

The Ninth Step

by Minerva

Hiding in the basement of a church after a raid gone wrong, Severus Snape gets a surprise.

Part I

Chapter 1 of 3

Hiding in the basement of a church after a raid gone wrong, Severus Snape gets a surprise.

Author's Note: I had to place Spinner's End near Birmingham because for the sake of the story it has to be within reasonable driving range of another place. The story is progressing over a few years. While there will be a love-story later on, it centers around Severus' relationship with his father. It is finished and will be posted in three parts.

Many thanks to my marvellous beta Dreamy_Dragon! No copyright infringement intended.

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Severus Snape could not say whether he shuddered because of the taste of Polyjuice potion or because he had to wear Remus Lupin's second best robes. Personally, he considered even his Order colleague's best robes not fit for public appearances. He would (and could) not spend the amounts of Lucius Malfoy's tailor bills, but took great care to be always impeccably dressed - a childhood spent in poverty and awkwardly fitting Oxfam-clothes saw to that.

He had heard of a raid, but for obvious reasons could not be seen among the Order's fighters. Therefore he had had to assume the werewolf's role. Not bothering to check his appearance in a mirror, he Apparated to the meeting point, a depressingly familiar working class suburb in Kidderminster.

As the crow flies, it was only a mile from Spinner's End where Severus hailed from and still owned a house. Well, technically it might still be his father's property, but he hadn't seen Tobias Snape since he had thrown him out of the house after his mother's funeral during his sixth year. Thrown out without magic.

Coming of age a few weeks later, he had paid the meagre bills for the up-keeping of the house from the proceeds of the potions he sold on the side: for concentration, for lust, for pranking even. And he had warded the house in a way that prevented his father from entering. Neighbours had told him later that Tobias had asked after his son repeatedly, but as Severus hadn't warded the tool shed - and since the tools were gone when he had come back in summer - he felt no remorse.

Keeping to the shadows, he scanned the area of the supposed attack, the home of a Muggle-born Auror. The spy felt the anti-Apparition wards come down and knew that the arrival of the Death Eaters was imminent. It had been planned with about twenty followers of Voldemort in attendance; therefore, it was safe for Severus to alert the Order members, who were right now hidden in said Auror's house.

Going into battle-stance, he saw Fenrir Greyback less than thirty yards away, sniffing the air. It was a split-second decision. If the werewolf laid eyes on Remus Lupin smelling like Severus Snape, his cover would be thoroughly blown. Reasonably sure that Greyback had not yet noticed him neither by sight nor by scent, Severus legged it.

Even after dashing through back alleys for 200 yards, he could still feel the wards...some Death Eater must have been over-zealous. Climbing over a wall, he came to the back-entrance of a truly ugly modern church. Light spilled out from the door propped open by a bucket half filled with sand and cigarette butts. He slipped inside and found himself in the hall of what seemed to be a multi-purpose basement room with a circle of chairs and a thermos and plastic cups on a side table.

A man came out of the toilet off the hall. He took Severus' appearance in and addressed him in a friendly manner, "First time here, aren't you? Don't be shy, come in and grab a cup of coffee."

Surprised, the spy found himself ushered into a seat and presented with a cup of lukewarm, greyish coffee. He had meant to take refuge in the church before walking further away. One never knew if Voldemort had an Auror on his payroll who would scan the area for suspicious Apparitions afterwards, particularly if the attack failed.

Taking a cautious sip, Severus looked around. About twelve men and women of all ages sat in the chairs, some talking to their neighbours, others staring morosely at the worn linoleum floor. He was quite sure that he hadn't stumbled into the local parish council meeting but couldn't fathom what this motley crew of people had assembled for.

"Good evening, everyone. Welcome to the St. Bridget's step meeting. My name is Chris. I am an alcoholic. Tonight we'll be discussing the Ninth Step...asking for forgiveness from those we have wronged. Please join me in welcoming our speaker!"

Sparse clapping followed this announcement.

What the heck, Severus thought, this can't be worse than a staff-meeting.

A middle-aged man he hadn't noticed before because he had been arranging some brochures on a side-table made his way to the top of the circle.

"M' name's Toby, I'm an alcoholic."

The man talked about the purpose of the Ninth Step while Severus zoned out. There was no mistake...he was sitting in a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous with his own bastard of a father speaking. Speaking about forgiveness and redemption of all things! The Potions master was still too dazed to appreciate the irony of it.

As an adult Severus had slightly adjusted his view of his father, but not enough to ever bother to check whether he was still alive. He knew now that the Statute of Secrecy - no talk about magic before marriage - their different upbringing and their abject poverty had put a terrible strain on his parents' marriage.

Playing with toddler Draco had brought some good memories of Tobias Snape back: playing with wooden bricks the man had made, sanded and painted himself, which Severus still kept in the attic, sitting on his father's shoulders watching a local football game, Tobias mounting a swing on the lone struggling apple tree in the backyard and - although he hadn't done that with Draco - showing a four year old Sev'russ how to 'pee like a man' by pissing in the murky river that ran behind Spinner's End.

Tobias was a good mechanic and had managed to get more odd jobs than the rest of his former colleagues after the mill had closed. He was even hired back when the looms had been dismantled. That might have brought on the first real argument between Mr and Mrs Snape - Eileen urging her reluctant husband to take the offered job, Tobias feeling disloyal towards his mates who were giving him a hard time for helping to destroy the mill and everyone's - unrealistic - hope of the factory re-opening in the future.

In retrospect, Eileen had chosen the worst moment possible for apprising her husband of her magic. The elder Snape was already feeling inferior because he couldn't provide for his little family the way he used to; and now his wife revealed that she possessed powers unheard of. Severus' mother had meant well. With her son starting school, she had time on her hands and could get work in the Magical World.

Tobias had known that his wife was brewing salves and tinctures for the neighbours and thus earned a little bit on the side. The girl he had fallen in love with had always been reluctant to talk about her family and upbringing. From her hints and from her colouring, he had assumed her to be of Romani descent but hadn't pressured her to tell more.

As Tobias' sisters and even his mother had worked on and off in the factories, he might have come around to his wife being the family provider, at least temporarily, but by then his drinking had become more and work had become less.

Severus had got the odd slap now and then, but on the whole he reckoned he had been lucky compared to what was the norm in the early Sixties. He could remember two occasions when he had got serious spankings: one by his father, as a five-year-old, after he had nearly drowned when he had slipped into the river while he had played there, which was strictly forbidden. The second had come from his mother after he had secretly taken her wand and had nearly burned down the house. Severus did not believe in physical violence against children, but he hadn't considered his parent's reactions unreasonable then.

Nowadays, Tobias Snape looked better than on the day of Eileen's funeral. As the talk turned personal, Severus listened more closely.

"'Twas cancer that killed my wife Eileen, but it was my drinking and abuse that rendered her too weak to fight against it properly. I had knocked the fight out of her long before. And I had isolated her from her family who would have supported her."

Severus ruthlessly shoved aside the very mixed emotions that surfaced when he heard his father speaking like a sensible, empathising person and concentrated on the last bit of information.

'Her family' could only mean the wizarding world as the Princes had cut Eileen off the moment she had married Tobias. Or had there been some communication he was unaware of? One of his aunts was living in France; it might be possible that the siblings had been in contact without Severus' knowledge.

During his primary school years, his father's drinking and the arguments had become steadily worse until one evening he had beaten Eileen. She had been able to heal herself, but not completely, her magic had already begun to deteriorate. To Severus' knowledge this had been the most serious act of violence committed by his father against his wife. Tobias seemed shocked and full of remorse afterwards but could neither reign in his drinking nor his temper. He stayed away as much as possible. Still, an atmosphere of dread and despair had already settled over the household at Spinner's End.

"And my son. Clever lad. More into books than into football, but that shouldn't be a problem. I haven't seen him in twenty years, not after he threw me out of the house after his mother's funeral. I deserved that."

Severus tried to keep his breathing even as he felt his world once again tilt on its axis.

"I had taken to drinking away what little money we had. My wife never complained, only when we were lacking the bare necessities for our son. During his teens he started to run with the wrong crowd. I can only hope he grew out of it and is happy now. I cannot ask for Eileen's forgiveness, and I cannot hope for my son's. But I can and will face what I have done, try to make amends and stay sober, one day at a time."

Tobias Snape sat down to a round of applause, looking exhausted. Severus guessed he hadn't given that speech for the first time, but he didn't need Veritaserum to hear the sincerity in his father's words.

After the meeting, the spy went to the loo for another swig of Polyjuice. He let his magic search for anti-Apparition wards and found none. He would find a secluded corner nearby and go back to Hogwarts. Coming out of the toilet, he ran into his father. The man was about to pass him by with a noncommittal nod when he froze. Tobias slowly turned towards him and, after a quick look to check if they were alone, asked in a low voice, "You're one of them, aren't you?"

Severus merely looked at the man.

"I have been married to one. I am exempt from the Statute of Secrecy. Look, I won't bother you, but do you know Severus Snape?"

"I do."

"Is he all right?"

"Yes, quite so. These are trying times in our world."

"I knew that presumed gas-leak in Woking was a bit off! Northern Lights in Surrey, my arse. Please, if you could just tell him that someone in Kidderminster asked about him, I would appreciate that very much."

"I will, though it may take some time."

"Thanks a lot. And feel free to stop by again, meetings are on Tuesdays and Fridays at 7 pm."

The Potions master thought highly of his mother, and today he had had a first-hand view of what Eileen Prince might have seen in Tobias Snape, mill worker. Severus knew a lot about guilt, remorse and penance. His father's words had struck home. Albus had been telling him time and time again to let go of the guilt about having delivered that fateful prophecy. Intellectually, Severus knew his mentor was right; he hadn't killed Lily and James. And his father hadn't killed Eileen Snape.

During the Easter holidays Severus had more time to think about what he'd learned at St. Bridget's than he liked. But he had never been a coward or prone to self-delusions. He had to concede that his father hadn't been a monster, same as his mother had not been without faults. During his short, genuine time as a Death Eater, he had liked to paint Tobias as a most despicable example of a Muggle. Severus might have denounced all other supremacist propaganda (not that he had believed it wholly in the first place, being friends with Lily); now it was time to let go of the most personal part of it. He decided to seek his father out. He felt that it was unlikely he would survive this war, so the spy wanted to leave as few loose ends as possible.

In his spare time, Severus had tried to keep up with developments in the Muggle world. He went to the library and spent some hours with phonebooks and newspapers on microfiche. Thankfully, he hadn't had to search beyond the city. There was a T. Snape thanked for helping with a raffle in a primary school near Spinner's End in Kidderminster. A phone call brought the desired result. Yes, they had a caretaker named Snape, who was not on holiday.

In front of the caretaker's flat at Summerfield Primary School was a box with basil, rosemary and parsley. It was oddly incongruent with the heavy window-grilles. The bluish light from a TV-set could be seen through the curtains. Severus braced himself and then knocked. He noticed the TV being silenced and a man shouting, "Coming!"

Buttoning up his shirt, Tobias Snape didn't look at his visitor's face at first, but a quiet 'Hello, father' made him jerk his head up.

"Dear god, Severus, it's you!"

The elder man held one hand in front of his mouth, and Severus' throat constricted unexpectedly at the sight of unshed tears in his eyes. His father seemed to gather his spirits and ushered him into the small flat. Much like in the Spinner's End house, the front door opened right into the living room where a frugal evening meal, half eaten, sat on a table in view of the now silent TV, showing a sheepdog trial of all things. Tobias busied himself with making fresh tea, surreptitiously wiping his eyes with his shirt. Severus looked for a second chair and finding none kept standing.

After putting the tea tray on the table, Snape Sr went into his bedroom for another chair before motioning for his son to sit down.

That first, awkward talk was followed by tea every six weeks or so. Being reasonably sure that no-one in the wizarding world knew of his father's existence and therefore telling him things would not put the man in danger, Severus was more open with Tobias than with anyone else during that time. He even told him of Dumbledore's request and was equally surprised and thankful that his father did not offer any consolation. Consolation that was impossible because of the task and impossible because of their history. They only skirted certain topics such as Severus' childhood, but the elder man listened to his son without judgement, which said son greatly appreciated.

Part II

Chapter 2 of 3

Post-war struggles.

17 July 1998

Exhausted, Hermione Granger dropped down on the worn settee in the gloomy living room of 42 Spinner's End. Mr Snape Sr. seemed antsy in the surroundings, which puzzled her greatly. He hadn't seemed wary of magic before when they had performed the Fidelius on the property.

"May I talk to him?"

"I can take you upstairs, but I don't think he will talk. That's what worries me so about him. He doesn't care at all, no spark left. Lies in that bed, sleeping most of the day, doesn't eat. Yesterday I all but dragged him into the shower. Before he would have hexed me six ways to Sunday, but he only managed a few half-hearted punches and then started to cry."

Hermione was shocked to hear this. To her, Professor Snape had always been imperturbable, the one certainty of her school years. Well, aside from part of her would-be-seventh. But he had come through and had been the pivotal figure in this war. She was heartily glad that he had survived, thanks to a forgotten emergency Portkey installed by Albus Dumbledore. The old headmaster had the house-elves sew a special button into each of his spy's clothes, which would put him in stasis and transport him to the infirmary if his heart-rate or blood-pressure dropped below a certain level. And thankfully, Madam Pomfrey had acted on her instincts and had managed to stabilize him long enough for an anti-venin to be administered.

Somewhat healthy, fully pardoned...Severus Snape should be dancing on Voldemort's grave instead of wasting away in a dingy suburb.

She followed Mr Snape upstairs into a small room. Without his robes the Potions Master seemed very fragile. He was huddled under a thin blanket, lying on the bed facing away from the door. The white shell of an ear peaking out of the lanky strands of hair added to the general air of vulnerability.

"I'll leave you to it. A friend of mine who knows about these things will pop round tomorrow, maybe Severus will talk to him then."

Hermione sat on the bed. A quick survey of the room showed no evidence of Snape's wand; a fact that worried her more than anything else his father had told her. Tenderly, she laid a hand on his shoulder, not expecting a reaction. Rubbing small circles with her thumb Hermione sighed. There were no words. If she felt weary beyond anything imaginable...how could Snape be up and well? He had done far more, and had done it for nigh on twenty years. And still, even seeing him so small and defeated, his presence instilled a sense of security and stability she had not experienced since before Bill's and Fleur's wedding. She could not go on another yard or another minute, she simply couldn't. Hermione toed off her trainers, put her wand on the bedside table and slipped under the blanket into the bed, snuggling up to Snape's back.

A small chirping sound from Miss Granger's jacket alerted Tobias to the possibility of people looking for the young woman, who was sleeping off her exhaustion in his son's bed. He had checked on them half an hour earlier. Both were deeply asleep; they hadn't even stirred when the bin lorry had emptied the dustbins noisily.

Snape Sr. patted down the jacket and found a mobile phone, thankfully a fairly simple one. He pressed the book-sign, hoping to find numbers for family and friends. There: 'Mum&Dad.'

As he had no means to contact someone in the wizarding world, he pressed the connect button and waited. The phone was picked up on the third ring.

"I told you not to contact us, Hermione! Didn't we agree that you give us time to come to terms with what you did to us? Isn't it enough that we have to sit tight in this forsaken place until YOU deem it right for us to return to our lives?" an angry male voice asked.

Tobias felt indignation swell in his chest. Miss Granger seemed to be a good person, running herself ragged in the weeks following the end of the war.

"This is Tobias Snape speaking. I'm only ringing to let you know that your daughter is safe, if completely exhausted. `Though it seems you're not overly concerned."

"Snape? Any relation to Dumbledore's murderer?"

"That would be my son, who most assuredly did not murder the old coot! I would do the job myself for everything he put Severus through, forcing him to kill him and be reviled by clueless dunderheads like you! As it is quite unlikely that he will ever be well again, I was only trying to at least spare Miss Granger's parents the same agony. Please pass this on, if her friends are calling."

Tobias disconnected. Poor girl. He busied himself with making leek and potato soup, in case his charges woke up hungry. If Severus were up tonight, he wanted desperately to attend a meeting as the house and the memories connected with it made him positively itchy. He didn't crave a drink but felt himself off balance, which was the first step to falling off the wagon; a lesson life had taught him more than once. This time Tobias had stayed sober for nearly nine years, and he really wanted to stay that way, now that he had his son back.

Who just then made an appearance in the kitchen. Barefooted and bleary-eyed, but at least he was up and had even put on trousers.

"What's Miss Granger doing in my bed?"

"She did that complicated spell to hide us and literally fell asleep while checking on you, mumbling something about feeling safe near you."

Severus only nodded, looking around.

"Your wand's in the drawer."

"I should check on her."

"After you've had some soup. Her colour and pulse have been improving over the last few hours. I guess she just needs sleep and sustenance. Poor girl, looks like she hasn't slept properly in months."

The boy stayed put and managed half a bowl of soup before he pushed himself up on his arms, away from the table, and shuffled towards the living room with a nearly inaudible "Thanks, Da."

Tobias was heartily glad that he had arranged for one of his AA-acquaintances, a retired psychiatrist from the RAF, to come over to talk to his son. Miss Granger's mobile rang again. He picked up, resolved not to listen to abuse from her parents. "Snape on Miss Granger's mobile."

"Good day, Mr Snape, this is Monica Granger speaking. Please accept my sincerest apologies for my husband's behaviour, and our thanks for caring for our daughter."

Tobias was slightly mollified. "That's all right, Mrs Granger, these are truly trying times."

"Thank you. How is Hermione?"

"She hasn't woken up, but her colour is better. My guess would be complete exhaustion."

"Should I come and get her?"

"Nothing can happen to her as long as she stays in the house. They haven't apprehended all the bad guys, and your daughter and my son are prime targets as are we. It would be safest if we all stayed put."

"Well yes, I am sure you are right. Will you please tell Hermione to ring me when she wakes up?"

"Will do."

"Thank you, goodbye."

At least the girl's mother seemed to have come around enough to lend her daughter some support. Severus came back into the kitchen, looking crestfallen.

"What's wrong with Miss Granger?"

"Nothing, as far as I can see. I could not do a diagnostic charm." He put his wand back in the drawer.

"Give it time, Severus. You've been through an awful lot."

The emergency Portkeys had saved Severus, as had the appearance of Dumbledore's familiar, who had donated some tears and helped quite a lot to convince the general

public of the spy's comparative innocence. Afterwards, Luna Lovegood had hidden the still unconscious - and not yet pardoned - Potions master at her aunt's house. He had woken up after a week, weak and shell-shocked. Acting minister Kingsley Shacklebolt had delivered a pardon after Potter's testimony in front of the Wizengamot. Severus had not shown any reaction then, but a week later had refused Lucius Malfoy's offer to recuperate at Malfoy Manor and instead asked Miss Lovegood to contact his father.

Thankfully, Tobias had been able to take time off from his job to look after his son. Miss Lovegood had deposited an uncharacteristically silent Severus at his house. He had then vanished into his room, refusing to talk or eat. A week later, Luna returned and had been worried that neither Severus nor anyone else had enforced the wards on the Spinner's End house. Her vacant air had been replaced by benevolent focus, and she'd sent some magical messages to friends of hers.

While she had waited for them, she had remained in the living room, not quite in battle stance but the air was almost humming with magic. Then, Miss Granger and a young man called Neville Longbottom had arrived. Severus seemed to have sensed them and had shuffled downstairs in all his unshaven glory, briefs and Led Zeppelin T-shirt. After seeing him like that, the two new arrivals had adopted Miss Lovegood's sense of urgency and had heatedly debated the best course of action - a spell called 'Fidelius', with Longbottom as Secret-Keeper. The young man had protested, sneaking anxious glances towards Severus, who had been watching the discussion with eerie detachment from the sofa until he had spoken, voice gravelly from disuse, "Please, do it, Mr Longbottom."

The other wizard's eyes had widened in surprise. "But, sir, what if I am caught?"

"You have managed to avoid detection admirably during the last year, you have withstood more torture than anyone so young I know, and you've killed that bloody snake...who else?"

The young man had seemed to grow a few inches and acquiesced immediately. It had been decided that Miss Granger - as the most powerful of the three - should perform the spell, Longbottom would be the Secret-Keeper and Lovegood the binder. Severus hadn't stayed to watch but had asked his father to thank them and give them sweetened tea and sandwiches afterwards.

Lovegood and Longbottom had left soon afterwards, but Granger had stayed to put on some additional layers of wards able to detect any wizard in a 100-yard perimeter from the house. Then she had dragged herself upstairs to check on Severus and promptly passed out.

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"Severus, can you please look after Miss Granger for me for the next two hours? I really want to go to a meeting."

Severus looked up. "I do not think it is safe for you to go out. They might lay in wait."

"I'd rather be blown to pieces than start drinking again. I plan to go through the back gardens until the tracks. Do you think a wizard would know enough about the area here to wait there?"

"No, I don't think so. And I suppose they do not know about you helping me. They would look for a wizard. Still, I'd rather not have you taking any risks."

"I will be careful, and I will take something from Miss Granger with me that alerts me to any magical person nearby." Tobias was pleased that Severus took an interest and decided to push his advantage. "If I am to stay here for a while longer you might think about redecorating. The house brings up terrible memories. Why didn't you change anything?"

"I couldn't be bothered."

He looked at his son with a raised eyebrow.

"Right. I didn't think I deserved anything better. Not after I got Lily killed."

"You could not have known that your madman would take the damn prophecy seriously. That Riddle fellow could just as well 'ave read the 'oroscope in the Mirror and planned world domination accordingly. Perhaps, Miss Granger has access to a car and could drive us to IKEA."

"IKEA?"

"Yup. Swedish. Sells cheap furniture you have to assemble yourself. Very cheerful colouring."

Severus shuddered but seemed to get the joke.

"Right. Meeting starts in half an hour, I should be back by ten o'clock."

"Take care."

Tobias came back safely from his meeting; Miss Granger declined going to IKEA on account of having neither a driving licence nor a hand for interior decorating and went back to her friends.

Severus' magic came back a while later, helped along by quite a few sessions with Col. Dr Ryan McGough, some spectacular shouting matches with said doctor, Tobias and even Kingsley Shacklebolt, who made things worse by trying to hug the irate Potions master afterwards, mumbling "Ah, good, you're back."

Three years later, March 2001

Tobias Snape was uncommonly silent during his weekly tea with his son. Severus did not notice at first; he was busily detailing the pros and cons of buying the adjacent building and installing a state of the art potions lab in there. He could use St Mungo's facilities for brewing and research but loathed the distractions there.

Tobias decided to take the plunge. "Buy it, do the lab, and I'll live upstairs."

That had Severus looking at him. He recovered fast, however. "It would be big for just me, but why now?"

"The council is forcing me to retire, and I will lose my little flat in the school then."

At 69, Tobias was long past the age of retirement. It had been his choice to continue working, and all headmasters and headmistresses had been glad to have him. He did all the necessary repairs (and often more), kept the children in line without being nasty or crass and was valued by staff and parents alike.

"When?"

"This June. And no, I didn't think of moving in with you until you mentioned the Singhs' house."

In truth it hadn't been the Singhs' house for more than twenty years, but that's what long-term residents of Spinners End still called it, in memory of the first Indian family moving here after the mill had closed.

"I would buy it tomorrow if two houses weren't too large for me."

"I think you would get good money for the bigger property if you decided to move one day. The prices beyond the tracks are already going through the roof; in a few years even our dead end will be sought after."

"If I connect the two houses and install the lab, I won't move, ever."

"Spinner's End is better now than it was in the Seventies, but still not an ideal place to raise children."

"Children?"

"Yes. Now that I have to retire, I would have time to look after my grandchildren."

"Of course. You have that planned nicely. Do I know their mother yet?"

"Seriously, Severus, it was a spur of the moment idea, but I'd say we both think it over. I suppose with me contributing you won't need a mortgage at all, and the property is large enough that we won't have to see each other for days if we don't feel like it."

"You're right; the idea has some merit, sans the wife and children."

Severus and Tobias Snape had several lengthy talks, which sometimes ended in rather tempestuous arguments. Severus' sessions with Col. McGough had enabled him to voice a handful of unpleasant truths he didn't hesitate to throw into his father's face. Tobias, on the other hand, had years of experience with AA-meetings under his belt, which let him stay calm and focused longer than his son. A fact that often enough drove said son 'round the bend.

Both knew they had to work through these grievances before they even could think about moving into adjacent buildings. Painful as this process was, father and son were equally grateful to get the chance of fighting for a semblance of family life.

Severus had found that the end of the war, his survival and subsequent breakdown had given him a new taste for life. He was mostly content to live peacefully, supporting himself with the sale of complicated potions and research projects. Meeting regularly with former pupils of his house, seeing them strive, sometimes struggle, but pull through in the end, helped him to make peace with himself and his actions during the Voldemort wars.

Neville Longbottom showed to have the courage of a Gryffindor as well as the tenacity of a Hufflepuff in maintaining contact after their initial meeting as quasi-peers during the warding of Spinner's End. Luna Lovegood was an often funny and surprisingly insightful penfriend, travelling with her fiancé Rolf Scamander and sending home various plants to both Neville and Severus.

Tobias would be the last person to be blinded by his son's faults - it took one to know one - but thanked whoever was watching over them daily for their second chance at a relationship. Personally, he believed it to be Eileen's gentle presence. The elder Snape had dreaded living out his days in a bedsit with only his thoughts as company. A prospect that promised relapse and doom. He kept his resolve however not to pressure Severus for grandchildren.

Monica Granger was visibly surprised to see her daughter when she answered the door.

"Sorry, I haven't rung, Mum, but my battery is empty, and I was nearby."

"Hermione, you don't need to phone in advance. We are not alone, however."

The ministry employee needed only a moment to recognise her parents' visitor. "Mr Snape! It is good to see you again. How are you?"

"Fine, thank you, Ms Granger, fine." He held up his bandaged left hand. "Just a bit of a strain. I am thinking of retirement, actually."

"Hermione, would you like some tea?"

"Yes, mum, thank duck!" The witch went into battle stance, casting wards and protection spells. "A wizard has Apparated onto the grounds. Stay put, I'll have a look."

"Ms Granger!" Tobias tried to make himself heard. "Ms Granger! Hermione! That's Severus; he's come to take me home."

"Oh." Hermione looked a tad embarrassed. "Well. I'll go and dismantle the wards, then."

Monica and Wendell Granger got up from the kitchen floor, sharing a look with their visitor.

Snape was standing next to the garden shed, arms crossed. Thankfully, he looked more amused than upset. Hermione hadn't seen him since her short stay at Spinner's End and, to tell the truth, hadn't thought a lot about him either. This - combined with his manner of dress: trainers jeans, an oxford shirt and a tweed jacket - made the transition from teacher to man easy.

"Constant vigilance, eh?"

Hermione couldn't suppress a sheepish smile. "Sorry about that, I acted instinctively."

"No need to apologise. I gave my father a black eye when he wanted to wake me up once."

"Oh. Well, I think I scared my parents just now. It is one thing, I suppose, to hear about one's daughter having been in a war and quite another to see her in battle-mode."

"My father doesn't tell me a lot about his visits to your parents, but I gathered that it started when he had an argument with your father after the war when your parents were still very much upset about your Memory Charm. They meet about every two or three months."

"Mum never mentioned it. But then, I do not see them all that often. Today's visit was a spur of the moment decision. Do you always Side-Along your father here?"

"No. He strained his left wrist and therefore couldn't drive."

It occurred to Hermione that one reason why she didn't know about Mr Snape's visits was that she never asked her parents what they did on weekends. She asked about their practice and about old family friends, but otherwise mainly talked about herself. Could she have fallen in the age-old trap of considering her life, her magical life, superior?

Snape apparently noticed her pensive mood but didn't say anything. It crossed Hermione's mind fleetingly that he must have been a very good Head of House. She shook her head ruefully. "Just thinking. It seems I will need to have a talk with my parents. I knew they were terribly hurt by what I did, but it looks like I was not sensitive enough to realise how they truly feel."

"While I think both your parents and my father gain from talking about their experience of living with wizards, hardly any Muggle-born manages to integrate both worlds. Usually, it is all right during their time at Hogwarts, the child is away for most of the year like in any other boarding school and magic is forbidden during the holidays. The

problems start later when students choose careers and marry in the wizarding world, and finally have magical children. Then, the Muggle parents get more and more marginalized."

Hermione considered this and had to concede that Snape was right.

"Mhm. I can think of only two acquaintances who haven't had problems, but both have married Muggles and live mostly a Muggle life."

They had reached the conservatory door and, after the Potions Master declined an invitation to tea, the Snape men said their farewells.

Three months later, Hermione was at a point in her career where she knew something had to change, change drastically. She had spent more time with her parents lately. They had talked a lot, about sensitive issues like the still smarting break of trust her parents felt, but also about more trivial matters. Monica and Wendell had taken up golfing of all things. Meetings with Mr Snape had indeed started after the war. The first few had been pretty tense, with Monica the only one keeping the conversation going. But a mutual friendship had been growing. Last week Wendell Granger had even travelled up to Kidderminster on Saturday to help the Snapes knock down some walls, a task better done without magic. Hermione listened with fascination as her father described their plans for the lab, the garden and the remodelling of the adjoining houses.

Therefore, when her Portkey to a much needed holiday, which she'd planned to spend with Viktor Krum and his family, had malfunctioned, Hermione decided on a whim to offer her help with the building-work for the three days she had to wait for another Portkey to Sofia. She couldn't quite remember the alley she'd Apparated from nearly four years earlier and opted to take a public Floo to Birmingham's main station and a bus from there.

The sight was priceless. For the first time in her life, Hermione felt the need to whip out her mobile and snap a picture. Her former Potions master was standing on a ladder, carefully chipping away plaster around a first floor window. He wore work shoes, cut-off jeans and nothing else save a bandana. There were some scars on his back, but none too noticeable under the tan and dust. The jeans went down to barely mid-thigh, showing off lean runner's legs, also far from pasty white. Whatever Snape nowadays did in his spare time, it obviously involved sunlight and casual clothing. He didn't seem to notice her, and after two minutes, Hermione began to feel stupid, standing there and staring. She cleared her throat. The man on the ladder didn't turn around.

"Good morning, Ms Granger. I will be down shortly. Feel free to look around but stand clear of the garden wall; father is demolishing it."

Hermione realized that he must have felt her presence due to the wards, which obviously still included her. She supposed that he used personalized wards, so her inclusion flattered her a tiny bit. She made her way round to the back of the house where indeed Tobias Snape was carefully bringing down the wall between the two lots.

"Ah, Ms Granger, good day! Did your father tell you about our project?"

"Hello! He did indeed; he even might become infected by a do-it-yourself virus, so my mother fears."

"He is welcome to putter around here where he can't do much harm."

"I have three days off, do you think I might be of use here?"

Severus had joined them. He had thankfully put on a short-sleeved shirt. "You are very welcome, if you really want to help, but I have to warn you, at this stage a lot of things have to be done by hand. Magical masonry comes into play a bit later."

"A few days of manual work will do me a world of good. I am thoroughly fed up with my job at the moment; it will be nice to do something, which has a logical and clear purpose and outcome."

And so Hermione Granger sorted and cleaned the bricks from the garden wall. It was monotonous and mindless work, but that was all right. When Tobias went to the chippy for lunch, she took on his sledgehammer with a ferocity that made Severus cringe for whomever she might be thinking about right now.

Lunch was eaten on a few mismatched chairs in Snape's garden. Hermione could not remember ever tasting such wonderful fish and chips, but then she had never wielded hammer and chisel for hours before. When Severus went inside to make coffee, Tobias stretched his legs, put his cap over his eyes and promptly fell asleep, right in his chair. His son chuckled softly as he came back, carrying two cups of Italian espresso and whispered to her, "Serves him right if he wants to impress young women. He's worked twice as hard since you came."

His look grew more serious. "You work at the Ministry, don't you?"

Hermione sighed. She had tried to talk with Harry and Ron about her problems at work, but neither had listened properly.

"Yes. Division of Magical Beings and Beasts. I have learned a lot since my campaign for house-elves, but I have accomplished nothing. I get praised for my diligence, and I have a good rapport with most magical beings, but every proposal, every amendment, on which I spent countless hours, gets pushed from desk to desk and then is declined. I do not know whether this is because I am Muggle-born, or because I am like I am. I know that I can come over as being a bit bossy. I get stonewalled wherever I go. At first, I thought it was a coincidence and worked even harder, but now I have to face it. After my holidays, I will ask Arthur or Kingsley and try to change departments."

"No!"

"Pardon?" Hermione was slightly startled by this emphatic response.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to get quite as loud. But will you listen to my advice? A different approach might be helpful."

"Of course I'll listen. I realize that I need help, that I have a few friends but no network."

"I will try to treat this like the career advice a Head of House would give. It would be a shame to waste your talents."

Hermione raised her eyebrows.

"Well, yes, I saw your good points, even when you were still my student. But you were a teacher's nightmare! If you were in a class, not even the Ravenclaws bothered to do their readings as you did not leave any room for their participation during class. Your essays! Didn't you realize that your teachers had to check your arguments, your footnotes? That is all right within the required length, but on two extra feet of parchment?!"

She blanched and Tobias, long since awake again, interfered, "Sev'rus, you're sputtering! Lay off!"

The man in question shook himself. "I do apologize, I got carried away. The most frustrating aspect about your work however was that you had some very good arguments and even new approaches to some problems I would have liked to try out. But there was neither time for that nor a possibility for me to acknowledge your achievement."

The last bit mollified Hermione. "It's quite all right, don't worry. I know that I overdid it, and I have since then shortened my written work."

"As for asking Kingsley for a change of department: if you do that, and he finds you another job at the Ministry, you will be in the weaker position. If, however, you are headhunted by another department, that gives you a better standing there right from the start. Another aspect is that departments execute the law; they do not propose or change it. If your boss puts forth one of your proposals, he has to leave his comfort zone; he has to find allies within the Ministry. I cannot know whether he does not think

your work worth the effort, or whether he is simply un-enterprising. A former pupil of mine who works for the Wizengamot has recently complained that they can't find an employee who is up to their standards. If you want, I will put out the word that you might be open to a change in careers."

"Yes, I would like that, thank you."

By the time Hermione said her farewells to catch the new Portkey, she was on first name terms with Snape Sr. and Jr. and the garden wall was gone, its bricks cleaned and carefully stowed in the area to host the future herbal garden. Tobias found in the young woman's interaction with his son much to think about but wisely refrained from any comments.

Severus delayed his monthly meeting with the younger ex-students a bit - tricky potions were always a handy excuse - and bided his time in the "Silver Lining", a pub favoured for after-work relaxation and networking by the more open-minded pure-bloods. The young people treasured these meetings with their former Head of House because they were safe in the knowledge that he was the one person who would never judge them for the decisions made for them.

Due to the later hour, the Potions master knew the mid-management people from the Ministry would come in eventually. He would wait for Aloysius Greengrass, head of the Wizengamot Legal team. Aloysius was two years younger than himself, tenacious and thorough and married to his job. Ms Granger and he would get along very well. The slight unease that befell Severus at this point of his reasoning was quelled immediately. He owed it to the young woman to help her.

Hermione Granger returned to her job, kept her head down and started to leave on time. In her spare time, she read up on wizarding law and marvelled how well that particular subject fit in with her interests in other areas. She vowed to herself to be more open towards other people's suggestions, be it from her parents, from Snape or even from Harry and Ron, trying to get her to socialise more often. Her family and friends knew her best after all, and by now she was mature enough to realise that her weakest point was that she sometimes became so absorbed in her own thoughts or convictions that she no longer saw the bigger picture.

Part III

Chapter 3 of 3

Quite a few new beginnings for our heroine and her hero ...

Four months later, May 2002

The houses Spinner's End 40 and 42 were fairly sparkling, to wizarding eyes at least. The Muggle world would only see a carefully kept but still slightly shabby facade, but witches and wizards wandered in awe through the shiny lab in the former Singh house, nursed their drinks in the Potion master's impressive library or milled about in the garden. The temporary Apparition spot at the foot of the garden released one after another: the Malfoys, the Longbottom-Abbots, the Scamanders and numerous Hogwarts professors and alumni. Mr and Mrs Granger arrived via car, a new Skoda with lots of electronics on board. Seeing Arthur and George Weasley eyeing the car with interest, Wendell asked their host to put protective spells on it.

Severus Snape had enough experience with soirees, but his first own one made him nervous. Not that anyone would be able to tell of course. Mrs Longbottom, née Abbot, had first put the idea into his head, offering a special price for the catering for a party to show off the finished lab and remodelled house. Severus' first impulse was to scoff at the thought.

Having slept over it, he didn't find the idea preposterous anymore, and after a run along the riverbanks, still decrepit but not as bad as they used to be, he thought *What the fuck? Why not throw a party and celebrate?*

The closest he had ever come to such an event were cocoa and a muffin with a candle, courtesy of Mrs Evans, on his thirteenth birthday. His father further convinced him with, "We have a lot to celebrate, Severus, we really do!"

And indeed they had. Not in his wildest dreams would the Potions master have imagined something like his current life. The best scenario he could have come up with was living the solitary life of a shunned murderer, paying for his porridge with illicit brews sold in Knockturn Alley.

As he had invited most of the Weasleys, it would have been a noticeable slight if he excluded Ronald. Putting Harry Potter on the guest list was a given. The young man might still not be Severus' favourite person, but he had a lot of clout in the wizarding world besides being related by marriage to the Weasleys. And he was not completely insufferable any more. And his and Ronald's attendance would guarantee that Hermione would come, too. Her parents had been doubtful of her attendance due to the relish with which she had taken on her new responsibilities. To be on the safe side he had invited Aloysius as well.

Aloysius Greengrass did not mind that he was indebted to Severus Snape for having pointed him towards Miss Granger *you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours* was the Slytherin lifestyle after all. He was grateful for having finally found an employee who complemented his approach to research perfectly, someone on whom he could rely to 99 % (100 would have been too much). Only sometimes the department Head worried that Ms Granger might overdo it, what with keeping even longer hours than himself. Therefore, he was relieved to see her at Snape's housewarming party, relaxed and chatting with friends.

Hannah Longbottom sidled up to Severus Snape to inform him that the buffet would be ready in half an hour, reminding him that now would be the perfect moment for a speech, or speeches. The man - while content with how the party had gone so far - hadn't planned any speeches. Unfortunately, Mrs Weasley had overheard Hannah and was already clinking a spoon to her glass, starting a chorus of "Speech, speech!"

Severus, feeling uncomfortable with being put on the spot so, beckoned his father over, internally chastising himself for not having prepared for such a moment. Thankfully, Kingsley Shacklebolt, newly elected Minister of Magic, realised the former spy's predicament and dove in. "I will be brief. Even though, we have many fine and capable Aurors..." There he sent a smirk in Harry's direction. "I would always choose Severus to fight with. Not that I expect any such necessity to arise in both our lifetimes again." Kingsley lifted his glass. "Severus, the time of peace we now live in would not have been possible without you, may you enjoy it to the fullest! Cheers!"

Everyone raised their glass to their host, who had not relaxed enough to enjoy the accolades. In a moment of surprising perspicacity, Harry Potter took up where the minister had left off. "Severus, I stand by my words that you are the bravest man I've ever known. In the meantime I have learned that you are impossible to beat at poker. Cheers!"

More clinking glasses could be heard among the laughter Harry's statement had produced, and Draco Malfoy's muttered, "Idiot! Who would play poker with a Master Occlumens?"

Lucius Malfoy shushed his son and took the stand himself. "Severus, I am honoured to be your friend. On behalf of my family and myself, I cannot be grateful enough for all you have done for us. It is the Slytherin way never to show a weakness, but in this case I will gladly concede that you saw years before me the error of the way I led you down and acted accordingly. May the blessings of Merlin and Nimue always be with you!"

Hermione saw how moved Severus was by Malfoy's public honouring of his person, how proudly Tobias Snape was looking at his son. She briefly contemplated adding a short speech of her own but then decided not to.

At last the Potions master found his voice again and thanked them all for being here before inviting them to the buffet. Hermione, not very hungry, wanted to avoid the first rush and took her glass and wandered through the sparsely lit garden. The swing on the apple tree made her smile. She wondered whether a previous owner left it, as she could picture neither Snape installing a swing for their own use, although it was big enough for adults to sit on. Testing its stability first, she sat down on it. The speeches had been a reminder of how close Severus had come to dying, and the realisation of how much she would miss him were he not in her life came as a shock. Hermione cast her memory back over their last few meetings. If she dared to explore her newfound feelings was there a chance of them being reciprocated? She felt that she could read and understand the Potions master much better than ever, but how much did she really know about the man, not the teacher or comrade-in-arms? He had certainly enjoyed her being flustered by his very casual dress during building works, but did that indicate interest in her as a woman?

The object of said musings interrupted her. It was too dark to see the expression of his face.

"Hello Severus, would you rather be alone for a while?"

"No, it's all right." He looked distinctively uncertain.

"A bit overwhelming, isn't it?"

Reaching a decision, he answered, "I have come far, considering my history. And I know that I will rebuff people who mean well if I act on my instincts and try to keep them at arm's length. Only sometimes it is a bit too much."

Briefly touching his shoulder, she picked up her glass from the ground. "I will leave you to the swing and the stars for a while."

"Thank you."

As the evening grew later, Hermione was in for some surprises. Thankfully, she had brought her magical camera. The pictures would make a wonderful present for Severus at a later date: Molly and Narcissa doing the Twist, Draco and Harry arm-wrestling, Tobias and her mum dancing, Severus and Aloysius in an earnest discussion that brought spots of colour to their cheeks, Lucius trying to understand a mobile phone ...

Severus had re-joined them after three quarters of an hour and had asked her to dance. It was a boogie-woogie Tobias at the decks and Hermione had to concentrate on the steps too much to talk, but at the end her partner had briefly drawn her into a hug. She was resolved to ask him to dinner, to thank him for pointing her into the right direction job-wise. They could talk then.

A week later they did talk at length, only leaving the restaurant when the waiter was starting to put up chairs. Neither of the couple was adept at current dating-rules and therefore their first kiss came about without much fuss, but was thoroughly enjoyable nevertheless. It didn't muddle their brains too much to briefly reassure themselves that yes, both wanted more than a dalliance. Further details were not necessary at this point.

Their next meeting was for an early breakfast on Saturday because they wanted to visit an antiques market where Severus had already found some things for the house and even the odd magical item like stirrers or glass balls. They were barely beyond the first stalls when it started to rain heavily. As everyone was running for cover, they could not find a place to Apparate safely before they were completely drenched. Tobias was entertaining the former headmistress of Summerview Primary, therefore they went to Hermione's little flat.

Even her largest t-shirt did not cover Severus' navel, and as her tracksuit bottoms did not reach his mid-calf, he opted for a bath towel, sarong style.

Hermione had thought or rather daydreamed a lot about the possible course of their relationship, but when he emerged from the bathroom thus, all rationale went down the drain.

They came together in a heated kiss, mapping each other's bodies with trembling hands, relishing in the smell of summer rain on their skin. Only briefly did she think about silencing spells when his lips closed around her nipple.

Severus was an extraordinary man, but not in every aspect of his life. So he fell asleep, like an ordinary man, after a mutually satisfying conclusion to their frantic lovemaking.

He woke up half an hour later, however, to the sight of Hermione sitting against the headboard, knees drawn up and a frown on her face. Caressing her toes gently, he enquired, "Hermione, what is the matter?"

She sighed. "We did not talk enough about-" Here she gestured between her and Severus. "I did not think it through!"

Severus made an attempt at levity. "Isn't that the point of it, not to think?"

"I have only just started in a job I really love!"

Mentally cursing Ron Weasley, he went on to reassure her.

"What do you expect now? That I chain you to the kitchen and keep you pregnant the next twenty years?"

A brief smile appeared on her face, yet her eyes became suspiciously shiny. "You must think me a world-class dunderhead, but I can't help..."

Tugging on her arm, he managed to get her to lay down again, stiff as a board.

"Now tell me what is bothering you, and I promise not to distract you."

"You do distract me, by looking like you do, by smelling like you do. And your voice is even more devastating when gravelly with sleep."

"Stop this flattery, or I'll strut around like Lucius' prize peacock."

Her story, however, surprised him. Behind Hermione's bossiness quite a lot of insecurity remained. It turned out that every serious relationship of hers had turned sour when the men in question Ronald Weasley and, surprise there, Theodore Nott - would not understand her need of having a fulfilling career. It may well be that at the root of their expectations was that they were pure-bloods and had no idea of the Muggle concept of working mothers. The few flings left her emotionally unsatisfied.

"Severus, you have come far. You are a war-hero, the foremost Potions master in Britain and possibly Europe; you have a beautiful home with a terrific library. To me, it seems only a family is missing. And I am not sure I am ready for that."

He drew her closer but kept his touches innocuous. "You are right. My life is better than I ever expected it to be. And for that I am thankful every day anew. As for a family: I am grateful I mended fences with my father, and I carefully nurture the relationships I have, now that I can enjoy them as I wish and not as my two masters dictated. I rather think the first morning after is too early to talk about children, but if we will have some one day, it will be a mutual decision, and we will care for them both. Or maybe I will do more as I work from home. Tobias will want to help as well. And now stop wriggling in that manner, or I can't keep my promise."

A very relieved Hermione wriggled a lot more, naturally.

Severus' library lost its ordered look when Hermione, along with 19,583 books, moved in six months later.

One year later

Severus Snape sighed contentedly. After the first few months, his life had turned out pretty good after the war, but since he was in a relationship with Hermione Granger, it was bloody fantastic. Never in his life could he have imagined waking up like this. Nose buried in her impossible hair, he let his hand glide up her hip, waiting for a telltale sigh. Sometimes on these Sunday mornings, she would sleepily turn on her back, and he would bury his face between her thighs. When she was more alert, she would press herself back towards Severus, rub her neck against the stubble on his chin and enjoy his attentions to her breasts before he entered her from behind.

Today was one of the latter Sundays. He let his hand slide up further, caressing the sensitive skin on the side of her breasts. She moaned quietly and pressed her bottom against his erection. They mostly slept in the nude now, although it had taken a few months for Hermione to get comfortable with this state. Severus' fingers ghosted over her right nipple, then he cupped her breast, relishing in its heaviness. Heaviness? He stopped his ministrations and thought about this. His lover pressed herself against his hand, but it did not react.

"Hermione, your breast..."

That woke her up instantly. "What is it? Did you feel a knot?"

"What? No! Witches can't get breast cancer."

Sitting bare-chested against the headboard, she looked at him with big eyes. Severus cupped both her breasts, taking in their heaviness and also the darkened aureoles. "Love, about your menses..."

"I am due tomorrow."

"You didn't miss the monthly potion, did you?"

"No. But it was the last bottle, the one right at the back of the cupboard."

Oh, well. Severus quickly did some calculations in his head. The last few weeks he had been very busy with work. That may have been the reason why Hermione hadn't bothered him with brewing her contraception potion, not when one bottle was still left. He remembered brewing that potion two years ago when he had first thought about dating. The potion's shelf life was six months, but neither colour nor taste changed at this time. Which accounted for Hermione never noticing anything wrong. "Love, that potion was out of date. I think we might be pregnant."

Hermione looked startled, for sure, but not in a bad way. Stroking over her breasts, she answered, "They have been tender for a few days, but I did not think anything amiss. Is it too early for the charm?"

"Let's find out."

She scooted down the bed, laying flat on her back. Severus drew a deep breath and cast the charm. A very faint green circle appeared over her stomach. "I might have a book that would tell us more."

"No. I once heard Molly telling Lavender that a faint circle meant that one has conceived but that the magics of mother and child have not yet recognised each other. Which means that things can still go wrong."

He drew her in an embrace. Partially to give her time to voice her own opinion, partly to hide his suspiciously moist eyes from her. For a moment the image of his lover, swollen with their child had inspired a fierce longing he had not expected. Yes, he interacted with his friends' children, sometimes even entertained some what-if musings, but never felt the urge to approach the question. Now the possibility played havoc with his emotions and Hermione's as well, it seemed.

"Severus, what do you think? Will we manage?"

He kept his face averted. "I think I would not have thought of having children for a while, but right now the thought of a child, our child, growing inside you makes me very happy."

Hermione's answering smile made him relax. "I am too. It comes as a surprise, for sure, but I think I am ready; we are ready."

Hannah Longbottom was a tad surprised to receive another order for catering for a Snape soiree, but knew why when Hermione, green in the face, dashed for the loo while talking about the dishes. Severus swore her to secrecy, which she kept, of course, being a businesswoman and generally a nice person. The Potions master's Slytherin friends also guessed the reason for the invitation long before Severus clinked a spoon against a glass, having taken in the glow Hermione radiated and her avoidance of prosecco.

"Dear friends, we have invited you all tonight to celebrate with us. Hermione and I have been married today. Please raise your glasses with me to my wife!"

Ronald Weasley's guffaw was loudest, and the yelp he emitted, when his wife, the former Miss Brown, elbowed him was scarcely quieter, but all the others joined in the congratulations. And Molly Weasley needed about five minutes to figure out the immediate reason for the surprise wedding. Mrs Granger, despite having raised her daughter as a modern woman, needed a while to overcome her disappointment of not planning an elaborate wedding, complete with masses of white tulle and a huge cake. Hermione resigned herself to expect a very lavish baby-shower.

As Severus knew far more embarrassing secrets about Lucius than the other way round, the Malfoy pater familias was the only one who was told that Britain's most prominent Potions master would owe his first child to a potions mishap. After nearly falling from the settee with laughing, Lucius managed to pronounce, "I guess that's magic's way of getting her wish. The way you two would have analysed and thought about having children you would have been too old for it to happen."

Hepzibah Eileen Snape would have been the most over-educated child in Britain if not for her granddad Toby and her brothers Simon Tobias and Jeremy Lucius, who were born two and four years later. With three children under five, Hermione and Severus both cut down their work-load to about three days a week and still were glad to have help from Tobias and his partner, Miss Sophie Havisham, the former Headmistress of Summerview Primary. They were indeed ready for a family, but fifteen years later, they were equally ready for some time alone again, after sending Jeremy off to Hogwarts.

The End