."

"*What is* pregnant?" Athair asked Severus silently.

"*She's going to have a baby.*" Severus answered in the same manner.

"*Baby? I know this word! She will lay an egg and have a hatchling!*"

Severus choked on his tea. Without missing a beat, Neville leaned over and swatted him on the back, ignoring the glare he got in return.

"*Humans don't hatch from eggs!*"

"*Where do humans come from then?*"

Severus sputtered into his tea, attracting the attention of the others who were still congratulating Ron and Gabrielle. "*You'll have to ask Hermione that question,*" he answered, using his best teaching glare to silence any questions from the others. Then he smirked as Hermione gasped and sat up straighter.

She glared at him. "Later," she mouthed, and Severus knew it wasn't an idle threat. "When's the baby due, Gabrielle?" she asked. *I'll tell you later,*" she promised Athair.

"Seven months," Ron said proudly, placing his arm protectively around his wife's shoulders.

"*They are mated?*" Athair asked, following the by-play.

"*For some time now, or so I am given to understand,*" Severus answered. "*This young one is special to them because it has been a long time in coming.*"

"*Ah!*" For a moment, Athair was silent. "*Family is important,*" he added wistfully.

"*Where is your family?*" Severus asked. "*Do you know?*"

"*I have no family,*" Athair admitted sadly. "*I came into being when you did.*"

"*I have no family, either,*" Severus told him. "*You and I can be a family together.*"

"*With Hermione?*"

"*If she's willing.*" Severus rather hoped she would be.

"*That would be good.*"

"*Indeed.*"

§§§§§§§

Athair stayed silent and watched the interactions of the humans in the room. The small beings both amused him and confused him. While he had learned much in the past eight years, it was the last few weeks that had taught him the most. Right now, it seemed as if everyone was tiring out. The smallest female, who was mated to the red male, leaned against him and yawned. Not missing a beat, he laid a protective arm across her shoulders, but also yawned loudly.

This was not normal human behaviour, he thought in confusion, as his friends' thoughts also grew muddled. Something was wrong. The black and brown collapsed against one another just as the red slid down in his seat. When Hermione collapsed, and Severus was in danger of doing the same, Athair decided he had to act.

Taking control of Severus' body...easy to do since the male's mind was so weak at the moment...Athair started to discreetly sniff the air. He discovered a strange smell...nothing he was familiar with...and traced it to the entryway of Hermione's den. His eyes...not as sharp as when he was in dragon form...saw a slight flicker against the wall that moved towards the entrance.

A sharp rap at the panel guarding the entryway caused the flicker to start, so Athair chose that moment to surge upwards out of his chair. The flicker pulled the panel open and shoved the older female aside as Athair started in pursuit.

"Severus," the female sputtered. "What is the meaning of this?"

"It is getting away, Matriarch!" Athair spoke with his deeper version of Severus' voice. "I must hunt it down!"

"Athair?" Minerva grabbed at Severus' arm, trying to hold the dragon back. "Is that you?"

"It hurt Hermione and her friends!" Athair replied. Not wanting to injure the female he considered the matriarch of this particular sept, he stopped following the flicker.

"Oh, Merlin!" Minerva had caught a glimpse of what lay in wait in Hermione's sitting room. "What's happened to them, and why weren't you affected?"

"Friend Severus is not there," Athair said, trying to voice his confusion. "Friend Hermione is not there. But they *are* there. The flicker did something to them."

Minerva quickly moved into the room and began checking pulses. "They're alive," she said, sniffing. "What is that smell?"

"It is what made them not there," Athair explained. "The flicker did it."

"I don't understand what you mean, Athair." Minerva moved to the hearth and frowned. "The Floo powder is gone," she muttered to herself. "What flicker?"

"There was a flicker at the portal," Athair said. "It moved. None saw it but me. It made them 'not there'."

Minerva opened the window to allow the room to air, then checked pulses once more. She lingered the longest on Gabrielle's pulse. Frowning again, she looked at Athair. "Do you remember how to get to the hospital wing?" she asked.

Athair thought a moment. "That is where the female stops the hurting?" he asked. When Minerva nodded in agreement, he continued, "I know where this place is. Do you need the nurturing female?"

"Indeed, I do," Minerva said, "but I want you to take Gabrielle to her and explain what happened. I'll get Lucius and the others to help me carry Hermione and the others up to the hospital wing. Oh, and Athair..." He paused in the process of lifting Gabrielle into his arms and looked at her. "When Severus wakes up, I will need to speak with him as soon as possible."

Athair nodded and gently carried the little female to the portal. "I will tell him," he responded, looking back at the Matriarch. "I think friend Severus will wish to speak with you as well."

**§§§§§§§**

Severus came awake with a start, wondering how he had managed to be back in a bed in the hospital wing...with a pounding head, no less. Sitting up, he saw Minerva and Poppy conferring with Lucius, Remus, and Draco as they clustered around another bed.

"What the devil is going on?" he demanded.

"*The Matriarch wishes to speak with you,*" Athair responded at the same time Minerva looked over at him and said, "Oh, good. You're awake."

"Awake?" Severus looked down at himself. He was still wearing the robes he had worn to tea with Hermione and her dunderheaded friends. Looking up, he saw Minerva and Poppy moving in his direction, but his attention was drawn to the bed where they had been standing.

"Hermione!" he shouted as he leapt from his bed, his headache notwithstanding. "What's happened to her?" he demanded, grabbing Poppy's arm as she raised her wand. "Why are we here?" He dragged the mediwitch with him as he rushed to the side of Hermione's bed.

"Don't talk so loud," Hermione muttered, her eyes squeezed shut in pain. "It's bad enough having Athair shouting in my head."

"*Sorry,*" Athair said in his version of a whisper.

"It's okay, Athair," she said soothingly as she sat up, wincing. "You're still learning to control the volume." Hermione looked at Poppy. "What happened to us?" she asked. "Are the others okay? Gabrielle! Is she okay? Will the baby be all right?"

"*Baby?*" Minerva and Poppy looked at one another. "Mrs Weasley is pregnant?" Minerva asked. "Oh, dear. Poppy..."

But the mediwitch was already on her way across the room. "I told you, Minerva," she said. "The girl's about two months gone."

"I just thought she might have gotten a stronger dose of whatever it was, being smaller," Minerva said. "I didn't know she was pregnant."

"Gaby!" Ron yelled suddenly as he woke up from his sleep. "Where's my wife? Is she okay?" He spotted Poppy and stumbled across the room, arriving at his wife's bedside at almost the same time as the mediwitch.

"What's wrong with her, Madam Pomfrey?" he asked, sinking to his knees next to the bed. "Why isn't she waking up? Gaby? Baby, can you hear me? Come on, sweetheart, don't scare me like this." He took her hand and laid his forehead against it in anguish.

"Mr Weasley, please let me do my job," Poppy said, trying to work around him. "I need you to back away for a moment. Please!"

Ron looked up at her, his blue eyes dim with tears. "She's going to be all right, isn't she?" he asked. "Please let her be all right."

"I'll know in a moment," Poppy said briskly. "You need to let go right now and stand back."

Hermione took his arm and helped him to his feet as Harry, still a little shaky, moved a chair up behind him. "Sit down, Ron," she said. "You need to sit down."

He collapsed onto the chair, his eyes never leaving the mediwitch who moved her wand in intricate patterns over his wife. Poppy muttered an incantation, then frowned at the results.

"What?" he asked. "What's wrong?"

"There's nothing wrong, Mr. Weasley," Poppy snapped. She repeated the incantation. "How much does your wife weigh?"

"I dunno," Ron said. "Between seven and eight stone, I guess. Why?"

"I would say that being smaller and part Veela as well, she is reacting to whatever it is more strongly than the rest of you." Poppy paused and made some notes to the case parchment. "It will take a little longer for her to wake up.

"Don't worry," she went on. "Your wife and the baby are fine. You're lucky Athair was there, and Minerva arrived when she did."

"Athair?" Ron looked confused. "The dragon? I didn't see him there. How'd he fit into Hermione's sitting room?" He looked down at Gabrielle and picked up her hand again. "Ya know," he said, looking up at Poppy and his friends. "I don't think I really want to know. Just thank him for me, will ya?"

"Indeed, Mr. Weasley," Severus said. "I believe he already knows."

"*Indeed.*"

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Hours later, Minerva returned to the hospital wing to find Ron still seated by his wife's bedside, her hand in his. He looked haggard and worn, but still hopeful she would wake up soon.

"Ronald," Minerva said, laying her hand on his shoulder. "I've had the house-elves prepare a guest room for you."

"Thanks, Professor," he said, "but I think I'll stay here until Gaby wakes up." He looked up at the headmistress. "If that's okay, that is?"

Minerva smiled. "I thought you might," she said, "but the room is available should you wish to make use of it. Shall I call your parents?"

"If you haven't already, then Merlin, no!" Ron said. "Mum would make this huge fuss about Gaby travelling in her condition, and say I had no right to expect it of her and..."

"I understand perfectly, Ronald," Minerva said. "You can explain or not, as you desire. I just thought I would make the suggestion."

"Professor, what happened to us?" he asked. "One minute we're drinking tea and talking about the baby, and the next, we're here and Gaby won't wake up."

"Hogwarts seems to be under some kind of attack, Mr. Weasley," Minerva explained with a sigh. "We don't know who is doing this or why, but in the past week we have had several incidents."

"That's why the wards were changed," Ron said, catching on with alacrity. "But whoever it was, he still managed to get in." He frowned. "I'll bet it was when Harry and Neville let me and Gaby in, wasn't it?"

Minerva smiled tiredly. "A most astute supposition," she said. "We believe so."

"That must mean he's still on the grounds, then." Ron looked down at his sleeping wife. "Have you searched for him?"

"Hogwarts is huge, Mr. Weasley," Minerva pointed out. "And the wards only keep strangers out, not in."

"In other words, whoever it was could be long gone by now." Ron frowned. "I know most Aurors probably wouldn't be bothered with this. They'd consider it some kind of prank, especially if Snape was involved, but what about Tonks and Shacklebolt? They're usually more open-minded about him."

"We haven't reported it to the Aurors for just that reason," Minerva said. "It would instantly throw suspicion on Severus, and that's the last thing we would want. We're working on it, and Athair's on the scene. He won't let anything happen to the school or us."

"Yeah, I don't get that," Ron said. "I thought Snape was the dragon, but you're talking like the dragon is still here. How's that possible?"

"All in good time, Mr Weasley," Minerva said briskly, patting him on the shoulder. "All in good time. Right now, you need to concentrate on Mrs Weasley and that baby of yours. Can you do that?"

"Yeah, sure." Ron lifted Gabrielle's hand and kissed the back of it. "She's going to wake up and be just fine. The baby, too."

"We'll help you keep those good thoughts," Minerva assured him before leaving the hospital wing to help in the ongoing search.

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*un logement charmant* = a charming accommodation (nice quarters)

*sommes encientes* = "we are pregnant"


# Chapter Fourteen

*Chapter 14 of 14*

This story is a sequel to Velvet Song's "Damsels and Dragons". Severus apparently has not conquered the curse after all, or is there something else going on?


**Disclaimer:** Not mine. Uh-uh. No way, no how.

Author's Note: My apologies for taking so long to post the next chapters. I promise you, the story *is* finished. I have been dealing with family illnesses for the past year and the eventual death of my mother earlier this year.

Thank you to **noybate** for her beta of this chapter. And on with the show.

**Chapter 14**

It was evident by the next morning that whomever the intruder had been, he or she was long gone from the Hogwarts grounds. Even Athair, granted usage of their joint body by Severus, could not discover any trace of the 'flicker' he had seen the afternoon before.

Tired and feeling definitely out of sorts, Minerva led her small group of searchers into the Entrance Hall, only to be confronted with the news that a group of Ministry officials were demanding entrance onto Hogwarts grounds. With a sigh, she turned to start back toward the gates, but Remus and Severus stepped in front of her.

"We'll handle the gate, Minerva," Remus told her. "You go check on Ron and Gabrielle, then make sure you get something to eat."

"Indeed," Severus concurred. He looked at Lucius, who nodded. "Between the three of us, I am sure we can admit Mr. Diggory and *help* him look for that dratted dragon."

Minerva gave her three unlikely heroes a tired smile. "If you're sure," she said, "then, yes, I do want to see if Gabrielle has awakened. I must admit, I am growing a bit concerned. Oh, Severus," she called as the three wizards started for the door. "Make sure you don't *help* Amos so much that he becomes suspicious."

Severus could only dignify his answer with a snort. "Minerva, please. Remember what house two of us were sorted into." He glanced at Remus. "Of course, I can't answer for the mongrel."

"The *mongrel* will be fine," Remus answered with a grin. "Besides, I'm just along for the fun."

"*Remus*," Minerva warned.

He laughed. "Don't worry, Minerva. I won't spoil their fun." He waved as he walked out the door, followed by two grinning Slytherins.

Minerva huffed in irritation before she started up the stairs to the hospital wing.

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Lucius stood behind the gates and, crossing his arms, simply stared out at the group of men and nets waiting to be allowed entry. At his back, Severus and Remus mimicked his actions, Severus adding an intimidating scowl to the mix.

"What are you waiting for?" Amos Diggory demanded. "You obviously know why we're here. Let us in."

"*Do they think to capture me with nets?*" Athair asked Severus with a snort.

"*Apparently so*," Severus answered, his unvoiced comment paired with a smirk at the crowd. "Why the nets, Diggory?" he called. "There's no dragon here anymore."

"As if I would fall for that chicanery," Diggory scoffed, stomping onto the grounds as Lucius opened the gates. "You were never a dragon, and you're definitely not Severus Snape." He got up into Severus' face. "You might have the people living here fooled," he said fiercely, "but you certainly don't fool me!"

He motioned to the men who had followed him through the gates. "There's the forest," he ordered, pointing to the line of trees. "Follow my directions, use the proper spells, and we should be out of here within the hour and on our way to Wales." He started toward the castle.

"Here now, Diggory, where do you think you're going?" Lucius asked, stepping into the other man's path. "As you pointed out, there's the forest."

Diggory looked him up and down as though Lucius were a particular ugly specimen of bug to be crushed. "I am going to speak with the headmistress," he said coldly. "Move aside, Death Eater."

Remus stepped up and tried to defuse the tense situation. "Perhaps I might help?" he asked. "After all, I'm not a Death Eater"...he nodded at Lucius..."nor am I an impostor"...he grinned at Severus.

"I will not discuss Ministry business with a bootlicking werewolf," Diggory snapped. "Now get out of my way." He shoved past Remus and made his way up to the castle.

"Three for three," Severus snarked. "Apparently we're quite the trio...a Death Eater, an impostor, and a bootlicking werewolf." He smirked at Remus. "Which one of us is the most insulted?"

"*He didn't say anything about me!*" Athair complained. "*I thought I was the reason he came here to begin with!*"

"He's an ass," Severus growled aloud. "Don't worry about it." He started down the path after Diggory, followed by Lucius and Remus. "When I was you, I could sense the state of a person's mind. Can you do that?"

Athair said nothing for a moment, but Severus could sense the dragon was testing the defences of Diggory's mind. "*He does not feel right,*" Athair said finally. "*I am not sure if that is normal because I have only the experience of those here.*"

Severus paused and turned back to Lucius and Remus, forcing them to halt as well. "He doesn't feel right?" he repeated. Lucius and Remus caught on immediately. "How different does he feel from the three of us?"

"*Very different. Not sad; not angry.*" The dragon sounded confused. "*It is like he is feeling both at the same time and confused as to why. His mind is very...what you would call muddled perhaps?...to me.*"

"Muddled?" Severus blinked. "Athair, tell Hermione. Poppy should be able to observe him unseen."

Lucius grabbed Severus by the arm. "I don't want any of the women around him, especially Narcissa and Susan," he said. "Can the dragon ask Hermione to tell them to stay away?"

"*Done*," Athair said. "*Hermione says she will try to keep him from the den of the nurturing female. The incubating female is awake now, but she is not allowed to move yet. The other females, except for the Matriarch, are in the nurturing female's den.*"

Severus passed on the information, and Lucius smirked even as he sighed in relief. "I'm pretty sure the 'nurturing female' is Poppy," he said, "and Minerva is 'the Matriarch'..."

"I'll bet she loves that," Remus interrupted with a grin.

"But who is the 'incubating female'?" Lucius finished with a scowl for the interruption.

"Gabrielle Weasley," Severus answered. "She and Mr. Weasley made the announcement yesterday at tea." He turned and started jogging toward the school. "I have a bad feeling about this," he muttered.

Lucius and Remus quickly followed, their faces tight with concern.

§§§§§§§

"Amos, I have already told you once," Minerva said, seated behind her desk. She kept her wand discreetly hidden in her hand while Hermione, having given the headmistress Athair's warning, stood by the hearth, her arms arranged across her chest and wand blatantly exposed. "There is no dragon in the Forbidden Forest. The dragon known as Athair was actually a cursed Severus Snape."

"Don't play me for a fool, Headmistress," Diggory sneered. "The Ministry knows of no curse that can change a man into a dragon. It can't be done."

"Tom Riddle managed," Hermione said from behind him. "We found the curse in his papers."

"Prove it," Diggory retorted, swinging around to face her.

"We can't." Minerva drew his attention once more. "All of his papers were destroyed once we found the counter-curse and were able to break the curse on Severus."

"A likely story," Diggory sneered. "Severus Snape died eight years ago in the final battle. I don't know who this impostor is, but he is *not* Severus Snape. Now, where is the

dragon?"

Minerva pinched the bridge of her nose. "Amos," she said softly, "there is no dragon. I don't know how many times I have to tell you this." She laid her wand on the desk and clasped her hands on top of it. "Even if there were a dragon in the Forbidden Forest, you and your department have no jurisdiction over it. It would be part of Hogwarts."

"And Hogwarts is considered to be part of the Ministry," Diggory shot back. "Your funding is contingent on Ministry support. I repeat, that dragon is dangerous and should not be on school grounds where it would have the chance to harm students." Spittle flew from his mouth in his anger.

"He was here for almost four years and never harmed a student," Hermione pointed out. "In fact, he protected the students by discovering and disarming some rogue Death Eaters."

"I don't need some little girl to tell me my business," he shouted. "I happen to be a senior member of the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, and I know my dragons. Now, where is he?"

"I don't know," Hermione said simply and, throwing a glance of sympathy toward Minerva, walked out of the office.

Diggory sputtered in anger. "Get back in here!" he shouted. "I'll have your job for this! Headmistress, I must demand..."

"You have no right to make demands here, Amos Diggory," Minerva said, finally losing her temper. "I am the headmistress of this school, and *I* make the final decisions as to whom I hire and fire, not you." She grasped her wand and pointed it at him. "Now, I would strongly suggest you join the rest of your men in the Forbidden Forest in this asinine attempt to trap a dragon which is not there."

Diggory looked down at the wand pointed at his abdomen and back up at Minerva. "You have not heard the last of this," he threatened as he stood up. "The Ministry..."

"The Ministry can send someone who is not going to threaten *my* professors with the loss of their jobs," Minerva said. "You can show yourself out of this office. There will be someone waiting in the corridor to escort you out of the building. Good day, Mr. Diggory."

Diggory huffed and rumbled, but in the end he left Minerva alone in her office. Once the door slammed shut behind him, Poppy rose from her hiding place in the alcove behind the window curtains.

"Athair was right," she said without preamble. "There's something wrong with that man's mind."

"Is he sane?" Minerva said. "He certainly sounds sure of himself."

"I'm not a Mind Healer," Poppy said. "I couldn't tell you if he's sane or insane. I just know what my diagnostics tell me, and they tell me his mind is not right."

Minerva pinched the bridge of her nose again. "All right. I suppose I should alert the Ministry about this." She looked at the other witch. "You wouldn't have something on you for a headache, would you?"

Poppy just smiled and handed over a small vial.

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"Harry Potter!" Diggory exclaimed as he exited the gargoyle into the corridor below the headmistress' tower. "What are you doing here?"

"I teach here, Mr. Diggory," Harry said respectfully. "The headmistress asked me to show you the way out."

"The way out?" Diggory got indignant. "I'm not leaving until we catch that dragon."

Harry sighed. "Sir," he said, "there is no dragon."

"That's what *she* said." Diggory pointed up toward the headmistress' office. "I didn't believe her, and I don't believe you. Now, get out of my way." He shoved past Harry and almost trampled Neville in his single-minded intent to find answers. "Where's the corridor to the hospital wing?" he demanded.

"Why? Are you ill?" Harry asked, knowing the castle had made certain adjustments after Hermione's warnings.

"Certainly not," Diggory huffed. "I want to question Madam Pomfrey about this so-called curse that was supposedly broken. I'm sure she has the records I want to see."

"Medical records are private," the witch in question said, coming up behind Harry and Diggory. "I am not allowed to show them to all and sundry."

"I am an official from the Ministry," Diggory insisted.

"*You* are with the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures," Poppy replied. "And I wouldn't show my medical records to the Minister of Magic himself. It would be against every oath I've taken as a mediwitch."

"This is preposterous!" Diggory stomped off down the stairs to the Entrance Hall. "The Ministry *will* hear about this! You people are hampering an official investigation." He whirled and faced the three of them where they stood on the stairs. "But then, it's not the first time now, is it?" he stated. "I've seen the records."

"Go and find your dragon, you silly old fool," Poppy said, waving toward the outside doors. "If you can," she added under her breath as he slammed the doors open and stomped down the steps and out toward the Forbidden Forest.

Harry and Neville grinned at each other before they turned to follow.

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