

The Taming of the S.P.E.W

by neelix

Of House Elves and Life Debts, Severus Snape learns there is more to Hogwarts,
and it might just change his life forever.

In The Beginning

Chapter 1 of 5

Of House Elves and Life Debts, Severus Snape learns there is more to Hogwarts, and it might just change his life
forever.

a/n: Hello everyone :) This is a bit of a delayed posting of my entry to the sshg_promptfest on Livejournal (and the next one is currently ON, so I am as very late with this!) - this might read a little differently to the entry on LJ because it finally lives up to its NC-17 rating (doesn't it, onecelstialbeing?)

This was a gift for jaxsomride. Thanks for the brilliant prompt!

In the Beginning

The reading of The Last Will and Testament of Helga Hufflepuff changed the course of Hogwarts history.

Helga had lived a good life by all accounts, and was the kindest of all of the founders of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. While the other founders had concentrated on developing the curriculum, strengthening the wards or, in the case of Salazar Slytherin, developing an elite group of pure-blood students, Helga Hufflepuff concentrated on the baser needs of the new students; a roof over their heads, somewhere warm and safe to sleep, and most importantly, good food in their bellies.

'A student won't hold a wand straight if their stomachs are empty,' she would say regularly, and the kitchens became her domain. Her skills became legend, and her ability to Charm the plainest food into platters and mounds of the most delicious repast made her a firm favourite amongst the students. But despite her reputation, Helga was only one witch, and as the school grew, she soon realised that she needed help.

Helga had been born to a poor family in the small village of Trelewis, tucked away in the valleys of South Wales. Her parents were both magical, but not exceptional. Her mother baked bread and buns for the small local wizarding community, and the shop sat on the border so they served Muggles now and then too. One thing her parents instilled in young Helga was that everyone needed a chance, and kindness cost nothing. Just at the far edge of Trelewis was a large manor house owned by the Smith family. They were distant cousins of Helga's father, wealthy Purebloods with a seat on the Wizengamot and a reputation to match. The families rarely mixed in the same circles, but on occasions when Helga and her parents had been graced with an invitation to visit, they would always go. Helga's mother insisted, because they were family. Helga's father always went under protest, hating to be literally the poor relation. And Helga went, because she got to see the House-Elves. Because Helga was small, the House-Elves would take her down the hidden passageways of the manor and into the kitchen, where they would fuss over her, and braid her hair, and feed her sweet pastries and jellies and trifles and literally spoil her rotten. Helga loved them, with their huge ears and large eyes, and their funny voices and even funnier clothes. It was only as Helga got older that she realised that all was not as it seemed.

There was a birthday gathering for one of the older Smith children. Turning seventeen was a time for celebration, and Daniel Smith was home from Durmstrang for his party. He had been given a new title, Baron Smith of Trelewis, and access to his trust fund at Gringotts. He was also to be betrothed the same day, to Hephzibah Blishwick of London. It was seen to be a good match, and anyone who was anyone in Pureblood circles was due to attend the feast. Helga was excited to be attending. At the age of

fourteen, she was starting to blossom into her womanhood, and her father had brought her to Diagon Alley for the very first time, spending his hard earned savings on the very best dress robes. For once, he insisted that they would look like part of the family, and Helga felt pretty and very grown up in her pale blue robes and matching pumps.

When they entered the manor, Helga's eyes grew wide. The whole house was decorated with fairy lights, tiny glass jars on lengths of ribbon, each jar holding its very own sparkling fairy, which danced and fluttered and gave off a bright, white light. The sweeping stairway led up to the ballroom, tastefully elegant and decorated with large, overfull vases of cream and lilac flowers that sparkled as you walked past. A group of Wizard musicians played traditional tunes for set dances, where the ladies lined up opposite their men and were twirled and spun around each other in intricate circles. Helga stood in the doorway and watched in awe, hoping that when she was older, someone would mark her own dance card.

Watching the dancers soon became boring, so she slipped away and down the back stairway that led to the kitchen. As she arrived, she heard a raised voice and paused. It was her father's cousin Aloysius Smith, Lord of Trelewis Manor. She crept up slowly to the open kitchen door, and couldn't help but let out a gasp of horror. The House-Elves were gathered as a group, and they were staring up at the angry man with what was clearly fear on their faces. He had an elf by the ear and was shaking her fiercely, all the while shouting.

'You will not be seen! I have told you over one hundred times! You are all lucky to have a home here. I let you reside in my house, eat my food, enjoy the warmth of my kitchen, but only if you follow my orders, to the letter! For the last time, you will obey me, or the whole lot of you shall be given clothes!'

At this last, several elves fell to their knees shaking, and their wailing sobs rent the air. Helga could stand it no longer, and without a thought for herself, she ran into the room and collided full into the rear of Aloysius Smith, causing him to stumble and let go of the trembling elf in his grasp.

'Oh, my goodness! I am so sorry, my Lord!' she simpered, her face aghast. 'I was in such a rush to visit my elf friends, I didn't see you!' Helga cast her eyes downwards and curtsied deeply.

'Ridiculous child!' Aloysius spat at her. 'Elves are not friends! They are slaves, and you would do well to remember it!' With one last glare of contempt, which seemed to encompass Helga herself, he swept from the room, and for a brief moment there was silence as the House-Elves stared at Helga and she stared back at them. Her eyes filled with compassionate tears, and she started to cry.

'How can you let him treat you like that?' she said with a sob.

'It is the way of it, Missy Helga.' A very old elf came towards her and looked at her with understanding. 'Lord Smith is our Master, and we does what he says.'

'But he was so cruel!' Helga said in protest.

The House-Elves stared back at her but said nothing, until there was a brief nod from the oldest elf and they all scattered, carrying on with their tasks as if nothing untoward had taken place.

This incident had stayed with Helga for all of her formative years, and when she needed help in the Hogwarts kitchens, she knew exactly where to get it. Word amongst the elves spread country-wide and as their Pureblood families died out, homeless and ownerless elves would find a place at Hogwarts. Helga Hufflepuff taught them all to cook, and treated them with kindness and respect, encouraging all the students in her house to do the same. Helga understood the elves and their need to feel that they belonged somewhere. She understood their need to be useful, and encouraged it so that eventually, all domestic work at Hogwarts was undertaken by the House-Elves.

When she died, her last wish was that any elf who needed a home and useful occupation would find it at Hogwarts. And so they stayed, secure and happy in their work, loyal to a fault and proud of their position and status as a Hogwarts House-Elf.

And then one day, an eleven year old girl called Hermione Granger came to Hogwarts.

In The Middle

Chapter 2 of 5

Of House Elves and Life Debts, Severus Snape learns there is more to Hogwarts, and it might just change his life forever.

In The Middle

It was the summer holiday. The last of the students had departed the day before, and Severus Snape and his colleagues had celebrated until the early hours in the Hogshead. Before retiring, Severus had magnanimously distributed phials of Sober Up potion to everyone, and he was gratified when everyone shook his hand, apart from Pomona Sprout who had grabbed him in a bear hug and inappropriately squeezed his buttocks before he could extricate himself. The staff staggered away, laughing and telling each other what a great bloke Severus had turned out to be all along.

Headmaster Snape rolled over in bed, snuggling down a bit further under the warm covers. He wriggled his toes happily and sighed, his lips curled up in a smile. He had six whole weeks to do whatever the blazes he wanted. No one could tell him what to do, or force him to attend a meeting, or twinkle at him forebodingly across a desk. He was free. He could decide when to eat, what to eat, what to drink, when to drink, when to get up or whether to stay in bed all day. Right now, Severus had a taste for coffee and a chocolate muffin, so he rubbed his eyes, letting the pale morning light filter through until he felt a bit more awake. He stretched his arms upwards and let the covers fall from his thin torso before he distinctly heard a faint, high pitched giggle coming from the end of his bed. His eyes snapped open and his wand was in his hand and pointing before he had even registered what he was seeing.

His bedchamber was full of house-elves. Three or four deep, they were jammed against each other, peering at him with their large glossy eyes, ears twitching and feet shuffling as they vied for the best view. Some had scaled the furniture and were sat on the top of the large armoire in the corner, and a particularly enterprising pair was actually staring down at him from the chandelier above the bed.

'What's going on?' he asked. He had never seen as many elves in one place, not even in the kitchens. He mentally counted the heads and frowned. He didn't think that Hogwarts even had this many elves. He narrowed his eyes and scanned the room until he found the elf he was looking for.

'Smith,' he said firmly. 'Tell me what the bloody hell you and your cohorts are doing in my room.'

'Headmaster Snape.' The elf bowed low briefly and then stood, placing his hands behind his back before clearing his throat. 'We has decided, sir.'

'Decided? Decided what?' Severus lowered his wand a little but didn't put it away altogether. There was something fishy going on, and it wasn't even Friday.

'You is owing, Headmaster Snape,' Smith said clearly.

A chorus of whispers ran around the room. 'Owing... owing....'

Severus closed his eyes as the sickle dropped. He knew exactly what he owed, and as he acknowledged it, a prickle of magic washed over him, along with a sudden urge to get up and do something.

'The Life Debt,' he said lowly. 'After three years, you choose to collect now?'

It wasn't really a question. The very nature of the debt meant that there was no time limit; it could be claimed at any point. And Severus had to admit, he really did owe the house-elves a huge favour.

The night of the final battle, when Severus was bleeding to death in the Shrieking Shack and Voldemort's voice was nothing more than a whisper of a memory in his muddled mind, the house-elves had been doing things. They had made food for the survivors. They had ensured that all of the common rooms were clean, tidy and warm. They had helped with collecting the dead. And in a small room down a flight of stairs from the back of the kitchens, two doors down from the house-elves sleeping quarters, they had consulted with the Keeper of the Books.

The Keeper of the Books was old. He was so old that no living elf knew his name and none dared to ask. He didn't come out of his room. He just read, and documented, and noted, and informed. And he was very busy on the night of the final battle. The names in the Register were disappearing at the rate of speeding Snitches, and as each name faded from one thick, mottled page, it appeared in the Dead Book, which was growing thicker and adding new pages as it went. The books held the names of every single student that had ever been taught at Hogwarts, living or no, and it was really the Keeper that Severus had to thank for the heroic rescue that followed.

The Keeper's room held a map of Hogwarts that would have made the Marauders weep. Every nook and cranny, every hidden passageway, and even the Room of Hidden Things were laid out in detail along one wall. On the next wall were Hogsmeade and its environs, the Forbidden Forest, the Shrieking Shack, and even the tunnel that lead back to the Whomping Willow. Myriad dots glowed around the map. Red for house-elves, yellow for students, blue for professors and purple for the Headmaster. When Tom Riddle died and his yellow dot faded to nothing, the Keeper nodded in grim acknowledgement and waited until his name appeared in the Death Book under the names of Vincent Crabbe and Fred Weasley. He stood then, stretched his gnarly fingers and stepped up to the map, staring through his half-moon spectacles at each remaining dot. He mentally noted each one and then frowned. The Headmaster was alone in the Shrieking Shack and his dot was fading fast. The Keeper whispered softly, keeping his eyes on the map, and watched as the dot suddenly moved from the Shack to the hospital wing, still dim, but still there. He rubbed his eyes, and went back to his books.

Severus sat behind his desk and stared gloomily back at the delegation of elves that were now crammed into his office. He had finally persuaded them to leave him a little dignity in allowing him to dress, but that was as far as it went. There was still no coffee, still no muffin. To Snape's utter horror, the house-elves were on strike.

'Let me get this straight,' he said with a dramatic sigh. 'You won't do any work around the castle unless I get Hermione Granger to repeal the 'Law for House-Elf Rights and Liberty'? Even when the students return?'

'That is it, Headmaster, sir.'

'You can't do that,' Severus said with a smug grin. 'You have to do what you're told by the Headmaster, which is me. So I am telling you that you will continue your duties.'

'The Headmaster is right, sir. We does what you tells us. But the Owing is a greater power.' A new voice, old and gravely, came from the back of the gathered crowd, and there was a collective gasp from the other elves. Many sank to their knees in supplication, and the crowd parted to let the old elf through.

Severus leaned forwards and stared. This house-elf looked even older than Kreacher. His skin hung in soft, grey folds, and large tufts of white hair sprung out of his ears and eyebrows. He was so short that the top of his head stopped at the edge of the large desk, but when he looked up and met the Headmaster's stare with his own, Severus knew he wasn't speaking to an ordinary elf. A pair of half-moon glasses sat on the end of the house-elf's long, pointed nose, but the eyes behind were sharp and knowing. If Severus didn't know better, he might have suspected there was a touch of the goblin about him. He felt as if the elf was seeing into his very soul, and it was quite disconcerting.

'Have we met?' Severus asked. To his surprise, the elf chuckled.

'Not in the flesh, Headmaster. But I is knowing you, Severus Snape. Just as I is knowing every boy-child and girl-child at Hogwarts School.'

Severus was non-plussed, but he schooled his features carefully. 'What do I call you?'

The elf narrowed his gaze slightly. 'They call me The Keeper.'

'The Keeper? The Keeper of the Books?'

Severus sat back and his mouth fell open. He had thought the Keeper was just a myth. His mother had told him fairy stories about the Hogwarts house-elves as a child, and of a secret room where a very old elf sat surrounded by books and was by far the cleverest elf in the whole of the world. He had thought it just make-believe, a story to take his mind off the horror that surrounded their reality. But here was the proof that it was no fairy tale.

'Did you meet my mother?' he whispered.

'Eileen Prince I knew.'

The elf snapped his fingers and Severus felt a pull of magic. He was suddenly not at his desk, but somewhere beneath the castle. An ancient wooden door stood open before him, and he had to bend to walk inside. The Keeper sat at a large table in the centre of the room, and candlelight flickered around the walls. Severus stared at the walls. The maps were half in shadow, but he knew immediately what he was looking at. He turned to speak, but the elf was holding out an ancient scroll to him. An old, purple ribbon was tied around the middle, and he took the scroll and opened it carefully. As he rolled out the cracking parchment, ink started to appear in spidery lines, and Severus realised he was looking at a very old family tree. Without thinking, Severus sat down in the chair that appeared behind him and smoothed the parchment with a shaking hand. He stared at the name at the top of the page in puzzlement.

'This is the family tree of Helga Hufflepuff,' he said in a whisper.

The Keeper said nothing but pointed a knobbly finger to the lower end of the tree, past whole generations of Pureblood families, some of which Severus didn't even recognise. The strand that he had been shown, however, was very familiar to him. The Prince bloodline had all but disappeared at the time of his mother's birth, but there she was, Eileen Prince, the last female member of a bloodline that subsequently ended with Severus himself. That he was related to Helga Hufflepuff was a revelation in itself. That she was responsible for bringing the house-elves to Hogwarts in the first place was something he had always known, but now he felt the weight of family responsibility. What would Auntie Helga expect of her great-nephew, sixty-nine times removed?

He started to tremble and almost didn't notice when a rough hand grabbed his, and he was rudely taken back to his office, where he landed less than gracefully back in his chair. The house-elves were still there, lolling around on various bits of furniture, and as Severus looked up to the top of the bookshelf he realised that one was actually wearing the Sorting Hat. He started to laugh hysterically at the total absurdity of his life. He had a feeling that nothing would ever be normal, and as he wiped the tears from his face, he spoke to Smith and the Keeper with a voice far more sure and confident than he really felt.

'What do I have to do?'

The Ministry was buzzing with people when Severus stepped out of the Floo. He mentally drew himself inwards in the hope that his passage would go relatively unnoticed, and followed the signs to the lift. He stepped in after a particularly rotund and sweaty wizard with a personal hygiene issue, and held his breath until he reached his floor. The Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures was set away from the main Ministry offices, for obvious reasons. Severus was grateful that the Beasts Division was even further away than where he was headed. He'd had enough encounters with dangerous animals to last him ten lifetimes. He found the door marked Beings Division and entered as if he did so on a daily basis. There was a large reception area with doors leading from it, and on the wall behind the desk was a large mural of various 'beings' that were classified X or XX by the Classification Department. Severus wondered how he should classify Hermione Granger, but chose to reserve judgement.

The blonde witch behind the desk looked up at him with a wide smile. 'Headmaster Snape, how nice to see you again, sir.'

Severus squinted down at the girl's ample cleavage then slicked his eyes back to her face. 'Brown?'

'That's right. Well, by rights it's Weasley but I kept my maiden name for work purposes,' she replied in an almost conspiratorial whisper.

'You mean you don't want to be hexed by Granger every time she has to be reminded that you stole her fiancée three weeks before her wedding day?' Severus smirked at the pink spots that flush the cheeks of Lavender Weasley, nee Brown. 'That's either very Slytherin or very cowardly of you. It is the estimable Ms. Granger I am here to see, so if you could hurry that along?'

'Yes, Professor Snape.'

This time the witch didn't even look at him, and privately Severus felt rather pleased.

Ronald Weasley was carving out a successful career as a Quidditch commentator for the wizarding radio's sports channel, 'By The Balls', and to all accounts, his exploits before marrying the strumpet were now something of legend. That he was meant to be with Granger at the time hadn't seemed to matter to him, and if the Prophet was to be believed, she had been the last to know. On the other side of the infernal triangle, Potter and the female Weasley were married and had gone travelling for a year or two before settling in Godric's Hollow. He was working as an Architect or Interior Designer or some such and had even worked with Draco on the rebuilding of Malfoy Manor. The way Granger had been treated by Weasley and his bit of fluff was bad enough, but because she was who she was, and they were who they were, the Prophet had made headlines of the story even when it should have been lining the bottom of a bird cage. Sometimes he felt that of all of the Golden Trio, Granger had been given the shitty end of the stick.

'She'll see you now. Second door on the left.'

Lavender Weasley, nee Brown, pointed along the left hand corridor, and Snape nodded with a smirk as he strode towards the door. He rapped briskly, and heard a familiar voice bid him in. Thrusting the door open, he was about to do his best to tell the Granger girl exactly what she needed to do to change the house-elf law and that she should do it immediately, if not sooner. But the sight that met him seemed to rob him of the ability to close his mouth, let alone speak.

Hermione Granger's office was large, even by wizarding standards. It was sleek and pristine, lined with floor to ceiling bookshelves in white, each shelf crammed full with books. Behind the glass-topped desk was a huge picture window, charmed to show a real time moving image of Hyde Park, and the whole room was carpeted in deep lilac shag pile. It was quite simply the most beautiful office he had ever seen, but it wasn't this that made his jaw drop.

Leaning against the desk was a vision of womanly beauty Severus had only ever read about in his mother's old romance novels. Her figure was most definitely hour-glass, her legs shapely and her ankles adorned with deliciously sexy black stiletto heels. She wore a red pencil skirt that hugged her like a second skin. Her shirt was crisp, clean white, with a perky collar and one too many buttons opened at the neck. There was the briefest hint of white lace and cleavage, covered just slightly by lustrous waves and tumbles of tamed and well cared for tresses in a deep shade of chestnut brown. Her skin was flawless, her eye make-up barely there but effectively accentuating her large, brown eyes. Her lips were slicked with peachy gloss, and as she caught his eye and smiled, she dazzled him with her beautiful teeth and the little dimple that leant a cheeky lilt to her stunning mouth. She was moving towards him now, her hips swaying, her shirt stretching across her chest and she walked. She held out a perfectly manicured hand, and he took it without thinking. Her grip was warm and firm and his fingers tingled beneath her touch.

'Headmaster. It's so lovely to see you looking so well. I imagine the school holidays have something to do with that? I've ordered up some coffee, and I brought in some home-made muffins. I hope that's acceptable?' She grinned at him, and he noticed the flecks of amber in her eyes and the bronze streaks in her hair. He knew he should say something, etiquette demanded it off him.

'Weasley was a bloody fool,' he said with a sigh.

Which wasn't what he had wanted to say at all.

the Middle of the Middle

Chapter 3 of 5

Of House Elves and Life Debts, Severus Snape learns there is more to Hogwarts, and it might just change his life forever.

The Middle of the Middle.

Severus Snape sat in high-backed leather chair opposite Hermione Granger and licked the remaining crumbs of chocolate muffin from his fingertips. They had tasted sublime, and the coffee was a rich, bitter counterpoint to the sweet and sticky chocolate on his tongue. He felt utterly spoiled, and couldn't help but smile across at the stunning witch before him.

'You have hidden talents, Ms. Granger,' he said softly.

'You have no idea, Professor Snape. Now, shall we get down to it?' She lifted her wand and with a slight flick, the detritus of plates and coffee cups disappeared. She sat up straight and pulled down her shirt smartly.

Hermione took out a pad of paper and a Muggle biro pen, slipped a pair of silver-framed reading glasses from a soft, leather pouch on her desk and then looked up

expectantly.

'So, Headmaster. What was it that you wished to discuss?'

The smile was gone from her face and her eyes were serious as they stared over the top of her spectacles at him. Severus felt his mouth go dry, and he realised he had been a fool to even think that she would capitulate to his wishes so easily. He had a feeling that being Slytherin wouldn't work either. He resolved to be honest, hoping he might gain ground.

'To be truthful with you Granger, I think I am about to waste both my time and yours, but I made a promise and I have to try to see it through. My life, such as it is, has been held forfeit by a Debt, and this Debt has now been called in,' he said quietly.

'You have a Life Debt?' Hermione sat forward and her tongue slipped out to lick her bottom lip in her eagerness for information. 'We did go back, you know. Actually we thought you were dead, to be frank. But when we arrived you had already gone, and we just thought your body had been collected along with the others.'

'Quite obviously, Granger, I am alive.' Severus pursed his lips. The talk of him being presumed dead had sent a chill up his spine, and he could feel a spark of frustration building.

'Of course. I apologise, Headmaster. I'm sure you have no wish to be reminded. Please go on,' she murmured, waving her biro at him like a stubby wand.

'As you know, Hogwarts has its own rules. After I had to leave the castle, Minerva took over my role as Head of the school. However, Hogwarts had other ideas and alerted those who saved my life.'

'You're saying the school still viewed you as Headmaster and that's why you're still alive?' Granger commented with a small smile.

'In a manner of speaking. I was saved by the house-elves.' Severus narrowed his eyes as Hermione Granger put down her pen and crossed her arms across her chest.

'I think I know where this is going and the answer is no, Headmaster.'

The witch set her mouth in a stubborn line. She certainly didn't look like she was going to smile at him again. Severus ran his fingertips across his lower lip and narrowed his eyes as he stared at Granger. Her eyes were like flint, and he fought hard not to smirk. He was reminded fully of his former student, and his inner Slytherin prodded him in just the right direction.

'Then I shall need to speak with the Keeper of the Books,' he murmured lowly with a frown. His gaze caught the slight flicker in Granger's face, then stood and smoothed his robes firmly before bowing slightly in her direction. 'A pleasure to see you, Ms. Granger.'

He started to walk towards the door and counted down in head 'Three, Two, One...' His hand was already on the door handle before she took the bait and he had to admit to being a little impressed at her restraint.

'Headmaster Snape,' she called out to him. 'Who is the Keeper of the Books? Did you mean Madame Pince?'

Severus smirked and turned to face her. 'The Keeper of the Books is a house-elf. Good day to you.'

With a swirl of robes, he opened the door and departed swiftly before she could catch him up. Now all he could do was return to Hogwarts and wait.

Hermione Granger stepped out of her Apparition and immediately tidied her hair. Being groomed for her work at the Ministry had become such a habit that even on her downtime; she couldn't help but be immaculate. She straightened her light navy jacket, took her wand from her pocket and then walked slowly towards the gates of her old school. Hogwarts looked just the same as ever, and it amazed Hermione that there were no residual signs of the war that had been fought within its walls and grounds. The gates were closed, but as she approached they swung open and Hermione frowned. If the castle was aware of her arrival then it stood to reason that so was the Headmaster, and she wasn't sure she was ready for that encounter just yet. His visit had rattled her in more ways than one, and in ways she hadn't anticipated.

Of course, there was the issue of the house-elves, which she had been rude to dismiss out of hand given that there was a life debt involved. But what had unnerved her most was the effect of his very presence on her libido. Hermione Granger was not a prude. Nor was she an innocent virgin. Hermione enjoyed good sex when it felt right, which was one of the reasons she had been more than happy to allow Ron his length of rope. It had worked like a charm, as she had known it would, and she had managed to extricate herself from a doomed marriage just in the nick of time, while at the same time protecting her position at the Ministry. Being a Muggle born witch meant that Hermione had to fight twice as hard for the respect she gained from her colleagues. Dumping Ronald Weasley would not have done her any favours and Lavender Brown was welcome to him, as far as Hermione was concerned. But there had been no 'significant other' since Ron, and Hermione, being a normal person, did have a yearning for a special someone in her life, someone to share her passions in bed and out, someone who would love her beyond all measure. Someone she could love back.

These thoughts hadn't been in the forefront of her mind when she had welcomed Severus Snape into her office, and she hadn't expected the jolt of lust as his eyes had met hers. He had looked better than she had ever seen him, and her adult self had realised very quickly that he was alluring and fascinating. She had found it hard to keep her eyes off him, and by the time he had left the room, her hands were shaking.

Hermione walked through the gates and caught sight of smoke coming from the chimney of Hagrid's hut. She smiled and felt a rush of affection for the big man who had been so much a part of her growing up at Hogwarts and decided that a short visit might just set her up before she had to face the Headmaster again. In fact, Hermione decided she could really use one of Hagrid's hugs right now. She quickened her pace, and knocked firmly on the door. She had expected to hear Fang barking to announce her arrival, but all she heard was shuffling beyond the closed door and then a loud click. She held her arms open and smiled widely, expecting to be hauled up into a face full of bristly beard. When the door was opened by Severus Snape, it was all she could do not to run away very fast. She dropped her arms in embarrassment, which wasn't helped by the amused, bloody gorgeous grin on the mans' face.

'I thought you were Hagrid,' she said, disappointment evident in her tone

'Hagrid is currently En France. I should imagine he is seducing the statuesque Madame Maxime as we speak.' He leant against the door frame and shoved his hands into the pockets of his black trousers. He was only wearing them and a white shirt, the sleeves rolled up to the elbow and two buttons opened at the neck. Hermione couldn't help but notice his firm thighs, and the pale trace of a scar at his throat. His hair was longer than she remembered it and glossy, too. She found herself wondering what it would feel like, and then blushed even harder as his lips quirked upwards.

'I'm sorry for staring. I don't think I've ever seen you out of your school robes,' she muttered.

'You only ever had to ask,' he said with a chuckle, obviously enjoying her embarrassment far more than she should let him.

'You know what I mean,' she said in exasperation. 'Why are you in Hagrid's home anyway?'

'I was hungry. I'm making bacon sandwiches, if you'd care to join me. I'm afraid you won't get anything else unless you want to walk down to Hogsmeade.' He turned and walked back into the hut, leaving the door open. Hermione's feet seemed to have a mind of their own and she followed him without even thinking.

'Surely you can still get food in the castle even if the children are on holiday? Or are the house-elves on holiday too?' Hermione said with a small smile. Silently she thought they deserved to have paid holidays and proper tea breaks, but she suspected that might just stoke the furnace of Snape's legendary temper, so she said nothing. She wasn't prepared for him to turn on her with a toasting fork and wave it dangerously at her. She withdrew her wand quickly and put up her strongest Shield Charm, feeling

non-plussed when he shook his head and began to laugh.

'I'm using it for the bacon.' He stepped aside and Hermione could see a frying pan full of sizzling bacon above the fire, and slabs of fresh, white bread slathered with real butter. Her mouth began to water. 'And you could say the house-elves are on holiday. They're on strike, thanks to you and your bloody crusade.'

Hermione removed her charm with a slight flick and glared at the back of Snape's shirt. 'It's not a crusade! It's about giving them equal rights! Slavery is not right and not fair. Not even you could agree to it!'

Snape stood up straight, and Hermione instantly felt the atmosphere change from sort-of cordial to downright chilly. He turned and pinned her with a cold, blank stare, all trace of amusement gone from his face, and his hand gripped the handle of the toasting fork so tightly his knuckles were bright white.

'Not even me? Do you mean me, the Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry? Or perhaps me, the Death Eater? Or the other me, Ms Granger? The one that existed before, during and after the rise and fall of Tom Riddle, the real me, the one that doesn't get labelled and actually does care about the well-being of every living creature here?'

His voice was soft, and he spoke slowly, but Hermione detected a slight tremor and she realised she had fallen into the same trap as every witch and wizard who believed everything the read in the Prophet. She felt sick, and apology was on the tip of her tongue, but before she could speak, he turned back to the pan and started to shift the bacon onto the buttered bread. None too gently, he slapped the slices together, slammed them onto a waiting plate and shoved the plate plus its sandwich into her hands.

'You'd better eat it. I don't want to be accused of allowing a paragon of the Ministry to starve on school premises. When you're done, meet me in the kitchens. And have that handy Shield Charm ready. The house-elves are none too pleased with you.'

Hermione bit her lip as he stormed out of the hut and slammed the door behind him. She rather thought that the Headmaster wasn't too pleased with her either. She did as she was told and ate her sandwich.

Snape's anger stayed with him until he tickled the pear on the tapestry outside the kitchens. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes, willing his temper to let it go. He was used to the judgement of those beyond the Hogwarts gates, and even some within them. It mattered very little. But Hermione Granger knew the truth. Or at least, he had assumed she did. There was always that slim chance that Potter the Brave hadn't actually shared the details of his memories, which would mean that Granger actually didn't understand his story. He had thought better of her though. To hear her words, thoughtless as they might have been, had wounded him, where he had been so looking forward to spending a friendly few minutes sharing his bacon sandwiches.

He stepped into the kitchens to find the house-elves seated around the long benches. Some were talking in groups, some were playing Gobstones, and some were drinking hot coffee and eating muffins. His eyes narrowed briefly.

'Smith, Miss Granger is here. She wishes to speak with the Keeper.'

Smith's mouth quirked briefly and he closed his eyes, mumbling under his breath. His eyes popped open seemingly in surprise and he stared up at Snape.

'He will see the Miss after he is speaking with the descendent of Hufflepuff,' he said in hushed, reverent tones.

'He means me, Smith. I am her last surviving relative.' Severus felt his cheeks flush as Smith took a low bow before him.

'Don't be so ridiculous, elf. I didn't even know myself until yesterday, and I won't have any of that cow-towing now. Point me to the Keeper, if you will?'

Severus soon found himself in a low, dark hallway lit with small, sputtering torches. He had to bend low in parts, and it was clear that the castle had purpose built itself to accommodate its shorter inhabitants. He found the old, wooden door and knocked once. The door swung open and he was ushered into what he assumed was now his chair by the old elf.

'Miss Granger shall join us shortly, I imagine,' he said quietly.

The Keeper checked the map and chuckled under his breath before eyeing Severus with a knowing look. 'Miss Granger is in the dungeons, Headmaster. In the Potions classroom.'

'Is she? What on earth for?' Severus shook his head and his brow furrowed. The witch was throwing him off balance at every turn.

'Reminiscence, perhaps. Remembrance, also. They are all important for witch and wizard kind, I understand. Now, Severus Snape. Information I need you to see, for you alone and not to be spoken of.'

The Keeper walked over to a dark corner of the room and clicked his fingers. The sound was loud in the quiet space and almost made Severus jump. He had a feeling he wasn't going to like this very much, and the glint in the Keeper's eye when he turned and smiled at him made him almost convinced of it.

The book he carried was slim, but clearly old. The cover was dark brown and cracked, the title obscured and faded by age. The Keeper put the book it before him, then took Severus' hand and placed it on the cover and held it there. The binding grew warm, and the book transformed. Where the book was dun and worn, new covering took its place in shades of red and green. Letters began to appear in silver edged with gold, and the scents of vanilla, musk and patchouli tickled his nostrils as they rose from the book.

'The Book of Destiny? You have to be joking,' he groaned. 'Here, have it back. I don't want to know what my destiny is; I'll just see what happens, if that's alright with you.' He lifted the book and tried to hand it back to the Keeper. The Keeper crossed his arms and gave Severus a shrewd glare.

'It is not just your destiny within these sacred pages, Severus Snape. The Gryffindor Miss also has a destiny to fulfil.'

'Granger? What does she have to do with me?' Severus couldn't help but open the book, and it flew open to a page that glowed like candle light.

'She is a daughter of Gryffindor, as you are a son of Hufflepuff and champion of Slytherin. Read.' The elf pointed his finger at the glowing page, and Severus began to scan the ancient-looking text.

'Through battle they fight, for the light they will win, but still their paths will not meet.'

'The servants of Helga claim their reward; her heir will repay all he owes'

'And the daughter of Gryffindor returns to the fold, in aid to her future betrothed.'

Severus stared open-mouthed and then closed the book shut with a slam. 'Ridiculous nonsense! If you knew all along that the light would win, why didn't Dumbledore know? You've made this up, elf, and I do not appreciate the joke!'

'Headmaster Dumbledore had his own destiny to fulfil. His book spoke differently, as they all do.'

The Keeper took the book out of Severus' tight grip and its colourful cover changed back almost immediately to the cracked and battered appearance it originally held.

'Believe it or believe it not. I only show.'

'You expect me to believe that Granger and I are meant to marry?' he said in a whisper. He could only wish to gain the love and desire of such a stunning witch. What she would see in him he couldn't begin to understand. But if the Book of Destiny was right.... If there was hope...

Severus felt his heart leap and his stomach flip, and his sensitive sense of smell caught a whiff of patchouli and a hint of vanilla. He turned towards the door to see Hermione Granger standing there and staring at him with wide eyes. Her curvaceous frame was highlighted by torchlight from behind, her smooth curls sparkling with hints of copper and gold. His mouth was dry, but he saw a hint of a smile touch her lips and he couldn't help but smile back and try to ignore the butterflies that seemed to increase their merry dance inside.

'Miss Granger,' he started to say, but he stopped, not knowing how much she had heard, or what she might be thinking.

'I think maybe you should start calling me Hermione, don't you?' She smiled, and stepped into the room.

The Beginning of the End

Chapter 4 of 5

Of House Elves and Life Debts, Severus Snape learns there is more to Hogwarts, and it might just change his life forever.

The Beginning of the End.

Hermione approached The Keeper with fascination. She had read 'Hogwarts: A History' from cover to cover at least once every term when she had attended the school, and she had always felt the section on house-elves to be woefully lacking. Everyone knew that Helga Hufflepuff had been responsible for their indenture... and that was as far as it went. The creatures within the Forbidden Forest were given more ink, and as far as Hermione was concerned it further highlighted the lack of status they held. Knowing now that the castle housed an elf who was as intelligent as and more learned than Albus Dumbledore himself, well... Hermione felt her indignation rise. How dare they make him live below the kitchens, out of sight and out of mind, with no-one to know and care about his welfare and well-being? It was simply unconscionable.

'You needs to stop that thinking, daughter of Gryffindor. You who might be called a know-it-all, you know nothing of us. That which you do know is that which we have permitted up until this moment in time.'

The Keeper eyed Hermione sharply, and she couldn't help but feel as if he could see right through her. Snape used to do the same thing in Potions class, and she wondered if it was a sign of intelligence, because this was clearly no ordinary house-elf. She tipped her head to one side, trying to grasp why this elf seemed so familiar to her, but the moment was gone as she let herself hear what he was actually saying.

'Are you telling me that you're telepathic?' she said bluntly. To her chagrin the elf started to laugh, a deep, wheezy chuckle that ended in a slight cough.

'We is many things. Perhaps I see your thinking, or perhaps it shows on your face. The Keeper was right, was he not?'

He looked a little too smug for Hermione's liking and she tore her gaze from him, suddenly aware that she was standing right beside Severus Snape, her thigh almost touching his hand where it rested on the arm of his chair. She flushed as she looked down into his face, but she didn't miss the open look of appreciation in his gaze before he schooled his features again.

'I wonder if I might sit somewhere?' she asked lightly. Looking around the cramped space, there didn't seem room for her, until the chair that Snape was sat in suddenly expanded into a small couch. Hermione bit her lip and stifled a nervous giggle as she squeezed herself beside the Headmaster, not least because of the low growl he shot at the now innocent looking elf.

'He reminds me of Dumbledore,' Severus murmured under his breath.

'Or Yoda,' Hermione responded, sotto voce, trying not to think about her thigh pushed warmly against his or her arm pressed against his side, or how his maleness was almost overwhelming her.

'Star Wars? Really?' Severus Snape grinned and shifted sideways so he was looking at her fully.

'You do remember my best friend, Harry Potter? We were both raised as Muggles and it's become a bit of a Christmas tradition. Ron was always convinced that Yoda was a house-elf and not a small man in a costume,' she replied with a laugh.

Snape smiled at her warmly, and their eyes met. She found herself smiling back, and felt like a lovesick teenager.

Severus couldn't stop looking at Hermione Granger. She was sitting right next to him, seemingly willingly. Their knees were touching, and at times her elbow dug him in the ribs. He didn't complain just in case she decided to move, but still, he didn't understand her actions.

'Miss Granger, after what you've heard I don't understand why you're not running in the opposite direction,' he said with resignation in his voice. Perhaps she hadn't heard everything after all?

'I spent my teenage years following a Prophecy that was really nothing to do with me. I didn't stop to think that I could be killed at any moment; I just went blindly along, helping Harry, putting his needs before my own. Then I put Ron's needs first after the war, and well, the whole world knows how that turned out. Honestly? Nothing shocks me any more. The fact that my destiny is linked to you, well...' she paused and their eyes met briefly before he was forced to look away. 'I wouldn't be averse to the idea, and it might explain a lot.' She put a warm hand over his and squeezed, before turning her attentions back to the elf.

To say that Severus was stunned was an understatement. His hand tingled where she had touched him, and he was openly staring at her profile as she was now head down and reading an ancient parchment that looked suspiciously like his own family tree. She mouthed the words unconsciously as she read, her lower lip full, pink and luscious. Her tongue darted out and licked the drying skin, and Severus bit back a moan. He stood hastily, wishing he had worn his robes. His cock was getting hard just being in her presence, and he had to put space between them if he wanted to maintain any dignity at all. He caught the knowing smirk on the face of The Keeper and he glared at him, but didn't say a word. He wasn't going to give him the satisfaction, and felt more than a little frustrated that a house-elf knew more about his future than he did himself.

'I shall meet you in my office when you're fully sated, Miss Granger.' He nodded his goodbye to Hermione and The Keeper and made for the door, but as he did so she caught his hand and pulled him back a little. He turned back, quite sure that his face was telling her exactly why he had to leave, and the touch of her fingertips against his palm made him feel weak at knees.

'Call me Hermione, Severus. And if you think this will sate me,' she waved her hand over the pile of parchments and books, 'I think you have a lot to learn.' And then she winked at him. He felt his mouth go dry but couldn't help but grin at her not so subtle statement of intent, for clearly this was a witch who knew exactly what she desired.

'Unhand me, witch. You have the house-elves to placate before we discuss matters of a more... personal nature.' He let his hand slide from hers and traced her lower lip with his index finger. It was warm and soft, more than enticing.... And he really had to leave.

Hermione felt like she'd been hit by ten Bludgers. The amount of information she had digested was overwhelming, and her stomach was growling. There had been a time, during the height of the war, when Hermione would have gone hungry in the name of research. But she was older now and understood the need to keep her body fuelled and her brain working. But even though it was way past dinner time and she had probably kept Severus waiting for far too long, she still read on.

The Keeper had shared ancient texts from as far back as the founding of Hogwarts, including two journals written by Helga Hufflepuff herself. The relevant sections had detailed the first house-elves to come to the school, and for them it had apparently been a sanctuary. Some had arrived in a terrible state, beaten, naked, and half-starved to death by the lack of care shown to them by their Pureblood owners. It made sense to her now why the house-elves were so averse to being freed. After all, what would freedom offer them that they didn't have already? Even Dobby had used his freedom to join his fellow house-elves at Hogwarts, because in reality, how else would he have survived? What she had thought was slavery and mistreatment had actually provided succour. And Hermione understood the need to be needed all too well.

Hermione made a few more notes onto the six foot parchment she had already written, and put down her quill with a satisfied sigh. She rubbed the back of her hand across her eyes, and looked up at The Keeper with a soft smile.

'Thank you so much,' she said sincerely. 'I am so grateful to you for sharing all of this with me.'

'You is most welcome, Miss. And we have an accord?'

The Keeper was still sharp-eyed despite the hour, and Hermione couldn't help but laugh. The elf had provided her with more information on the history of the elves and the school that had ever known had existed, but he hadn't forgotten their agreement. And Hermione had to admit, he was right. Her bid to change the legal status of the house-elves was foolhardy, she could see that now. However, there were still improvements that could be made, and they had bartered back and forth until she had a new Law written and ready to be scrutinised by the Ministry's legal department, and enough information that she could write a whole chapter on House Elves for inclusion in a revised version of 'Hogwarts: A History.'

'Yes, we have an accord. Could you tell me where the Headmaster is? I think have some more negotiating to do today.'

Hermione smiled to herself. What she had said to Severus had been right. Nothing surprised her now in the wizarding world. Prophecies, Books of Destiny... anything could be thrown at her and she wouldn't bat an eyelid. That her destiny wanted her to spend the rest of her life with Severus Snape was a little bit ironic, given that she had begun to think along those lines herself. At least this way she wouldn't have to fight too much to get him, because he had read the book himself. He didn't seem averse either, and there was clearly chemistry between them. Hermione had noticed his swift exit earlier and had known exactly why, too. She stifled a giggle at the thought of Snape trying to hide seemingly keen erection, but she had lived with Ron and Harry for long enough to know the signs. She had felt quite flattered, really.

'The Headmaster is now in his quarters. Here.' The Keeper pointed to a brightly glowing purple dot on his incredible map, and Hermione followed the route back to the kitchens. There was a glowing pink dot, the only one she could see, and she looked at the elf in surprise.

'Why am I in pink?' She asked him.

'Lover of the Headmaster,' The Keeper said with a small smile, 'and Keeper of The Secrets.'

'Why do I get the feeling you're not telling me something?' She narrowed her eyes shrewdly.

'In time, you shall know. In time, you shall know everything,' he whispered, his eyes closing as if he were seeing something that only he could see.

Hermione sighed. She had spent enough time in Dumbledore's company to know that she wasn't likely to get anything more from the elf right now. She stood and stretched, and felt a slight tingle between her legs as she thought about Severus. Her hunger for food was taken over by another kind of hunger altogether, and she almost ran to find him.

Severus sat in his usual chair beside the fire, nursing his whiskey and brooding. He had waited for her for hours in his office until he realised she wasn't coming. He was fairly sure he hadn't misread her flirting, and chose to assume that she was just engrossed in her research. He knew that feeling well himself and had often spent days researching for a new potion without sleep and little sustenance. He was all but resolved to go and find her when he heard footsteps running up the stairs and a hasty rapping on his door. He went to the door quickly and all but wrenched it from its hinges. She stood before him panting, her hair awry and her blouse askew. Her eyes were bright with excitement, and he grinned at her. She was such an open book, and he knew that she was full to the brim with new information. He recognised that feeling too. It seemed they were much alike in that respect.

'Are you alright?' he asked her with a smile.

'Have you any idea how much that elf knows?' Hermione grabbed his hand as she walked into his quarters, her eyes never leaving his face.

'More than you or I together, I should imagine,' he said with amusement. He linked his fingers through hers as she stepped towards him, and his breath hitched as she stared at his mouth and licked her lower lip.

'I think I should like you to kiss me now,' she whispered.

She closed her eyes as he bent towards her, and Severus paused for a brief moment, knowing that his life was about to change forever and this time welcoming it. He brushed her lips lightly with his own, and couldn't restrain the groan as she surged towards him and immediately deepened the kiss. He opened his mouth to her questing tongue, and pulled her flush to him until she would be in no doubt as to how her kiss was affecting him. She moaned between their lips and pushed her thigh against his hardness, but etiquette forced its way into Severus' heady thoughts and he reluctantly slowed their kisses to a gentle caress.

'Should we go this far on a first date?' he whispered huskily. She kissed him again sweetly, and he sighed, knowing his gentlemanly behaviour would be scorned by his fellow Slytherins and not caring one bit. This witch was different.

'How long do you think we should know each other before we make love, Severus?' Hermione said in exasperation. 'It's already been twelve years.' She looked up at him, and there was a feral lust in her eyes that Severus could no longer ignore.

'Point taken,' he growled. There was brief heartbeat, and then Severus wrapped his arms around her and kissed her with so much passion he thought he might explode before they had even made it to the bedroom. He pushed her backwards as her hands started to deftly unfasten his shirt buttons, and she hit the bedroom door forcefully. This seemed to fire her lust even further, and Severus ran his hands through her thick locks and trailed hot, moist kisses along her throat and across the tops of her breasts as she threw her head back.

'Bedroom, Severus, Gods, please,' she moaned as he licked his warm tongue along her cleavage and his thumb brushed lightly across her needy nipples.

Severus waved his hand absently, engrossed again by Hermione's delicious mouth, and they stumbled through the bedroom door. Hermione pushed his shirt open and latched her mouth to a waiting nipple, and Severus held her to his chest as he gasped with pleasure. He opened his eyes dreamily, and froze.

Hermione seemed to realise he had stopped moving and she raised her eyes to his, and then turned to follow his gaze. The bedroom was full of house-elves. This time they were even lying on the bed, looking far too comfortable for Severus' liking.

'Please tell me you came to an agreement,' he asked her with a sigh.

'Oh, yes, of course. The Keeper and I have drawn up a new Law. It's all been sorted out. And I'm very sorry for the distress I caused you all.' She addressed the elves with a small wave, and then pulled closer to Severus. He wrapped his arm around her as he drew himself up to his full height.

'You heard her. You can get back to the kitchens. Now!' Severus snapped.

The house-elves immediately jumped, and one by one they disappeared, leaving Smith, who bowed lowly.

'My thanks, Headmaster.' He had the nerve to wink before he too, disappeared.

'Severus, you must know that one of the new Laws is that the elves are to be addressed in polite manner,' Hermione chastened with a smirk.

Severus rolled his eyes and pushed her by the shoulders towards the bed. 'In that case, I should be punished, don't you think?'

Hermione pulled him closer and kissed him. 'You have the best ideas.'

With a flick of his fingertips, Severus locked, warded and set a strong silencing spell around the room. He had high hopes that things would get a bit noisy, but his musings were interrupted by the sudden draught of cold air around his crotch, swiftly followed by the feel of a warm and sure grip around the base of his now throbbing cock. Pre-come was weeping from the tip, and Hermione held his gaze as she ran a fingertip though the slick liquid and brought her finger to her lips. Her other hand drew upwards, a thumb ghosting over the ridge of Severus' cock, and he let out an audible moan as she slipped her finger into her mouth and sucked his essence from it. She closed her eyes and whimpered at the taste, before dropping to her knees. Severus held his breath as she angled his cock just so, then placed a delicate kiss to the tip, his sticky juices smearing her lips until she took him into the sweet, wet warmth of her mouth. The feel of her tongue swirling around him was almost too much. Slipping his hands into her hair, he tugged slightly. Hermione's mouth dropped open in surprise and he took the chance to withdraw and pull her back up to him. He kissed her swollen lips fiercely, at the same time unfastening her fly and slipping his slim fingers past the elastic of her knickers and down, down into her soft pubic hair, his index finger slipping through her soaking labia until he found her needy little clit. With a soft chuckle, he slipped past it after one stroke, and crooked his finger under, finding her hole and teasing her entrance with shallow thrusts. He noticed Hermione's hand was now plucking at her own nipple through the fabric of her bra, and her mouth fell open when he let his lips drift from hers and downwards to take the dark brown bud into his mouth, sucking softly and then with more intent.

'Severus,' Hermione whispered urgently, running her fingers up the length of his cock and making it twitch. 'Please. I need you to fuck me now.'

Severus pulled his mouth away and looked at Hermione. Her eyes were wide and glassy with lust, and as he pulled his hand from her panties, she stumbled. He held onto her waist with one, strong arm, and pushed her trousers and underwear lower before pulling her damp curls flush against the tip of his cock, making them both gasp. A light push had them both falling onto the bed, and as Hermione pushed her trousers fully off, Severus grabbed her by the hips, thrusting home without further preamble. Hermione keened and pushed forwards, tipping her hips up to meet him as his heavy balls slapped against the firm flesh of her pink arse.

'Fuck,' Severus moaned, his eyes out of focus as he bent to kiss the gasps from Hermione's pink lips. She felt so tight, but so eager. He knew he wasn't going to last long. Pushing himself up onto his hands, he started down briefly at where their bodies were joined, taking in the sight of her moist lips as they clung and sucked him in to the very hilt. Hermione smiled at him softly, then pushed down the cups of her bra to reveal her soft, creamy breasts, running her palms across her nipples and making herself groan, squeezing her nether walls at the sensation.

'Touch yourself, minx. I won't last, not this time...' he whispered, forcing himself to hold still until her fingers had found her swollen clit and she started to thrum herself to orgasm.

'Gods, Severus, move... move...' she ground out, bucking her hips until he got the hint. Slowly, he began to withdraw, and then thrust firmly back in, and then again, this time increasing his pace unbidden. The sensation began deep within, a tightening that made his eyes close at the pleasure of sensation. He was aware of Hermione's thighs trembling as her orgasm started, and a loud, wailing cry as she came, her cunt throbbing and grasping around him as he felt himself grow harder. And then it was all too much. This witch, and this incredible sex, the best he had ever experienced, with someone who wanted him as much as he wanted her, apparently. He stilled as his orgasm broke, feeling his cock pulse as he came hard, his own cry mingling with Hermione's. He collapsed unceremoniously on top of the panting witch, and sighed as he felt her gentle fingers carding his hair and her soft lips kissing his cheek. Pulling back slightly, he stared into her dark, sparkling eyes, and answered her wide smile with one of his own.

The End

Chapter 5 of 5

Of House Elves and Life Debts, Severus Snape learns there is more to Hogwarts, and it might just change his life forever.

The End

The hour was late, and Hermione Granger was sat in the library of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry as she had on so many nights, with her head in a book.

Severus stood and watched her for a moment, still enthralled that this witch was now his. It had been three years since they had first met with The Keeper, and his life had changed more than he had ever imagined it would. It was about to change again, for tomorrow was their wedding day, and they were with child. Severus felt his heart ache and tears pricking his eyes. He was a fortunate man indeed.

'Severus?' Hermione looked up from her book and smiled. She had known he was there from the moment he had entered the library. Her time spent getting to know the castle has almost melded her magic with its walls, and she could sense someone approaching and sometime who that person was, even before she could see them. Now,

she could find Severus wherever he was within Hogwarts just by extended her senses. She hadn't shared that bit of information with him yet, because even now he valued his privacy and needed his time alone. But not for too long. Too much thinking time would get him brooding, and brooding would lead to negative thinking and pushing her away. They had started their relationship passionately, and it had taken time for them to fully get to know each other beyond the bedroom. But she loved him, and he loved her, and they were rubbing the edges off each other in order to fit comfortably. Hermione had never been happier.

Hermione closed her book and stood, waving her wand to place the new, revised copy of 'Hogwarts: A History' back on its shelf as she walked towards Severus. She wrapped her arms around his waist and rested her head against his chest, inhaling the scents of the Potions classroom, where he had been teaching an advanced class.

'Is everything alright?' she murmured against him. She smiled as he wrapped his arms around her and nuzzled his large nose into her hair.

'It's late, Hermione. You should rest. We have a long day tomorrow.' Severus stroked her hair softly.

'I know. I'm fine. I could come back with you,' she said hopefully.

Severus chuckled. 'Nice try, witch. Traditions will be upheld, even if we are closing the door once the Hippogriff has bolted. I shall walk you back to the guest room.'

Hermione sighed and allowed Severus to take her hand and walk her out of the library.

In a small room below the kitchens, The Keeper watched as the Headmaster and his intended walked through the castle. The Book of Destiny in his hand was glowing as it added new pages, and he would have to call them both down in a week or so.

He had been young when he had first met Helga Hufflepuff in the home of her relatives, but he had never forgotten her, or her pretty blue dress. When she had called him to Hogwarts, he had not needed to think twice, and they had become friends. He missed her still, but he thought he had done her well, in the end. He was tired and older than even he remembered, and it was almost time for the new Keeper to be born.

This time, The Keeper would be a wizard, and the whole world would know.

The Beginning....