

The Way To A Woman's Heart Is Through Her Stomach

by *articcat621*

Hermione offers to teach her friend Martha's summer baking class. While doing so, she runs into someone she hadn't seen for years.

Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 8

Hermione offers to teach her friend Martha's summer baking class. While doing so, she runs into someone she hadn't seen for years.

A/N: This little beauty is dedicated to Araeofsomething for her birthday. I'd like to give a huge thanks to JenniferLupinBlack for being my fantastic alpha and to TrisanaChandler13 for being my fantastic beta. I hope you all enjoy, and April, happy (late) birthday!

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Chapter 1

Hermione hurried down the hall, thankful that they were empty. She had accidentally overslept this morning and was now late for the class. Her best friend Martha had gone into labor a month early so she was unable to finish teaching the summer baking course she ran at the local community center. Hermione, unable to say no, agreed to teach the remaining two weeks of the course. She was a decent baker so she figured it wouldn't be too difficult. Martha was confident Hermione would be able to handle the class. There were only five people in the class.

But those five people will be angry you're late Hermione reminded herself, picking up her pace. When she realized she was at the right room, she paused outside the door to collect a calming breath.

Opening the door, she walked inside. "Sorry I'm late everyone!" she said, moving to place her bag on the table in the front. "My name is Hermione Granger, and I'll be filling in for Martha. Her little one was born early so she'll be unable to teach. I will finish up the course since she is obviously unable to. I hope none of you object that."

Hermione glanced up for the first time, looking over the people in the class. Near the front was a couple sitting so close together that Hermione thought the girl was sitting on the boy's lap. A middle-aged woman sat at the opposite table. There was a young girl sitting behind the woman, who looked to be no older than fourteen. She glanced at the last person and felt her jaw drop slightly.

No, that wasn't right.

There was no way it was him. There was no way in hell that was Severus Snape staring at her. No, it couldn't be.

She swallowed nervously, her tongue darting out to wet her lips. With the glare she was receiving, she could only assume it was indeed her surly Potions professor. She

coughed nervously under his glare.

"Well, today we'll be baking a bay leaf pound cake," Hermione said, her eyes darting around the room. How is it that one look from this man made her feel like she was in his classroom once again? "Some of you may be wondering about the bay leaves. Sounds gross, doesn't it?" She laughed. "Well, coupled with the orange, it creates a delicious taste. And as an added bonus, the cake makes the room smell absolutely wonderful."

She walked around, passing the recipe to all the people. Hermione was careful to avert her eyes from Snape as she slipped him a paper. Turning, she walked to the front of the room.

As everyone collected their ingredients, Hermione thought about her former potions professor, Severus Snape. She had not heard of him, or seen him, since the end of the war. After recovering at St. Mungo's, the surly wizard slipped away from the wizarding world. No one even knew where he went or lived.

Yet here he was, Hermione mused. Severus Snape taking a summer pastry course in a small Muggle neighborhood. She would have to ask Martha if she knew anything about him.

The class flew by as she explained step by step what to do. It seemed most of them knew what they were doing so they were able to get through quickly. The only ones who had any difficulty were those two teens that wouldn't stop hanging off one another.

"April, if you can't untangle yourself from Dave long enough to watch your cake, there's nothing I can do to prevent it from burning," Hermione said with a sigh as April continued to cry about her ruined cake.

Oh, to be young and in love Hermione rolled her eyes. As everyone packaged up their things to leave, Hermione noticed Snape was lingering behind the others. Her heart raced as she wondered why.

Slowly, everyone left the room except for Snape. She watched him, waiting for him to say something.

As the silence stretched between them, Hermione realized Snape wouldn't be saying anything. She sighed, knowing she would have to start the conversation.

"Well, Professor Snape, fancy seeing you here," she said, immediately cursing herself. Why in the world would she say something so cheesy to him? She was an idiot.

An amused expression appeared on his face. He stood, approaching the front of the room.

"Miss Granger," he said with a slight nod of his head. "I did not expect to see you here."

She laughed. "Well, I never expected our paths to cross again." Her eyes widened in horror. "Not that I didn't want them to, it's just, er, wow." She bit her lip. "I'm really making an arse out of myself, aren't I?"

"Yes, but it is rather amusing," Snape stated. He looked at the witch, taking in her appearance.

Hermione squirmed under his intense stare. Those onyx eyes could make a first year shake in fear, but now they were having a different effect on her. It suddenly felt as if the room was too hot. She opened her mouth to say something, but he cut her off.

"Not now, Miss Granger. I can see the wheels turning in that head of yours and know you must have questions. Why don't you ask them as we walk to the parking lot? I'm assuming you drove?"

Hermione collected herself and nodded. "Yes, I drove here." She tilted her head to the side, looking up at him. "Did you drive here, Professor?"

"Call me Snape or Severus," he corrected. "I haven't been your professor in six or so years now."

"All right, Severus," she said, testing his name on her lips. "You may call me Hermione, then."

"No," Severus replied, a smirk appearing on his face. "I think not, Miss Granger."

What? Hermione gaped at him. It seemed this man was as vexing and infuriating as ever, just how she remembered him.

"But yes to your earlier question," Snape responded, moving towards the door. "I drove here."

Hermione slung her bag over her shoulder and followed him out. "So, have you been living as a Muggle?" she asked.

He shrugged. "I suppose. It is much simpler. I still brew potions, but I get all my ingredients delivered through the post. I have no use for being seen in public."

Hermione nodded. She knew people still hated him, despite Harry making sure everyone knew the truth. It was quite sad, to be honest.

"But I must ask," Snape said. "Is Miss Jones all right? She went into labor quite early."

"Oh, Martha's fine!" Hermione said. "I just visited with her yesterday. She and the baby are good. They're both home. She named him Jared, Jared Jones."

"How do you know her?" he inquired.

"Martha and I have been friends for ages. She knows I'm a witch. She found out during my third year. We've been inseparable since our childhood. We went to grade school together." Hermione explained walking beside him.

"Miss Jones is the reason I'm in this infernal class," Snape said.

"Oh?" Hermione glanced up at him, taking in his profile. His nose wasn't as large as she remembered it being. Immediately, she scolded herself for thinking that. What the hell was wrong with her today?

"Yes, we're neighbors. She grew tired of me asking her to bake for me."

Hermione laughed. "Sounds like Martha, all right. But you're neighbors? I thought you lived in Spinner's End."

"No, I moved. Wanted to hide from the public, remember?" Severus said as if it were obvious.

"Well, this is me," Hermione said abruptly, pointing to her yellow Volkswagen Beetle.

Snape snorted. "I don't know why I'm surprised you're driving a car with an obnoxious color."

"Hey!" Hermione protested, throwing her hands on her hips. "What the heck is that supposed to mean? Yellow is a cheerful color!"

"For a Hufflepuff," Snape retorted.

"Oh? And I bet you drive a green car, don't you?" she asked snidely.

"Yes, Miss Granger, I do," he replied with smirk. Pulling out his car keys, he pressed a button and a beep sounded out.

Looking around, she tried to spot his car. When she did, she had to stop herself from gaping. He did drive a green car. It was a deep forest green. It was a green Jaguar. Severus Snape drove a green Jaguar.

"I need to go home," she murmured, feeling as if today had been a trip down the rabbit hole.

"Well, Miss Granger, I'll see you tomorrow," Snape said, walking towards his car.

"Bye," she muttered, getting into her own car. She would be calling Martha as soon as she got home.

Chapter Two

Chapter 2 of 8

Hermione offers to teach her friend Martha's summer baking class. While doing so, she runs into someone she hadn't seen for years.

A/N: Oh my goodness, I'm so glad so many of you are enjoying the story! I'd like to give a huge thanks to JenniferLupinBlack for being my alpha and to TrisanaChandler13 for being my amazing beta. I hope you enjoy the next chapter of our little story.

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Chapter 2

Severus pulled into his driveway. Getting out of his car, he walked into his small home. Today had been tiring.

When Hermione Granger had walked into the room today, his heart had stopped. She was the last person on Earth he would have expected to see.

He had to admit that she looked good, much different than the young girl he remembered from Hogwarts. Gone were the knobby knees and awkward figure, in its place was a woman's body. She was all curves with legs that seem to go on forever. Her hair seemed to have tamed itself since her youth. She had cascading curls instead of that matted bird's nest.

Not that he was checking her out or anything, because he wasn't. He'd rather pluck his eyes from his face than look at her in that way... any way really.

After spending so much time in seclusion, it was a strange feeling to see someone from his past. Severus had been determined that he would spend the rest of his days in solitude without anyone from the wizarding world in his life. He didn't need anyone. He never needed anyone. Why should that change?

He wondered what she was up too. The other two thirds of the "Golden Trio" were often in the paper *The Weasley boy especially*, Severus thought with a sneer. It seemed the redhead had no class as he was always in the paper for something. He knew Potter had married the Weasley girl, but nothing about Hermione. She was never in paper. It was almost like she never existed.

Was she married? What was her career? What has she been doing with her life? He wanted answers to these questions, even though he would not admit that.

He knew she was Muggleborn. Maybe she had integrated herself into Muggle society much like he did. Maybe she was also a social recluse. She had always been cleverer than her friends; maybe she had finally realized that?

She moved beautifully in the kitchen. He had watched, captivated, as she walked about, gathering the ingredients and mixing them together. Her curls had bounced with every step, and she was cheerful at every moment.

He wondered if she wanted to strangle those two young lovers. He knew he did, as well as Martha. April and Dave spent every lesson the same way. They'd kiss, cook a little, kiss, cook some more, kiss... It was a never ending pattern. Severus knew if he had students like that in his Potions classroom he'd be frustrated beyond belief.

His cake had turned out a bit dry, but it was good. He wanted to do better, though. He was a Potion's master. Putting ingredients together and heating them was something he should be able to do with perfection. He shook his head. He'd just have to try harder.

Severus glanced at his bay leaf pound cake. Hermione was right; the combination of orange and bay leaves was quite delicious. But it was too much; he wouldn't be able to eat it all.

He glanced out his window and looked across the way. Maybe Martha would like some? He was sure that with a newborn, she wouldn't have time to make herself food. Yes, he decided he would bring some cake over.

Cutting Martha a slice, he wrapped it up. He walked across the day, knocking on her door.

It flung open seconds later, revealing a frazzled Martha. "Severus!" she exclaimed. "Come in, come in. Jared just went down for a nap so you'll have to wait to see him."

"It's all right, Miss Jones. I was just going to drop off the pound cake we made today." He held up the plate.

"Oh, do come in," Martha gestured, holding open the door to let him in. "I'll make us a cup of tea."

Severus followed her into the living room. He took a seat as she bustled around the kitchen. "Are you sure you don't want me to do it?" he asked.

Martha poked her head out of the kitchen. "Oh, yes, please. Can you do it fast with your magic thing?"

Severus chuckled. "It won't be as good as the normal way."

"Don't care," Martha said with a wave of her hand. "I need tea, now."

Severus went into the kitchen, quickly making two cups of tea. Taking them back into the living room, he saw Martha sprawled across the couch.

"Feeling all right?" he inquired. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Severus, you are just too sweet," Martha said, flashing him a smile. "And no, I'm fine. It'll take some time to adjust, but I think I've got it."

"I'm glad to hear that," he replied, taking a seat.

"So," Martha said, sending him a look. "I just got off the phone with Hermione."

Severus internally groaned. He should have known Martha would want to speak about Hermione.

"Why didn't you tell me you knew her?" Martha inquired.

"You've never mentioned her," Severus countered. "She was my student many years ago."

"Hmm," Martha said. "I suppose I should have made the connection, she attending Hogwarts while you teaching there."

Severus grunted noncommittally.

"She's grown a bit since you've last seen her, eh?" Martha said, a mischievous look in her eye. "She said you looked good for your age."

He abruptly stood, not liking where Martha was going. He could see the silly gleam in her eye and knew better. He would not fall victim to her ploy. "Miss Jones, I think I will take my leave."

"Oh, Severus, come on," she said with a laugh. "Stay! What's wrong with talking about Hermione?"

He ignored her. "Take care, Miss Jones. Ring me if you need anything."

"She loves a man who cooks!" Martha called out after his retreating form. "She's single!"

Severus shook his head, walking out the door. The cries of a baby filled the air behind him, and he silently smirked *Serves that meddling woman right. What was she thinking? Trying to set Miss Granger and me up.*

No, he'd pour himself a glass of bourbon and forget Hermione Granger.

Chapter Three

Chapter 3 of 8

Hermione offers to teach her friend Martha's summer baking class. While doing so, she runs into someone she hadn't seen for years.

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Chapter 3

"Hermione, it's so early. Why in Merlin's name are you Flooing me so early?" Ginny said through the Floo, rubbing the sleep from her eyes.

"Early? Ginny, it's nine o'clock in the morning. It's not exactly a crazy hour," Hermione retorted with a laugh.

"Early enough for your pregnant friend. This baby won't stop moving," Ginny complained. "I can barely sleep at night; he won't stay still."

"Well, I'm sure James is just eager to be born," Hermione said. "Speaking of babies, Martha had hers!"

Ginny smiled. "That's exciting! Send her my love."

"I will," Hermione promised. "But that's why I've messaged you. You'll never guess who's in the class I've agreed to teach for her."

"Who?"

"Severus Snape!" Hermione said with an air of excitement. "After all this time, I've found Snape!"

"What?" Ginny hissed in disbelief. "You really found Professor Snape? Has he been living as a Muggle?"

"Yes!" Hermione responded. "I won't tell you where, of course, because that's his secret." She paused for a moment before saying, "Don't tell Harry. I don't want him to know just yet."

"I won't," Ginny promised. They both knew if Harry found out he'd stop at nothing to ask Snape about his memories. "How is he?"

"He looks healthy, Gin," Hermione responded, a light blush forming on her face. "He's gain a bit of weight since the war."

"Well, I'm sure not being a spy anymore has something to do with that," Ginny retorted. She sighed. "Poor man."

"I know," Hermione agreed. "He was nice, though. It was a bit strange, but he wasn't opposed to my presence. We talked the whole way to our cars."

"Cars?" Ginny asked surprised.

"He drives a Jaguar!" Hermione said. "Can you believe it? I practically had to scrape my jaw off the floor."

"Really? Oh, Hermione," Ginny said with a laugh.

Hermione frowned. "I was so tongue tied yesterday, Ginny. I don't know why, but it was embarrassing."

"Tongue tied? Hermione Granger, no you didn't!" Ginny let out a squeal that made Hermione cringe.

"What are you going on about?"

"You like him!" Ginny shrieked. "Oh my goodness, Hermione! You fancy Snape!"

Her brown eyes widened. She shook her head fervently. "No, no way! I do not fancy Professor Snape!"

"I know you, missy, and you definitely do. I see it all over your face. You never get flustered around anyone, Hermione. This is a sign!" Ginny continued to mumble something under her breath.

"Well, I've got to go. Thanks for nothing, Gin," she huffed, closing the connection.

As Hermione stood, she shook her head. Ginny was wrong. She did not like Professor Snape. Nope, no way in hell. Her reactions yesterday were just due to the surprise of seeing him, that's all.

Grabbing her things, she drove to the community center. At least she wouldn't be late today. Parking her car, she looked around the lot, immediately cursing herself. There was no reason for her to be looking for Snape's car.

Making her way to the classroom, she placed her bag on the table. Slowly, her students began to walk in.

"Good morning, Miss Granger," Snape said, walking past her. He nodded towards her.

"Good morning, Severus," Hermione responded.

As everyone took their seats, Hermione began to grow uncomfortable. Snape was staring at her, his hard obsidian eyes pining her down. What the hell was he doing?

With a jolt, she realized he was trying to read her mind. *That sneaky, little bastard* Hermione made sure to strengthen her shields, forcefully pushing him away. If he wanted to know something, he'd have to work for it. No easy way for him.

"Well, today we're going to make vanilla cupcakes with a chocolate ganache frosting." She passed out the instructions. "Why don't we get started?"

As everyone was moving to get ingredients, Hermione noticed April and Dave were too busy wrapped up in themselves.

"April! Dave!" Hermione reprimanded them, causing them to jump apart. "If you two are here to cook, then get going. If not, there's the door. Feel free to use it."

April blushed, bowing her head forward, her hair forming a curtain around her face. Dave bolted upright, fixed his glasses and moved to gather their ingredients.

Hermione watched as everyone began to cook. She read through the steps, making sure everyone was following along properly.

"Miss Granger."

Looking up, she saw Snape looking at her expectantly. "Severus? What is it?" she inquired, moving towards him.

"Come here," he said, his voice smooth and demanding.

Hermione ignored the way his voice made her stomach turn. Approaching him, she tried to see what the problem was. "Yes?"

"There. Why did my ganache do this?" he pointed one of his fingers towards his cupcakes.

"Ah," Hermione said. "The ganache was too warm. When you poured it on the cupcakes, it simply ran right off. If you had waited for the ganache to cool a bit longer, it would have been perfect, Severus." She looked at him, smiling. "May I?" He nodded, and she reached down and took a cupcake.

Severus watched as Hermione picked up a cupcake and took a bite. He stared as she swallowed, shifting in his seat. Placing the cupcake down, she beamed.

"Well done, Severus. It's very moist."

Her words made him feel uncomfortably tight in the pants. It was then he noticed a small drop of ganache on the corner of her mouth. "You've got a little something there," he said, pointing to her face.

He enjoyed the way her face turned pink from embarrassment.

Severus narrowed his eyes at the witch, startled by the sudden erection he was sporting. Her pink tongue darted out, sensually licking the ganache from the corner of her lip. Desire ran through him, making it feel like he had been electrocuted.

"Are we done today?" he asked, his voice scratchy.

Hermione was startled. "Er, yes, we're done for today."

He stood, grabbing his things and practically bolted from the room. Hermione watched him go, wondering what on Earth had just happened.

"He's a bit of a strange one," Dave said, watching the abrupt departure.

"But he's dreamy," April said, a smile on her face. Dave made a sound of protest. "But don't worry, baby, I've only got eyes for you." She planted a kiss on his lips.

Hermione shook her head. She would never understand some people. It seemed that Severus Snape might be one of those people.

Chapter Four

Chapter 4 of 8

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Chapter 4

The first week passed by quickly. Every day was practically the same and Hermione was growing frustrated.

His formality was driving her up a wall. Everyone else called her Hermione, but not him. She remained Miss Granger, no matter how many times she tried to correct him. She would call him Severus, and he'd still respond formally. She didn't understand him. What was so wrong with him saying her first name?

Just once, she decided. Just once she wanted to hear that deliciously smooth voice of his say her name. She wondered if it would roll off his tongue perfectly or if he would stumble over the mess of consonants.

Severus Snape was driving her insane, and she was sure was sure he was doing it on purpose. He was constantly asking questions that she was sure he knew the answer to.

It was like Snape was turning into a teacher's pet, and she couldn't figure out why. Why in Merlin's name was he constantly vying for her attention? It was so unlike him and she just couldn't figure him out.

It was frustrating as hell. She felt like tearing her hair from her head in frustration. Every time she tried to ask him about his behaviors, he always made up some incomprehensible excuse before walking away. She just didn't understand him.

A small part of it was amusing. It was almost like their tables had turned. Just as she was always going the extra mile on her homework, he was going the extra mile with his baking. His skills continued to improve, and he was almost at the point of being a perfect baker. She was always making an excuse to taste his food. It was always delicious.

But today would be different. Hermione was determined to find a way to make him spill. The way he was messing around with her wasn't fair, and she wouldn't take it anymore!

As the class filed in, Hermione watched the door. She was waiting for him. He would always greet her first, sometimes cutting her off in the process. But today, she was determined to beat him to it.

He strode through the door, his messenger bag slung over his shoulder.

"Morning, Severus," Hermione cheerfully said, doing a victory dance in her mind.

He paused mid-stride to look at her. "Good morning, Miss Granger." Then, without a backward glance, he took his seat.

She frowned. That wasn't exactly the reaction she had been hoping for. She didn't know quite what she was looking for, but something would have been nice. A smirk? Or even a full hint of a smile? But no, she received a blank face.

Well, bugger.

Sighing, she turned towards her class. "Today we'll be making chocolate chip cookies. I know this seems like an easy recipe for most, but it isn't. It takes careful measurements and cooking time—April, make sure you pay attention today—in order to keep the cookies from burning, being too dry, etc. Now, come take a paper and begin."

Everyone began to move forward but she only had eyes for one person. Severus was sitting in his chair, his dark eyes watching her. She arched a brow in return, silently challenging him. He blinked, and then got up from his chair to collect his ingredients.

Hermione chose that moment to go over to the cooler as well. She loved chocolate chip cookies and had decided to bake some.

As she reached up for the milk, a hand brushed hers. Startled, she pulled back.

"Do you need any assistance, Miss Granger?" Severus asked, his body incredibly close to hers.

Hermione licked her lips, shaking her head. He smelt wonderful, absolutely wonderful. Like woodland spices and coffee all mixed together. It was unique. It was him.

"Miss Granger?" he asked, a small smirk appearing on his face. "Why, it seems I've rendered the infamous Miss Granger speechless once again."

She scowled. "Severus, you know it isn't nice to tease people."

"Then you shouldn't make it so easy," he retorted. He glanced at her and then back at the milk. "Are you sure you don't need my assistance? You are quite short, Miss Granger."

"No," she snapped, grumbling something under her breath. Getting up on her tippy toes, she reached up to the cooler shelf and grabbed a cartridge of milk.

Severus watched with an amused expression as Hermione moved around the cooler to gather her ingredients. Her lips formed the most adorable little pout as she shook her head, her curls tumbling all over the place. The fire in her eyes ignited something deep within him.

He had thought he'd never have felt such passion for anyone again. After all, the situation with Lily ruined any types of hopes he had about finding a partner. Life had been continuously cruel to him. It seemed only right that he would die alone.

But then Hermione walked into the classroom earlier this week and his life had changed. For the first time in forever, Severus felt something more than complete indifference. At first it was innocent. He enjoyed the way her hips would sway as she moved around the kitchen. Her nose would scrunch up when she was concentrating on a difficult baking task. And he loved the way she'd take the time to explain the steps to everyone, especially those two lovesick teenagers. Hermione would have made a great teacher.

But what got him most was the idea of her baking for him and him alone. He imagined her moving about the kitchen, making dinner and baking cake for dessert. Or maybe she'd make him Crème Brulée or some other succulent dessert.

And he knew what he felt was desire. He wanted Miss Hermione Granger, despite all the red flags and warning. Her age was a big one but he pushed that thought aside. She was an adult now, long past her Hogwarts years. To begin with, she had always been mature for her age.

So he set out with his mission to impress her. He used to mock her behaviorism during her students years, but now, he was trying to channel his inner teacher's pet. He wanted to impress Hermione enough so she would give him a chance. He wanted a chance with her.

"Miss Granger," he said, gaining her attention. He watched with eager eyes as she walked over.

"Yes, Severus?"

"I'm sorry to bother you, but could you show me how to properly cut my dough?" He had molded it into a long roll of cookie dough and had seen the perfect opportunity to gain Hermione's attention.

"Pardon?" she asked, disbelief written all over her face.

"May you show me how to cut it?" He held up the knife.

Hermione carefully took the knife, brushing her hand against his. "Like this," she said, cutting the end of the roll off to form a cookie.

"Ah, so I see, Miss Granger," he said, looking up at her. She had the most beautiful brown eyes. "Thank you for showing me; I don't know how I would have managed."

"Severus, what are you playing at?" Hermione hissed quietly, her eyes darting around frantically.

He shrugged. "I don't know what you mean, Miss Granger. I needed your assistance, isn't that what you're here for?"

She looked at him warily. "Yes, I suppose I am. Well, if that's all."

"For now," he responded, smirking at her. He watched as she huffed and stormed away.

It really was too easy to mess with her.

Chapter Five

Chapter 5 of 8

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Chapter 5

Hermione carefully packaged her cookies, having decided to bring them over to Martha's house. She was eager to see her friend, as they had a lot to discuss...mainly, her neighbor.

When Hermione discussed Severus with Martha earlier in the week, her friend had been incredibly aloof about the situation. She was determined to find out why Martha was being so secretive. There wasn't any reason for it, was there? All she wanted to know was a little more about Severus, was that too much to ask?

Getting into her car, she drove to Martha's house while humming a song she had heard on the radio earlier in the day.

Pulling into the driveway, Hermione looked at the houses on each side of Martha's home. She wondered which one was Severus'.

"Hermione!" Martha called from the front porch. She waved, a warming smile on her.

"Hello, Martha!" Hermione called as she exited her car. "I brought over some cookies we made in class today." She placed the cookies on the table, taking a seat on the bench swing.

"Those smell absolutely delicious, Hermione," Martha gushed, immediately reaching for a cookie.

"And how's my favorite godson?" Hermione asked, taking the small babe from her friend's arms.

"Favorite godson?" Martha shook her head. "He's your only godson."

"Well, maybe, but once little James is born, I'll have two godsons."

"Oh, you lucky, lucky girl," Martha said with a snort. "But he's doing well. He was just fed and burped so I'm sure he'll fall asleep soon."

Hermione cuddled Jared while she sang to him softly.

Martha watched with a smile on her face. "You'd make a wonderful mother, Hermione."

At Martha's words, an image of Severus popped into her mind. She tried to push the idea of him and children away, but failed miserably. Ginny was right: she had developed a crush on her former professor.

"Hermione?" Martha asked. "Is there anything you want to talk about?" A knowing expression appeared on her face.

Hermione sighed. "Tell me about Severus, Martha. How long have you been neighbors? Is he decent to you? Has he mentioned the war or anything about the wizarding world to you? Has he said anything about his past?"

Martha laughed. "Hermione, one question at a time!" She took another cookie, biting into the soft center. "We've been neighbors for five years now. He moved in shortly after I bought my own house. He was a very private man then. He still is, of course, but now it isn't as bad. It took ages for me to get him to come over for a cup of tea. Although he can be snide and callous, he is a good man on the inside, which I'm sure you've noticed." Martha smirked, watching Hermione.

She blushed. "Er, yes, I may have noticed that Severus had changed from when I last spoke to him."

Her friend grinned. "I think he would do you some good, Hermione. You've been single for so long."

"I'm sorry, am I interrupting?"

Startled, both girls turned to the porch steps. Severus stood there, a plate of cookies in his hand.

Hermione's eyes widened in mortification as she wondered how much he had heard. "Hello, Severus," she said quickly.

"Oh, more cookies!" Martha said excitedly. "Thank you, Severus." Martha stood and took the plate from him. "He's been bringing me all his baked goods the past few days."

"Have you?" Hermione questioned, looking to Severus. His expression remained stoic.

"He's improved quite a bit, thanks to you," Martha said. "It seems Hermione's been doing you some good, Severus."

"Yes, well," he said, shifting on his feet. "I hope you enjoy."

"Actually, Severus, I was wondering if you'd do me a favor. You see, I was going to invite Hermione in for tea, but I actually don't have any."

He arched his brow. "Your point being?"

Martha gave him a look. "I know you have some tea at your house."

Severus let out a sigh. He turned to Hermione, an amused expression on his face. "Miss Granger, would you care to come over for tea?"

Embarrassed from Martha's antics, Hermione blushed. She nodded, sending a glare to Martha.

"Wonderful!" Martha said, standing. "Let me see Jared." She took the baby from Hermione's arms and grabbed her cookies. "Thanks again for the cookies." Entering her house, she closed the door behind her.

Hermione looked to Severus awkwardly. "So," she said, gently biting her lip.

"Come along, Miss Granger," he said, turning and walking down the sidewalk. "I invited you to tea."

"But only because of Martha," Hermione retorted, cursing herself for wishing he had invited her on his own accord. She looked down at her feet, wishing she was anywhere but here.

"Hermione," he said softly, saying her name for the first time.

Her head jerked upwards, eyes wide as she met his gaze. "Severus," she replied.

"Please, come in for tea," he said, pointing to his house. It was the one to the left of Martha's. A white house with grey shutters. Completely ordinary.

"All right," she said, following him to his house. As she walked inside, she quietly looked around.

His home was clean. Cleaner than she would have expected from a bachelor. But was he one? Her eyes widened when she realized she didn't know if he had anyone.

"Are you married?" she blurted out.

He paused, turning to look at her. "No, I'm not. Why would you ask that?"

"Well, your house is so clean, so I thought..."

"So you thought I was married," Severus finished for her. "No, Miss Granger, some people are simply capable of taking care of their home." He motioned for her to take a seat on the sofa.

"Miss Granger? I was Hermione five seconds ago," Hermione complained as he made them tea. She watched as his fingers moved quickly, preparing the tea exactly to her liking. How did he know how she liked her tea?

"That moment has passed," Severus retorted quickly.

She sighed, shaking her head. Her curls tumbled about. "I just can't read you." She accepted the cup of tea he handed her but didn't drink from it. She suddenly felt sick to her stomach.

Looking up at Severus, she saw his expression was once more cool. Hermione let out a small groan of frustration.

"Yes, Miss Granger?" he inquired, curious as to her behavior.

Hermione placed her cup of tea on the table. "You're just so hot and cold, Severus! One minute, I think you like me, and the next, you're treating me as if I'm an inconvenience. I can't stand it."

"Then don't," he said curtly. "Leave."

"It's just frustrating, Severus. I just want to know. I need an answer or at least something." She looked at him with pleading eyes. "Don't shut me out, Severus. Not when we've come so far."

He watched with guarded eyes as she stood and slowly approached him. She hated the coldness in his eyes. It reminded her too much of the past.

"Please, Severus. All this flirting and your behavior in class... Does it mean anything?"

He remained silent.

Hermione could scream in frustration. "Please, Severus, I want it to mean something."

Severus closed the distance between them, his lips landing on hers. Hermione immediately wrapped her arms around his neck, deepening the kiss. She closed her eyes, savoring the sensation of his body pressed against hers.

It was pure heaven. Ecstasy bubbled within her body, spreading throughout her like a warm fire. He was everything she ever wanted. Yes, she wanted him. Oh, sweet Merlin, she did.

Abruptly, the kiss ended as Severus pushed her away.

"What?" she asked, looking up at him in a daze. Horror was written all over his face.

"Get out," he abruptly said, backing away from her.

The warm, fuzzy feeling slowly left her body. It was replaced with a dark, depressing coolness.

"Severus, I don't understand," Hermione whispered. "I thought that you..."

"Get out," he said, narrowing his eyes at her. "Get out of my house, Granger."

Tears filled her eyes. "Severus, please, talk to me."

"Get out of my house!" he shouted, pulling out his wand. Her eyes widened.

She didn't need to be told twice. Hermione ran from the room as quickly as possible, slamming his front door shut with unnecessary force.

She cried the whole way home.

Chapter Six

Chapter 6 of 8

Hermione offers to teach her friend Martha's summer baking class. While doing so, she runs into someone she hadn't seen for years.

A/N: Well, onward with the story! I know many of you would like to give Severus a thorough spanking for his behavior, but patience! I'd like to give a huge thanks to JenniferLupinBlack for being my fantastic alpha and to TrisanaChandler13 for being my fantastic beta.

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Chapter 6

Hermione spent the whole weekend moping around. She watched tear jerkers on her telly and ate three gallons of ice cream. She knew it was pathetic, but Severus had taken her heart and stomped on it.

That stupid git.

She dreaded seeing him today, but she would get over it. She had to continue teaching the class. There were only five more days of it, anyway.

She could do it. She would do it. She was Hermione Granger, for Merlin's sake! She wouldn't let some cranky, old man keep her down.

Yeah, that's right, Hermione. Go on and pretend you're not miserable.

Driving to the community center was awful. Every song on the radio made her want to burst into tears.

Martha had been absolutely no help either. She had called to see how their "tea date" had gone and Hermione responded by telling her it was absolutely awful. Martha, determined to see the two of them together, had pressed Hermione to call Severus and apologize.

It wasn't even my fault! Severus is the one who ruined the moment.

But those lips, sweet Merlin, she could not forget that kiss. That small kiss had lit a fire inside of Hermione that she had been unable to put out herself. And she attempted to find relief but none was found. She spent the nights tangled in her sheets, a sweaty, frustrated mess.

Walking into the center, she made her way to the classroom. Mentally, she braced herself for the awkwardness to come. Hopefully, he'd be his formal self. She didn't think she could handle any of his flirty teasing. Not after their disaster.

When Hermione entered the classroom, she found everyone but Severus *wasn't* there.

Strange, he's usually punctual, she thought to herself. Figuring he must have hit traffic or something, she decided to wait a few minutes before starting.

But once it was ten past, she knew she needed to start class. Hopefully he would turn up at some point.

Not that he wants me worrying for him or anything.

"Today, we'll be making some banana bread. Bread can be tricky because you don't want it to get too dry on the inside. You want it nice and moist. Here are the directions, you may begin. Feel free to ask me questions as you go along."

After getting everyone settled, Hermione stood back and watched. She didn't bake today, as she just wasn't in the mood.

Where was Severus? Despite the fact he was a snarky git, she hoped he was all right. She would hate if something had happened to him, especially after the way they had left things.

She wondered what had happened. Outside his house he had spoken her name. She had never thought her name to be sensual, but the way he had said it sent chills down her spine. It was beautiful.

And then he had prepared his tea the exact way she liked it. But how would he have known? Maybe he had asked Martha? He had to have cared for her. Why else would he have gone through so much trouble?

Or maybe he had just invited her over because Martha had practically forced him. Maybe he just wanted nothing to do with her. Maybe she was just a fool for imagining all of the flirting between them.

No, there was no way she imagined it. She had seen the lusty looks he had given her and the way his body would slightly turn towards hers. She saw the want in his eyes right before they kissed.

That kiss.

It was pure heaven. It was ecstasy. Whatever it was, Hermione desperately wanted more.

And then for him to just push her away like that... It wasn't fair. Maybe he was just conflicted? He had spent so much time alone that maybe he was just afraid to let anyone else in.

Yeah, maybe that was it. Maybe he was just afraid.

"Hermione, I have a question," April said, interrupting Hermione's thoughts.

Pushing Severus from her mind, Hermione went to assist April.

You're a fool, Severus.

Martha's words had stung him more than he had imagined they would. He knew he was an idiot; he didn't need to hear anyone else say it. But coming from her, it had hurt. He had thought that by putting distance between himself and Hermione; he would just be saving everyone trouble.

Hermione didn't know what she was getting into. She was a young witch with a whole future ahead of her. She probably wanted kids and a whole family, something he did not desire in the slightest. She deserved to live a happy life, not be dragged down by his guilt and misery.

And she barely knew anything about him. He barely knew anything about her.

It was just a bad idea. Even if they did get together, she would come to her senses and leave him anyway. That's what people do to him, isn't it?

Lily, Albus, Minerva... there was a long list of people who had deserted him. He had no desire to add Hermione to that list. He could not handle losing one more person he had let himself care for.

Best nip it in the bud before it can turn into something else.

Deciding to drop the baking class was a hard decision, not one that he made with a light heart. Severus had spent the weekend thinking about it. He had decided that after having Hermione in his home, after kissing her, he wouldn't be able to be around her.

There was no way he could do it.

A knock on the door interrupted his thoughts.

"Severus!" Martha shouted through the door. "Severus, open the damn door this minute!"

He snorted, shaking his head. *I don't think so, Martha.*

"Severus, stop doing this!" Martha cried. "Don't be an idiot."

No, he'd continue to ignore her and wallow in his misery. It's worked for him all these years and would continue to do so.

Chapter Seven

Chapter 7 of 8

Hermione offers to teach her friend Martha's summer baking class. While doing so, she runs into someone she hadn't seen for years.

A/N: Seriously, thank you all so much for the reviews! There's just one more chapter left after this one, and I really hope you all continue to enjoy. Thanks to JenniferLupinBlack for being my fabulous alpha, and TrisanaChandler13 for being my fantastic beta.

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Chapter 7

Before Hermione knew it, the baking class was over. As she said good-bye to her students, she knew she would miss them all. April and Dave especially. The two teens were adorable, and Hermione imagined they'd marry someday. They were perfect for one another.

Severus, on the other hand, never showed. He missed the last week of class because of her. Hermione felt awful about it, but she was still angry with him. Angry that he stopped coming just so he wouldn't have to face her. She knew that she deserved an explanation, so she was determined to get it.

Which was why she was currently driving over to his house. She would talk to him even if she had to break down his door to get an answer. Hermione had called Martha to tell her she was stopping over. Martha had explained that she had tried to get Severus' attention, but he would not respond.

He just can't shut people out, and Hermione was determined to prove it.

She couldn't get him out of her mind. She thought about him every day and every night. Oh, she had the most delicious dreams about him.

Hermione was determined to make those dreams realities.

Pulling into Severus' driveway, she looked up at his house. A few lights were on so he was obviously home. Getting out of her car, she slammed the door shut.

Gathering her Gryffindor courage, Hermione marched up to his door. She knocked on it. There was no response. She knocked again, harder this time. Still no response.

"Severus Snape, if you do not open this door in five seconds, I will knock down this door!" she shouted. Her hand slid into her pocket, fiddling with her wand. And she would do it too. Screw all the Muggles surrounding them.

"Five!" she shouted. "Four!"

She paused. Still no response. She discreetly pulled her wand out.

"Three, two o—"

The door flung open.

Severus stood in the doorway, glaring at her. "Put your wand away this instant, you foolish girl!" he hissed, his eyes darting up and down the street.

"Not until you let me in your house," she said, narrowing her eyes at him. He looked as if he hadn't slept in days, not to mention he smelled a bit. She crinkled her nose at him. "Let me in." She rolled her wand between her fingers in a subtle way.

"This is forced entry," he growled.

"Don't care," Hermione said with a shrug. "We need to talk, and we're going to talk."

"What if I don't want to talk?"

She smiled at him cheerfully. "Then I will tie you to a chair and make you listen to me."

Severus grumbled something under his breath. He stepped aside, allowing her entrance. "Fine," he said curtly. "I'm not pleased about this one bit."

"I knew you wouldn't be, and once again, I don't care!" Hermione repeated over her shoulder, entering his home. "You've been a right git and you owe me an explanation." She crossed her arms and looked at him. "Martha, too. You've had her quite worried about you." She sighed, shaking her head. "I was worried about you too."

"I did not ask either of you to worry about me," he retorted, moving into the kitchen.

Hermione followed him. "That's what people do when they care about you, Severus. They worry!"

"I never asked anyone to care," he snapped.

Hermione huffed, shaking her head. "Don't be an idiot, Severus. People care about you, whether you realize it or not. Merlin forbid someone actually does."

He didn't say anything, just turned his back to her.

Hermione looked around the room. Dirty dishes were in the sink and the trash smelled horrible.

"Severus," she said gently. "What's been going on? Why is your house a mess? Why are you a mess?"

"Because," he snapped.

"That's not an answer. Why do you do this to yourself? Why are you so masochistic?"

Severus turned to her, a horrified expression on his face. "I am not a masochist."

She tilted her head, looking him over carefully. "It sure seems like that. You kiss me and then push me away. You let yourself and your house fall to shite because of it? And back to your Hogwarts time, spying on Voldemort? Were all the Cruciatus Curses and all the pain and suffering you received punishment for what you called Lily? Retreating from everyone who cared about you? Retreating from the world without even caring? Was that punishment for killing Dumbledore, despite him asking you to?" She knew she was pushing his buttons, but she needed him to snap so he would see reason. "It sure seems to me that you like punishing yourself, Severus."

"Be quiet!" he shouted, moving towards her. He towered over her small body, his face contorted in rage. "You know nothing about me. How dare you stand there and even say such things."

"Then let me in," Hermione replied, grasping the front of his shirt. She held onto him as tightly as she could. "Let me in, Severus, please! I want to know you. I want to help you get past whatever's holding you back."

He took her hands and pushed them away from his body. "Nothing is holding me back."

"Yes, it is," Hermione protested. "You want me; I know you want me. You've made it painfully obvious during our cooking lessons last week. We kissed, which you instigated, mind you, and then you suddenly push me away. What happened?"

"You're wrong," he said, shaking his head. They were still dangerously close, and Severus knew he needed to pull away, but his feet were planted firmly where they were. Her sweet cinnamon scent filled his nostrils, teasing him endlessly.

"Severus, please, let me in. I care about you. I want the chance to know you more." Her brown eyes peered up at him. "Please, I want you," she begged.

He looked away from her. "I don't know."

With a sigh, Hermione took a few steps away. "Well, think about what I told you. You don't need to punish yourself anymore." She looked to him pleadingly. "Please."

When Severus didn't respond, Hermione turned and walked towards the front door.

"Good-bye, Severus," she said, closing the door softly behind her.

She didn't hear him whisper, "Good-bye, Hermione."

Chapter Eight

Chapter 8 of 8

Hermione offers to teach her friend Martha's summer baking class. While doing so, she runs into someone she hadn't seen for years.

A/N: Well, here is the final chapter! I hope you all enjoy it. I had so much fun writing this little story, and I am so pleased that so many of you liked it. A huge thanks to JenniferLupinBlack for being my fantastic alpha and to TrisanaChandler13 for being my awesome beta.

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Chapter 8

It had been a week since she had spoken to Severus. It was with a heavy heart that she realized she probably wouldn't hear from him again. She could only hope that he had learned his lesson, and if he found someone else, he would not make the same mistake twice.

The phone rang and Hermione answered it, assuming it to be Martha.

"Hermione?"

She froze, not believing it. "Um, yes, this is Hermione," she said into the receiver.

"It's Severus." There was a pause. "I was wondering if you'd like to come over tonight for dinner."

She smiled. "Yes, Severus, I'd like that very much."

"There's much to discuss."

"Indeed," she retorted. "What time shall I come over?"

"Six, if that works."

"Okay, see you then."

"Good-bye, Hermione."

She grinned at the sound of her name. "Good-bye, Severus. See you later." She hung up the telephone before doing a small dance.

Immediately, she dialed up Martha.

"Hermione, did he finally call you?" Martha's voice came through the receiver.

"Yes!" Hermione said excitedly. "I think I really got to him."

"You did," Martha responded. "He told me he'd invite you over for dinner a few days ago. I guess it took him some time to gather his courage."

"I guess so. Martha, I'm excited."

"I'm excited for you. The two of you are perfect for each other." Martha told her truthfully. Martha knew the pair was made for one another.

"Well, there's a lot I need to do before tonight. Thank you, Martha." Hermione said with a huge smile spreading across her face.

"You both just have fun tonight." Martha laughed at how excited her friend was. "I'll talk to you later, Hermione. Bye."

"Bye, Martha." She quickly hung up the phone going to the fireplace to Floo Ginny.

Hermione spent the afternoon prepping. She got a manicure and pedicure with Ginny and shaved her legs when she got home.

She had one goal in mind and that was to seduce Severus.

Pulling into his driveway, Hermione collected her nerves as best as she could. She could do this. She wanted this.

Walking up to his door, she gently smoothed her dress. She had decided on a little black number. It stopped right above her knees, revealing just enough leg to tempt. It had thick black straps on the top and there was white lace around the middle. A pair of black kitten heels accompanied the outfit.

Knocking on the door, she waited patiently for Severus to open it. He did moments later, a small smile on his face.

"Hermione, come in," he said, stepping aside for her.

She smiled at him stepping into his house. "You look a lot better than you did the last time I saw you."

"Thank you, I feel much better."

"If you want to move into the dining room, I have dinner set up."

"What did you make?" she inquired as she followed him in that direction.

"Spaghetti and meatballs," he retorted. "Would you like red or white wine with dinner, Hermione?"

"Am I Hermione permanently, now?" she asked, turning to face him.

Severus paused. "I think so, yes." He smirked. "Now answer the question, witch, red or white."

"White, please." Hermione took a seat at the table. The lights were dimmed to the perfect level, and there were candles on the table. It was utterly romantic, and not something she would have expected from him at all.

He handed her a glass of wine before taking a seat across from her. "I hope this is all right."

"This looks perfect," she said honestly. "Severus, I'm quite impressed. I've never had anyone romance me like this."

"Well, I've never had, wait, did you just say you've never been romanced properly?" He looked at her, his eyes wide.

"Nope," Hermione said with a shrug. "Suppose this is my first date." She laughed nervously.

"But, no." He shook his head. "Someone must have. Weasley?"

Hermione burst out laughing. "Oh, sweet Merlin, no. I've been single since Hogwarts. Not a single date. I suppose I'm too intimidating."

"Well, you are intimidating."

"But this is nice, Severus. I really appreciate it." Hermione held up her glass of wine, toasting him. He did the same. After taking a sip, she looked at the food on her plate. "This looks delicious. Did you make it?"

"I'm an excellent cook," Severus replied. "It's baking I have difficulty with."

"That must have been hard to say," Hermione said, smirking. Severus gave her a small glare. "Well, your skills would have improved if you had stuck with the lessons."

"Perhaps I could get private lessons," he said, his dark eyes peering into hers.

She swallowed nervously. "Perhaps, Severus. We'll have to see how the evening goes."

He smirked. "And how would you like this evening to go, Hermione?"

"Ask me again once I've had more wine," she said, laughing.

The two of them made small talk during dinner. Hermione talked a bit about what she had been doing since the war ended. She explained that she preferred to stay at home, writing. She had a lot of unpublished material about her experiences during the war, and hoped that one day, she would publish a book. Severus, in turn, talked about his newfound love for gardening and how he brewed potions in his basement.

After dinner, the two of them retired to the couch where they continue to talk and drink wine.

"So after that incident with Kreacher, I never once again tried to free a house-elf," Hermione finished with a laugh.

Severus couldn't help but chuckle. "That is amusing. I'm very surprised that Kreacher did that to you."

Hermione nodded. "Oh, I'm quite sure Harry gave him permission, that little bugger."

"And Potter is good?" Severus inquired. He enjoyed the look of Hermione sitting on his couch, her feet tucked beneath her. He imagined the two of them sitting here beside the fire, reading novels together.

"He's doing well. He and Ginny are expecting their second baby."

Severus snuck her a look. "Are you jealous?"

Hermione looked confused. "Jealous? Why on earth would I be jealous?"

He shrugged, making a noncommittal grunt.

A sly smile broke out onto her face. "Severus, if that's your way of asking if I want children someday, the answer is no. I can't have children due to the torturing I received from Bellatrix. Not that it matters," she added hurriedly. "I never wanted children to begin with. I'm happy just babysitting everyone else's children."

He nodded, the gears turning in his head. She laughed, putting her wine down on the table. She scooted close to him, taking the glass from his hand and putting it down as well.

"Severus, if you haven't noticed, I'm very interested in you."

He cleared his throat, gazing at the beautiful witch in front of him. "Oh, I've noticed."

"And how do you feel about it?" Passion burned in her eyes, drawing his gaze into her. He felt as if he was looking at her soul. "Hmmm?" she prompted.

"I feel quite well," he stammered out before clearing his throat.

"Why don't we try that kissing thing again?"

Severus smirked before he covered her lips with his. She was just as soft and sweet as he remembered. Wrapping his arms around the small witch, he pulled her into his arms.

Hermione deepened the kiss. She tangled her fingers into his hair and adjusted herself so she was now sitting in his lap. Her dress had bunched up and was now showing an obscene amount of leg.

He broke away, nuzzling her nose with his own. "My petit croissant," he purred.

She smirked. "I think I'd like to see your petit croissant."

Severus chuckled as he placed a kiss to her neck. "I assure you, witch, my croissant is anything but petit."

Hermione blushed, wriggling in his lap. She bit her lip when she felt his now hardened member. Her hand dipped low, gently rubbing it.

He let out a hiss of pleasure. "Hermione," he groaned.

"Please, Severus. Let me in. Let me know all of you," she whispered, planting small kisses along his jawline.

"Yes," he replied, his hands moving to her hips. "Oh, sweet Merlin, yes."

Pulling away, she smiled at him. "Severus, you are a wonderful man." She gently kissed him.

He pulled away, kissing her neck. "I've wanted you for so long," he growled, gently biting at the sensitive skin there. She let out a soft moan, her hands gripping the front of his shirt.

"Severus," she whispered, wanting to feel him. She wanted his hands and lips everywhere.

"Want to take this to the bedroom?" he asked between kisses.

"No," she said. "I want you here and now."

Severus growled in response. His hands landed on her thighs as he gently caressed her creamy flesh. Slowly, his hands moved up and under her dress.

Her fingers quickly began to undo his buttons. Despite wearing Muggle clothes, Severus still had buttons everywhere. She vaguely wondered if the man had a button fetish.

Severus' fingers gently rubbed her slit through her lace knickers. She wriggled in his lap, wanting more. His lips moved to her neck, gently kissing and teasing the skin there.

"Severus," she cried, fumbling with the buttons. "You have too many damn buttons." Unable to wait any longer, she ripped his shirt open. Buttons went flying as her eyes widened. She saw scar upon scar on his chest. "Oh, Severus." She moved her hand towards his chest, but his hand grasped her wrist, stopping her.

"Don't pity me," he said, his voice flat. "My life has not been kind to me."

Hermione looked at him. "Severus, your scars make you beautiful."

He snorted, casting his gaze away. "They're ugly."

She looked at him sympathetically. "I hope you don't think my scars are ugly," she whispered softly.

Severus' gaze snapped towards her. "You have scars?"

Nodding, Hermione stood. Lifting the hem of her dress, she pulled it up and over her head. She stood before Severus wearing nothing but her lace bra and knickers. Her tongue darted out, wetting her lips.

"Here," she said, motioning to the scar that ran across her chest. "This is from Dolohov from my fifth year." She then showed him her arm. The nasty word stood out on her pale flesh. "This was a gift from Bellatrix, when she tortured me."

Severus frowned, letting the pad of his thumb run across the raised letters carved in her arm. "I knew you had been captured, but I had no idea."

She shrugged. "My scars are part of who I am. They don't bother me anymore. I used to hate them. I thought they made me ugly." She smiled at him, returning to her place in his lap. "But now I know they aren't ugly. My scars are a part of me. They show the world how hard I fought and how brave I was." She placed her hand on his chest. "And that's what your scars say to me. They tell me how hard you fought in both wars. They tell me how brave you are and how far you went to protect me and everyone else. Your scars are a sign of strength, Severus, not weakness."

He looked to her, astounded by her words. Emotion bubbled up within him, and he quickly closed the distance between them.

"You are perfect, witch," he whispered between kisses. "So perfect, so wise."

Hermione returned his affections eagerly. "Please, Severus, I don't want to wait anymore." She looked to him with pleading eyes. She wanted him inside of her. She wanted all of him.

Grabbing his wand, Severus murmured something under his breath.

Cool air hit Hermione's body, and she realized that he had vanished their clothing. Her eyes widened as she eagerly took in the sight before her. He was beautiful. Her hands ran up and down his arms, taking in the feel of his smooth skin. She smirked when her gaze landed on his hardened member. He was right... no petite-ness there.

Wrapping his arms around her, Severus maneuvered them so Hermione was now lying back against the sofa. He lowered his head, gently capturing her nipple in his mouth.

She hissed, arching her back. Tangling her fingers in his long hair, she let out a soft moan. His tongue swirled around the stiff peak as his hand gently palmed the other breast.

"Please, Severus," she whispered. "I'm more than ready for you. Please."

He smirked against her breast. "Please what, witch?"

"Take me!" Hermione practically sobbed. Her entire body was aching with desire. She needed him. "Please, Severus."

He moved his head lower, planting kisses across her taut stomach. "But I want to enjoy you, Hermione," he purred.

She wriggled his hips. "There will be plenty of time for that later, I promise."

His lips moved back towards her neck. "Are you quite sure?"

"Yes," Hermione moaned. "Severus."

Severus' hand trailed down her body to the place between her legs. He gently slid a finger into her, closing his eyes. "So wet," he murmured.

"Please." She bucked her hips against his hand.

He quickly withdrew his finger and placed his member at her entrance. Without any further hesitation, he pushed inside of her. Severus hissed in pleasure as her hot warmth surrounded him.

Hermione gasped, her hands wrapping themselves around his neck. Closing her eyes, she savored the feel of him stretching her.

Severus slowly began to move, pulling out slowly before plunging back in. Hermione bucked her hips, meeting him thrust for thrust. Eventually, they found a rhythm and began to increase their speed.

"Oh, Severus," Hermione panted, her nails digging into his shoulders. Every thrust of his was driving her closer and closer to the edge. *Severus.*"

He closed his eyes, savoring the sound of his name falling from her lips. He pushed everything from his mind but her. All that mattered was Hermione and how she tasted... How she felt...

"Severus," she whispered, her walls contracting around his member. She let out a gasp as she came.

Severus claimed her lips in a kiss. He reached completion quickly, moaning her name as he did. She swallowed his moans, kissing him tenderly as he finished.

They collapsed in a tangled heap on the couch. Chests were heaving as the sounds of heavy pants filled the air.

"Oh, Severus," Hermione said, turning to face him. "That was wonderful." She nestled against him.

Severus was quiet, allowing himself to take in the moment. He felt wanted for the first time in forever. He felt loved and accepted. He finally had someone who wasn't afraid to see every part of him. He wrapped his arms around her, holding her against him tightly.

"Are you all right?" Hermione asked after a few moments when she realized Severus wasn't going to say anything.

"Fine, Hermione," he replied, nuzzling her neck. "I was just enjoying myself."

She smiled. "I rather enjoyed myself right now."

Severus inhaled her sweet scent. Maybe Martha had been right all along? Maybe the two of them would be good for each other? Looking at Hermione, he saw she had fallen asleep. He chuckled as he summoned a blanket for them both. He fell asleep soon after.

The next morning, Hermione groggily opened her eyes. She felt a solid body next to her and immediately smiled as she recalled where she was. Propping her head up, she saw Severus was awake.

"Good morning, sleepyhead," she said, grinning at him.

"Good morning," Severus replied. "Did you sleep alright?"

She laughed. "As good as I could have sleeping on a couch." Her stomach growled. "What's for breakfast?"

"Go make something," he retorted.

"Nope," she said, giving him a hard push off the couch. He fell to the floor. "Go make breakfast."

He looked at her, a murderous expression on his face. "Why, you little vixen. I should..."

"Go make breakfast," Hermione finished for him. When he didn't move, she frowned. "Please, Severus, I'm hungry."

He arched his brow at her.

Smiling, Hermione lowered the blanket, revealing her nakedness. "The faster you make breakfast, the faster we can have a repeat of last night."

Severus huffed but stood. "You drive a hard bargain, wench."

She laughed. "Don't forget to wear your apron, dear!" she called after him teasingly.

He flicked his wand at her while walking into the kitchen, grinning when he heard her small yelp from the stinging hex he sent her.

Things would definitely work out between the two of them. They were like ingredients that meshed together to make the perfect cake.