

The Choices We Make

by Pearle

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*** Chapters 125 to 136 are new with this posting ***

Choices: Chapters 1 to 20

Chapter 1 of 12

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Chapter 01 Decisions

Challenge: Choices

A/N: Take place after seventh year.

"Didn't you hear what I said? Get out!" he hissed. His voice was low, but carried the full force of his rage. "I don't want you here."

She clutched the edge of the desk, desperately trying not to hex him, trying to get him to listen to reason. "I don't see what the problem is. I can still arrange my classes..."

Severus slammed his hands on the desktop, his voice rising in anger. "Why are you still here? I've already decided, I told you to leave."

Hermione glared at him. "What makes you think the choice is yours to make?"

Chapter 02 - Marry in haste - Repent in leisure

Marry in haste. Repent in leisure.

How true that little adage turned out to be. He watched his wife flush with anger. Anger? Try rage, pure fury. He was lucky she was not able to cast the killing charm without raising her wand or he would be dead by now.

Wearily, Severus sank into his chair in defeat. "This...was a mistake. I have no intentions of keeping you to your original promise."

"Please, don't turn me away." Hermione's voice could hardly convey the anguish she was feeling.

"That's not up to you now, is it?" he asked with a sneer.

Chapter 03 - A Question Of Right or Wrong

He watched her eyes well up with tears, one lone teardrop slowly making its way down her cheek, his traitorous-hand wanting to gently sooth the droplet away.

"Hermione, you're young. You have your whole life ahead of you. I will not let you do this." He was trying to be noble, for once in his life. Why didn't she just go? The anger in her voice surprised him.

"I'm through trying to convince you I'm right. If I leave, I'm not coming back."

Finally. "Fine, go. Leave."

She stopped in the doorway. "Just remember, this was your choice, not mine."

Chapter 04 - Ripe With Consequences

He could just imagine her storming through their quarters as she packed her trunks. As if his thought put deed to word, several books and a cauldron rose in the air and flew through the hidden door between his office and their chambers.

His fireplace suddenly flamed to life, Poppy's head appearing in the green flames. "Severus, your private Floo is closed, would you tell Hermione I need to change her appointment from Thursday to Friday?"

"Her appointment?"

"Didn't she tell you...?" Someone yelling for Poppy could be heard in the background. "Severus, I have to go."

Tell him what?

Chapter 05 - A Fork In The Road

Severus stood silently for a moment, watching her pack. He was doing the right thing. He was sure of it.

So why did it feel so wrong?

"Poppy was trying to reach you. Your appointment has been changed to Friday morning."

She slammed the trunk closed before turning toward him. "I will send for the rest of my belongings once I get settled."

"Did you hear what I said?" he asked angrily.

Her icy glare cut him to the quick. "It is no concern of yours. You have made that abundantly clear. I will be fine. ~~We~~ We will be fine."

Chapter 06 - Regrets

Severus grabbed her arm as she tried to push past him. "You're pregnant."

It was a statement of fact, not a question.

"Let go of me. You're hurting my arm." Hermione wrenched her arm from his grasp. "I'll be back for the rest of my things tomorrow. This doesn't change anything. You've already stated you want nothing more to do with me."

"It changes everything. That's my child you're carrying. I will not permit you to leave."

Hermione's hand rose to cover her stomach as she threw his words back in his face. "That's not up to now, is it?"

Chapter 07 - Questions

She was having his child.

"I will not let you leave."

"I really don't care what you want."

"Hermione, think. Where will you go? What will you do?"

"Now you want to talk?" Her voice rose shrilly in disbelief. "It's a little too late for talking."

"Be reasonable."

"I'm being unreasonable? You told me to get out, you didn't want me here, or don't you remember?"

"That was before." Severus's eyes darkened. "When were you planning on telling me you were pregnant? If Poppy hadn't changed your appointment, I might never have known."

"What makes you think it's yours?"

Chapter 08 - The Consequences of Leaping Before You Look

Challenge: Leaving

Half-carrying, half-dragging her, he pulled Hermione through the corridor, ignoring her protests.

"Let go of me!"

He threw open the Hospital doors and deposited the angry witch on the closest cot, his hand holding her firmly in place. Did she really think he would let her leave? "I refuse to play games with you."

"You're the one who told me to get out."

"I've changed my mind. Poppy!" he bellowed.

"Well, I haven't!"

"Hermione? Are you alright?" Poppy asked, worriedly.

"Perform a DNA spell."

"But..."

"Just do it!" Severus yelled. She was pregnant with his child. She wasn't going anywhere.

Chapter 09 - Defiance

Challenge: Expecting

Severus held the angry witch in place. He was tired of feeling as if he were riding a bucking dragon. She'd be better off without him, but that point was moot if she were truly pregnant with his child.

Poppy's eyes widened in shock, "Severus..."

"Do it! Cast the damn charm!" Not his child, he'd show her.

Poppy's wand glowed purple. Purple? "She's blocking the spell."

Angrily, Severus turned on Hermione. "Enough!"

"I agree. I tried, but you wouldn't listen to me. Well, now I'm through with you." Hermione left Severus speechless as she turned and walked out the door.

Chapter 10 - Alone Again, Naturally

Challenge: Expecting

Severus sat heavily on the empty cot. Wearily, he wiped a hand across his eyes.

"Severus? What's going on? How could you doubt the paternity of the child she's carrying? What did Hermione mean she was through...?" Whatever else Poppy was going to say died in her throat as she looked into the tormented eyes of the broken man before her.

Silently, Severus rose to his full height. Drawing the tattered remains of his pride around him, it was all he had left now, he returned to his quarters, alone.

.

She was gone. Maybe this was for the best.

Chapter 11 - One Is A Lonely Number

Challenge: Expecting/"I'd give my wand-hand..."

Severus looked around the empty room. He never realized how much her presence filled the void in his life. She'd only been gone a few hours, but he missed her more than he thought he had the right to.

'Had she run to Potter?' he wondered bitterly. He sure as hell wasn't going allow that brat to have his wife. Or raise his child.

"I'd give my wand-hand to go back and undo the damage I did this morning." He looked at their wedding picture over the mantle, a smiling Hermione waving happily at the camera.

"Hermione," he said softly.

Chapter 12 - Too Late Now

Challenge: In the dark.

He'd reached for her in his sleep again, his subconscious mind refusing to believe she was really gone. He'd woken up almost every night about this time when his hand closed around empty space.

How long had it been? He closed his eyes, calculating the last time he'd seen Hermione in the hospital wing. Had it really been three weeks? She would be about two months along now, not really showing yet.

He knew he should have followed her and brought her back, it was too late now, too much time had passed.

Frustrated, he turned over.

Life moved on.

Chapter 13 - Disenchantment

Challenge: Leaving

"Why don't you talk to him, it's almost a month already?" Harry couldn't believe he was encouraging Hermione to talk with Snape.

"I'm sorry, Harry, I know I should look for a place to stay..."

"No, that's not it, you can stay here as long as you want, but you're not happy, he's not happy. And with a baby on the way..." Harry trailed off.

"He doesn't want me." Hermione stared out the window, Hogwarts looming in the distance. It was time to move out from under its shadow. She smiled sadly. "I guess you could say: the magic's gone."

Chapter 14 - Two Hearts Don't Always Make A Pair

Challenge: Broken

A/N: The title is from the song of the same name, recorded by Ronnie Milsap

Harry, Ginny, and Hermione walked up the path from Hogsmeade. Hogwarts was again host to the annual Victory celebration having been the site of the final battle.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm fine. He has no hold over me. Whether I see him or not, is of no consequence to me."

His heart dropped as she walked in...with Potter at her side. Even the presence of Ginevra didn't soften the blow.

"Talk to her, Severus. You've wounded each other enough. Think of the child." Minerva's advice adding to the pain he felt.

Think of the child, but was it *his* child?

Chapter 15 - Hope Springs Eternal

Challenge: Compromise

Her breathing hitched as she watched the imposing figure in black move towards her.

"Potter, Miss Weasley." He bowed stiffly, his expression carefully composed to show no emotion. "Madame, may I have this dance?"

Reluctantly, Hermione followed him. "What do you want, Severus?"

Slowly, they moved around the dance floor. He could feel the gentle swell of her stomach as she moved with him.

"How are you?"

"Why are you asking? It's obvious you don't care."

Severus sighed, refusing to release his hold on her as the song ended. "What will it take for you to come back to me?"

Chapter 16 - Not A Chance In Hell

A/N: Both attending the annual victory celebration, Hermione rebuffs Severus's offer of reconciliation.

"Let go of me!" Hermione yelled.

"Hermione..." he hissed.

"I don't believe you. You throw me out, when you find out I'm pregnant, you decide I should stay but question the baby's paternity. And now, I'm supposed to come back, as if nothing happened, without so much as an 'I'm sorry' on your part?" Hermione's voice rose shrilly in the suddenly quiet hall. "It'll be a cold day in Hell before you ever set eyes on this child, Snape! And for the record, it's a boy. And yes, Severus, it's yours. Fool that I am, there has only been you."

Chapter 17 - Who Are You And What Have You Done With Severus Snape?

"Hermione, wait!" Ignoring the stares of those around him, Severus chased after Hermione as she ran from the Great Hall. Desperation gave him purpose, driving him to catch up with her at the front entrance. "Please, I know you've every right to hate me, to never speak to me again..."

Despite her resolution to be done with him, Hermione stopped; she'd never heard him plead with anyone before. Her voice was cold as she turned to face him, "What do you want?"

"Just let me talk to you. I promise, if you wish to leave after, I...I won't stop you."

Chapter 18 - Hermione Doesn't Live Here Anymore

He gestured to the corridor leading to the dungeons. "Perhaps our quarters would be more private?"

Hermione eyed her husband. "Your quarters, I don't live here anymore."

Resolutely, Severus nodded. "Fine, my quarters."

Silently they made their way. Once inside, Severus was at a loss on how to begin.

"Would you like a cup of tea?"

"Say what you have to say so I can leave with a clear conscience."

"I never wanted you to leave, not really." He sighed heavily. "I've always loved you."

"You sure have a funny way of showing it. Why should I believe you?"

"Veritaserum."

Chapter 19 - And The Truth Shall Set You Free

Severus pulled a small bottle of clear liquid from his coat pocket and set it on the coffee table next to his teacup.

"You'll take Veritaserum?"

Wearily he nodded. "You may ask me anything you wish, I will have no choice but to answer truthfully."

Hermione's voice registered her surprise. "Anything?"

"I know of no other way to convince you I'm telling the truth. Anything I say will sound like some underhanded scheme just to get you back."

"And the truth will change my mind?"

Severus laughed bitterly, "I believe the saying is 'And the truth shall set you free.'"

Chapter 20 - A Lack of Lies

Severus tipped three drops of the clear liquid in a glass of water he'd summoned and drank the mixture down. He could feel the loss of control over his mind as the veritaserum took hold.

"What did you want to tell me?"

"I want you to come back." His voice was low, the words seeming to cause him great pain.

"Why?"

"Because I love you."

"If you love me, why did you try to send me away?"

"You deserve better. I was wrong to ever marry you."

"And now?" But she knew the answer even before he did. The baby.

TBC

Choices: Chapters 21 to 40

Chapter 2 of 12

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Chapter 21 - What's Love Got To Do With It?

"You're carrying my child. I can't let either of you go."

"What about finding someone better?" Hermione watched his face contort with the effort of trying to avoid answering the question.

"It's too late for that now."

"Do you still love me?"

"Yes," he whispered.

"And the baby?" Did he still doubt her?

"I never wanted children, but it's my child, I know that. What is, is."

Hermione held back the tears that threatened to fall. "I'm sorry, Severus, I need to go."

"But I just said I love you."

"I know. But that's just not enough, anymore. I'm sorry."

Chapter 22 - As Clear As Mud

"What do you mean it isn't enough? What do you want me to say? I took the bloody veritaserum, you have to know I'm telling you the truth?" Severus glared at his wife; not liking the way the conversation was going.

"That's just it, isn't it? I can't even pretend you're trying to manipulate me. You really don't understand."

Severus found it difficult to hide his annoyance. "Understand what? Obviously, I'm missing some salient point. Why don't you enlighten me?"

"Love wasn't enough before. Why do you think it should be the answer now?"

"Hermione, what is it you want?"

Chapter 23 - Strangers

"I want you to need me, to want me. I want you to let me in. We've been married for almost two years, and I still don't know who you are. You keep me at arm's length. You're polite, you're considerate, but I never see you with your mask down." Hermione sighed, her voice quiet with regret. "The only time I get real emotion from you, is when you're angry. Even when we make love, you hold back. You're so quiet I wouldn't know you've come if I didn't find evidence of it. I need you to be human, Severus."

Chapter 24 - Candy And Flowers - A Romance Do Not Make

"I'm the same man I was when you married me. I've never pretended to be something I'm not. If I've never made you happy, why did you marry me? Did you think I would change, become some love sick sap that brought you candy and flowers?"

Sadly, Hermione shook her head. "You still don't understand. I don't need candy and flowers, or poetry for that matter. I need you to be my partner, to make me a part of your life. Your cauldron means more to you than I do."

"My cauldron doesn't give me grief like you do, either."

Chapter 25 - Who's On First

Challenge: Choices/Potion of Fyre

A/N: The title is from the Abbott and Costello routine of the same name.

"That's true, but your cauldron doesn't keep you warm at night like I do, either."

Severus smiled. "It depends. If I use it to brew a Sleeping potion, then no, but a Potion of Fyre might do the trick."

This was the Severus she'd fallen in love with. This is what she needed, this feeling of being connected. "It's a shame I can't keep you dosed with veritaserum indefinitely."

Severus pulled Hermione into his arms and gently hugged her. He missed holding her; he missed...her. He'd do whatever was needed to stop her from leaving.

"Hermione, please...can't we try again?"

Chapter 26 - Under The Influence

She'd never heard him plead before. His eyes were still glazed looking. He was still under the influence of veritaserum; it had to be the truth.

Try again, but to what purpose?

"I can't go back to the way things were, Severus. I won't. I know you love me. God help me, I love you, too. But it's just not enough."

He knew if she walked out the door this time, she wouldn't be coming back. He was looking at a lifetime without her, of never knowing his own child.

"I can change. What will it take to convince you?"

Chapter 27 - Insults And Insights

"It's not a matter of changing. I don't want you to suddenly become best mates with Harry. Or start wearing lime green robes. You have to stop shutting me out. I need you to be the man you were when you married me."

"I don't know if that man still exists."

"He did back then. Maybe you can find him again."

"And if you leave, will you go back to Potter?" The name brought a sneer to his lips.

"No. Believe it or not, Harry thought we should talk. See if we can work things out."

"How kind of him."

Chapter 28 - Words To Live By

"Stop it! This is getting us nowhere." Hermione sighed. "I'll let you know when I get settled in. There's a house in Hogsmeade I've thought about renting. It's not large, but it there's enough space for the baby and me."

His voice broke with desperation, the veritaserum forcing the truth from his lips. "Hermione, don't do this. Please, don't leave me. I'm sorry I hurt you. That was never my intention."

Tears flowed unchecked down the young woman's cheeks. "I know that, but we can't keep hurting each other. It not fair to either one of us, or the baby."

Chapter 29 - A Change In Tactics

She was leaving.

He could've slipped her some type of love potion. Or put her under the Imperious Curse. He could've forced her to stay, and been well within his rights. But neither magic, nor force, was the answer. He wanted her to *want* to be with him.

"I meant what I said. I want to start over." He struggled to get the words out. "Rent the house, do what you have to, but let me court you again. You don't want me shutting you out, I'm asking the same of you. Don't shut me out, give me a chance."

Chapter 30 - Echoes of the Past

Hermione sighed. "You want me to give you a chance? Funny how our words keep chasing themselves, isn't that what I asked you to do?"

Severus held her hands, refusing to let go, refusing to let *her* go. He struggled to stop speaking, the veritaserum overriding his ability to edit his thoughts. "That day in the hospital, if I'd known I was going to survive...I wouldn't have agreed to marry you. I was...delirious. I would have agreed to anything, at the time. It seemed the only way to ..."

Hermione tried to pull away. "The only way to what, Severus?"

Chapter 31 - Sometimes Truth Isn't The Answer

"I don't mean it the way it sounds."

"The only way to what, Severus?"

"The only way to shut you up," he hissed. "You sat there, so solemnly tending my wounds. Applying potions to counteract the hexes, all the while quietly whispering in my ear to wake up. That you were waiting for me. That you would devote yourself to me, if I would just wake up."

"You never cared."

"I loved you too much to condemn you to a life with me, but you refused to listen."

Knowing the veritaserum wouldn't let him lie, Hermione pushed on. "And now?"

Chapter 32 - Confessions in the Dark

"And now? Now, I don't want you to leave. I don't know, maybe I didn't believe you'd really go." Warily he dragged a hand through his hair.

"Is it your pride, or is it really me you want back?"

"I don't know anymore." No longer resisting, the words came out in a quiet monotone. "Sometimes I dream you're still here. And then I wake up and I'm alone. Stephens managed to blow up three cauldrons in one period, and all I could think was Hermione would tell me Longbottom was a master compared to this one. It's you I've missed."

Chapter 33 - Still Slytherin After All

Despite her churning emotions, Hermione laughed as she listened to Severus. "You're right, Neville never did that much damage in a single period."

Severus's eyes softened. "That's something else I miss, your laugh. I love you. I was a fool to let you throw your life away on an embittered ex-Death Eater, but the time for regretting that is passed. Do you really want our child to grow up without its' mother *and* father?"

Hermione glared at him. "That's not fair, and you know it!"

"I was wrong to push you away. I'm sorry, one chance, that's all I'm asking."

Chapter 34 - And Now?

Hermione sighed. She didn't believe he deserved anything. She'd tried to talk to him time and time again during their marriage, but there comes a point when you just stop trying.

He'd dismissed her feelings with an idle wave of his hand, never trying to understand what made her so unhappy with her life.

And then, when she demanded he listen or she'd leave, when she'd finally had enough, he *threw* her out, vehemently, insisting she leave, for her own good.

Until he learned of the baby. Protectively, her hand moved to her stomach.

The movement did not go unnoticed.

Chapter 35 - Further Consequence

"Hermione..." Severus watched her intently, still clueless as to what else he could say to convince her to stay, or at least give him another chance.

"All right, Severus, you win," she said wearily.

"You'll stay?"

"No. But I'll let you 'court me', as you so charmingly put it. I spoke with the witch that owns the house in Hogsmeade I looked at. She's willing to rent to me on a month-to-month basis. That will do, for now."

Severus nodded, his smile tight. At least she wasn't shutting him out entirely. He still had some chance of changing her mind.

Chapter 36 - Action and...

He noticed the change in her expression immediately, not sure what it meant. "Are you all right?"

Coming to a decision, Hermione rose from the chair she'd been sitting in and moved next to him on the couch. Severus watched as she opened her robes part way to expose her stomach. Taking his hand, she gently placed it against her bare skin, quietly mumbling a spell he didn't recognize.

"What...?"

"Shhh!"

They sat quietly for a moment, before he felt a slight movement beneath his hand.

"Is that the baby?" he asked in awe, suddenly finding it hard to speak.

Chapter 37 - ... and Reaction

Hermione smiled genuinely for the first time in a long time. "Yeah, it's him. He's usually a bit livelier in the evening, but lately he's been making his presence known all day."

Severus sat quietly; stunned as he felt the life he'd helped create. "When...when are you due?"

"Late November. Poppy said sometime around the 25th."

Reluctantly, he allowed her to remove his hand, still too overwhelmed with emotion to do little more than sit there. His son. He felt his son moving.

Hermione gathered her things. "I'll contact you in a few days, after I'm settled in."

"You're leaving?"

Chapter 38 - For Every Action There Is An Equal And Opposite Reaction

Hermione stood still, faltering under his glare. "I agreed to let you court me."

Shakily, Severus ran a hand through his hair. "I know that's what I asked, but that was before."

"Before?"

"Damn it!" Angrily, Severus rose and started to pace. "I 'courted' you already. We *did* this already. I know I've been a bastard. I promise, I'll change. But after feeling the baby...how can you just walk out?" He sat heavily on the couch, his anger suddenly spent.

"If I don't, we'll never work things out." Gently, she kissed his cheek. "I'll owl you when I'm settled in."

Chapter 39 - Leaving

With an inner-strength she didn't know she possessed, Hermione turned toward the door.

"All right, fine. I'll walk you to Hogsmeade."

"Severus, you don't have to. I'm capable of getting back on my own." She was still staying with Harry. The last thing Hermione wanted was a scene between the two.

"I won't hex Potter, if that's what you're worried about," he said, smirking.

The conversation was strained, as they moved along the path. Severus cast about his mind for topics before quietly asking what she planned to do about her Charms apprenticeship. Talking amicably, they soon reached Harry's home.

Chapter 40 - Moving On

Severus looked around, not wanting to let Hermione go. "Potter's living here?" he asked.

"He's building a home in Godric's Hollow. It won't be done for another six months, so he's living here until then."

"Hermione..."

"Please, don't. We can't go through this every time I see you. I can't take it."

Severus nodded. "All right. I don't want you lifting anything heavy. When are you moving?"

"I'll let you know. Most likely in a week or two."

"I..." Severus pulled her to him. Leaning forward, he captured her lips.

The kiss was bittersweet. Silently, he turned and walked away.

Choices: Chapters 41 to 46

Chapter 3 of 12

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Chapter 41 – And So It Begins

Hedwig appeared at breakfast, two days later, bearing a note from Hermione. Severus glared at the owl before removing the scroll attached to its' leg and sending it on its way.

"Shoo! I'll take care of this myself."

Abruptly, Severus left the Great Hall and headed to his office. He only had a few minutes before classes started.

Severus,

I'll be moving into Eighteen Thistle Way this Friday. Harry has offered to help me move, too. Let me know your plans.

Hermione

It was as he expected, with one exception – she'd always signed her missives *Love, Hermione* in the past.

Chapter 42 – Lateral Moves

The remainder of the week passed in a haze. Friday found him saddled with the boy who continued to live and make his life a living hell. The situation was strained, at best.

"Potter and I will do all the heavy work. You just need to direct."

"Severus, I'm pregnant, not infirm. I appreciate your concern, but there's no reason I can't do this myself. How do you expect me to manage after the baby's born?"

"I'm hoping you'll be back at Hogwarts before that happens."

"Severus..."

"I'm not pushing you. But you asked a question and I answered it."

Chapter 43 – A Cold Day In...

"For both your sakes, I hope you work things out. A kid needs *both* his parents."

"Even if I'm the father?"

Harry shrugged. "Too late now," he said with a smile.

Thirty years of loathing rose to the forefront, with an effort, Severus refrained from verbally flaying the young man. If he was going to get Hermione back, he might as well start with Potter. "A child needs both parents, preferably, living in the *same* home. Perhaps you can convince Hermione of that notion?"

Harry looked out the window.

"What are you doing?"

"Checking to see if Hell froze over."

Chapter 44 – Looks Can be Deceiving

"Harry! Severus!"

Harry grinned sheepishly. "Why don't I set the protection wards and you can reinforce them when I'm done?"

Severus nodded. He pulled a small package from his pocket and handed it to Hermione. "If you're going to be living here alone, I want you to have this."

"What is it?" Hermione removed the paper to reveal a small pocket mirror.

"It's a two-way mirror. I have the other one. If you need me, for any reason, just say my name into it; you'll appear in my mirror and I'll be able to talk in yours."

"Thank you, Severus."

Chapter 45 – Warding His Heart

"You seem to be handling this better than I thought. Are you okay?"

"No I'm not okay, but you don't seem to be giving me much choice."

Hermione sighed. "Why don't you check the wards? I'll make tea."

Severus stood in the doorway watching her move. He'd never taken the time to just watch her before; it was something he would always regret.

"Severus, you startled me. Where's Harry? Tea's ready."

"He left. Said to tell you he'd owl you later. You look tired, maybe I should go."

"I could use a good night's sleep."

"Are you...? I'd like to..."

Chapter 46 – Beginnings?

"Severus?"

"Can I take you to dinner tomorrow night?"

Hermione smiled. "I'd like that."

"I'll be round at six-thirty to pick you up, if that's okay?"

"That's fine."

He closed the distance between them and pulled her into his arms. Where his previous kisses had been tentative, this one left no doubt as to his intentions.

"Severus, it's too soon..."

"Don't worry, I'm going." She could protest all she liked; he'd felt her respond to him. Maybe all was not lost. "If you need me, use the mirror. Until tomorrow, goodnight."

Stepping out the front door, he Disapparated to Hogwarts.

TBC

A/N: To all that have reviewed and encouraged this series – thank you! More soon.

Choices: Chapters 47 to 54

Chapter 4 of 12

He was a fool to hold Hermione to her original promise. It was time to rectify that mistake. But it seemed fate, and Hermione had other plans. Can Severus learn to live with the choices he's made, even at the cost of his own happiness?

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The Choices We Make

Chapter 47 - As Far From All Right As You Can Get

Deep in thought as he walked up the path to the front door of Hogwarts from the Apparition Point, Severus failed to notice the figure standing in the doorway.

"Severus, are you all right, my boy?"

"Albus." He pinched the bridge of his nose, a headache threatening to add to his problems. "Define all right."

"Did you see Hermione?"

"I saw my wife. Lucky me. I have a date with her tomorrow night. A bloody date," he said sarcastically.

"Give it time, she'll come round."

"If there's nothing more, Headmaster?"

Severus walked off in the direction of the dungeons, alone.

Chapter 48 – Mirror, Mirror On The Wall...

He stopped before the mirror to straighten his collar for the third time in the last ten minutes. He thought about adding a few enhancing charms, but Hermione had married him as is, so, as is would be how he remained.

Severus sneered at his reflection. "Maybe if you'd have used a few charms in the first place, she wouldn't have left you." Fortunately, the mirror had been spelled for silence. There was no acceptable response to that remark. "And if you'd listened, you might not be forced to date your own wife now."

Sighing, he headed out the door.

Chapter 49 – Somebody's Knockin'

Drawing a calming breath, he knocked sharply on the front door. He could hear Hermione moving inside just before the door opened.

"Hi, come on in." Hermione gestured to a worn sofa that hadn't been there when she moved in. "Have a seat. I'll be right with you."

He watched silently as she disappeared down the narrow hallway to the back bedroom. Severus snorted. Invited to sit and wait in his wife's home. His life was unhinged and here he was sitting quietly hoping to convince the mother of his unborn child that she belonged back at Hogwarts with him.

Chapter 50 – Should I Let Him In?

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to keep you waiting. I was taking my daily potions when you knocked. I just didn't want to forget them."

"Are you all right?" Severus took the time to examine her face. While he thought she could do with more sleep, he couldn't detect anything a miss.

Hermione nodded. "Other than I seem to be tired all the time, and still a bit nauseous, I'm fine. Shall we?"

"If you're tired, we don't have to go."

"I'm fine."

"You just said you were tired."

"Pregnant women tire easily."

Severus glared at her. "I wouldn't know."

Chapter 51 – Defense Mechanisms

Severus held up a hand to stop the complaint he was sure was coming. "I'm sorry. That was uncalled for. Dinner at the Three Broomsticks? It's close and we can come right back here."

"You want to go to the Three Broomsticks?"

"Unless you have somewhere else in mind?"

"No, it's just that we'll most likely run into people we know."

Severus frowned. "And you rather not be seen with me?"

"It's not a question of being seen with you, I married you, didn't I?" she answered angrily.

"How kind of you to remember. I assumed you'd forgotten that fact."

Chapter 52 – Regrets, I've Had A Few

Hermione sat heavily on the couch. "This isn't going to work, is it?"

"We're just out of...practice. It'll be fine."

"Out of practice? You've got to be kidding."

"Hermione, I still love you. The more I think about it, the more I realize I want you and the baby, with me. Our quarters are too quiet. I never knew how lonely I could be, until you left."

Hermione sat quietly weighing her words, afraid whatever she might say next would hinder the situation.

Severus smiled tiredly and extended his hand. "May I have the honor of escorting you to dinner?"

Chapter 53 - Open Mouth And Insert Foot

Bells chimed as Hermione pushed open the door to the Three Broomsticks. Rosmerta looked up with a smile. "Hermione, it's good to see you. I was afraid you'd hide yourself away thinking about Sna..."

Severus stepped through the doorway and out of the shadows. He nodded to Rosmerta, thinking she was doing an excellent imitation of a fish: her mouth open and gapping. His hand at the small of Hermione's back directed her to a quiet booth in the corner.

Rosmerta followed them to the table, her face slightly red with embarrassment. "Uh, what can I get you two?"

Chapter 54 – Words Fail Me

After taking their order, Rosmerta left the pair alone.

“What’ve you decided to do with your apprenticeship? I know how important it is to you. Did Filius say there’d be any harm to the baby if you continued?”

“He didn’t see a problem as long as I don’t push myself. It may take an extra semester to finish the apprenticeship, with the baby due late November, I’m not sure if I’ll be able to finish up my exams.”

For the second time in her life, Severus Snape rendered his wife speechless.

“I’ll help in anyway that I can,” he said quietly.

TBC

Choices: Chapters 55 to 61

Chapter 5 of 12

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The Choices We Make

Chapter 55: A Child By Any Other Name...Would Still Annoy

Hermione stared blankly at her estranged husband. He would help her with the baby? “Severus, you don't like children; you've never wanted any. Why would you help now?”

“No, I've never been...fond of children, but this would be my child. *Our* child. From what I can gather, your feelings change when the offspring in question, is yours,” he mumbled.

Despite the tension, Hermione started laughing. “Fond of children? More like hated the little blighters, I'd say. Sorry, maybe that should be the little offsprings.”

Severus smiled, at least he could still make her laugh, that had to count for something.

Chapter 56: How Do We Get From There To Here?

Hermione's hand went to her stomach.

“The baby?”

“Yeah,” she said with a nod. “He's more active than usual today.”

“Would you rather go home?”

“No, I'm fine.” Hermione sighed. “What are we going to do?”

“Do you mean now, or in general? I assumed we were here to eat dinner. Did you have something else in mind?” Light humor seemed to relax the witch, detracting her from the problem at hand. He hoped to show her they could still relate to each other, that they could still have a future together, regardless of the thoughtless sentiments he'd spouted previously.

Chapter 57: We Always Want What We Can't Have

“Filius thinks I'm ready to take a few of the upper level class. I start Monday with fourth year Ravenclaws.”

“You know, you don't have to leave the castle after classes. I promise I won't accost you. I haven't seen you so much as take lunch in the Great Hall, the last few weeks.” Severus gestured to her midsection. “With an increased work load and the baby on the way, you should be eating regularly.”

Odd, it had taken her leaving him, to get him to demonstrate this level of concern. It seems we always want what we can't have.

Chapter 58: Dealing With The Here And Now

Hermione played with her fork, not meeting his eyes. “It didn't feel right, attending meals in the Great Hall when we're not together. Besides, that was only two mornings a

week. With the added classes, I'll be at Hogwarts all day Monday and Wednesday as well as Friday mornings now, starting next week." She'd been running off, attempting to avoid him at all costs.

"Which is why you need to eat regularly. Three meals a day."

Ah, Monday and Wednesday afternoons – fifth year Slytherins. Maybe he could engineer a few 'chance' encounters under the guise of concerns about a student.

Chapter 59: Is There An *Us* In Our Future?

"And what about us?" she asked quietly.

"Is there still an *us*?"

"Regardless of us getting back together, there's still the baby to consider."

Severus's eyes shone with intensity. "I told you, I'll do whatever you want, whatever it takes to make you happy again."

"Even if that means we don't get back together as husband and wife?" Hermione knew he wanted her back. He was contrite in his actions, but how long would this new attitude last? Would they revert back to form if they reconciled, Hermione still playing the victim, Severus, once again, the villain in their relationship?

Chapter 60: Divining The Future or Opinions Better Left Unsaid

"Why don't we wait and see what develops?"

Hermione nodded as Rosmerta approached the table.

"Can I get you two anything else?"

"Our check, please."

"Congratulations on the little one. Babies are always such a blessing."

"Thank you, I can hardly wait." Hermione's smile was dazzling as she thought of her unborn child.

Severus settled the bill, stiffly acknowledging the witch's comments and escorted Hermione out the door.

Rosmerta watched the couple leave. She'd thought Hermione had been a fool when she married Snape, war hero or not.

"That's one relationship," she thought sadly, "that was doomed from the start."

Chapter 61: Questions Without Answers

They walked side-by-side down the narrow lane, not quite touching. "Have you thought about names for the baby? Any special preferences, other than we don't call him Harry?"

"I think I shall have to kill myself if you name him Harry."

"Yeah, I didn't think you'd like that name, but it should be a joint decision. It's *our* baby."

Severus was thankful for the cover of darkness. Just last week she'd been resigned to raising the child alone, now she willingly talked *their* child. Could he accept the role of father if it didn't include husband? He didn't know.

TBC

Choices: Chapters 62 to 69

Chapter 6 of 12

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The Choices We Make

Chapter 62: Dating Your Wife Is Never Easy

They stood nervously regarding each other outside Hermione's front door.

"Do you want to come in for coffee or..."

"No, I'll let you get your rest." If he stayed, he couldn't be sure he could maintain his calm, irrational emotions and questions were fighting for control in his mind.

"I am a bit tired, but you'll think about names, won't you?"

Severus nodded. "How will you be getting to Hogwarts on Monday?"

"The same as always, walking up the path from here to the school. Why?"

"You shouldn't have to exert yourself. I'll speak to Albus about connecting your Floo."

Chapter 63: A Startling Confession

Hermione nodded, she knew Severus was trying to keep his end of the bargain. Truth be told, his new contentious nature was a bit unnerving to the witch. The sudden change in her husband, though welcome, did make her doubt his sincerity.

Severus watched the range of emotions playing across his wife's face. Even without Legilimency, he could read the doubt in her eyes. "You have no idea how much I want you back. Hurting you is probably the worst thing I've ever done." His eyes gleamed in their intensity. "Without exception."

Hermione frowned. "Worse than taking the Dark Mark?"

Chapter 64: A Running Tally of Mistakes I Have Made

"Joining the Dark Lord was an act of idiocy I may never overcome, but hurting you was unforgivable. The only excuse I can offer, feeble as it may be, is that I was only thinking of you. I've told you before, I never should've allowed you to marry me. I could've released you from your promise. But I was too weak, too selfish, to let you go; instead I married you, not caring if my love poisoned you. I was trying to make it up to you when I sent you away by giving you a chance to start over."

Chapter 65: Skepticism Runs Rampant

"None of that really matters, anymore. I never really wanted you to go, and now with the baby on the way...I know it'll take time for you to believe me, to accept that I really want this to work." He laughed softly. "If it were me, I don't know that I would believe me, either, so perhaps I can understand your skepticism. Let's just let things be for now."

Severus leaned forward and gently kissed his wife goodnight. "I'll speak to Albus in the morning and have your Floo connected to my office. Get some sleep. I'll see you Monday."

Chapter 66: Of Potions and Tactics

"You're wrong, you know. You didn't coerce me into marrying you. I wanted to. I went into this marriage with my eyes wide open."

Severus shook his head. "You only think you did."

"Are you telling me you slipped me a love potion?" Harry and Ron would have a field day with that bit of information. They were convinced from the start that Severus had somehow bewitched their friend.

Severus looked aghast. "You wound me, my dear, to think I would've tried anything so trite as a love potion. Slytherin tactics are much more effective, and so much more subtle."

Chapter 67: Slytherin Sex God

"Ah, the whole Slytherin Sex God thing." Though secretly, Hermione had to admit, while her husband may not have been vocal in his own responses, he was an expert at extracting a wide range of sounds from her when he chose to focus on her pleasure.

It was something she had missed over the last two months: the touch of his hands when he pleased her, the feel of his body when they made love, his warm presence as she lay back against him, and the comforting weight of his arm on her hip before dropping peacefully off to sleep.

Chapter 68: Unfulfilled Desires

Severus smiled; there was that response again. It's what kept him going. Strengthening his resolve, he leaned forward and gently brushed his lips against Hermione's earlobe. "I will contact you tomorrow, after I speak with Albus. I'll wait while you let yourself in. I can't leave until I know you're safe," he whispered silkily in her ear.

Hermione's eyes slipped shut, her breathing ragged. His warm breathe in her ear, the heat of his body, was making her blood boil. Silently, she cursed the pregnancy hormones coursing through her blood, before adding a curse aimed at her husband as well.

Chapter 69: A Chance Worth Taking

"Do you know what you're doing to me?"

"Yes, I'm making the most of my last chance." Pulling her into his arms, he kissed the witch goodnight again. Releasing her from his embrace, he turned her toward the door. "Go in before I lose my resolve and follow you."

Nodding, she lowered the wards and let herself in. Hermione turned before closing the door. "Goodnight, Severus, and thank you, I enjoyed myself tonight."

"Goodnight, Hermione." Feeling the wards fall back in place, Severus Apparated back to the main gates of Hogwarts. Lost in thought, he walked up the front path.

TBC

Choices: Chapters 70 to 78

Chapter 7 of 12

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The Choices We Make

Chapter 70: Life Is Full of Minor Annoyances

Once again, Albus greeted him at the door.

"How's Hermione? I trust all went well tonight?"

Severus snarled at his friend. "Don't you have anything better to do than stand here waiting to annoy me?"

Albus smiled. "Well?"

"It went...fine. As well a date with my own wife can go." Severus sighed. Leaving Hermione at her door had been more difficult than he'd anticipated. "By the way, you need to connect her Floo to my office. She can't keep trudging up the path from Hogsmeade. Especially since she's taken on more work. I don't want her to tire herself out."

Chapter 71: Tempting Fate or Put On A Happy Face

"For obvious reasons, I can't leave an open connection. Is there a way to contact her when she's ready to come through?"

"What about setting a time to open and close the Floo?"

Albus shook his head. "I'd rather not have anything that specific set up. There hasn't been any real trouble in the last few years. Still, it's never wise to tempt fate."

Severus snorted, he knew all about fate. "I gave her a two-way mirror. She'll call me when she's ready, you can open the connection then."

"Splendid. Smile, things are looking up."

"Right. Wonderful." He agreed, miserably.

Chapter 72: The Edge of Reason

Saturday turned into Sunday, the weather warmer than usual. Severus contemplated the stack of essays in front of him, not really seeing them. Perhaps he could set up a small garden outside the side entrance. Hermione often commented how much she missed her parent's garden. It might give her a reason to visit their quarters, if only to check on the plants.

Holding the two-way mirror, Severus called to her. "Hermione."

The image of his estranged wife, a quill stuck messily through her hair, her expression one of intense concentration, appeared in his mirror.

"Hermione," he intoned, louder this time.

Chapter 73: Eavesdropping

The witch jumped. "Oh great, not only do I dream about him, now I'm hearing his voice when he's not here."

A sly smile appeared on Severus's lips. "And what, pray tell, do these dreams entail?"

"Severus? Where are you?"

"You're not going to tell me your dreams?"

"Where are you?"

"Pick up the mirror you have propped to the side and you'll see me."

The two-way mirror he'd given her. She'd forgotten about it. It was like looking into a wizarding photo, without the loop. His lean image looked back at her.

"Good afternoon, I trust you slept well?"

Chapter 74: There's No Place Like Home

"Good afternoon, yourself, I did sleep well. I'm just going over the lesson plans for the classes I'm taking over."

"I won't keep you. I spoke with Albus. Contact me tomorrow by mirror when you're ready to come through and he'll open the Floo network. You'll come through in my office."

"Thank you. I really do appreciate it. The walk to school is fine, it's the trip home that's getting tiring."

Unconsciously, Severus winced at her use of the word 'home' when referring to the cottage she was renting. Home should have been with him, in their chambers at Hogwarts.

Chapter 75: A Glimpse of Things To Come

"Which is exactly the reason you should not be walking up and back. Is there anything I can help you with?"

Hermione sighed. "No, Filius has the lessons already planned. I'm just reviewing the next set of charms. Tell Albus thank you for me. It'll be nice to sleep in a bit since I don't have to allow for travel time. I can call to you when I'm ready. How does eight a.m. sound?"

"That's fine. You'll be able to have breakfast before your first class."

"Severus, I...I don't know what to say. You've gone above and beyond. Thank you."

Chapter 76: Understanding

She should not have had to thank him for caring. Hadn't that been one of the problems she'd pointed out, his lack of involvement in their marriage? This should've been a natural part of their relationship, not just a reaction to circumstances.

Severus shook his head; maybe he'd actually learned something.

"Don't thank me, I've a vested interest in your continued good health. You need to remember to stop and eat; I know how you get when you're involved in something. I'll have the mirror with me tonight when I make rounds, just in case. Call if you need me."

Chapter 77: Of Zippers and Reality

Hermione laughed. "Be careful which pocket you put the mirror in. I don't think you want the sound of my voice issuing from your zipper while you're walking around."

While he found it difficult to voice his pleasure, Hermione had no such problem. His body responded to the image of his wife, in the flesh, her voice coming from the very area of his body she had just mentioned.

She smiled as she watched Severus shift in his chair, pleased she seemed to be having an effect on her taciturn husband. "I'll call you in the morning. Take care, Severus."

Chapter 78: Forty-Two Days and Counting

He didn't want to sever the connection; all he had to look forward to was bad essays and another evening alone. Severus regarded his desk calendar. School was over in six weeks, after that, Hermione wouldn't be coming to the castle on a regular basis. He'd have to schedule dates if he wanted to see her. Six weeks. He'd have to make the most of that time.

He had a month and a half to win her over, to prove he'd changed. Forty-two days to show her how much he cared.

Severus sighed, he only hoped it was enough time.

TBC

A/N: Just a quick note to thank all those that have been following *Choices*.

I did have every intention of answering each review, but RL has dramatically cut into my free time lately, so I have been spending the little free time I have, writing instead (yes, before you ask, this does include finishing the next chapter of *Dances...grin*). More "*Choices*" (and "*Dances*") to come!

Choices: Chapters 79 to 86

Chapter 8 of 12

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The Choices We Make

Chapter 79: Monday, Monday

"Hasn't she called yet, it's almost eight o'clock?"

Severus glared at the man in the portrait. "I'm well aware of the time, Phineas. She should be calling any..."

"Severus?"

Hermione's image appeared in the mirror he held.

"Good morning. Are you ready to come through?"

The image in the mirror smiled. "All set. Should I come through now?"

"Albus will open the Floo on three. Ready?" Severus nodded to the portrait leaning against the wall, watching intently as the late Headmaster left the frame. "One, two..."

Severus reached out. "...Three," he said, and helped Hermione step out of the fireplace.

Chapter 80: If You Lived Here, You'd Be Home Already

"You cleaned the fireplace! Thank you." Hermione brushed her robes; Floo travel would not be Floo travel without *some* soot.

"I'll tell Albus he can close the connection." Phineas said with a nod.

"Thank you, Phineas." Severus turned to Hermione. "Breakfast is about to start. Shall we?"

They walked amicably through the dungeon corridor, Hermione yawning repeatedly.

"Are you all right?"

"Just tired. I didn't sleep well last night," she said through a yawn. "Actually, I'm still sleepy."

"You should've called me."

"It was hardly an emergency."

Silently, Severus held the staff door to the Great Hall open for her.

Chapter 81: Time Passes

His hope for added time with Hermione at breakfast failed to materialize as the staff monopolized her attention.

She waved to him as she set off to teach her first class of the morning.

Annoyed, Severus headed for the dungeons, his robes billowing out behind him.

His mood did not improve when Potter showed up for lunch.

Frustrated, he managed to take more points off the students in one afternoon than all the other teachers combined.

Reaching the dinner table before Hermione, he sat quietly fuming.

What was the point in eating meals together if he couldn't talk to her?

Chapter 82: The Power of Words

Hermione settled heavily into the seat next to him. "What a day."

Severus smiled. "Does that mean you're not enjoying the little darlings?"

With a resounding thud, she lowered a satchel brimming with books and parchments to the floor between them. "I don't think 'enjoying' is the word I'd use. God, I'm a mess. I hope Junior lets me sleep tonight." She managed to stifle a yawn while patting her stomach.

One brow shot up. "Junior?"

Hermione shrugged. "Well, we haven't settled on a name yet. Junior's just as good as anything else, for now."

There was that word again...we.

Chapter 83: When Bookophiles Collide

"Is there some reason you're carrying such a heavy bag? I would imagine that can't be good for your back...or the baby."

"No, it's not, but with the additional classes, I need a few more books than before. Filius said I could leave them in his office, but I can't keep going from the third floor classroom to his seventh floor office and back again."

"A Levitation spell?"

"I tried that, but the baby is zapping my strength. It takes more effort to use magic than to just drag it around."

"I see."

Perhaps this could work to his advantage.

Chapter 84: Open Mouth And Insert Foot

"Leave the books you need for your afternoon classes in my office when you arrive in the morning. I'll bring them to lunch and take back whatever you're no longer using. You can retrieve what you need at the end of the day."

"Thank you, that would really help." Hermione's expression turned thoughtful. "I seem to be thanking you a lot lately."

"I just..."

"Severus, there you are." Sprout called, the door shutting behind her. "I'm all done. Finally got the plants to settle in. You can show them to ..."

Sprout stopped short. "Hermione, what are you doing here?"

Chapter 85: Evasive Tactics

"Plants?" Hermione looked questioningly between the two.

Severus glared at the diminutive woman.

"Uh, yes the plants for his, uhm, potions. They're ready to go," Sprout said, looking dismayed.

She moved to the far end of the table, as far away from the angry Potions master as she could get. "I hope I haven't spoiled the surprise," she said quietly.

"Severus, what plants? Would you care to explain?"

"No."

"No?"

"No. Care for a roll?" Severus asked, holding the breadbasket.

"No, I don't want a roll. What's this about? What plants? I doubt they're for potions."

"They might be. Eventually."

Chapter 86: Defining Boundaries

Severus sighed. "Are you through with dinner? I wanted to surprise you, but I suppose you can see it now since the surprise is already ruined."

He shot an angry glare in the general direction of the Herbology teacher. He'd remember to thank her for her time and efforts later. At the moment, he was too annoyed that she ruined his plans.

"What surprise?"

Severus took the heavy bag from her hand and gestured to the staff door. "It's in our quarters."

"Your quarters." Hermione reminded him.

"No, Hermione, whether you're there or not – they're *our* quarters," he said firmly.

TBC

A/N: A few people have commented that the story is not as angst driven as it started out. I've tried to maintain the intensity of feelings, and will continue to do so. But if the story is to resolve on a happy note, it has to move toward a lighter tone. After all, angst driven and happy ending are diametrically opposed phrases and I assume you would like to see the two reunite, maybe *before* the baby is born?

Pearle

-Who knows how the story is going to end, but refuses to say-

Choices: Chapters 87 to 100

Chapter 9 of 12

He was a fool to hold Hermione to her original promise. It was time to rectify that mistake. But it seemed fate, and Hermione had other plans. Can Severus learn to live with the choices he's made, even at the cost of his own happiness?

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The Choices We Make

Chapter 87: The Garden of Snape

Their chamber door opened on silent hinges as Severus lowered the wards for them to enter.

A garden? Hermione's curiosity was definitely peaked. "You put in a potions garden?"

Severus shook his head, his headache now a dull throb behind his eyes. "Not exactly."

"Exactly what type of garden is it?"

He led the way to the side entrance he used during his spying days. The castle had been most accommodating when he requested a slight structural change to allow for a small sun patio and garden space, all surrounded by a high illusion-brick wall.

"Oh, Severus, this is lovely!"

Chapter 88: The Better To See You With, My Dear

A riot of colours met Hermione's eyes. Surrounding the patio on all sides was a wide variety of flowers and plants, both Muggle and magical. A low brick wall, divided by a tall wrought-iron gate, ran around the perimeter of the garden. A stone path meandered through the flowers, ending at the wrought-iron gate. A wrought-iron table and chairs set, complete with an umbrella, sat to the side on the patio, completing the scene.

"I can't believe how beautiful it is, but I'm a bit surprised. There won't be much privacy with such a low wall, doesn't that bother you?"

Chapter 89: As Clear As Mud

Severus shook his head. "It's illusion-brick, from the outside all anyone will see is a solid, eight-foot brick wall. Even the gate is spelled to be visible only to you and me."

"We can see out, but no one can see in?"

"Yes, hence the phrase 'illusion-brick', meaning it gives the illusion of brick on one side and not the other." Considering an *Illusion Spell* was used on the top six feet of brick to make it transparent, Severus could understand her curiosity.

Hermione strode toward the gate.

"Where are you going?"

"To see what the other side looks like."

Chapter 90: Now You See It, Now You Don't

"It looks like brick."

But Hermione was already through the gate and looking on in amazement at the apparently solid eight-foot brick wall that didn't match the view from the garden side. Stepping back through the gate, she tentatively ran her hand along the invisible brick, slightly surprised at how solid the invisible wall felt.

"That's amazing!"

Severus smiled. "You approve?"

"Yes, but why did you do all this?"

"You've mentioned how much you missed the garden you had growing up, so..." Severus shrugged, unable to finish the explanation. "Would you like a cuppa, or do you have to leave?"

Chapter 91: An Offer Of Shelter

Hermione plopped into the patio chair, her hand massaging the small of her back. "I would love a cuppa."

Severus conjured a tea service, adding a few chocolate biscuits for good measure, and took the seat opposite his estranged wife.

"So today went...?"

"It went," Hermione said with a sigh.

"Not as easy as it looks."

Severus smirked at Hermione's glare.

"Maybe not, but being so tired all the time just makes matter worse. The garden is lovely, thank you. I really think I should get going before I'm too tired to move."

"You could stay here," he said quietly.

Chapter 92: Illusions of A Different Kind

"Thank you, but no." The statement would've carried more weight if it hadn't been cut off at the end by a series of yawns.

Grimly, Severus nodded. "Let's get you home."

"You're not going to try and convince me to stay?"

"I would be happy to tuck you into our bed and rub your back until you fall asleep, but I don't think that's what you want." The calm in Severus's tone belied the inner-turmoil he was really feeling. He wanted nothing more than to wake up next to Hermione again, but that possibility still seemed a long way off.

Chapter 93: Another Day, Another Galleon

The next morning went much the same as the day before, Hermione calling him on the magic mirror when she was ready to come through, Phineas traveling between the portraits in Severus's office and Albus's office.

"Leave the books you need for this afternoon here. I'll bring them to you at lunch."

"All right." Hermione emptied half her book bag onto the desk.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong. I have a checkup with Poppy after dinner tonight, would you like to come with me?"

"Do you want me to come?"

"I wouldn't have asked you if I didn't want you there."

Chapter 94: I Want What You Want

"After the way you reacted when you felt the baby move, I thought you might like to hear the heartbeat, too." Hermione watched Severus as she waited for him to answer.

He appeared as controlled as ever, unless you knew what to look for. The small tic, only for a second, below his left eye, the slight clenching of his jaw, the minute widening of his pupils, all added up to restrained emotion.

"Severus, talk to me. Tell me what *you* want, not what you think I want to hear."

"You really want me to tell you what I want?"

Chapter 95: If Only Want Could Make It So

"Are you sure you want to know?"

Silently, Hermione nodded.

"I want you. I want to go with you to your exam, and thrill in the sound of our child's heartbeat. I want to bring you back to our quarters after, and show you just how much I love you and how sorry I am for all that has happened between us. I want to make love to you and fall asleep with you next to me, and know you'll still be here in the morning. And that you'll be here the day after that, and the day after that."

Chapter 96: My That's A Lovely Desk You Have There

Hermione felt hot and cold at the same time. She knew he wanted her back, but to actually hear the raw emotion in his voice unnerved the witch. Pregnancy hormones were already playing havoc with her mind and body. For the last week, her nights had been filled with erotic dreams starring, none other than Severus Snape. After hearing his desire for her expressed so openly, it was all she could do to stop herself from throwing him down on the desk and shagging him silly -definitely not the move of a woman who is trying to prove a point.

Chapter 97: Feelings

Severus watched the emotions as they played across Hermione's face, pleased as he saw want and desire make their appearance; it meant he still had a chance. Hermione still had feelings for him; all he had to do was get her to act on them. "More than you wanted to know?"

"Well, I can...uh... accommodate part of what you want. My exam is right after dinner tonight. Oh my God, look at the time. I have to go. See you at lunch." And in a flurry of cloth worthy of the man himself, she was out the door and gone.

Chapter 98: Here We Are Again

"Poppy?" Hermione looked around the deserted ward. "She said to come in right after dinner."

"Perhaps she's in the back office."

"Poppy?"

"Hermione? I'll be right out." The matron came bustling out of the office. "Sorry, I was just shelv..." The sight of Severus standing next to Hermione brought Poppy up short, especially when she considered their actions the last time they'd been in the hospital wing.

"We're here for my exam," Hermione said with a smile.

"Of course, why don't you lay down here?" Poppy eyed the Potions master. "Severus, you can stand on that side, if you like."

Chapter 99: Examinations and Advice

Severus watched intently as Poppy performed a series of intricate wand movements.

"Well, you seem to be doing just fine. All the readings are right where they should be. Are you eating properly, getting enough sleep?"

"No matter how much I sleep, it never seems to be enough. I'm always tired."

"I have a potion that can help with that. I want you to start a series of vitamin potions. I think I know of a local Potions master that can brew them for you," she said smiling. "Don't push yourself too hard. Take time to rest during the day."

Chapter 100: Enchantment

"I will, I promise. Before we go, can you perform that charm you did last time? I'd like Severus to hear the baby's heartbeat."

"Of course." Poppy pointed her wand at Hermione's growing belly. A quick series of movements accompanied the spell she chanted. Instantly the ward filled with an odd calliope of sounds. "The clippety-clop sound you hear is the baby's heart beat. It beats must faster than the mother's."

"And that swishing sound?"

"I wondered about that last time, that's my blood flowing."

Severus shook his head, awed by the sound of his son's heart beating. "It sounds...amazing."

TBC

A/N: Thank you all for your well wishes and your patience. I know updates have been a long time coming, but I'm out of the hospital, off the home IV's, and now finished with the last round of medication. Hopefully nothing else will get the way of my writing again. More to come soon!

Pearle

Choices: Chapters 101 to 110

Chapter 10 of 12

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The Choices We Make

Chapter 101: Control Is A Relative Term

Refusing Severus's offer of help, Hermione Floo'd home almost immediately after her appointment, weariness evident in the effort it took to walk back to his office. He was sure stubbornness kept her from asking Albus if there were quarters available in the castle.

He would've preferred her back home...with him, but he would've settled for just having her in the castle for now, if it came down to that.

The cauldron bubbled merrily, the base of the first vitamin potion almost complete. Severus chopped the daisy root with an economy of precision movements, his mind, however, was not as controlled.

Chapter 102: Quidditch For Newborns

Hermione stifled a yawn as she stepped through. Junior had been particularly active last night, waking her periodically as he moved about. She looked longingly at the worn leather couch in the corner, thinking she'd kill for another fifteen minutes of sleep. "Good morning."

"Morning. Trouble sleeping again?"

"How can you tell? I think Junior's practicing his Quidditch moves. It's never too early to learn the Wronski feint, it seems."

"Try this, it should help. The other two potions won't be ready until after dinner, the Revitalization Draught needs a minimum of twenty-two hours to simmer to reach full potency."

Chapter 103: From Pink to Blue and Back Again

Hermione eyed the bubble-gum pink phial. "Shouldn't it be baby blue, not pink?"

"Hermione." His tone was gruff, but his eyes shone with amusement at her comment.

"Fine." With practiced ease, she flipped the stopper and drank the contents of the phial.

Almost immediately Severus could see the difference in the witch - her eyes sparkled, her skin glowed, even her stance seemed straighter.

"That's amazing, I feel better already."

"Good, it's a variation on the Pepperup Potion. I'm glad it helped.

Hermione smiled. "I guess it pays to have my own Potions master on call."

"So it would seem."

Chapter 104: I Say Hello, You Say Goodbye

Once again, Minerva and Flitwick monopolized Hermione's time at lunch.

Severus barely had time to say hello and goodbye before exchanging Hermione's books with the stack she'd left in his office that morning. He knew it was childish to feel

jealous, but how was he supposed to woo her if he didn't talk to her?

"Enter!" he barked, the knock on his door during his office hours startling him. It was rare for him to have a visitor, even rarer still for it to be a student, so bold as to seek him out.

Sheepishly, Hermione peered around the doorframe.

Chapter 105: A Nap Is A Terrible Thing to Waste

"Hermione? Are you all right? Is something wrong?"

"I'm sorry to bother you, but do you have any more of that potion you gave me this morning?"

Severus shook his head. "It can only be taken once every twenty-four hours. Are you feeling tired again?"

"Just a bit worn out."

"Poppy said you were to take a nap during the day."

"Did she say where I should take this nap? The teacher's lounge is too noisy and I'm too tired to Floo home and back."

Severus led her over to the couch in front of the fire. "How about here?"

Chapter 106: Yours, Mine, and Ours

"You used to like to curl up and read in front of the fire, if I'm not mistaken."

"I don't want to bother you."

"Hermione, it's no bother. If you don't want to nap here, you can always sleep in our quarters."

"Severus, they're not..."

Severus held up his hand. "We've been through this before, they're *our* quarters. When is your next class?"

"In an hour."

"Lay down." He gestured to the couch, snagging the coverlet she left there the last time she'd used the couch. "I have class in a few minutes, but I'll come back and wake you."

Chapter 107: Down For the Count

"I seem to be intruding on..."

"You need to think of you and the baby." His voice softened as he draped the blanket over her still form. "Please think about moving back to the castle. If not our quarters, I'm sure spare rooms are available. It would be so much easier on you."

His concern was lost; Hermione had fallen asleep almost as soon as she lay down.

Gently he brushed her hair back. "How do I convince you to come back to me?"

Silently he left the office, setting a timer-charm lest he forget to wake her on time.

Chapter 108: The Garden of Snape Revisited

"The Revitalization Draught needs to cool another ten minutes before I can bottle it. Why don't you sit on the patio and have a cupppa while you wait? The garden is rather peaceful this time of day."

"You've sat in the garden?"

"Last night. It was...pleasant."

"You say 'pleasant' as if it were painful," she said with a grin.

"Go, sit. I'll be back in a few minutes."

Severus returned twenty minutes later with two phials and a small package. "There's enough here for five days. The draught and vitamin potion should be taken at the same time each day."

Chapter 109: Sometimes Even Magic Is Not Enough

"Have you given any further thought to moving back to the castle?"

"I suppose it would be the most practical solution, but I still have two weeks left on this month's lease." Hermione groaned. "I can't believe I'm thinking about moving again. I just don't have the strength to pack -again."

Severus shook his head. "Are you not a witch?"

"Yes, I am a witch," she said, a yawn distorting her comment. "*Apregnant* witch, who seems to be sharing her magic with your heir. It's all I can do to make it through the day and still remain upright."

Chapter 110: A Helping Hand

"That's exactly why you should be here, where I can help you, and not alone in Hogsmeade.

There's a suite of unused rooms just north of my office. It was originally used by visiting House alumni, an event that has yet to happen during my twenty years as Head of

Slytherin," he said with amusement. "Stay here and rest. I can have you packed up and moved in short order."

Moving back to the castle made the most sense, but she couldn't shake the notion that she might be giving up something indefinable if she moved back. Hermione sighed, "Fine."

TBC

A/N: And for those of us who are a bit geekier, Chapter 103 can be expressed in hexadecimal format: From #FFC0CB to #0000FF and Back Again

Chapter 104: I Say Hello, You Say Goodbye A play on the lyrics of the Beatles song, *Hello, Goodbye*".

I want to thank everyone for their prayers and kind thoughts, my health is still somewhat questionable, but my husband's surgery went well and he's on the road to recovery. More information can be found on my LiveJournal (see my author's page for the link). Hopefully my life is back on track and I can get back to regular updates (including an update for Dances).

Pearle

Choices: Chapters 111 to 124

Chapter 11 of 12

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The Choices We Make

Chapter 111: Transfigurations of the Heart

He returned less than an hour later to find Hermione dozing on the sofa. It hadn't taken him long to pack and shrink her possessions. Confining Crookshanks was another story entirely.

Normally he and the beast ignored each other. However, Severus' attempt to cage him, without his mistress present, was another story. Finally, his patience worn thin, Severus managed to capture the animal, only to have it jump on Hermione's sleeping form the second he'd let it loose in his quarters.

Wistfully, Severus watched as Hermione hugged and cooed over the half-kneazle, wishing he and the beast could trade places.

Chapter 112: Welcome to Hogwarts Seven Floors, One Hundred Forty-two Staircases, and a Suite of Unused Rooms

"Right through here." Severus lowered the wards on a painting a few yards from his office doorway.

Cautiously, Hermione stepped through to the sitting room, dreading what she would find. Surprise coloured her voice as she took in the cozy sitting room. "Severus, it's lovely. I expected decades of dust."

"Ah, Professors Snape, you is here. Dobby hopes this is to your liking." The house-elf emerged from what Hermione assumed was the bedroom.

"Dobby, did you clean the suite?"

"Yes, Mrs. Professor Snape. Professor Snape said to make it special for you."

"Severus, thank you."

Embarrassed, Severus just nodded stiffly.

Chapter 113: The Jury Will Disregard That Last Remark...

"It's lovely, Dobby, thank you."

"You is welcome, Mrs. Professor Snape. Should Dobby move Professor Snape's things in now?"

"Move Professor Snape's things?"

"So you can be together. So you can have your rooms ready for the baby."

"That's enough. You can go, Dobby," said Severus as he watched Hermione pale.

"Mrs. Professor Snape, why is not you and the baby with Professor Snape? Dobby keeps his secrets, but Dobby hears the professor cry out for you in his sleep."

Severus' tone was sharp. "You can go, Dobby."

A sob escaped before Hermione turned and fled into the bedroom.

"Hermione..."

Chapter 114: A Sudden Change In The Weather

"I can't do this. I thought I could, but I can't." Hermione lay on her side, tears streaming down her face.

"He's a house-elf, Hermione, and it's an honest question: why is you not with Professor Snape?"

Hermione rolled her eyes at the absurdity of his remark. "Severus."

Gently, he rubbed her back. "You know, I've never given you a sock in all the time we've been married."

Despite herself, Hermione smiled as she arched one brow questioningly. "Does that mean you haven't set me free?"

"Never. I'd be a fool to let you go."

Only silence met Severus' declaration.

Chapter 115: There's Something You Don't See Every Day: A Striped Leopard

"Severus, don't..."

"It's late. You need your rest." His tone was stilted, hurt and anger warring for control below his seemingly calm exterior. "Don't forget to take your potions. I'm next-door if you need me. Either use the two-way mirror, or I can open a passage if you like."

"Please, try to understand. I'm just not ready for things to go back the way they were."

"And you don't believe I've changed?"

"I believe you want to."

"Fine. Goodnight, Hermione," he said angrily.

"Oh no, you don't. Don't put this on me. You're the one who threw *me* out, remember?"

Chapter 116: Every Action Has An Equal And Opposite Reaction

"How can I forget? You won't let me." Severus closed his eyes. "Hermione, I love you, but I don't know what to do anymore. Why did you ever marry me in the first place?"

"You were...different. You cared. After a while, it was as if I wasn't even there. All you did was 'look through' me. It's like I was a ghost. At least until you found out I was pregnant."

Severus sighed; he had pushed her away. "I was distancing myself from you. Giving you the chance to leave me, to start over with someone...younger, more worthy of you."

Chapter 117: Three Can Be An Interesting Number

"And now?"

"Now? I don't want you to leave. I need you. I love you," he said softly.

Hermione could hear the pain in his voice. She didn't doubt the sincerity of his words. He cared, but for how long? "Severus..." She moved forward, propping herself up on one arm as she watched his face, her body curling around his side.

Severus could feel the swell of her stomach against his hip and arm, a silent reminder of the need to convince Hermione to come back to him. It was at that moment their son chose to 'join' the conversation.

Chapter 118: An 'Alien' Encounter

Severus felt a thump against his hip as the baby shifted positions. Hermione smiled, lying back so he could watch the movement.

The unmistakable shape of an elbow stretched her stomach before disappearing again.

"Does he do that often?" he asked in an awed whisper.

Hermione laughed. "Thank God it's not twins. Some nights I swear he's playing Quidditch in there with two Bludgers and a Quaffle. Here, feel." Without thinking, she reached for his hand, laying it low on her belly. A jolt of desire raced through her as the edge of his fingers brushed against her pelvic bone.

Chapter 119: Lost In The Moment

Severus felt Hermione shudder, his eyes locking with hers. There was no mistaking the desire burning within. Whatever problems their marriage may have had, attraction was not one of them.

He hardened with desire as he watched Hermione lick her bottom lip; her hand at his shoulder pulled him down. Her eyes drifted closed as Severus closed the space between them, his arms sliding around her, holding her tightly as he passionately kissed her. All reason disappeared in the heat of the moment.

"Severus," she moaned.

A sudden pounding at her doorway shattered the moment.

"Hermione, are you in there?"

Chapter 120: Am I Interrupting Something?

"What in the bloody hell?" Severus looked up, but Hermione was already moving, wriggling free of his embrace.

"I'll get it. That sounds like Harry."

"Hermione, are you all right?"

The muffled voice coming from the other side of the door was Potter.

Severus would've gladly cast every Unforgivable he knew to rid himself of the brat. Azkaban be damned!

He'd had her in his arms. She'd wanted him. There'd been no question where things would have led if Potter had not shown up. Severus took a deep breath, his temper barely contained. Quietly, he walked into the sitting room.

Chapter 121: Open Mouth And Insert Both Feet And An Arm For Good Measure

While Severus looked his usual self, Harry could see the man was trying to control his anger. He eyed Hermione's flushed cheeks and ruffled appearance. It was apparent what he'd interrupted.

He turned to Hermione, studiously avoiding Severus' glare. "I'm, uh, sorry to bother you, but I got worried when I found your house empty. You've been so tired lately. I thought something might've happened. I ran into Dumbledore in the Entrance Hall; he told me you were here." He finished lamely. "I could come back later, or tomorrow, or something. I just wanted to know you were all right."

Chapter 122: Slytherin Tactics

Perhaps this was for the best. He didn't want Hermione feeling rushed, despite the fact that she'd wanted him, too.

"It's fine, Potter. I've some things I must attend to. Hermione, you know where to find me if you need me. Don't forget your potions." The look *oboth* their faces was almost worth the intrusion.

Potter watched Severus leave; sure the man was planning something.

Hermione was another matter. Feeling Severus' arms around her, the feel of his lips on hers, the heat between them...made her miss his touch even more.

"What do you want, Harry?" she snapped.

Chapter 123: Pleasant Dreams

She got rid of Harry; assuring him she was fine, that moving back to the castle was for the best. The house-elves would take care of things, and she wouldn't tire herself out coming and going any more.

And her husband was right next-door.

If she were being honest, she'd have to admit she had no complaints about their sex life. Severus may've had difficulty vocalizing his feelings, but he never failed to please her before finding his own.

Despite the need thrumming through her body, Hermione fell into an exhausted sleep, erotic dreams of her husband filling her mind.

Chapter 124: Slytherin Subtlety Meets Gryffindor Bravado

He'd had all night to figure out how to turn the situation to his advantage. While charging in and shagging Hermione senseless would've made him happy, it was too 'Gryffindor' for his tastes; subtlety could be the only answer.

The next morning he waved off all discussion of the previous evening, merely reminding her to take her potion before escorting her to breakfast.

That night, in spite of her lustful gaze, he declined her offer of tea when he brought her a new batch of potion, saying she needed her rest.

It would be interesting to see who cracked first.

To Be Continued

A/N: Thank you for your patience. I know updates have been a long time coming. This story has never been abandoned, merely on hiatus while I resolved a few health problems. RealLife and, more specifically, my health tend to get in my way.

A grateful thank you to my beta, the wonderful Southern_Witch_69, who has a never ending supply of commas and kind words for me. The mistakes, however, are still mine.

Updates (through to the end) should be more frequent. More to come soon!

Pearle

Chapter 12 of 12

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The Choices We Make

Chapter 125: Cat And Mouse

As the week wore on, Severus continued to play the part of perfect gentleman, escorting Hermione to meals, going with her for her check-up, bringing her fresh potions. He was careful to maintain their distance, despite Hermione's repeated attempts to seduce him.

That's not to say he didn't try and tempt the witch.

His hand at her back when walking slid lower than necessary; his voice, deliberately dropped to a silky tone to entice her when whispering in her ear at a meal; 'accidentally' brushing the side of her breast when taking her books.

It was driving them both crazy.

Chapter 126: Hindsight Is 1000% Accurate

Saturday--May 27th, should have been circled in red on his calendar, heralded for the change it brought, or perhaps avoided entirely if hindsight were employed.

It started as any other Hogsmeade weekend he'd chaperoned: irritating and annoying. The only good thing he could say about it was it kept him away from temptation for the day, away from Hermione.

Libidos had been rising steadily all week, the original reason for their separation lost in a sea of lustful hormones. Severus could barely remember why he was keeping Hermione at arm's length anymore, the desire to take her becoming overwhelming.

Chapter 127: Timing Is Everything

She was entering her second trimester. According to Poppy, she should tire less, her magic should be more accessible as the baby started to develop some of its own. Less aches and pains, too. Tell that to her back, she thought, rubbing the base of her spine. She wondered if Severus had something for her backache.

A glance at the clock showed he should have returned from Hogsmeade sometime within the last hour. He was never in a good mood when forced to chaperone; heading for Severus' office, she could only hope he'd been back long enough to calm down.

Chapter 128: Let "Sleeping" Dogs Lie

"Enter!"

Hermione sighed; this was one case where his bark might not be worse than his bite. She suppressed a giggle as she opened his office door.

"Severus, I'm sorry to bother you, but my back is killing me. Do you have something I can take for it?"

His eyes softened at the sight of Hermione. "Did you lift something you shouldn't have?"

"Possibly, but it's been bothering me for weeks. I can go see Poppy if you're busy." Her eyes trailed from his eyes to his lips and back; thoughts of her erotic dreams raised the color in cheeks.

Chapter 129: Decisions, Decisions, Decisions

"No, it's fine. I still have the balm I used when I pulled a muscle in my back. It's much more effective than anything Poppy has." A quick spell revealed a hidden doorway. He moved quickly, Hermione's presence unsettling him. "If you'll wait a moment, I'll get it for you."

Stay or follow?

Hermione debated a moment before following him through the doorway. She'd been alone in their old quarters with Severus before, and nothing had happened. Of course at the time her mind hadn't been occupied with thoughts of ripping his clothes off and shagging him senseless.

Damn hormones!

Chapter 130: Can You Say Duplicity?

She wasn't following him.

She told herself she needed an Advanced Charms text she'd left on the nightstand. Her traitorous mind reminded her she'd packed her books first, all of her books, before she'd even thought to pack her personal belongs when she'd left.

"Hermione!" Intent on reading the jar, Severus barely avoided colliding with the witch. "I'm sorry, I didn't see you. I thought you were going to wait in my office?"

"Yes, well, I...thought I left a book I needed on the nightstand, but it's...not there." Hermione looked around nervously. "So, I just rub that on my back?"

Chapter 131: The Right Place At The Wrong Time, Or Is It The Wrong Place At The Right Time?

"Rub it in thoroughly on the affected area; you should feel relief almost immediately." Severus saw Hermione grimace. "What?"

"It's hard for me to reach my back. Would you mind putting it on me?"

Warning bells were clanging in his mind; his carefully constructed plan was about to crumble. He should've said no; he should've handed her the jar and sent her on her way. He should've done a lot of things. Instead he watched as Hermione slipped her robes off and lay face down on the bed, her shirt riding up to expose a broad expanse of golden skin.

Chapter 132: Is That A Wand In Your Pocket Or Are You Just Happy To See Me?

"Hermione..." Severus swallowed thickly, watching the witch wriggle higher up on the bed.

"Severus, please, just put the balm on. I'll be out of your hair in no time."

Not trusting his voice, he nodded mutely. The spelled balm warmed instantly in his hand. Gently, he rubbed a small circle into the small of Hermione's back.

Her moan of appreciation was his undoing.

Kneading her shoulders before moving lower, his fingers stroked the sides of her breasts. He gave up all pretense of propriety, rolling her over to suck wetly at a hardened nipple through the fabric of her blouse.

Chapter 133: When Two Become One

Hermione lost herself in his touch, the feel of his hands on her body, the jolt of pure lust coursing through her veins.

A whispered spell and their clothes disappeared.

Severus settled between her legs, capturing her mouth in a searing kiss as he buried himself in her heat. He thrust slowly, setting an easy pace, but Hermione would have none of it.

"The baby..."

"...Is fine. Please, I need more." Pulling him forward, she urged him on, her hips rising to meet his every thrust.

He felt her muscles tighten as she shattered around him, her climax triggering his.

Chapter 134: Reflections

Severus moved to the side, mindful of his pregnant wife. He smiled as she nestled against him, her eyes drifting closed even as she kissed his cheek. He managed to snag the coverlet, pulling it over both of them before settling back to watch Hermione sleep.

Poppy had assured him everything was fine. Pregnant women got tired, their bodies adjusting for the new life growing inside them.

At last she was home where he could take care of her. He was pleased to know it was over. Hermione was back in his arms, back in their bed where she belonged.

Chapter 135: Don't Count Your Blast-Ended Skrewts Until They're Hatched

Her stomach growled, waking them both.

Sometime during his musings, Severus had fallen asleep. "Feeling better?" he asked with a smile.

"Most definitely. I think we both needed that. What time is it?" Her stomach gave another loud rumble. "I think we missed dinner."

"It's after seven. Why don't I have the house-elves send up dinner before they move your things back in?"

"Move my things back in?" Hermione looked at him in confusion. "Why would they do that?"

"Because you're home." His tone said he'd had enough of this game.

"Severus, I'm not ready to move back in yet."

Chapter 136: Conjecture or When You Assume, You Make An Ass Out of You and Me

"But we just made love!"

"Yes, and it was amazing. I can't tell you how randy I get these days."

"You used me," he snarled.

"You seemed to be having a pretty good time of it yourself."

"What was this all about if you weren't coming home?"

"It was about two people coming together. I won't let you pressure me into making a decision."

Sitting up, Severus stared at his still estranged wife. "Enough is enough, Hermione, I can only apologize so many times. I've tried to prove I've changed. Either you forgive me and come back or..."

"Or what?"

To Be Continued

A/N: I know-evil cliffhanger by the evil author. Sorry about that, but this was the most natural place to end the chapter. More soon!

A grateful thank you to my beta, the wonderful Southern_Witch_69, who has a never ending supply of commas and kind words for me. The mistakes, however, are still

mine.

Hmm, after a quick reread (before posting) I realize those following this story will most likely want to take Hermione out and string her up, possibly me, too (especially if SW69's comments in the margins were any indication). Think about the fact that Severus threw her out in the beginning and that her emotions have been running through a roller coaster ride ever since then.

Pearle