

The Softer Side of Severus Snape

by themistresssnape

When the Final Battle is fought and won, Severus Snape takes stock of what he has lost as well as what he has gained.

Andromeda

Chapter 1 of 11

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Chapter 1: Andromeda

"Victory Day," boomed an ancient looking man standing on the grotesque mud pit that had once been the picturesque sloping lawn of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The man's long silver beard and hair were tucked haphazardly into his belt and his half-moon spectacles skewed on the end of his long, crooked nose. His eyes were a crisp, knowing blue and reflected the light of the fading sun. He surveyed the ragtag group around him with a satisfied sigh but a deep frown etched across his worn face. "Victory Day!"

The crowd around him whooped in triumph as they looked at the still smoldering pile of black robes in the middle of the battlefield. Lying there, stinking of burned flesh and unspeakable rotting things, were the remains of the most evil wizard the world had ever known. In a final, tortuously long battle on the grounds of Hogwarts itself, Lord Voldemort, the creature who had once been the handsome boy Tom Riddle, had been defeated by the Boy Who Lived. And so there he stood, black hair falling over his face as he leaned over the remains of Lord Voldemort, gathering his thoughts as the splinters of his wand dangled from his right hand.

A tall, lanky redhead limped over to the Boy Who Lived and grasped him firmly by the shoulder. "Well done, mate," the redhead said, wincing as he put a bit of weight on his left foot. "You've done it, Harry."

"Yeah," came the mumbled reply from the Boy Who Lived. "But not soon enough." Harry raised his eyes and surveyed the battlefield. "Who's missing, Ron?"

The redhead drew an unsteady breath and braced himself on Harry's shoulder again. "McGonagall, Shackbolt, Tonks, Moody, Lavender, Parvati, Pansy... Cho. I'm sorry, Harry."

"Where's Hermione?" Harry looked around anxiously. "Where's Ginny?"

"POTTER! WEASLEY! Give me a hand over here!" came a deep, rough voice from off in the distance. Seven years under his unbearably watchful eye taught Ron and Harry to obey this command without question as they followed the sound of Severus Snape's voice.

Stepping over the bodies of Death Eaters and fellow Order members alike, Ron and Harry found Professor Snape kneeling in the mud and muck between two mangled bodies. To his right, lay the silent and motionless form of Ginny Weasley. Her flaming red hair was blackened with congealed blood and muck as it fanned out beneath her head. Her face was smeared with blood and cut so deep Harry thought he could see her cheekbones. Her clothes were ripped, torn, and bloodied from neck to ankle. More cuts and bruises criss-crossed her body the further down Harry looked. Her shattered wand lay at her feet. The green eyes of the Boy Who Lived glistened with tears as he

knelt at Ginny's side and took her hand. *Merlin and Dumbledore, she's still alive*, Harry thought as he felt her faint pulse skip against the pads of his fingers. Harry stole a glance to Snape's left and saw Ron cradling Hermione Granger in his arms.

Intelligent, loyal, loving Hermione lay covered in blood and muck, her left leg twisting at an odd angle and both shoulders clearly sitting out of their sockets. Her brown curls were limp and tangled around her shoulders as Ron pulled her into his lap, her arms flailing grotesquely behind her. The faint rise and fall of her chest was all that kept Ron from turning to Snape and begging him for the *Avada Kedavra* curse.

"Mr. Weasley, it's best that you put Miss Granger down for now, you may do more damage than good. Watch her arms, boy!" Snape ordered, his voice raw and deep. "Listen carefully, Potter. You as well, Weasley. They are already taking the wounded to the Great Hall. There is not enough room in the hospital wing for them. I am going to conjure stretchers for Misses Granger and Weasley. You are to take them directly to the Great Hall where the mediwizards can properly care for them. Am I understood?"

Harry and Ron nodded absently and took control of the stretchers Snape conjured. After Hermione and Ginny had been safely and gently placed in the stretchers, Snape shooed the boys off towards Hogwarts castle. The Weasley twins, Fred and George, were already being treated for *Sectumsempra* wounds. As Ron maneuvered Hermione's stretcher through the maze of bodies, he looked over his shoulder and said, "I'm sorry, sir."

Snape, who had turned to make his way toward Dumbledore, glanced back at the redhead with weary irritation in his eyes. "Sorry for what, Mr. Weasley?"

The color drained from Ron's face as quickly as if Moody had been dangling a spider in front of his face again. He cleared his throat and looked to Harry for support, but Harry was already guiding Ginny's stretcher up the marble steps of the castle. "You didn't know, sir? Oh... um... I really shouldn't be the one to tell you then, sir. Maybe Dumbledore could..."

"SPIT. IT. OUT. WEASLEY!" Snape bellowed, striding purposefully over a dozen bodies and closed the distance between himself and the younger boy. He grabbed the boy by the front of his sweater and dragged him nearer. "What is it you're sorry for, Weasley?"

"Mrs. Snape, sir," Ron sputtered, staring down at the long fingered hands that had a white-knuckled grip on his sweater.

"Samantha? Where is she, Weasley? WHERE IS SHE?!" Snape's bellow echoed through the silent battlefield as he shook Ron senseless.

"Over there, sir," Ron muttered, pointing to where the Whomping Willow stood motionless and charred. Beneath it laid a single body, the young, beautiful body of Samantha Snape.

Severus dropped Ron roughly and set off at a sprint toward the Whomping Willow. The smell of rotting flesh and death was in his sensitive nostrils as he stumbled over a jumble of bodies and fell to the ground. Sliding in the mud and muck, Severus struggled to regain his footing as he stared into the face of Minerva McGonagall. Her pale, sharp eyes were staring blankly at some lost point in the distance. A gash stretched across her stern face from her right temple to beneath her left ear. Severus felt the bile begin to rise in his throat as his brain struggled between mourning the loss of the woman who had been a mother to him and going to the side of his wife. Digging his worn dragon hide boots in the soft turf, he pushed himself off the ground and set off once more towards the smoldering tree in the distance.

"SAMANTHA!" The sound was out of his mouth before he could hold it back. Her thick, auburn curls came into view as he cleared the top of the tiny hill upon which the Whomping Willow stood. Her face was pink, flushed, and spotted with blood as he neared her motionless body. Wide, empty green eyes stared into nothingness, an expression of utter fear on her once beautiful face.

Severus fell to his knees, all pretense of the Potions master lost beside the body of his wife. He pulled her into his lap with shaking arms and felt the hot, stinging tears run down his cheeks. The grief that was visible in those fathomless black eyes was enough to bring the old man standing nearby to sickness. It was a moment Albus Dumbledore didn't want to intrude on, this tender sight of a man so haunted by his past now having to face his future with a shattered heart.

Almost as if he sensed the presence of the older wizard, Severus lifted his tear-stained face from where it was buried in his wife's shoulder. Gazing absently in Dumbledore's direction, Severus whispered, "Please, Albus, as your last kindness to me... kill me."

Dumbledore's face contorted with a wince at this request. The younger man kneeling in the mud had been so in love with the wife whose body he now clutched desperately to his chest. "I cannot, Severus, not when you have Andromeda. If it were not for her, I might consider..."

Severus's head jerked. "Andromeda? Dear gods, Albus, what has happened to her? Where is she? I will *Avada* myself if I have lost her as well. Tell me, do I have a reason to live?" The desperate look that invaded those tired, sculpted features cut Dumbledore as deep in his heart as anything ever had.

He knelt beside Snape and placed a soothing hand on the back of the younger man's head as he began to sob. "Hush, my boy," Dumbledore cooed. "She is quite safe, Severus. I put her in the care of the house-elves myself as soon as the alarm was sounded."

Snape let out a rattling, deep breath and looked gratefully into the older man's crisp eyes. "I cannot tell you how thankful I am for that. How did you find her, Albus?"

A soft, genuine smile spread across Dumbledore's old face as he recalled the sight of Severus and Samantha's daughter from just a few hours before. "She was in my study, Severus, eating lemon drops and playing with Hermione Granger's cat. I gave her to Dobby and Winky, giving them explicit instructions as to protect Andromeda from harm at all costs. They have taken her into hiding in the most secret places of the castle. The house-elves will not allow an innocent child to be harmed."

Severus sighed with something resembling relief before turning back toward the body of his wife. The pink flush of her face had been replaced by a pale gray shadow. Her green eyes still stared off into an unknown distance, the mask of fear forever etched onto her face. Severus scrunched his eyes together and tried desperately to hold back the bile that rose in his throat. A soft hand fell on his shoulder and an expressly feminine voice whispered in his ear.

"Get up, Professor," said the gentle voice. "You're bleeding; you need to see Madam Pomfrey."

An animalistic grunt rumbled from his chest, and he pulled the body of his wife closer. His black robes were now spotted red with their mingled blood. The gentle voice was in his ear again.

"Please, Professor. You seem to be hurt pretty bad. Let me take you up to the castle, sir." The girl to whom the gentle voice belonged began to tug insistently at his arms. She began to plead with him. "Sir, please, get up. Please, sir, please. Severus..."

The use of his given name startled him, and he turned his head to see the girl standing behind him. She couldn't have been more than seventeen or eighteen and Severus thought that he knew the girl's name, but it wouldn't come to him. All he could think about was the body in his arms and the growing pain low in his back. It grew, searing through him like white, hot fire. A primal scream erupted from him before everything went black. Severus Snape slumped over the body of his wife on the battlefield.

The sun was streaming through the high windows of the hospital wing as Severus Snape began to rouse from a deep, heavy sleep. There were white curtains around his bed to ensure his privacy. A pitcher of water and an empty glass were on the table beside him, along with a worn encyclopedia of medicinal potions. He groaned as he tried to sit up, the pain in his lower back excruciating.

There was a soft rustling of robes as Madam Pomfrey pushed aside the curtains surrounding his bed. The mediwitch clicked her tongue reprovingly as she swept her wand through the air above Snape's body. "What do you think you are doing?"

"Exactly what it looks like I'm doing, Poppy." Snape winced as he shifted against his pillows. "I need to get to Andromeda. I haven't seen her in... Merlin, how long has it

been?"

A softer look crossed the old mediwitch's face as she looked down at Severus. "Two weeks, Severus. But don't worry. Andromeda is quite all right. Albus has been checking in on her every day. Winky and Dobby have kept her safe until Hermione was well enough to take charge of her."

"Humph," Severus mumbled. "Who would have thought Miss Granger had a mothering instinct?"

"Oh, really. Don't be so sarcastic. She's not let Andromeda out of her sight since she left the hospital wing." Madam Pomfrey fluffed Snape's pillows and turned to pour a draught of potion into the glass on the table. "She was asking about you almost as soon as she woke up, Severus. And that was a week and a half ago. Here, drink this."

Severus took the cup and drank the potion down in one swallow. He made a sour face as he handed the glass back to the mediwitch. "Is she being good to my daughter, Poppy?"

"Like she was her own," she replied. "Now go back to sleep and I'll see if Miss Granger will bring her up to see you when you wake up." Madam Pomfrey placed the glass on the table and turned to see Severus snuggling back down into his bed.

"Poppy," he murmured as he began to drift off to sleep again, the pain in his back ebbing away. "Send for Samantha... I would... *yawn*... like to tell her... *yawn*... I love her."

Madam Pomfrey closed her eyes tightly to hold back the stinging tears threatening to spill out. She closed her soft, worn hand over Severus's and whispered, "I can't do that, dear boy."

Snape grunted in answer before he drifted off completely. It seemed to Madam Pomfrey that he slept for hours, but they were peaceful hours. He neither moved nor made noise until near dinnertime when he began to stir. *Of course*, thought Madam Pomfrey as she made her rounds in the hospital wing. *Severus must be starving. The poor thing hasn't eaten anything solid in two weeks.*

She crossed the room to her office and grasped a handful of Floo powder. Kneeling slowly onto the hearth of her fireplace, Madam Pomfrey threw the powder into the fire and watched the flames burn high and green. She called out "Professor Granger's chambers!" before sticking her head into the warm flames.

Her head continued to spin for a few moments before she opened her eyes to see Hermione Granger sitting in the floor playing dolls with a small child. Madam Pomfrey cleared her throat in order to not frighten them.

"Oh, hello, Madam Pomfrey. I didn't see you there," said Hermione cheerfully. She smiled and turned her attention to the child playing in the floor near her. "Andromeda, I am going to talk to Madam Pomfrey for a minute. I'll be just here, okay?"

The child looked up, her eyes were deep green and wide with ridiculously long, black lashes. Her face was round and pleasant with rose-colored lips and pink cheeks. Her hair was black and fell in thick curls that Hermione had pulled away from her face with clips. Anyone who looked at the child would not have mistaken that she was the daughter of Severus Snape and Samantha Cole.

Hermione turned her attention back to the head of the mediwitch sitting in her fireplace. "Is everything all right?"

"Oh, yes, dear. I thought you might be glad to hear that Severus is going to make a full recovery. He's sleeping just now, but he said he would like to see Andromeda. I was hoping you would bring her down to visit after he has eaten his supper." There was a muffled grunt from Madam Pomfrey's end of the Floo connection. A soft smile crossed her face. "Apparently, he is already awake. If you don't mind, Hermione, please bring the child down in half an hour. I think she will be the only one to keep him tolerable until he is well enough to be out on his own."

"Of course, Madam Pomfrey. I... um..." Hermione's voice trailed off as she stared at the little girl nearby.

A soft, almost knowing smile crossed the old mediwitch's face. "Something you want to ask, dear?" Madam Pomfrey didn't need to ask. She already knew that Hermione was going to ask about Samantha Snape.

"Has Sev... I mean, Professor Snape realized about his wife? Is he all right?" The look that crossed the young woman's face was enough to make the mediwitch staring at her from the fire want to cry.

"He's asked for her, Hermione, but I can't bring myself to tell him what happened. I believe he's blocked it out for the time being. It's best we don't come out and tell him in his current state, but if he were to ask, we cannot... nor should we... hide it from him." She smiled and looked at Hermione sideways. "I think he will be all right with time. Andromeda will be able to help him heal some of those wounds that his wife's death has inflicted. A child is one of the best healers, dear; remember that. They work so innocently that their magic cannot help but be felt."

There was another grunt from the other end of the Floo connection. Madam Pomfrey smiled slightly at the child playing in the floor before her head disappeared with a pop. Hermione turned back to the child stroking the hair of her dolls. Those soft green eyes turned up to hers, and a smile stretched across her round face as she scooted across the carpet. "Hermimmy... I want daddy," the little girl mumbled.

Hermione smiled and reached out to scoop the girl up off the floor. "We're going to see daddy today, Andromeda. That was daddy's doctor that I was just talking to, you know, in the fireplace."

Andromeda Snape looked at the fireplace for a moment then turned her green eyes back to her babysitter. "Aunt Pop-pee," she mumbled, crawling up into Hermione's lap. "Where did Mummy go?"

The question caught Hermione off guard so that she jumped a bit. She pulled the little girl closer against her chest and kissed the top of her head. "Your mummy was a very brave woman, Andromeda. She was a soldier, and she fought in a dangerous war. We all fought, daddy and Gampa and Gamma, me and Harry and Ron." Hermione smiled as the little girl in her arms giggled and held her tiny fingers over her nose. Every time Ron came near her, he would pretend to steal Andromeda's nose and hide it. She had taken well to Ron and Harry, who helped give Hermione a few well-deserved naps every now and then.

"The war came here to our house, and your mummy went out to fight with everyone else, Andromeda. But a very, very bad man didn't want your mummy to fight for us because he knew we would win. So, he hurt your mummy really bad. He hurt her so bad that she went to be with the angels. And you know what, Andromeda?" The little girl twisted in Hermione's arms and looked up at her questioningly. "Now, your mummy is with the angels and so is Gamma and my grandmother. They're all watching over us now, and they'll keep us safe."

Hermione thought her heart was going to burst when the little girl started to cry. "Mummy coming back from the angels, Hermimmy?" When Hermione shook her head and murmured "no" into the little girl's hair, tears began to streak down her cheeks as well. Yes, she mourned for the loss of Samantha Snape, who had been a wonderful Dark Arts teacher and a good friend (having been a Gryffindor herself). But more so, she mourned for Professor Snape, who had changed so much with Samantha in his life. He had emerged from his bitter, dark, snapping persona to become a respected mentor, a loyal soldier and husband, and a doting father. She mourned for the man she had secretly come to admire and to love.

"Daddy, daddy, daddy!" Andromeda chanted as she skipped next to Hermione on the way to the hospital wing. Her black curls were bouncing, and her green eyes were shining as Hermione told her stories about Professor Snape. "Daddy said you have big teeth, Hermimmy?"

Although the memory used to break her heart and make her feel so much like crying that she felt sick, Hermione laughed in spite of herself. "Yes, and I cried so hard that I

almost got sick. I went to Aunt Poppy, and she made them better. I even let her make them smaller than what I started with!"

They had arrived at the door of the hospital wing. Hermione raised her hand to knock on the door but found it being pushed open by Andromeda. The little girl squeezed through the opening she had made and ran through the rows of empty beds squealing "Daddy!" the whole way. Hermione slid through the opening and pushed the door shut behind her before rushing off in pursuit of the little girl.

"Andromeda," she called in a hushed voice. She caught up to the child and grasped her by the back of her dress and pulled her back. "We have to be quiet or else we go back to our room."

"I should think not, Miss Granger," came the familiar, albeit a bit softer, voice of Professor Snape.

Hermione looked up to see him propped up against a pile of pillows in the very last bed. The afternoon light trickled through the window above his bed and cast a faint glow on him. It was the first time Hermione had seen him awake since the battle, and she had to admit he was looking better than he had that day. She grasped Andromeda by her tiny hand and led her to her father's bedside.

"You're looking much better today, Professor," she said, sitting in the chair set up beside his bed and pulling Andromeda into her lap. "Have you been eating well?"

Hermione expected the customary sneer and insult from the man sitting in the bed. It didn't come. Instead, he replied, "I have eaten what Poppy has brought me, but it hasn't been much."

If that hadn't been enough to stop Hermione's heart from shock, what he said next finished the job.

"How have you been feeling?"

"I... um... I'm fine, Professor," she sputtered, breaking away from looking at him to stare into Andromeda's hair. She began fidgeting with a group of curls pulled back from the child's face. "I've not felt any pain for a few days now, and the wounds have healed for the most part. I just have to be careful."

"I am glad to hear that, Miss Granger, but that is not all that I was inquiring about," said Snape, a concerned look passing over his face momentarily. "I know you have been looking after Andromeda while I have been otherwise disposed. And, I also know what an energetic child she can be. You may be truthful. Have you been eating and sleeping decently? Has she been any trouble at all?"

Hermione released the child as she slid out of her lap and went to climb into her father's bed. Automatically, Hermione stood and helped Andromeda onto the bed, being careful to position her away from Professor Snape's fresh battle wounds. "She has been no trouble at all, Professor. It has been a pleasure to take care of her. I think I will be quite lonely once Madam Pomfrey has released you and you have taken her back. I will miss her."

Sinking back into her chair, Hermione watched as Snape put his arm around his daughter and pulled her closer. The little girl turned her face up to her father and gave him a beaming smile. "Daddy, you said Herminny has big teeth!"

Blushing furiously, Hermione felt like melting into the floor and disappearing forever.

A small smile fluttered over Snape's face. "Yes, I did. It was very rude and very ugly of me to say that, Andromeda. I should apologize to 'Herminny,' shouldn't I?"

"Daddy, you should say sorry to Herminny." Andromeda giggled as she wriggled under the blankets and pulled them daintily over her legs.

"I'm very sorry for anything I have said that has hurt your feelings, Miss Granger. I would hope that you understand now why I acted as I did," said Snape, the sincere look in his eyes making Hermione feel as if she was flying. Snape had never so much as looked at her without disdain, and now he was apologizing to her for the lot of it.

The door at the end of the room opened with a creak, and Professor Dumbledore swept inside. Andromeda turned away from her father at the sound and squealed, "Gampa!" before sliding from the bed and running the length of the room. Professor Snape winced as Andromeda's foot made contact with a fresh wound on his side. Professor Dumbledore swept his goddaughter into his arms and began to make his way toward Snape and Hermione.

"Really, Miss Granger, I'm perfectly fine," Snape was grumbling as Hermione insisted on pulling back his blankets and checking the bandage that Andromeda had dislodged. "It was an accident. It doesn't even hurt anymore. I'm fine, Miss Granger... Miss Granger... really, could you just... Stop that!"

Hermione jumped and clasped her hands together over her mouth. The bandage had been completely removed from the gaping wound in Professor Snape's side. The gash was red and glistening with blood. It stretched in a wide arc from his right hipbone over his flattened stomach and disappeared beneath his left arm. It seemed as if it went all the way around his body. The tears welled up in Hermione's eyes as he fumbled to pull the blankets over his wounds so that Andromeda wouldn't see them.

"How are you feeling today, my boy?" asked Professor Dumbledore, as he swept up to Snape's bedside and conjured himself a cushy chair opposite Hermione's wooden one. "You look much better than you did yesterday. I'm very pleased with your recovery."

Snape smiled weakly and tried to ignore the sight of Hermione sinking into her chair and wiping the tears from her eyes. "Andromeda, don't pull on Gampa's beard. That hurts," he said as his daughter gave Dumbledore's long silver beard a hearty tug. "Thank you for everything you've done for us, Albus. It would break Samantha's heart if something happened to Andromeda. How is she, Albus? Poppy won't tell me where she is or what is wrong with her."

A sad light came into Dumbledore's eyes as he looked from the child in his arms to the younger man lying in the hospital bed to Hermione, who was trying desperately to wipe the tears from her eyes. His heart ached for the young woman she had become, the young woman who had accepted his offer as a confidant during one of their many meetings at Snape's bedside. Hermione had confided to Dumbledore through a myriad of tears and sniffles that not only had she grown to love and adore Andromeda, she had also come to love Severus himself. Dumbledore's crystal blue eyes followed her as she swiped at the tears in her eyes and stood slowly.

Hermione's legs were shaking as she stood, and she felt the bile rise in her throat. She didn't think she could listen to this; she shouldn't. This was something private between Dumbledore and Professor Snape. The tears began to well up again as she murmured something about going to see Madam Pomfrey about a headache potion, turned on her heel, and all but ran to the mediwitch's office.

Severus stared after her for a moment. "What is the matter with Miss Granger?" he mumbled, almost as if to himself. His attention shifted to his daughter, who was still tugging insistently on Dumbledore's beard.

"What did I tell you, Andromeda? Mummy and I have told you a hundred times..."

"Mummy is with Gamma and the angels, Daddy," said Andromeda as she let go of Dumbledore's beard and slid out of his lap. She went to her father's bedside and grasped his large, long-fingered hand in both of hers. "Herminny says she can't come back."

Severus looked as if he had been hit. What color he had drained rapidly from his face. He swallowed hard and shifted his gaze to his mentor. "Albus, what is this? I demand you tell me what happened? Why can't I remember anything about Samantha after the battle broke out? Albus, tell me, please."

The light in Dumbledore's eyes faded until his eyes were bleak and gray. He looked at the younger man with more sympathy and remorse than he had ever felt in his very long life. "I don't know how to tell you, Severus. I will confess that I had hoped it would never come to this... that you would come to the realization of what happened on your own. But as it has not been so simple, I suppose it has fallen upon me to be the bearer of terrible news."

As Dumbledore spoke, Severus began to pale even further, if that were even possible. The younger man pulled his daughter onto the bed next to him and cradled her as close as he could without agitating his wounds. "Severus, I am sorry," Dumbledore continued. "Samantha did not make it through the battle. Voldemort himself killed her."

For a moment it looked as if Snape didn't believe what he had heard. He knew that somehow, it had to be a cruel and insensitive joke. However, slowly and painfully, his brain began to compute what Dumbledore said. The innocent confession of his daughter, the uncomfortable tears of Hermione, and the pained expression on Dumbledore's face all pointed to the one conclusion that Snape had blocked from his mind for days. Samantha, his wonderful, beautiful, intelligent wife, was dead and gone forever. Without the energy to compose himself and put on a brave face, the tears began to trickle out of Snape's distant black eyes.

Andromeda looked up at her father with her wide green eyes and smiled. She reached up her tiny hand and clumsily wiped the tears from his cheeks. "It's okay, Daddy. Mummy and Gamma were brave, and they are taking care of us and helping the angels."

Dumbledore stood and left the grieving man with his daughter. He crossed the hospital wing and knocked quietly on Madam Pomfrey's office door. The mediwitch appeared at the door with red, puffy eyes and a handkerchief. "Oh, Albus. How is he?"

"He will be alright in time, Poppy. I think it will do him good to have Andromeda with him for a while so that he can reconnect with the only part of Samantha he has left," Dumbledore said as he stepped into the office and closed the door behind him. "Give him some time and do not badger him to talk about anything he does not wish to. Now, how are you feeling, Hermione?"

Startled, Hermione looked up at the Headmaster with red eyes. She pressed a tissue to her eyes and drew in several deep breaths. "Professor, I can't do this. I don't think I can watch him hurt so much. It was hard enough to listen to Andromeda crying for Samantha the first few nights. I can't watch Severus go through this... Oh, Professor, what am I going to do?"

Hermione's tears began to flow anew, and Dumbledore pulled her into his arms as she cried. "As unfortunate as it is, he will not heal if he does not experience the pain that comes from losing someone you care about. It will be hard for Severus. He has never loved anyone before Samantha and Andromeda."

"No, Professor," Hermione mumbled as she pulled away and wiped her eyes. "He loves you, sir." *I wonder if he loved his parents?* Hermione thought as she stared at the office door. "May I go check on him, Madam Pomfrey, or should I just let him be?"

Madam Pomfrey and Professor Dumbledore looked at each other for a moment before turning their attention to Hermione, who still looked as if she could burst into tears again at any moment. "I must caution you not to push him, Hermione. Do not make him talk about anything he does not wish to. And, for your own sake as well as his, please do not make any drastic bedside confessions."

Hermione nodded limply and made her way slowly to the door of Madam Pomfrey's office. She turned and smiled weakly at Professor Dumbledore.

"Go on, Hermione. I suppose he will thank you for it some day."

Hermione

Chapter 2 of 11

Bedside confessions and the morning after.

CHAPTER 2: Hermione

The hospital wing had grown dark since Hermione had brought Andromeda down for her first visit with her father since the battle. She knew that Snape's bed was directly across from Madam Pomfrey's office, but she felt as if the floor were spinning in a thousand different directions at once. She felt disoriented and nauseated. Her legs shook beneath her, and Hermione knew she would faint if she took a single step.

A tiny shape moved in the distance, and Hermione heard Andromeda's soft voice. "Hermionny, is Daddy going to be okay?" The little girl fumbled through the darkened hospital wing toward Madam Pomfrey's office.

Hermione reached out her hand and, kneeling, pulled the little girl close to her. She wrapped her in her arms and kissed the top of her head gently. "I don't know, Andromeda. I hope so," she whispered. Hermione pulled away from the little girl and stared down into her dark brown eyes. "Why don't you go in with Gampa and Aunt Poppy while I go check on Daddy, okay?"

"Okay, Hermionny," Andromeda whispered. She turned to go into Madam Pomfrey's office, but then raced back to Hermione. She wrapped her tiny arms around Hermione's neck and mumbled, "I love you, Hermionny."

The tears sprang to Hermione's eyes so quickly that she didn't trust herself to talk at all. She kissed Andromeda's head again and shoed her off to Madam Pomfrey's office. She stood and made her way to Professor Snape's bedside on wobbly legs.

Snape's ragged, shallow breathing seemed to echo through the hospital wing. Hermione couldn't tell whether he was awake and still crying or had drifted off into a fitful sleep. She crept close to Snape's bedside and sank into the wooden chair that sat next to it. Tears from Andromeda's heartfelt confession still glided down her cheeks as she stared down at Snape's gaunt form. After convincing herself that he indeed was asleep, Hermione reached out and took his hand.

"Oh, Severus," she whispered, her voice choked and raw from her tears. "How I love that little girl of yours. She's so wonderful, Severus. She's so much like you, I can't help but love her." Hermione stopped and swiped at the tears rolling down her cheeks.

"I can see so much of you in her, Severus. Andromeda has your wit. I've never seen a child so precocious and talkative. She loves learning so much. I'll miss her when you are well enough to take her back. These past few weeks... Oh, Severus, it feels like she's mine." Hermione laughed nervously. "Harry and Ron told me once she even looks like me. I can't see it, but sometimes I wish I could. I loved Samantha like a sister and I..."

Hermione stopped and put her free hand over her mouth as she felt Professor Snape squeeze her hand gently. She could see his black eyes glistening in the moonlight and felt her face redden. She quickly looked down and tried to hide her face behind her falling hair. Hermione felt as if she could die of embarrassment. Dumbledore had asked her not to say anything, but it seemed as if the words came spilling out before she could stop them.

"Hermione," came Snape's voice. It was soft and gentle, something that Hermione would have given all the high marks she'd ever gotten to hear just once in class. A cool waft of air washed over Hermione's face as Snape raised his free hand and swept her thick brown curls behind her ear. "Hermione, look at me."

She obligingly raised her eyes to his and felt her heart skip a beat. "She loved you the same," he continued as he held her gaze. It was so different from the way he had looked at her for so many years. It could almost be called loving as his dark eyes shifted over her face in the darkness. "We talked about you often, especially when we

began to notice how much Andromeda looked like you."

"Please, Professor," Hermione managed. "Lay back and try to sleep. I shouldn't have bothered you. Andromeda and I will be back tomorrow morning, now that you're well enough to know we're here."

Snape grunted as he struggled to sit up, despite Hermione's protestations that he try to sleep. "How often have you visited and I haven't been coherent enough to notice, Hermione?"

"Everyday, sir. I haven't brought Andromeda until today. I didn't want her to see you in such bad shape," she whispered. "Ron and Harry looked after her while I visited. Sometimes Professor Dumbledore watched her for me."

"Hermione, will you miss her so much when I am better?" He looked at her with such sincerity that the tears tickled Hermione's eyes again.

She nodded and swiped haphazardly at her tearing eyes. "... oh, sod it. Yes, Professor, I will miss her terribly. I have fallen in love with that little girl. It will break my heart to give her up. I wish..." Hermione's eyes grew wide as she slapped her free hand over her mouth. She had almost said too much. She quickly recollected herself. "I have to get Andromeda back to bed."

With that, Hermione squeezed Snape's hand quickly and stood. "Good night, sir," she mumbled before hurrying off to Madam Pomfrey's office to collect Andromeda. She knew that if she stayed at Snape's bedside any longer, she would say things that she had no right to say to him. Not now, not ever.

Hermione was up before dawn the next morning. Her mortification of revealing the little that she had to Professor Snape was evident in her face as she stared into the mirror after her bath. Her thick brown curls hung heavy and wet around her shoulders as tiny droplets of water clung to her skin and dripped onto the floor. Holding her towel in place, Hermione reached for her wand to cast a quick drying charm on her hair. She had learned the charm in fourth year from *Witch Weekly* and had tried it out for the Yule Ball. It kept her hair from getting frizzy and made her curls look more tamed and defined.

Once her hair was dry, Hermione pulled it back into a twist with a large clip. She was never much for spending hours getting ready in the mornings. However, since she had taken Andromeda in it was necessary to get up early to be ready when the child woke up. Hermione quickly dried off, trying desperately to ignore the pink scars crossing over almost every part of her body, and dressed in a pair of jeans and long-sleeved shirt. Andromeda was just stirring in her bed as Hermione slipped out of her private bathroom.

Hermione started a small fire and opened the curtains as Andromeda sat up in her bed, rubbing her eyes. She looked sleepily up at Hermione and smiled. "Morning, Mummy," she mumbled as she slipped out from under her covers and toddled toward the bathroom door.

The breath caught in Hermione's throat when she heard Andromeda's words. How much she wanted to hear those words every morning! "Give over, Granger," Hermione muttered angrily to herself. "He hated you then, and he hates you now. He's only being civil because he's heavily medicated and his daughter was in the room. Severus will never look at you as anything other than an insufferable know-it-all."

Hermione shook her head trying to dispel the torrent of thoughts swirling through her brain. She drew her wand and quickly made up both of the beds in the room. The window sprang open, and the cool morning air wafted through the room. A jumper and a skirt appeared, draped over the chair next to Andromeda's bed and a pair of shoes settled themselves alongside the chair.

"Good morning, Miss Professor," came a squeaky voice from behind Hermione. She turned to find a small house-elf standing behind her with a tray bearing a tumbler of orange juice, a steaming cup of coffee, two plates of toast and eggs, a copy of the *Daily Prophet*, and a small bundle of letters.

"Oh, good morning, Caddy," Hermione sighed as she cleared off a small table in the corner. "Have you been up to the hospital wing this morning?"

"No, Miss Professor. I is going there with Professor Snape's breakfast soon," replied the house-elf. "Is you wanting me to take a message there?" The house-elf began setting out their breakfast as the bathroom door opened and Andromeda emerged.

"Let's get dressed and eat our breakfast, and then we'll go see Daddy," Hermione said happily as she ushered the little girl over to the chair by her bed. She folded her nightgown and placed it on the end of her bed before conjuring a warm washcloth. Hermione washed Andromeda's face and hands with the warm water and smiled when the child started giggling when the cloth tickled her ribs. "Okay, change your knickers and put on your clothes. Did you brush your teeth?"

"Yes, Herminny," the little girl said, nodding her head and sending her black curls bouncing. She turned away from Hermione and began dressing herself. She was six years old, after all. Her mum had taught her how to dress herself when she was three.

Professor Snape was still asleep when Hermione arrived an hour later. She had brought Andromeda with her on the way to the hospital wing, but they had passed Professor Dumbledore as he left after visiting Severus. He had grabbed Andromeda up in his arms and taken her to his office to play with Fawkes and eat sweets. Perhaps it was for the best that she could face Professor Snape alone after what had happened the night before. She didn't think she could sit there with him *and* Andromeda at the same time.

Hermione sank onto the chair next to Professor Snape's bed and took his hand in her own. He still looked thin and frail as he lay sleeping, the morning sunlight washing over his bed. His black hair spilled across his pillows and made his complexion look even paler than usual.

"I'm sorry, Severus," she mumbled, swiping at the tears rolling down her cheeks. "I should have kept my mouth shut last night. It's just that I can't bear to see you in pain. Not like this. You shouldn't have had to go through this. You should have been able to live a long, healthy life with Samantha and Andromeda. You should be looking forward to the rest of your life and not dreading it."

Hermione fell silent and sniffled. She could remember so clearly the day of her last start of term feast as a student. There was Samantha Cole in the Defense Against the Dark Arts spot, her auburn hair tied back in a ponytail and her green eyes flitting over the brimming Great Hall. Hermione had loved her from that first moment she'd laid eyes on her. Samantha seemed a woman after Hermione's own heart... the new teacher had a copy of *Hogwarts, A History* propped open in front of her. Professor Snape sat to her right, sneering and casting sidelong glances at her.

It hadn't been long afterward that Professor Snape and Samantha Cole began sharing a table in the library. They could burst into terrible fights over some passage in some dusty tomb about some useless subject. Madam Pince threw them out more times than Hermione could count, but she chuckled knowing when she did. They were married that Christmas. In class, Professor Snape was still a right bastard who would still as soon insult her as look at her. But, then again, when he did look at her, there was a different look in his eyes. The real change for Severus Snape came whenever his new bride was in the room. He stood a little straighter, looked a little softer, acted a little nicer, and smiled a little... and just a little more.

Andromeda had been born September fourteenth, just three months after Hermione graduated from Hogwarts. She came back for the baby shower Minerva had thrown for Samantha. By the time she had left to return to her flat in Birmingham, she had fallen in love with Andromeda Diana Snape. In her years away from Hogwarts, Hermione had thought about the three of them often. She'd thought about everyone at Hogwarts often. Professor Flitwick had been on her mind as she worked toward her certification in Charms. She'd thought of Professor Vector when she was awarded her degree in Arithmancy. She had wondered if Professor Snape would be proud that she had achieved certification--though not quite Master status--in Potions at the same time.

Professor Snape grumbled something in his sleep and flexed his fingers around her hand. Hermione smiled as she heard a familiar laughter flitting down the hallway. She

wondered wistfully as to when she'd fallen in love with the both of them.

"Oh, I didn't know you were here, Hermione," Madam Pomfrey said brightly as she brought out several doses of medicine for when Severus woke up.

Hermione laughed. "I doubt that, Madam Pomfrey. You know everything that goes on in this place. But, thank you for the privacy anyway."

The old mediwitch smiled softly and placed a gentle hand on Hermione's shoulder. "It will get better, dear. Sooner or later. He loved Samantha dearly; it will be hard for him to get along without her. The poor boy has been through so much as it is."

"At least he has Andromeda," the young witch sighed. She watched his chest rise and fall slowly with each breath he took. *Please, God, if you're listening, let him get better. I can't bear to lose him.*

"Perhaps he has more than that, Hermione." Madam Pomfrey smiled knowingly before walking away to her office, leaving a terribly confused Arithmancy Professor in her wake.

Samantha

Chapter 3 of 11

Quite a startling revelation for Severus, and we finally see Samantha...alive, that is.

Yes, you guessed it... anything you recognize belongs to the fantastic JKR. Anything that sounds a bit strange or severely out of place... well, that's mine. I would like to dedicate this chapter to two very special readers, harrypotterfan2005 (who offered some plot points to straighten a few things out) and justjennifer (who requested an update for her birthday, which is or was June 28th--depending on when this goes up). So this one's for you two, thanks for the suggestions, and I hope this suffices as a much belated birthday gift! Please enjoy! Is it a dream, some fantasy produced by a potion, or is it something else? You decide, and don't forget to review.

CHAPTER 3: Samantha

Severus could hear soft feminine tones somewhere in the distance as he struggled through the limbo between wakefulness and sleep. His body ached from tremors, his throat was sore from sobbing, his eyes felt swollen and dry from tears, and his head and heart ached with the knowledge that his wife was dead. Samantha Cole Snape, his soul mate, his salvation from the darkness that so often threatened to overwhelm his soul, had stepped beyond the veil, sent there at the business end of Lord Now-A-Pile-Of-Stinky-Ashes Voldemort's wand. There was nothing he could do about it now, he had failed her even after vowing on their wedding night that he wouldn't let any harm come to her. At least he had done something right; at least he had the good fortune to keep Andromeda safe.

Allowing the fingers of sleep still lingering over his mind to draw him back into the peacefulness of unconsciousness, he let go of all coherent thought. Everything around him was veiled in thin, gray mist, the sound of a far off brook filling the air. Severus could barely hear the sound of his shoes against the cobbled street on which he walked. He had no sense of direction in this place; he simply walked forward, knowing somehow, somewhere ahead there was something he wanted desperately. Music that reminded him of phoenix song filled his senses, making him feel as if something warm and perfect had dripped into the pit of his stomach and began radiating outward. The pain in his limbs disappeared, and the emptiness of his heart dissolved into a peace he'd only known once in his life.

Severus Snape lifted his ebony eyes and looked off in the distance through the dissipating mist. Standing beneath a sprawling tree at the end of the street, her auburn curls draped over her shoulder and her emerald eyes shining, was Samantha. She was smiling knowingly at him and held out her hand to beckon him forward.

"Dear Merlin," he whispered softly, his feet taking him closer to her before he could make his brain think *move!* He reached out his hand as he came nearer and traced it over her face. He felt the familiar warmth of her skin beneath his palm as his eyes focused on those beloved freckles and the flecks of gold in her eyes that only he knew were there. "It can't be... It's impossible. You're dead, I saw you. Albus said they buried you at the war monument. But I know the feel of you, the way your hair wraps around my fingers like velvet, the way your skin is warm and soft against mine, the smell of rose water and soap that lingers whenever you leave a room. *Oh, gods,*" he groaned, sinking to his knees onto the cobbled street in front of her.

The tears came again, but they were refreshing. It felt as if the pain of losing her bled out of him with each tear that streaked down his pale face. Severus wrapped his arms around her legs like a frightened child and sobbed into her robes as she softly stroked his head and whispered soothing nonsense to him.

"It's alright, Severus," Samantha said softly, stroking his hair the way she knew would comfort him. "If you take nothing from this meeting, I want you to know this. It is all right to grieve, but don't grieve so hard that you do not enjoy the life you have left."

Severus raised his tear-stained face and looked into her serene face. "I don't have a life left without you. The bastard won, Samantha. He took you to break me, and he succeeded. Please, let me come with you."

She smiled indulgently and knelt. "You can't, dearest. Your time isn't finished yet. Andromeda needs you; she needs her father who she adores more than anything in the world. You can live for her. I know you can. Grieve for me, Severus, and let Andromeda grieve with you. There's nothing shameful in missing someone you love. It's the highest honor you can pay to my memory, to show that you will miss me."

"How am I going to get along without you? I don't know how to raise a child." Images of Andromeda playing by the lake with flowers woven in her black curls appeared before his eyes. Severus shook his head as if to clear away the thoughts as the scene he imagined appeared in front of him. The cobbled street gave way to the sloping lawns of Hogwarts, a bright summer sun shining on the rippling lake, a soft breeze wafting through the trees, and the sound of his daughter's laughter ringing in his ears.

Samantha stood up and extended her hand to help Severus from the ground. He stood on aching legs, feeling a bit dizzy, as the sight of his daughter remained. "She knows I love her, Severus. She will never forget that, but my time with her is over. The fates gave me six years with her, and seven with you, but I was never destined to see her grow up. There is someone else who fate has given that honor..."

She turned her eyes toward the scene playing before them. Andromeda was squealing with delight as she dipped her toes into the cool water of the lake. The breeze ruffled the flowers in her hair as she turned, seeming to look right at them, and called, "Are you coming, Mummy Hermiony?"

Severus felt his robes rustle slightly as the form of Hermione Granger swept past him, striding cheerfully toward his daughter. Hermione was smiling in a way that he didn't think he had ever seen her smile before. She toed off her shoes when she reached the bank of the lake and stuffed her socks inside them before settling onto a spot on the

grass next to Andromeda. "What do you want to talk about today, love?" Hermione asked, picking up a smooth stone and skipping it across the water.

The little girl rested her face in her hands and tapped her fingers against her cheeks as she thought. "Tell me stories, Mummy Herminny. Tell me 'bout my Mum and Dad."

His eyes wide and mouth hanging open, Severus watched as his former student pulled his daughter close to her side and began telling her stories about him that no one but Samantha knew. He turned to face her, a question lingering in his eyes. "How... I've never told Miss Granger those things. I've only told you. So, how could..." His question trailed off as he took in the knowing look on his wife's face.

She smiled again and took his hand in her own. Leading him toward Hermione and Andromeda, she chided, "Close your mouth, dear, before something flies in." She giggled at the sour look her husband gave her before returning to a serious countenance. "I'm surprised you never picked up on it, Severus, even when we talked about it. Hermione and I looked so much alike, different hair and eyes of course, but our personalities were identical. Andromeda looks like her, Severus, because Hermione looks like me. We read the same books, have the same tastes in friends, our favorite meal is the same, we're both only children, Muggle-borns. Piece it together, Severus. I know you can. Just think about it for a moment."

Looking back and forth between his wife and the young woman sitting and laughing with his daughter, comprehension dawned on him as to how alike they really were. He had noticed, all those years ago, although he would never have admitted it. He looked at her differently during her last year at Hogwarts, as if he knew her better than he should have. Something in her eyes were familiar, little flecks of gold amidst the chocolate brown, and it was almost as if he knew exactly where each freckle across her nose belonged.

He thought back over the past seven years. Samantha Cole appears out of the blue, a graduate student from a Wizarding University in America, and ends up becoming the love of his life. She was younger than he was, but only by ten years or so. She was a showoff with her knowledge, but it amused more than irritated him. All those nights they stayed up late nipping at each other over some article in *Potions Monthly* and then spending hours shagging each other senseless came flooding into his brain. He waited for the scene in front of him to change to reflect his memories, but it didn't. No matter how hard he concentrated on thoughts of shagging his wife, the scene remained. And then...

"Daddy!" Andromeda screeched, springing up from her seat on the bank and running across the springy grass to her father. Severus watched in awe as he saw himself striding across the lawn towards his daughter. He caught her in his arms and twirled her through the air as she laughed. Andromeda took her father's face in her tiny hands and kissed him sweetly on the tip of his beaklike nose.

Toeing off his boots and struggling out of his socks, Severus settled into Andromeda's vacated spot by the lake. He dangled his feet in the shallow water, allowing Andromeda to sit between his legs to stick her feet in as well, before leaning over to kiss Hermione on the cheek.

The real Severus turned back to Samantha and crossed his arms over his chest, looking very much like Andromeda did when she pouted. "What's going on, Samantha? I see it now, the similarities, but that doesn't mean anything. It's coincidence that the two of you are so alike, but there's nothing strange about it. There's..." He stopped, his mouth dropping open again, the proverbial light bulb going off over his head. "It can't be..."

"*Geminus animae*," Samantha whispered, nodding. "*Geminus animae sororum*, in our case."

Severus felt his mind whirling in a thousand different directions as he watched the three of them sitting by the lake enjoying a summer afternoon. He could hear Samantha's voice somewhere in the distance, and struggled to hear what she was saying.

"She is your other half, Severus, as much as I am. It's okay to move on, to love her. You're supposed to. The two of us, Hermione and I, were meant for you. I want you to be happy, to be the man I know you are going to become. You started to become that man with me, now you must finish it with Hermione. But when you love her, don't look at her and see me. Look at her and see the woman you are supposed to die beside. Love her, Severus, and love our daughter."

Severus felt a whispered kiss on his lips and looked up in time to see Samantha disappearing through a veil at the end of a cobbled street. The thin, gray mist was reappearing; the warmth of renewed phoenix song coursing through him again. He felt as though he were falling backwards even though he was standing straight up.

Hermione and Madam Pomfrey both jumped when Severus awoke, bolting upright in his bed. They were both silent for an instant, staring wide eyed at the Potions master.

"Lay back, Severus, and have your medicine," Madam Pomfrey said, gathering her wits and moving to guide the wizard back to bed.

"Hermione," he said, his voice sounding hoarse and strangled. Severus reached out, groping in the air in search of her. His fathomless black eyes fixed on her when her hands clasped over his.

"I'm right here, Severus," Hermione replied, not caring whether she used his first name or his title. "What is it? What do you need?"

Staring at her for a moment, almost as if he was seeing her for the first time, Severus saw something familiar flicker in Hermione's eyes. He swallowed hard and squeezed her hand. "Do you know what *geminus animae* is, Hermione?"

Looking more than a little confused, Hermione shook her head. "Not really. Please lay back, Severus. I'll be here when you wake; you can tell me then." She tried to help Madam Pomfrey get him back into bed, but he refused to budge.

"*Geminus animae*... twin souls. Do you understand now, Hermione?" his voice sounded pleading as he stared into her familiar eyes. "You and Samantha..." He trailed off as Madam Pomfrey forced a spoonful of potion into his mouth. He promptly fell asleep.

Notes from The Mistress: An unexpected twist, I hope. I had planned this one to be a short story, so I felt the need to move it along a bit. To harrypotterfan2005, I'm sorry I couldn't fit Sirius in, but I enjoyed writing this dream sequence so much that I may put in another and bring him in. Thanks for the idea!! I hope you, and justjennifer, enjoyed this one because it's for you!

Translations: I got them from the University of Notre Dame Latin website, so I don't know how good they are. Anyway, this is what they mean:

Geminus.....twin

Animae.....soul

Sorum.....sister

Special thanks to shalimar1981 for corrections of the Latin!

debilitating blows in his life, an abusive father, a mother who found it almost impossible to stand up to her husband, being despised at school, being drawn into the Death Eaters by Lucius Malfoy, spending more than half his life as a spy for the Order, and now losing the one person he ever opened up to enough to love. Severus is a very resilient young man, Miss Granger, but I have feared for a long time that he will break sooner rather than later.

"Now," he said, sighing deeply, "on to your question of *geminus animae*. It is a metaphysical occurrence in which there are soul groups, collections of like beings, who are bound to one another eternally. Each being amidst this soul group are what Muggles call 'soul mates' to one another. They are each a part of the other, some in a romantic situation and others not so. There are some instances where two beings are more than soul mates through the soul group; they are literally two halves of the same soul. One soul separated into two forms that are bound to come together to complete themselves during their lives.

"Some *geminus animae* have been documented to look, think, and behave almost identically. It is through this similarity in both physical and mental disposition that brings the two halves of the soul together. They tend to make decisions throughout their lives that eventually bring them to the same place at the same time. There is an almost instant feeling of familiarity and comfort between the two, and a camaraderie develops that others might find strange and disturbing. I know of three cases to happen in the last century, and two of those *geminus animae* I had the privilege and honor to know personally."

Hermione breathed deeply, trying to take in the information Professor Dumbledore had given her. She stroked Andromeda's curls as she slept in her lap and thought fleetingly of Professor Snape sleeping in the hospital wing. "If you don't mind my asking, sir, who have you known who were *geminus animae*?"

Professor Dumbledore smiled broadly at this and sat up straighter in his chair. "I wonder if you would mind if I answered your question with one of my own. What did Severus say to prompt your inquest?"

She swallowed and looked at the headmaster with wide eyes. "Sir, you don't mean... I mean, you can't be... Samantha... and *me*? That's what you meant isn't it, Professor. It's the two of us, we're the *geminus animae*, aren't we?"

"I believe you have answered your own question, my dear," he replied, rising from his chair and circling around his desk until he was kneeling in front of her. Hermione felt warmth spread through her at the memories of her grandfather that filled up her mind. He patted her hand softly and smiled. "Yourself and Samantha met as you were supposed to, and the similarities between you were unsettlingly striking. I believe Severus figured it out years ago, but refused to acknowledge it. The death of his wife has forced him to do so now.

"I must beg of you, Miss Granger, to not alter your treatment of Severus or your personality in any misguided attempt to help him. Doing so would be most troubling. He must come to terms with what he has learned, just as you must do the same." Professor Dumbledore stood and, popping a lemon drop in his mouth, said, "You know you are more than welcome to visit me if you are in need of someone to talk to, Miss Granger. However, I would also suggest you get in touch with Messrs. Potter and Weasley. Perhaps some moral support would not be amiss at present."

Hermione nodded and stood up, cradling Andromeda against her shoulder. Professor Dumbledore summoned the marbles and ring from the floor and placed them in a carrying pouch before handing them over to her. A few moments later, Hermione lay on the bed in her room watching Andromeda sleep soundly beside her. There were a few hours to go before dinner.

~~~HG~~SS~~HG~~SS~~HG~~SS~~HG~~SS~~HG~~SS~~HG~~SS~~HG~~SS~~

It was a brilliant evening. The slanted sunlight was shining through the window over his bed as Severus sat reclined against a pile of pillows, a photo album across his lap. He stared down at the moving pictures that documented the last seven years of his life. There was a picture of his wedding day, a small ceremony in Dumbledore's office. Samantha stood beside him, an arm around his waist as she smiled up at him from the picture and waved happily. She looked so content, they both did. There were pictures of Samantha as she grew round with Andromeda, a few of them with Severus pressing his palms to her belly reverently. Photos of Andromeda as she grew up, a mass of tousled black curls and bright green eyes, looking more like her mother the older she became. Looking more like Hermione Granger.

Severus groaned and rubbed his hands over his eyes before closing the photo album and putting it away beneath his pillows. Madam Pomfrey appeared around the curtain a few seconds later carrying his dinner tray and smiling.

"Here you are, Severus," she said, sitting the tray on the hospital table and pulling it up to his lap. "You may eat whatever you feel you can hold down, but do so slowly. I'll not have you making yourself ill trying to eat like..."

"Ronald Weasley," came a soft voice from the doorway. Severus and Madam Pomfrey both turned to the sound to find Hermione smiling at them, Andromeda holding on to her hand and swinging her marbles in their pouch. "I could never understand how he was able to eat like that!"

Hermione crossed the hospital wing to them, smiling softly at Severus as she sank onto the chair by his bed and pulled Andromeda into her lap. "How do you feel this evening, Severus?"

He was taken aback slightly by the fact that Hermione used his first name, but smiled at her nonetheless. "I'm feeling much better today, Hermione. Thank you." He wiped his hands on the bed covers, cursing himself for feeling so nervous. Every word he had said to her that morning was still running through his mind, the images from his dream of Samantha fresh as he looked over Hermione's face. There was something familiar in her eyes, in the small flecks of gold amid the warm brown depths, something that calmed the racing of his pulse and the uncertainty in his gut.

"Andromeda, why don't you show Daddy what Gampa Albus taught you today?" Hermione said, scooting her chair away from the side of Severus' bed, making room for Andromeda to set up her marbles in the floor. "This is amazing, Severus. We've been playing all afternoon."

Severus tried to sit up, wincing a bit at the wound that stretched across his torso that had yet to heal. Hermione stood up to help him, arranging his pillows behind him so that he could sit comfortably and smiled at the slight tremble of his hand when she brushed it with her own. She perched on the side of his bed and began arranging his dinner tray absently. They sat that way for hours watching Andromeda expertly flick marbles around the circle on the floor.

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**Notes from The Mistress:** *I want to send a thank you to Solar\_Starr for the bit on metaphysics. She left it in a review and I thought it was an outstanding way to explain what was happening between Samantha and Hermione. I promise there will be more interaction between Severus and Hermione next chapter!*

## Andromeda Part II

Chapter 5 of 11

Can a little girl's temper tantrum bring two people together?

*Usual disclaimer here, I own nothing you recognize. I'm just letting them out to play.*

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## CHAPTER 5: Andromeda Part II

"Well," Severus asked, looking up expectantly at Madam Pomfrey, who was changing the bandage over the wound across his torso. He was stiff and sore from being confined to the bed for nearly three weeks, and it was certainly not helping his temperament. Madam Pomfrey did her best with Cushioning Charms, but they wore off eventually. He was able to sit up occasionally, usually when Hermione and Andromeda came to visit. Severus smiled at the thought of them.

Madam Pomfrey straightened and smiled affectionately at the younger man. "You've healed nicely, Severus. I would like for you to stay through lunch, just to make sure you are able to keep everything down, and take these two potions with your food. If you do, we'll see about letting you get back to your quarters this afternoon." She placed two vials of potion on the bedside table and patted his arm softly before retreating to her office.

Severus lay back against his pillows and stared at the ceiling for a long while. He was glad to be getting out of the hospital wing, that was true, but he wasn't sure what he would do when he left. The school had remained open, and, from what Albus had been telling him during his visits, the grounds had been repaired as much as was magically possible. The new term would start next month, and Severus had all intentions of returning to his post. A war memorial had been erected by the gates, a low marble wall that skirted each side of the road to Hogsmeade. The names of all who had died or been incapacitated during the two Wizarding Wars were etched into the stone, each with the designation "Order of Merlin, First Class" beneath it. He wanted to see it, to see Samantha's name carved into the eternal stone. He wanted to leave flowers on her grave, to sit with her one more time, to tell her that he loved her and that he would take care of their little girl.

He would visit the war memorial and his wife's grave first. Severus knew that he needed to say his goodbyes to those he had loved and lost, not only Samantha but members of the staff and students as well. The people who inhabited this castle were the only real family he had ever known. Then he would begin straightening out their chambers. He would never get rid of Samantha's things. He didn't want to forget about her, but he knew that he could not move on surrounded by her possessions. He would put her clothes and jewelry in a box for Andromeda. Her books would go on the shelf with his. He would keep the pictures that had been taken since they were married, but the rest of her photographs would go back to her parents in America, along with a few of Andromeda and a promise to send more whenever new ones were taken. Severus had only met her parents twice, on their wedding day and a little after Andromeda was born. Albus said they came for her funeral and that they visited with him while he was still unconscious.

It was what to do about Hermione that eluded him. His heart pounded when he thought of her in much the same way as it did when he first began seeing Samantha. He saw her face in his dreams, even more than he saw his wife's face these days. He was happy when she was in the room, pulling back Andromeda's curls, absently arranging the lunch on his tray, patting his arm, holding his hand while she sat beside him to watch Andromeda play with her marbles, smiling at him. It was a comfortably domestic feeling when the three of them were together, something soothingly familiar in the way he could look at her face and know exactly what she was thinking.

It was as if Samantha's words to him had opened his eyes to who Hermione Granger really was. It wasn't that he couldn't still see the little girl she had been, that was nearly impossible when she held Andromeda on her lap. His daughter was a carbon copy of the eleven-year-old Gryffindor know-it-all. It was just that Severus could watch Hermione and see an attitude and mannerisms that he had known for the past seven years. It was as if he had lived with her day and night for all those years. Somehow he knew that if he held her in his arms she would fit perfectly against the planes and angles of his body.

The door at the end of the hospital wing creaked open and two nearly identical faces peered through the crack. Hermione smiled when she caught sight of him, warmth running through her when he smiled in return. She pushed the door further open with her free hand, the other already being clasped tightly by the little girl at her side. Andromeda's ever-present bag of marbles was tied to the belt loop of her pants, clanking softly with every step she took, and she carried a thin, care-worn book in her hand.

"Morning, Daddy," Andromeda squealed in a singsong voice. She practically beamed up at her father, dimples appearing in both her round cheeks.

Hermione's smile widened as she sank onto the chair by Severus' bed and leaned over to kiss him lightly on the cheek before drawing Andromeda up into her lap. Her heart felt like it was going to burst out of her chest as she busied herself pulling Andromeda's curls away from her face, waiting for the explosion to come. To her surprise, the hospital wing was so quiet you could hear a pin drop.

Wide eyed, Severus stared at her, his mouth gaping open. It felt as if the skin where she had kissed him was on fire. His brain was suddenly sluggish, barely registering the fact that a blush was creeping across her cheeks or that the fingers playing with his daughter's black curls were trembling. He felt as if he couldn't piece together what had just happened, not until...

"Herminny kissed Daddy!" Andromeda giggled and covered her mouth with her hands to hide it.

"Andromeda!" Hermione scolded playfully. She cast a glance at Severus, who looked away quickly, his eyes darting nervously. She decided to take pity on him. "Madam Pomfrey says you might be able to go back to your quarters this afternoon. I suppose you're glad to be going home."

"How did you know I was getting released? I wasn't day dreaming that long, was I?" Severus replied, chuckling nervously and still unable to meet her eyes.

"Aunt Pop-pee's head was in the fire," Andromeda said matter of factly. "She wants to talk to Herminny."

Hermione smiled and glanced over to Madam Pomfrey's office. "I think I'll just pop in and see what she wanted. Andromeda, why don't you keep Daddy company, okay? I'll be just a minute, love," she said, standing and placing Andromeda in the chair. She smiled softly at both of them, crossed the hospital wing, and disappeared into the mediwitch's office.

Severus watched his daughter for a moment as she stared silently at the closed office door through which Hermione had just disappeared. He smiled and, sitting up a little more, said, "Come here, darling." He patted the bed next to him and gathered her close when she climbed up beside him. He craned his neck to look down at her. "I want to talk to you about something."

Wide green eyes stared back at him, black curls bouncing as she nodded in silent consent, looking far older than her years. "I want you to tell me what you think about Hermione. Do you like her?"

Andromeda's round face lit up as a smile spread across her lips. She looked up at her father, her two tiny hands holding one of his. "I like Herminny lots, Daddy. She pways with me and reads to me and says she wuvs me when I go to bed. Herminny says she misses Mummy, too, and that it's okay for me to cry. She gives me lots of hugs and kisses when I cry. She kisses my boo boos when I fall and makes me toys to pway with in the bathtub. She tells me stories about you and Mummy. Herminny tells stories about Won and Hawwy, too." The little girl stopped and took a deep breath before her face went terribly serious. She held her finger up to her nose and poked it a few times to make sure it was still firmly attached to her face. "Won twys to take my nose, Daddy! Hawwy gets weally mad and fights with Won to get my nose back and Herminny laughs at them! Won and Hawwy tell me I'm pwetty and that I don't look like you. But I do look like you, Daddy. Herminny says so."

He sat in silence for a long while, listening to his daughter go on and on about the things Hermione said and did, the games Ron and Harry played with her, and the sweets Gampa Albus gave her when Hermione wasn't looking. Finally he sighed and covered her mouth slightly with his hand to stop her talking. He smiled at her and chuckled softly.

"Hermione has taught you how to talk non-stop as well, I see." He kissed the top of her back curls and moved his hand. "What would you think if I asked Hermione to come and have dinner with us when we go back home? Would you like that?"

Andromeda looked confused for a moment and crawled up on her knees so she was eye to eye with her father. "Why? Is Herminny not taking care of me anymore?" she asked, tears begging to well in her green eyes. Severus' heart nearly broke at the sight.

"No, darling, not every day. Daddy gets to go back home today and you have to come back to stay with me. I'm sure we could ask Hermione to visit us sometimes. If she isn't busy she could play with you and read you stories while I work." Severus stopped as the little girl at his side dissolved into terrible sobs. She covered her eyes with her hands and sniffled as tears streaked down her cheeks. He pulled her carefully up into his lap and held her as she threw her tiny arms around his neck and cried even harder. "What is it, love?" he cooed, "Tell me what's the matter."

"I don't want to weave Herminny! I want Mum!" she wailed through her tears. "I want Herminny! I want her to be my Mum!"

Severus could hardly believe his ears as his daughter continued to scream that she wanted Hermione to be her mother. He stroked Andromeda's curls and whispered words of soothing to her even as his thoughts raced in panic. What if Hermione could hear her screaming? What would she say? How could he calm her without making promises he wouldn't be able to keep, even if he wanted to?

After a while, Andromeda's sobs tapered off into intermittent sniffles and hiccoughs as she pillowed her head on his shoulder. One of her arms released his neck so that she could suck her thumb as she drifted into an exhausted sleep. Severus lay back against the pillows, his daughter sleeping against his chest, waiting silently for Hermione to reappear out of Madam Pomfrey's office.

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Hermione felt as if Madam Pomfrey would never stop talking. The entire reason for Hermione's visit was disposed of within the first two minutes of their conversation. Madam Pomfrey wanted her to check in on Professor Snape every day just to make sure he was okay. Hermione was more than willing to oblige, especially if it meant that she would get to spend more time with him. She begged away after nearly an hour of the mediwitch's gossiping, saying she needed to take Andromeda to lunch and let Severus rest.

The breath was nearly knocked out of her when she came out of the office and caught sight of father and daughter sleeping. Severus was lying back against the pillows, one arm at his side and the other holding onto Andromeda, who was sleeping atop him with her head on his shoulder. Andromeda was sucking her thumb and grasping handfuls of her father's long, dark hair. Severus looked more peaceful than he had since he learned of Samantha's death. The harsh lines on his face disappeared and a smile softened his features. Hermione smiled and pressed her hand to her mouth as her eyes stung with tears.

She crossed the room and sank into the chair beside his bed. How long she sat there she couldn't say, only that she couldn't bring herself to look away from the sweet sight before her. She would do anything to be able to see this every day, to wake up to Severus lying next to her and Andromeda running into the room toting Crookshanks and squealing for breakfast. Hermione loved them so much it hurt, and she felt the tears welling up as Severus stirred awake.

His dark lashes fluttered as he woke, his eyes darting between the warm weight on his chest and Hermione sitting next to the bed. "Is she still asleep?"

Hermione nodded and reached out to disentangle Andromeda's hand from his hair before taking her into her lap. The little girl whimpered for a moment before burrowing into the young witch's warmth. Hermione looked down at the child in her lap and stroked a few curls away from her forehead before giving her a gentle kiss. "I'll take her back and let her finish her nap. Madam Pomfrey is going to Floo when she has released you, and I'll bring Andromeda by with her things then." Hermione tried to ignore the echoes of Andromeda's cries in her head. She had heard them even through the mediwitch's warded office door. "Madam Pomfrey has asked me to stop by for the next few days just to make sure you are okay. I will do my best to not intrude, Severus, but I promised her that I would check on you."

Instead of springing out of his bed and storming into Madam Pomfrey's office as she expected, Hermione was surprised when Severus nodded and stared down at his hands. "I suppose that will make things easier for Andromeda. She was not happy when I told her that you would not be taking care of her every day. I'm surprised the two of you didn't hear her tantrum." His heart pounded and his mouth went dry. He chanced a glance at her and asked, "You didn't hear it, did you?"

Hermione tried to school her expression into surprise as she answered with a shaky, "No." By the incredulous look on Severus' face she knew he didn't believe her. She sighed and looked at the floor. "Oh, alright, yes. I did hear her, but I didn't take anything she said seriously. She's become attached, that's all. A few days without me around and she'll be fine. Shite," she looked apprehensively at Andromeda, "perhaps I shouldn't have promised Madam Pomfrey anything."

Severus smiled faintly and shook his head. "She has just lost her mother, Hermione. You have been there to comfort her at night when she has nightmares, to make sure she brushes her teeth, and to give her a kiss goodnight. And you must admit, you are remarkably like Samantha. Although, I don't dare say that she can't tell the difference between the two of you. She has dealt very well with losing her mother, and I suppose I have you to thank for that. I would be a terrible father if I took her away from that, forcing her to lose two people she loves in such a short time." He stopped and took in the sight of Hermione cradling his daughter to her chest, stroking her curls, and rocking back and forth slightly.

"Perhaps," he said, looking slightly nervous, "we can come to some agreement to keep that from happening. We may work out the details later, but would you be willing to sit with her while I am working during the holidays? Provided you yourself are not busy, of course. When term starts I will have to make other arrangements, but I think Andromeda will transition better if you were to remain in her daily routine. If that is the case, would you be willing to spend evenings with us, have dinner and help put Andromeda to bed?"

Hermione smiled, her heart thrumming against her ribs. She felt like shouting her answer at him but restrained herself. "I think I could do that, Severus. I would like that very much."

Notes from The Mistress: Things are moving along nicely, although I'm sure some of you are wondering when this delightful piece of romance and angst is going to earn its NC-17 rating. Yes? Well, I suppose after Andromeda is asleep there isn't any problem with Severus and Hermione getting to know each other a bit better. See you next chapter!

Severus

Chapter 6 of 11

Can Severus and Hermione keep to the agreement they made?

General disclaimer goes here. I don't own anything you are familiar with. I'd like to give a special thanks to harrypotterfan2005 for helping me through some terribly bad writer's block with this one. She's a real jumpstart to the muse! Please read and review! And enjoy, too!

CHAPTER 6: Severus

"Are you sure you didn't leave anything, Andromeda?" Hermione asked, crouching in the floor next to a tearful Andromeda Snape. A teddy bear hung from the little girl's right hand while her left rubbed angrily at her eyes, which were glassy with tears. Andromeda nodded glumly and snuffled. It broke Hermione's heart to see her this way. She sighed heavily and drew the little girl into her arms.

"I don't want you to leave either, little love, but you have to go home now that your dad is out of the hospital. I'm going to tell you a secret, are you ready?" She pulled back to look into Andromeda's face. Her green eyes were brightening slightly and her snuffles were becoming quieter. "We're not saying goodbye. You see; Daddy and I made a deal today while you were asleep. I'm still going to see you every day, sweetheart. How does that sound?"

Andromeda managed a watery smile before she threw her arms around Hermione's neck and hugged her as tight as she could manage. "Will you tell Daddy where to start in my book for my bedtime story?"

"I can do better than that. I'm going to come and have dinner with you every night. I'll be there until you go to sleep, so I can finish reading your book to you." Hermione was sitting cross-legged on the floor now, cradling Andromeda in her lap and speaking in soothing tones. "I want you to know something, Andromeda. I'm going to love you know matter what happens, even if we aren't together. You are always going to be my little love, and no one will ever take that away from you."

The little girl smiled a little brighter and whispered, "Can I tell you a secret, Hermenny?" Andromeda put her lips next to Hermione's ear. "I told Daddy that I want you to be my Mummy."

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Severus sank stiffly onto the sofa in his sitting room and stared into the fireplace. He had been working since he had been released from the hospital wing, packing Samantha's clothes and jewelry in boxes and putting them back in a closet for Andromeda. He had gathered Samantha's photographs together and packaged them together to mail to her parents. Her books were still on the shelves with his own collection, and a few photographs of them together waved at him from the walls. For a moment, he smiled softly at the image of his wife waving down at him, her auburn curls falling over her shoulder as she rocked an infant Andromeda to sleep.

Being in their home had impressed upon him how much he missed her. He closed his eyes and let his head fall back onto the sofa, thinking about the vision...he could think of nothing else to call it...that he had had of Samantha. She had been fond of Hermione since her first day teaching at Hogwarts. It was as if they had an unseen connection that brought out the best in both of them. Severus could not count how many times he saw the two in the corridors together, walking to the library or to the Great Hall and discussing Charms or Defense Against the Dark Arts. Where Hermione helped Samantha get used to life at Hogwarts, Samantha helped Hermione grow into a rather attractive young woman. He might not have admitted it, but he noticed it.

Severus stood and stretched, still terribly sore from lying on his back for three weeks. He was expecting Hermione to arrive with Andromeda around six, and it was already five-thirty. Groaning, he crossed his arms over his chest and called for a house-elf to order dinner. The tiny creature appeared, bowing so that its long, pencil-like nose touched the carpet and bat-like ears flopped forward.

"What can Missy do for Master Severus?" the house-elf squeaked. "Master is not ill again? Master just came home from the hospital!"

Severus smiled and patted the house-elf on the head. "No, Missy, I am quite alright. I'm just getting ready for Andromeda to come home, and I would like to have some dinner delivered. Would you please bring whatever is being served in the Great Hall with settings for three?"

"Three, Master Severus?" the house-elf looked up quizzically, obviously considering the fact that everyone in the castle knew of Samantha's death. "Is the Headmaster dining with you?"

"No, Professor Granger has been taking care of Andromeda while I was in the hospital wing. She will be having dinner here for a while," he replied, pulling out his wand and transfigured Samantha's desk into a round dinner table with three chairs. "If you'd just put it over there when you bring it, Missy. Oh, and please bring some macaroni and cheese for Andromeda, would you?"

With a swift nod and a crack the house-elf disappeared. Alone again, Severus felt terribly nervous and very guilt ridden. His wife had been dead almost a month, and he was already having another woman over for dinner. It was Hermione Granger, true, but he could not shake the memory of how comfortable he felt in her presence. It was almost like he had Samantha back.

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The knock on the door made Severus jump as he finished setting the food out on the table. He sat down the pitcher of Andromeda's favorite juice and crossed the room to answer the door. Hermione was carrying Andromeda on her hip, the little girl's face buried in the crook of her neck and her arms thrown over her shoulders. Andromeda's things floated in the air behind her.

Severus heard a snuffle and reached out to take his daughter in his arms. "Love, what's the matter?" he cooed, rubbing his palms over her back when she refused to let go of Hermione. "She's not feeling ill, is she?"

Hermione smiled warmly and shook her head. "She didn't want to leave. She's been clinging to me since I told her she was coming home." She turned her head toward the little girl in her arms and spoke softly in her ear. "Little love, look who I found."

Andromeda squirmed around in Hermione's arms and smiled softly at her father. He smiled back and held out his hands to her. She seemed to think about his offer for a moment before she leaned forward and wrapped her arms around his neck, twining her fingers in his hair. Severus felt tears prickling behind his eyes as he held his daughter close to his chest. There was something different about the way he felt now, standing in his sitting room with Hermione next to him and his daughter in his arms. He breathed deeply and stood aside to let Hermione through. She settled Andromeda's trunk in the corner and looked around the room nervously.

"Andromeda's probably hungry," she said, turning her hands in front of her. "She didn't eat much at lunch today. I'll go fix her plate."

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Hermione shut Andromeda's bedroom door softly later that evening, a well-worn volume hugged against her chest. She smiled warmly at the sight of Severus reclining on the sofa with a photo album in his lap. She watched him for a moment, his long, thin fingers grazing over the pages, before clearing her throat. "Andromeda's asleep," she said softly, avoiding his eyes. Suddenly, she didn't really feel like leaving, even though she knew she should. "Thank you for dinner, Severus. I suppose I'll see you at breakfast tomorrow?"

Severus nodded, closing the album and placing it on the coffee table as he stood up. "I should think so. I rather miss the bustle of the Great Hall after so long in the hospital. I'm sure Andromeda will be desperate to see you."

"I'll miss my little love tonight, I'm so used to her crawling into bed with me after a nightmare." She smiled sadly and looked at him, tilting her head to the side as if she were seeing him for the first time. The tip of her tongue darted out, wetting her lips slightly and drawing his eyes away from hers. She rose onto her tiptoes and pressed her lips gently against his. "Good night, Severus."

She smiled at him warmly and left him standing there, in the middle of his sitting room, staring after her as she swept out of his quarters. He could still feel the warmth of her lips and the momentary pressure of her body against his as he peeked into Andromeda's bedroom, brushing her curls away from her forehead and kissing her gently. Severus shut the door softly and extinguished the lights in the sitting room before staggering off to his bedroom, feeling slightly dizzy.

As he shrugged out of his robes, Severus groaned, feeling the tightness of his trousers. "Oh, dear gods!" he cursed. His boxers were tented with an erection he would have been proud of if it hadn't been for the fact that someone other than his wife had aroused him. "Not only am I a terrible, lecherous old man, I'm an adulterer, too!" He flung himself onto the bed, stubbornly determined to ignore the throbbing erection Hermione's touch had excited.

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Severus found himself being drawn through a thin, gray mist, his brain thoroughly muddled as to where he was and why. His face was warm, as if the sun were shining down on him, but there was no light to be seen. A soft, thick carpet of grass tickled his feet as he moved forward through the thinning mist. He could hear the sounds of voices, near enough that he could tell it was a man and a woman, but far enough away that he could not discern what they were saying.

The mist faded away, revealing a valley landscape that was enough to take his breath away. Sloping mountains rolled downwards, their grass covered shoulders giving way to a long and shaded valley filled with branching trees and sweet-smelling flowers. Severus breathed in the comforting aroma, his black eyes drifting closed as a breeze whipped through the valley and tousled his hair. When his eyes opened again, he saw an ancient archway standing unsupported at the foot of the nearest mountain. A dark blue veil fluttered in the breeze that still refreshed the air around him. He smiled.

"Samantha?" he said, questioningly. He looked around for the people whose voices he'd heard, but saw only mountains, trees, and flowers. Suddenly, he stiffened, the feeling that he was being watched running through him. He felt a hand on his arm and turned to see Samantha standing next to him, smiling.

"Merlin, but you are a stubborn man, aren't you, Severus?" she said, laughter in her voice. She kissed him lightly on the cheek and took his hand, guiding him into a sitting position on the grass next to her. "We really must deal with this. Hermione is destined for you, no matter how much you may want to fight it. Did you not wonder why I was brought to you first? True, Hermione and I grew to know and love each other in my time at Hogwarts, but as much as you loved me, you would never have looked at her the same way. Even if you had known then what you know now.

"Hermione had to grow up, to see a world outside of Hogwarts and make her choice about which world she would inhabit before you would look at her the same way you looked at me. You are an honorable man, Severus, with an acute sense of what is right and wrong. You would never have looked at her in a romantic, let alone a sexual, way while she was still a student. And so, I was destined for you first," she said softly, looking into his dark eyes. Confidence and knowledge crackled in the air around her, making his skin tingle. "I was destined to bear your first born and to see you through the last of your days as a spy."

Samantha looked away from him for a moment, tears stinging her wide green eyes. "I think I knew even in life that I wouldn't have long with you. Somehow, the more time I spent with her, the more I came to realize that she loved you, too. She would never have said or done anything about it. No, you see, Hermione is an honorable young woman. You were married, and then you were a father. She would love you, but she would do it in silence to ensure that you were happy."

"Then what am I to do, Samantha?" he questioned, drawing her attention back to him. "You've been gone not even a month and yet I think of Hermione in ways a widower shouldn't think of the girl helping him with his daughter."

Samantha smoothed his hair and smiled softly. "There isn't anything wrong with the way you feel, love. You are supposed to love her, just as you were supposed to love me. You are human, Severus, there is nothing shameful to desire companionship. I give you my blessing as far as Hermione goes. She deserves to be happy, and she will be happy with you. Go to her."

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"Andromeda's asleep," Hermione whispered, sinking onto the sofa next to Severus, who was staring at the fireplace. She watched the flames play over his face, causing his fathomless black eyes to glitter. The sitting room was warmer than usual and she shrugged out of her robes, leaving her clad in a pair of Muggle jeans and jumper. A shadow of something flickered across his face and Hermione placed her hand on top of his. "Is something the matter, Severus?"

He surprised her by lacing his fingers with hers and smiling softly at her. "Everything's fine," he said, gently tugging her closer. Hermione sighed happily and rested her head against his shoulder. He kissed the top of her head and whispered, "Do you have to leave tonight, Hermione?"

Hesitating for a second, she shook her head. "Not if you don't want me to." She looked up at him and smiled, her eyes shining amber in the firelight. His black eyes glittered back at her as he traced her cheek with the tips of his fingers. His hair tickled against her face as he leaned forward and pressed a gentle kiss to her cheek.

"I don't want you to," he whispered against her skin, feeling the slight shiver go through her as his warm breath washed over her. He kissed the corner of her mouth softly before sliding his lips over hers. The warmth and softness of her engulfed him as she sighed quietly, her lips opening to him slightly. Severus groaned and pulled her closer until she was straddled over his lap, his tongue sweeping against hers as her fingers found their way into his raven hair. He wrapped his arms around her, crushing her against his chest, and practically growled as she began kissing him in earnest.

Hermione drew back, gasping for breath, and smiled nervously. Her cheeks were pink with color and her pupils were dilated until only a thin ring of amber was visible. Her chest heaved with her labored breathing, thrusting her breasts forward into his face. She shivered again as his hand slithered under her jumper, skimming over her heated skin in feathered touches. Her eyes drifted closed as her head fell back, her curls cascading down her back. Severus leaned forward, kissing and nibbling at her exposed throat as his fingers tickled over her breast.

"Oh, Severus," she whispered, closing her hand over the one that was kneading her flesh. His voice rumbled some unintelligible words against her throat as the fingers of his other hand dipped beneath the waistband of her jeans. She swallowed hard, her panting breath washing over his hair. "Shouldn't we go somewhere else? What if Andromeda wakes up?"

He sobered momentarily at the reminder that his daughter was in the next room. "Hmm, yes, perhaps we should move this to the bedroom," he murmured, still stroking his hands up and down her back. Hermione climbed off his lap, her tousled curls falling around her shoulders and her eyes smoldering as she looked down at him. He stood and swept her into his arms, carrying her into his bedroom and shutting the door behind them with his foot.

When she had been set on her feet, Severus drew his wand from his pocket and cast a Silencing Charm as well as one to lock the door. The fire sprang to life in the hearth, bathing the room in a soft glow as they stood watching each other for a moment. Severus threw off his robes and began undoing the multitude of buttons on his coat and shirt as he watched her. Hermione chewed on her bottom lip, her fingers playing nervously through her hair as she watched him undress.

"Hermione," he whispered as his shirt and coat fell to the floor. He toed off his shoes and struggled out of his socks before crossing the room toward her. He grasped her by the waist and pulled her roughly to him, bruising her lips with his kiss as his fingers wound around the hem of her shirt. He tugged the fabric over her head when he pulled away, panting for breath. "So beautiful," he growled.

Hermione's head fell back when he took her in his arms again, the feel of skin on skin overwhelming her. Her arms were wrapped around his waist as his fingers worked at the clasp of her bra. Once he had flicked the clasp open, he drew the lace and satin garment down her arms and tossed it over his shoulder.

"Get on the bed, love," he purred, deftly snapping the button of her jeans open. He watched her with hooded eyes as she scrambled backwards onto the bed, her jeans slipping down her hips as she did. His trousers and underpants joined the pile of black clothing on the floor, her eyes widening at the sight of him standing stark naked in front of her.

Hermione struggled out of her jeans, kicking them down her legs as he climbed onto the bed next to her. He smirked at her as he shifted her legs apart and crawled up her body until he was situated between her splayed thighs. Her amber eyes dropped closed as he drew his fingers over her sex, pushing her knickers aside and thrusting his cock deep within her. She groaned as he began moving; thrusting into her with long, slow strokes. She bucked her hips upward, grinding her swollen clit against his pelvic bone and accelerating her to spiral up in pleasure.

Severus felt her walls flutter slightly in signal of her impending orgasm. He picked up the pace, hooking her legs over his arms and pounding into her with renewed force.

She let out a low moan as he began hitting her cervix with each thrust. Her moans turned into an unbroken, breathless chant of his name as her muscles contracted around him, dropping her over the edge of oblivion. She scratched her nails over his back as he thrust into her with abandon, chasing his own release now. He roared her name as he came, his body going rigid for a moment before he collapsed onto her, breathless.

"Merlin, but I love you, Hermione," he mumbled, sleep beginning to overtake him.

She stroked his sweat-drenched hair and kissed his forehead. "Whatever you say, Severus."

~~~HG~~SS~~HG~~SS~~HG~~SS~~HG~~SS~~HG~~SS~~HG~~SS~~HG~~SS~~

Severus sat bolt upright in his bed, his skin covered in a thin sheen of cold sweat. His bedclothes were sticky with his cum. He groaned at the fact that he'd went to sleep with a hard on and nothing but thoughts of Hermione Granger running through his head. This wasn't going to be as easy as he had thought.

Notes from The Mistress: I know, that scene wasn't my best work, but I've wanted to get this chapter out for a long time. I'll be leaving for camp...my boyfriend and I are counselors...at the end of the coming week and I won't have Internet access as far as I know. I'm going to try to get a chapter of *Always* out as well, but I'm also working on a little piece for the Sex Ed challenge, too. So please go easy with the reviews, please! I've had a long few weeks.

Hermione Part III

Chapter 7 of 11

The summer breeze brings change for Hermione and Severus.

Chapter 7: Hermione Part III

The wind blew gently across the surface of the lake, swaying the branches of the trees, and carrying the smell of summer across the grounds. Hermione glanced at the window that looked out over the sloping lawns of Hogwarts castle as she worked through her research. The breeze fluttered through her hair and made her long to run outside, to splash through the shallows of the lake and sleep on the cool grass under the summer sun.

"For Merlin's sake," she mumbled, crossing though an Arithmancy calculation for the third time. Her work went slowly these days. It was difficult to focus when thoughts of a beautiful little girl and her father wound through her mind.

Stretching, Hermione pushed away from her desk. She stood and went to the window, leaning on her elbows and holding her face in her hands. The view was spectacular and, on a normal day, she loved it. But today, she would much rather have been curled up with Andromeda reading a book to her while Severus graded papers at his desk.

The sound of laughter floated up from the grounds beneath her window. Leaning out in order to see what was going on, Hermione caught sight of a head full of black curls skipping down the front steps. A smile crossed Hermione's face a second later when she heard, "Huwwy up, Daddy! You pwomised!"

Severus followed quickly after Andromeda, brushing his raven hair behind his ears as he chased after her. "I'm coming, darling heart, but you have to give me a little time. Daddy's not so quick as he used to be."

Andromeda turned to her father and smiled sweetly, her curls falling over her shoulder as she clutched her bag of marbles. "Nope, youwr pewfect, Daddy. Now huwwy!" She shuffled from one tiny foot to the other as she watched Severus limp down the stairs as quickly as he could for the wound on his torso still throbbed with pain.

Her smile faded slightly as she saw Severus clutching his side as he tried to hurry toward Andromeda, who patiently waited at the bottom of the stairs. The little girl held out her hand as he drew closer, still smiling as if nothing else mattered in the world but her father. As he drew closer, Severus reached out and folded her tiny hand in his own. He smiled down at her, clicked his heels together, and bowed as low as he could bear.

"Princess Andromeda," he said, kissing her hand softly. "What shall we do today?"

Andromeda nibbled her bottom lip and blushed before pulling Severus toward the lake. "Let's play with my mawbles under the big twee," she squealed, shaking the bag as she skipped down the rolling lawn.

Hermione felt terribly sad that she wasn't with them. Her heart broke as Severus struggled slowly to the ground, holding his hand over his side. Andromeda knelt in front of her father and dumped the bag of marbles onto the grass. She looked up at her father and, tilting her head to the side, said, "I wish Herminny was here."

Severus smiled and pushed her black curls behind her ear. "Well," he said, pointing up toward Hermione's window. "That's her room right there, and the window is open. Maybe she's sitting up there working. I bet you could get her to come out to play."

That was all the prompting Andromeda needed. "Heminny!" she screamed, waving her arms in the air. "Heminny!"

Grinning, Hermione poked her head out of her window. "What are you doing down there, Andromeda?"

"Playing mawbles with Daddy. Come play with us!" She clapped her hands together and laughed. "Pwease, Herminny!"

"I'm coming, sweetheart. I'll be right there!" Hermione closed her window and put away her books and papers with a flick of her wand. After warding her rooms, she rushed down the stairs from Gryffindor tower, quickly tying her hair back as she went.

She burst through the front doors a few moments later, the warm summer breeze swirling around her. She smiled brightly as she heard Andromeda's laughter from beneath the tree by the lake. Breaking into a quick jog, Hermione laughed along with the little girl who had stolen her heart.

Breathless, Hermione collapsed onto the ground next to Severus and Andromeda. Gathering her into her arms, Hermione pressed kisses onto the top of Andromeda's head. "It feels like I haven't seen you in days, sweetheart! I've missed you."

"I miss you too, Herminny," she said, pulling her closer so she could whisper in her ear. "And Daddy has too."

A blush crept over Hermione's cheeks as she looked at Severus out of the corner of her eye. He smiled back at her, an action that softened his features. The summer breeze blew through his hair, nearly hiding the light in his eyes when he looked at her. He couldn't help but remember Samantha as he watched Hermione tickle

She squeezed his hand and took a sip of juice before responding. "Well, I suppose this is what it means to 'get to know' each other," she chuckled. "There are a thousand things I would like to know about you, Severus, but if I have learned nothing during my time at Hogwarts, I've learned that you are a private man. I will not push you for answers that you aren't ready to give. We'll take it slow, one day at a time as they say."

He nodded, taking a sip of juice himself. (He'd done away with his stash of Firewhiskey not long after Andromeda was born.) "Agreed. Seeing as we are now... courting," he mumbled, clearly uncomfortable with the archaic term. "I suppose a proper date is in order. Would you do me the honor of joining me for dinner before the term starts?"

"I'd like nothing more," she replied, leaning her head on his shoulder. "Thank you for a wonderful day, Severus."

Before he could stop himself, he bent his head and kissed her gently. Her scent wrapped around him as she returned his kiss. He felt light-headed when he pulled back slightly a second later. His lips fluttered over hers as he whispered, "No, thank you."

Notes from The Mistress : Please forgive me for taking so long to get this chapter out. It's been a busy couple of months. If you haven't heard, I got married in April and am now four months pregnant with what the doctors say is a boy (but you never can be really sure at this early stage). I hope you enjoyed this, and look forward to your always wonderful reviews. I think there may be three...maybe four...chapters left of this story. Enjoy and please review!

Severus Part II

Chapter 8 of 11

The seeds of a familiar romance are sown with the aid of a little girl with jam-covered fingers.

Chapter 8: Severus Part II

The letter lay on his desk covered in sticky fingerprints; Hermione's cramped writing barely visible through strawberry and blackberry jam. It arrived that morning by Floo, sending Andromeda into shouts of glee as Severus pulled her into his lap and read it to her. He smiled indulgently as she grabbed at the parchment and licked jam off her fingers.

"Hermione has invited us to go to London with her this weekend," he said, wiping a dab of strawberry jam on his trousers. "Would you like to go, Andromeda?"

He'd known the answer to the question before the words escaped him. His daughter looked up at him with a childish glare of incredulity on her face before patting his nose playfully and replying, "Abswootwey, Daddy."

Severus couldn't contain the laugh that escaped him as Andromeda pulled the letter from his hand and slid to the floor. She pulled down the back of her dress and tottered off to her bedroom humming the school song. It took several moments after his child's departure for Severus to regain his composure. He hiccupped once or twice and cleared his throat before summoning a glass of water with a snap of his fingers.

He debated for a moment whether he should send a note to Hermione by a house-elf or Floo her. In the end, he stood from his chair and crossed the sitting room to the fireplace. The pot of Floo powder sat on the middle of the mantle, surrounded by Wizarding photographs of Andromeda. Severus grasped a handful of the sparkling powder and climbed slowly to his knees on the hearthrug. Throwing the powder into the grate, he leaned forward into the erupting emerald flames and shouted, "Hermione Granger's room!"

Hermione was stretched out on the sofa in her sitting room reading *Intermediate Transfiguration* and absentmindedly turning her tea cup into an alarm clock and back again when the fire in the grate blazed emerald. Jumping slightly, she placed her book face down on the cushion next to her and looked over to find Snape's head in the fire, smiling at her.

She sank down on the floor and crawled over to the hearth to sit cross-legged in front of it. "Morning, Severus," she quipped, brushing her hair over her shoulder. "I didn't expect to see you until lunch."

"Yes, I know. But, you see, I have a small child here who would like for me to inform you that she would... let's see how did she put it..." he said, tapping his finger against his lips. His smile broadened as he fought back a laugh. "That she would 'abswootwey' like to go to London tomorrow."

Hermione giggled. "Well, I would be 'abswootwey' delighted to take her. I assume that means you are coming as well?"

"You know what they say--"

"Yes, yes, arse out of you and me. I've heard that one quite enough from Ron, thank you very much. Oh yeah," she said, jumping up and disappearing into her study for a moment. When she returned, Hermione was brandishing a lengthy bit of parchment covered in what appeared to Severus to be chicken scratch. "Ron sent me a letter yesterday to tell me that he had been accepted into St. Andrews, a Muggle university not far from here. And you'll never guess what he intends to study."

Not quite sure what the point of telling him about Ron's letter was, he shrugged his shoulders. "If I will never guess, then why do you ask me to?" He grinned at her look of exasperation.

Folding the parchment carefully and stowing it beneath her knee, she sighed. "Chemistry. Which is utterly surprising, seeing as he was abysmal at Potions. Understood the theory and all, but he just couldn't do it in class. I suppose you made him nervous, Severus."

"Me? Make Mr. Weasley nervous? How could you say such a thing, Hermione?" he replied, feigning surprise. His eyes softened as he looked at her for a long moment, making a bright blush suffuse her cheeks. "Now, when and where should we meet you for our little excursion tomorrow?"

Hermione thought for a moment, absently blowing a stray curl away from her face. "Well, they don't open until 11:30 and there's an Apparation point not far from there... oh, we can't take Andromeda by Side-Along, can we?" She shook her head before continuing. "Alright then, that changes our plans slightly. Oh! Has she ever been on the Knight Bus?"

Severus grimaced, remembering all too clearly the nauseous feeling he had every time he traveled by the damnable bus. "No. She should find it rather exciting, although I should probably take some Anti-Nausea potion before we leave."

"It might be a good idea to bring some of that along," she said, wrinkling her nose. "Well then, I expect we could leave around nine. That way we can do a little window shopping before then. There's a lovely little toy shop just down the street--"

Grinning, Severus listened to her talk about toy stores and clothing shops. It was uncanny how much she reminded him of Samantha at that moment. Samantha had always loved taking Andromeda into London and going to Muggle shops. It appeared Hermione was no different.

"...the best chocolate bars in the district. It's just like Willy Wonka's really, lollipops and candy canes and chocolate drops everywhere. Mum and Dad took me once a year to get one special treat...they were both dentists, you see, and they didn't like me having a great number of sweets. I always got the chocolate drops with cherries in the middle and Mum..." She trailed off as she looked down at him for the first time in several minutes. He was looking up at her, a half-smile on his face and the same glazed look in his eyes that Ron sported during History of Magic. "Severus, are you even listening to me? Severus!"

He jumped theatrically, making his head momentarily disappear from the flames, and winced at the pain in his knees. He had been kneeling there for nearly twenty minutes. "Yes, Hermione, I was listening to you. Toy shops, jumpers with little kittens on them, some bloke name Wonka, and a shop full of candy. Did I miss anything?" He smiled fully as he took in the look of exhaustion on her face.

"I shall bring some Anti-Nausea potion for you in the morning, as well as a few other supplies we may need in the way of headaches and stomach aches and so forth," he said softly, trying to calm her away from the righteous tantrum he saw brewing in her eyes. "Andromeda and I shall meet you at nine o'clock tomorrow morning in the entrance hall by the points glasses. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to get up off this floor or I won't be able to walk at all!"

Hermione giggled and nodded. "Alright then, and give Andromeda a hug and kiss from me. I'll see you both in the morning."

She began to struggle up from the floor before his head had disappeared from the flames, rustling the letter from Ron as she stood. For a moment she thought she heard Severus say something else, but when she looked back to see, he was gone.

Severus awoke the next morning with both a feeling of joy and trepidation. He was glad that he would enjoy the entire day in Hermione's company, but he was rather upset that it would be their last chance for a day together for several months. The students arrived on the train the next evening.

The door to his bedroom squeaked open and Andromeda shuffled in, rubbing her eyes and clutching a bedraggled rabbit. Her nightgown tickled her shins as she stood at the side of her father's plush four-poster, the mermaid on the front languidly flicking her tail as she twirled her magenta hair around her finger. Severus smiled and pulled her into the bed with him, tucking her into the crisp navy blue sheets and putting his arm around her. She snuggled next to him and stuck her thumb in her mouth, all the while still clutching the poor rabbit that had once been her mother's.

Severus gently pulled her thumb from her mouth and kissed the back of her tiny hand. "You're much too old to still be sucking your thumb, Andromeda," he said as she tried to return her thumb to her mouth. "We can't lie in much longer, or else we'll be late to meet Hermione."

Andromeda mumbled sleepily at the sound of Hermione's name, but continued to feign sleep at her father's side. He pulled her into the crook of his arm, her warm cheek sticking to his bicep slightly as she readjusted her positioning. It was true that they would miss their date with Hermione if they stayed in bed much longer, but Severus couldn't help but enjoy the brief moment of peace and joy he had at that moment.

Once the term started tomorrow, both he and Hermione would be busy teaching classes. They had spent much of their time together talking about how best to pursue their relationship during the school year. Neither of them wanted any sign of impropriety or focus to be taken away from the education of the students they had been entrusted with. Severus was to continue on with being Head of Slytherin House as well as Potions master, all the while trying to stay with Andromeda. (He had wondered about sending her down to the kinder-school in Hogsmeade, but he didn't think he could bear to part with her right now. She was, after all, only six... much too young to be sent off to school.) Hermione was still doing her internship research with Professors Vector and Sinistra. For the most part, Hermione would be nearby. She spent much of her time in the library pouring over giant tomes of rune translations and Arithmancy calculations. Other days, she would be aiding Vector in classes.

Severus shook his head, trying to clear it of all the worries the next morning would bring. His only worry now was to drag his slumbering child out of the bed and into her clothes for their outing with Hermione. "Come on, Andromeda," he whispered, gently shaking her to rouse her from sleep. "If you don't get up now, we won't go to London today."

Andromeda fluttered her eyes and sat up, dragging her rabbit with her. Grudgingly, she scooted out of the bed and stood silently, shifting from one foot to the other while she waited for her father to follow. Severus scooped her into his arms and carried her back down the hall to her bedroom to dress her for their trip.

Notes from The Mistress: Hi all! So sorry this post took so long. RL has intruded a bit on my writing, what with university, a husband, and a little one on the way. I hope to finish this story soon, but I can't guarantee when the updates will come. Updates to *The Chagny Letters* coming soon. I also have a few ideas for a songfic or two. Hope you enjoyed, and please, don't forget to review!

Andromeda Part III

Chapter 9 of 11

The trip to London, and a few surprise guests.

Chapter 9: Andromeda Part III

Hermione was waiting in the entrance hall when Severus and Andromeda came up from the dungeons. Her hair was tamed back in an elastic, and she wore a light summer skirt and sleeveless blouse. She smiled brightly and held out her arm as Andromeda came running toward her.

"Good morning, my darling," she said, kissing the little girl on the forehead. "Are you ready to have fun in London?"

Her black curls bouncing, Andromeda nodded. "Daddy says we get to go on the bus," she said gleefully. She beckoned Hermione closer and whispered, "Daddy said he's going to frow up."

Hermione giggled back and walked over to where Severus stood, leaning against the wall and watching them with a wistful look on his face. He smiled as she approached and wrapped her in a warm embrace. She kissed his cheek softly and grinned broadly at him. "Good morning, Severus."

The corner of his lips twitched upwards. "Good morning, Hermione. I suppose we should be on our way, hmm?"

"Of course," Hermione said, taking his hand and pulling him towards Andromeda, who was watching the entire scene with a little twinkle in her eye. She picked the little girl up and, placing Andromeda on her hip, led the way out the front doors of the castle.

The wind blew softly across the sloping lawns of Hogwarts, sending ripples through the tall grasses. The lake tossed with gentle waves from the giant squid streaming effortlessly across the surface. The sun gleamed through the morning mist, warming and casting a bronze light over them. Andromeda chattered on in an unending narration of why the sun shone or how wind was created as they strolled down the lane to the gates. Hermione couldn't remember being happier than she was at that moment, listening to Andromeda's soft voice and feeling the work roughened hand of Severus Snape in her own.

"You know that I despise this thrice damned bus, don't you?" Severus said as they passed through the wards at the gate. He removed his hand from Hermione's grasp and held it out in front of him with a scowl.

Immediately there was a loud *BANG!* and the luridly purple, triple-decker Knight Bus came rumbling down the lane. Trees and a waste bin jumped back as the bus swerved from side to side at blinding speed. It skidded to a halt in front of them, gravel crunching and dust rising up from its tires. A young man climbed down the stairs, adjusting the gray cap over his flaming red hair as Hermione straightened the hem of Andromeda's jeans.

"Welcome to the Knight Bu...*Hermione!*"

Hermione looked away from Andromeda to find Ron standing at the door of the Knight Bus. "Ron!" she exclaimed, throwing her arms around him in a tight embrace. "It feels like I haven't seen you for ages. What are you doing on the Knight Bus?"

Ron's face and ears reddened as Hermione smiled at him. "Stan's still in St. Mungo's, and, well, I could use some pocket money when I go off to university. This pays okay, if you can get over the motion sickness. And Ern's not such bad company," he said, jerking his thumb over his shoulder to the elderly man sitting behind the wheel.

"Uncle Won! Uncle Won!" Andromeda bellowed, hopping from foot to foot as she tried to get Ron's attention. "We're going to London!"

Ron's grin spread from one ear to the other as he knelt in front of the little girl. "Well, look at you. Andromeda Noel, I swear you get bigger every time I see you. And prettier, too." Andromeda giggled and held her hands over her nose, fearing that "Uncle Won" would try to take it again. Ron stood and held out his hand to his former teacher. "Professor Snape, how are you feeling?"

Severus shook Ron's hand, not quite hiding his surprise at his former student's cordiality. "Much better, Mr. Weasley. Thank you. And thank you for helping Hermione care for my daughter while I was ill. I am grateful."

Hermione? Ron mouthed to his friend as he turned to open the door to the bus. "Yes, well, I suppose we should be getting on then. A Sickie to London for the two of you," he said, pointing to Severus and Hermione, "and three Knuts for Miss Andromeda here."

Severus dug in his pocket and handed the money over to Ron, who in turn gave him three tickets and stood back to allow them on the bus. A chandelier hung above them on the third floor and a jumble of comfortable looking armchairs sat in haphazard rows leading to the front of the bus. Hermione led the way to the middle of the first floor, where they took a seat behind two elderly witches with Welsh accents.

"Alright, Ern. Off we go!" Ron said, striding confidently up the aisle to the front of the bus. Grasping the back of the driver's seat, he called, "Next stop, Manchester!"

Ron chatted with them on and off while he aided other passengers getting on to and off of the bus. With each lurch and stop, Severus seemed to grow paler and paler followed by greener and greener. Hermione felt slightly queasy herself, although she didn't feel nearly as bad as Severus looked. Only Andromeda and Ron seemed unaffected by the fanatical jerking of the bus.

"Next stop, London!" Ron called nearly twenty minutes into the ride.

"Oh thank Merlin," Severus muttered, holding his hand over his mouth. Hermione had long since closed her eyes and felt the queasiness melt away. Andromeda was standing at the front of the bus holding tightly to Ron's leg and smiling at newcomers, saying, "Welcome to the Right Bus" much to Ron's amusement.

The bus lurched to a stop in front of The Leaky Cauldron. Hermione stood quickly, eager to get off the bus. She grasped Severus by the arm to guide him to the steady assurance of the sidewalk. Andromeda stood by the door, waiting patiently. "Thank you very much, Ron," Hermione said as they departed. "I suppose we'll see you later this afternoon."

Ron smiled and tipped his hat at Andromeda as they climbed down the stairs. Severus sighed with relief as they entered the cool shade of the pub and found an empty table nearby. Hermione settled Andromeda into a seat next to her father before going off to find Tom, the barman.

"Are you okay, Daddy?" Andromeda asked, patting her father's arm sweetly. "You wook wike Uncle Won when he sees a spider."

Severus smiled softly, afraid to open his mouth should he be sick over the table. Just then, Hermione returned carrying a damp cloth and guiding a hovering tray of ginger ale in front of her. "Here, Severus, drink this," she said, handing him a tumbler and placing the cloth over his forehead. "We'll sit here a while until your stomach settles, then we'll head off to the toy store!"

Thirty minutes later, Severus and Hermione were being pulled through the tiny Cobblestone's Toys down the street from the Leaky Cauldron. There were teddy bears and stuffed animals on shelves lining the walls. Board games and puzzles were stacked in the floor on all sides. Packages of dolls and dress up kits were lined up on counters above video game units and portable computers. Andromeda was squealing gleefully as she maneuvered through the stacks and piles of toys, picking up a board game here and a doll there.

Hermione followed Andromeda loyally, giving each of the dolls voices and names and tickling Andromeda's cheeks with the stuffed rabbits' ears. Severus followed close behind, feeling oddly reminiscent of his toys as a boy. He picked up a small stuffed bear and turned it over in his hands. He felt a warmth flow through him, the same warmth that came with thoughts of Andromeda, Samantha, and Hermione. His logic told him to put the toy away, but his heart wasn't in it. Clutching the toy in his hands, he followed after his daughter and Hermione, smiling slightly.

If the toy shop was Andromeda's birthday, then the candy shop was Christmas. To his surprise, Severus enjoyed the shop as much as Hermione and Andromeda. They watched the shop owners make licorice sticks, rock candy, and chocolate drops with cherries in the middle. Andromeda wanted to taste everything, and if it had been up to Hermione, she would have been able to. Severus bought her a bag of rock candy and a licorice stick and allowed her to sample a chocolate drop with Hermione, who left the shop with a bag of candy of her own.

It was nearly dark when they arrived back in front of the Leaky Cauldron. Hermione and Andromeda were still sipping sodas from the café where they ate dinner and skipping along behind him. He held out his wand arm and waited for the deafening roar of the Knight Bus. He grimaced as the bus appeared, causing two waste bins and a mailbox to jump out of its way.

Ron smiled at them as they climbed aboard and paid the fare. "It'll be a shorter ride this time," he said jovially. "We've got a high paying customer going to Hogwarts, so it's

next stop."

Severus scowled. "Who in the hell is going to Hogwarts? The Minister?"

"Close enough," came a voice from two rows ahead of them. A head of tousled black hair appeared, followed by a pair of startling green eyes behind a pair of glasses. His scar was hardly visible anymore. It hadn't burned in months. "Hiya, Hermione."

Before she could respond, Severus nodded to Harry. "I've never been happier to see you, Mr. Potter."

"I was about to say the same thing to you, sir," Harry replied.

Hermione grinned and pulled Andromeda into her lap. "Why are you going to Hogwarts, Harry?"

"I didn't want to ride the train. After all, we've only had one teacher ride it, haven't we?" A smirk crossed his face, making him look more handsome than usual. It was odd now that Hermione could remember that Harry had always looked handsome.

"You're teaching, Harry? What subject?"

Severus chuckled, his head tilted back against the seat and his eyes closed. "Who better to teach Defense Against the Dark Arts?"

Notes from The Mistress: Sorry it took so long to get this chapter out. I am nearing the end of my pregnancy and don't have much time to write lately, but I am working hard to get another chapter of the Chagny Letters out as well as the next chapter of Softer Side. Please bear with me, and I promise I will NEVER abandon a fic...EVER!

Samantha Part II

Chapter 10 of 11

This time, it's Hermione's turn for a visit...

CHAPTER 10: Samantha Part II

It was difficult for Severus and Hermione to find time to build upon their growing friendship once term began. When Hermione was not conducting her own research in the library, she was tutoring students and aiding Professors Sinistra and Vector. She looked tired, but happy as she bustled into Snape's quarters every evening with her bag nearly bursting with books and stacks of parchments. Each evening she would leave her bag on the table by the door and join Severus and Andromeda at the table for dinner.

By far, the evenings were Hermione's favorite time of the day. She enjoyed hearing Andromeda talk about her day at the nursery school in Hogsmeade. (Severus had been quite against sending her to school in the village but he was finally convinced when Hermione took him down to visit the school and speak with the teachers.) Every day, Andromeda came home with new stories and crafts for her father and "Mummy Herminny." Severus would listen quietly as the two of them talked and looked over Andromeda's artwork.

After dinner, Andromeda would sit on the floor near the fireplace looking at her picture books and playing with her dolls. Severus and Hermione sat on the sofa grading papers or reading. Sometimes they would listen to the wireless or play games with Andromeda in the floor. It was during one of these nights when something quite exciting happened.

Severus was determined to teach Hermione how to play Wizard's Chess because he was getting bored playing Dumbledore and the not-so-annoying-after-all Professor Potter. Although she was extremely frustrated and annoyed that she didn't quite understand the rules and strategy of the game, Hermione was determined to stick it out. Andromeda was sitting at her side dressing her favorite doll when Severus claimed, "Check mate, Hermione."

"What! I don't understand that! Now, show me again. Here. Give it back," Hermione demanded, a little flush in her cheeks as she held out her hand for her king.

Before Severus could hand her king over, the chess piece zoomed out of his hand to land perfectly in Andromeda's. She smiled broadly and handed the piece to Hermione. "Here you go, Mummy Herminny."

Both Severus and Hermione were speechless for a long moment as they stared at the little girl, who was smiling as if nothing unusual had happened at all. Then, it seemed as if both Severus and Hermione pulled Andromeda into a warm hug. Hermione felt hot tears roll down her cheeks as she peppered the little girl's face with kisses. "How wonderful, Andromeda!" she said between hiccoughs. "Can you do it again?"

"Yes, 'Meda. See if you can do it again," Severus prompted, placing the king back in the middle of the chessboard.

Again the king flew into Andromeda's hand with ease. The bored look on her face indicated that she couldn't understand why her father and Hermione were so excited. She did it all the time with her dolls and toys at school. It was quite simple, really. She wanted the game piece and simply asked it to come to her. True, there was a warm, tingling feeling in the tips of her fingers, but that was the only unusual thing about it. Time and again, she summoned the king into her hand, much to their delight.

By nine o'clock that night, Andromeda had summoned the chess piece twenty times and taken her bath. Hermione helped her into her pajamas and carried her back to the sitting room, where Severus sat reading a copy of *Potions Professionals*. He smiled as they settled in next to him, Andromeda snuggling against Hermione's shoulder, clutching her stuffed rabbit. He put away the magazine and picked up a battered copy of *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. Opening the book to the page marked with a slip of parchment, Severus slipped his arm around Hermione and began to read.

Gampa Albus and Gamma Minerva were both very proud and excited to find out that Andromeda had done her first (they thought) bit of magic. A toy broomstick appeared in Snape's sitting room as a gift from Gampa Albus, which Andromeda was allowed to play with only when her father was nearby. Even though the toy rose barely three feet off the ground, it terrified Severus to see her zooming around on it. Andromeda's newly found "Uncle Harry" promised to teach her how to fly properly so that she could become the best Seeker that Hogwarts had ever seen. Gamma Minerva produced a necklace that Transfigured into a slow moving Snitch whenever Andromeda wanted to play with it. Hermione bought her a kitten from the Magical Menagerie in Diagon Alley, which Andromeda named Hatter after the Mad Hatter in *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. From that day on, wherever Andromeda went in the castle, Hatter was draped over her arm.

Much to Hermione and Severus's surprise, Andromeda continued to do magic with an unusual amount of control for someone so young. It was difficult for Severus to

explain to his daughter that she wasn't allowed to do magic at nursery school anymore (having found out about zooming toys and nap mats from her teacher), especially after everyone made such a fuss over her learning how. Worried that Andromeda may accidentally hurt one of her classmates; Severus went to the school to talk to her teacher. He felt much better knowing that everything in the classrooms had a Cushioning Charm on them so that they couldn't hurt any of the children. And so, he allowed her to do magic at home, given that she didn't make Hatter go flying through the air.

~~~HG~~SS~~HG~~SS~~HG~~SS~~HG~~SS~~HG~~SS~~HG~~SS~~HG~~SS~~

The autumn dawned on Hogwarts in a flurry of orange, red, and gold. The air in the castle became crisp and cool and the sky shone a brilliant blue. Each morning, Severus wrapped Andromeda in a sweater and walked her to the village for nursery school. He still didn't like leaving her there but she enjoyed it so much that he couldn't say no to her. He still missed Samantha terribly. He thought about her every time he passed the war memorial on his way to the village. It seemed as if Andromeda noticed this, for she held to her father's hand all the tighter as they passed it. Passing by the memorial so often made him crave Hermione's company more than he would care to admit. It comforted him to see her as they passed in the corridors, glad to see her make a point to smile and ask how he was holding up. It seemed that she was always smiling, no matter how tired or hurried she felt.

Hermione, however, was more tired than she had ever felt before and that was including the time with the Time-Turner in her third year. It was as if she was constantly running from one place to another, trying desperately to do her own work while aiding students and teachers with theirs as well. She was surprised that she made it through the day because she was usually awake by six in the morning and up late into the night reading. Sometimes she could sneak in a nap during lunch, and it was enough to get her through the day. She had even fallen asleep with Andromeda at night while Severus read to them. She had to admit, though, that it was nice being roused by the soothing sound of his voice.

It was of him that Hermione thought as she curled beneath the blankets at the end of October. The Halloween feast was the next evening and she was looking forward to seeing Andromeda's costume. She was going to be Alice. Hermione smiled at the thought of Severus sitting down in his chambers transfiguring a small set of robes into a bluebell dress with a white apron and stockings. She could see him sitting on the edge of his daughter's bed, straightening the bow at the back of her dress and brushing her black curls back into a blue ribbon. There was no denying that she loved that little girl and her father more than anything else she knew.

Near midnight, she finally drifted off to sleep only to find herself standing in a beautiful garden full of pink and silver roses, daisies, lilies, and tulips. A small fountain gurgled in the distance, birds chirped overhead, and butterflies fluttered around her head. A narrow stone path led throughout the garden, flanked by shaped bushes and shrubs. Hermione looked around and noticed the crumbling, unsupported archway hovering over the path. A silvery-blue veil hung from the archway and fluttered in an unseen breeze. Transfixed, she stared at the veil, finally understanding how Harry and Luna found the one in the Department of Mysteries so enticing.

The veil rustled as if caught by a strong gust of wind and Samantha Snape appeared, her auburn curls dangling over her shoulder and her eyes shining with the soft smile on her face. She approached Hermione quietly and held out her hand. "Hello, Hermione Granger. We meet again," she said softly.

For a long moment, Hermione was silent. She could feel warmth start to flow from Samantha's fingers into her own. It was an odd feeling that flooded over Hermione, a feeling of looking into a mirror with deliberate mistakes and distortions. She could see so clearly why Severus had fallen in love with the woman before her. She was breathtakingly beautiful and radiated warmth and joy.

"It's alright, Hermione," Samantha whispered, leading the younger woman over to a bench that had just appeared. "I know all of this must be very unsettling for you. Do not be discouraged; it was very difficult for Severus to understand as well. He wanted to fight so desperately, to cling to my memory and remain a widowed father for the rest of his days. But he has grown to realize that he will not dishonor my memory by loving another. On the contrary, it is what I want for him: to be happy and loved as he watches our daughter grow into a young woman."

After a few breaths, Hermione found her voice. "It is too soon for him to love me. He could never love me after loving someone as wonderful as you." Tears threatened to spill as Hermione felt her face go red.

"Oh no, my dear," Samantha replied warmly. "He has loved you for a very long while. He saw bits of you in me and pieces of me in you. He understands now that you and I are as much alike as we are different. Neither of you will show any contempt for me if you love each other."

"He loves you more than you may ever know, Hermione. You own more of his heart than I ever did. Severus needs you in his life, to help him raise Andromeda and to share his thoughts and passions. He is a very loving man who can be surprisingly sentimental. But he is also a very proud man. So take care of him, Hermione. I know you can, and I know that he will take care of you."

There was an amiable silence as the two women sat together. A soft breeze blew through their hair and rustled the veil nearby. Hermione drew a long breath and thought she saw some movement out of the corner of her eye. Finally she spoke. "I want so desperately to be with him, Sam. I love the person I am with him, with Andromeda. Does he really love me, truly?"

Samantha smiled softly and took both of the younger woman's hands in her own. "Yes, darling girl, he loves you very much. The bond of marriage lasts beyond the end of life, Hermione. It is almost like Legilimency. I can still feel Severus, and I know that he yearns for your companionship and your love." She kissed Hermione's hair softly. "Go to him, love. Go with my blessing."

The tears finally spilled over Hermione's cheeks. "Thank you, Sam. But what about you? What is it like... you know, being dead?"

Samantha smiled. "I am well taken care of," she said, her eyes flicking to the veil billowing nearby. Hermione's eyes followed and widened in surprise as a familiar form appeared. His thick hair blowing gently and a wide smile on his handsome face, Sirius Black sauntered over to them.

"Hello, Hermione," he said genially, looking between the two women. "Well, the *geminus animae* is really true, isn't it?"

Nodding, Samantha stood and put her arm around Sirius, who pulled her close. "Go on, Hermione. It's time to wake up." With a final smile, Samantha and Sirius turned and disappeared through the veil.

Hermione awoke abruptly, the watery morning sunlight shining through the curtained windows. The clock on the wall told her it was just past nine o'clock. She was certain Severus would be awake with Andromeda, having breakfast in his quarters. Quickly, Hermione climbed out of bed and dressed, throwing on an old jumper and jeans.

The corridors were silent as most of the students were outside enjoying some of the last good weather before winter set in. A few teachers were finishing breakfast in the Great Hall as Hermione crossed the entrance hall from the stairs leading up to Gryffindor tower. She hurried down to the dungeon, pulling her hair up in an elastic as she went. When she finally reached the door to Snape's quarters, she was flushed pink and out of breath.

"Severus," she panted, knocking on the door. A moment later, it swung inward to reveal Severus, still in his pajamas, and Andromeda, clinging to her father's leg.

"Hermione?" he said, his brow furrowing with worry. "What's the matter? Is everything okay?"

She smiled at him, taking in the concern in his fathomless eyes. Her heart drummed against her ribs as Samantha's words echoed in her mind. *He loves me*, she thought as comforting warmth spread through her. "I'm fine, Severus," she whispered. "Can I speak to you alone for a moment? Alone?"

He nodded, the confused look still clouding his features. Picking Andromeda up, he led Hermione inside to the sitting room. "Go finish your kippers, 'Meda," Severus said softly. "Hermione and I are going to talk in here, okay?"

Andromeda nodded, her black curls bouncing, and gave Hermione a strangely knowing smile before she trotted into the kitchen to finish her breakfast. Clearly puzzled as to what was wrong, Severus turned to Hermione and was startled to see a blissful look on her face. "You are scaring me, Hermione. What's the matter?"

*There's no use beating around the bush*, Hermione thought. "I had a very odd dream last night. A dream about Samantha."

It felt as if the wind had been knocked out of him. She said it so matter-of-factly, so certain that it had been real. Of course, he knew it had been for he had had many similar dreams about his dead wife. "And?" he said stiffly.

Hermione led him over to the sofa and sat down, facing him. She was unsure where to begin. She felt lightheaded as the flood of affection for this man poured through her. "And it made me realize something very important about you." She paused and caught his gaze. "I've realized that I want to spend my life with you and Andromeda."

"What exactly are you saying, Hermione?"

"I'm saying that I love you, Severus Snape."

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**Notes from The Mistress:** Sorry it took so long to get this chapter out, but RL has intruded into my writing time. For those of you who don't know, my son was born a month ago. So it's been a time just adjusting to having a baby. I have the next chapter ready to post but it may be a while before I get the epilogue out. So please bear with me!

## Severus Part III

Chapter 11 of 11

A startling revelation indeed...

### CHAPTER 11: Severus Part III

Feeling as though he'd been punched, Severus sank back against the arm of the sofa. His deep black eyes slid out of focus as he let her words swim through his mind. She had seen Samantha in a dream, and then she rushed to him the moment she awoke. She loved him; he had heard those words come out of her mouth.

"Severus?" Hermione said softly, reaching out to his face. "Are you alright?"

She stared into his ebony eyes trying to decipher what was going through his mind. His pulse pounded beneath the pads of her fingers and a muscle ticked in his jaw as he ground his teeth. The longer she looked at him, the more his eyes slipped in and out of focus. He drew several deep breaths and tried to swallow, but failed.

Hermione withdrew her hand nervously and folded them in her lap. Warm tears welled up in her eyes. *Maybe I was wrong to come here*, she thought, feeling as if she were choking. With trembling fingers, she pushed her hair away from her face and stood up. "I'm sorry, Severus. I shouldn't have come."

The tears poured silently down her cheeks as Hermione made her way toward the door. Hand on the doorknob, she turned and murmured. "Please tell Andromeda that I love her, and that I won't see her this evening." She felt her heart skip a beat and a sob catch in her throat as she walked out of Snape's sitting room without a backwards glance.

It was several minutes before Severus came back to himself. He looked around the room, his eyes finally coming back into focus. He could hear Andromeda talking to her stuffed rabbit in the kitchen. Hermione, however, was nowhere to be seen. Her words echoed through his mind, sounding as if they came from far away.

Severus stood, feeling the blood rushing from his head. He stumbled across the sitting room, groping for the wall to steady himself. Leaning against the doorframe between the kitchen and the sitting room, Severus looked at Andromeda, who was still munching on her remaining kippers. "Meda, stay here for a moment. I'm going to find Hermione."

Drawing a deep breath, Severus steeled himself and strode through the room and wrenched open the door. The dungeon corridor looked as dank and gray as he felt. He stood in the doorway for a long moment, looking up and down the empty corridor before heading toward the entrance hall. His footsteps echoed hauntingly, amplifying the emptiness that rumbled through him.

He was nearly to the stairs leading up from the dungeons when he heard muffled sobs in a shadowy alcove. He stopped to listen, his heart drumming against his ribs. It sounded as if whoever was crying was trying desperately to stifle the sound and pull themselves together.

"Oh, please," came Hermione's voice, soft and strained. She hiccupped and a fresh wave of tears flowed. "Please, I don't want to hurt anymore. I don't want to live without Andromeda and Severus, but I can't go on loving someone who doesn't love me. Please help me stop loving Severus. Please."

Hermione sounded so miserable that Severus could barely keep the anguish from exploding out of him. Before he could make a move, she appeared out of the alcove, wiping tears away from her red and swollen eyes. Her face was pale and blotchy and her hands were shaking.

Severus felt his heart breaking at the sight and let out a strangled sob. Looking up, fear and humiliation passed over Hermione's face. "Oh no," she moaned, burying her face in her hands. Her entire body began shuddering and she leaned against the stone wall behind her.

"Hermione," he murmured, reaching out to her. She moaned again and struggled away from his hands. "Hermione, please listen to me. I didn't mean to hurt you. I just didn't know what to say."

She sniffled and wiped her eyes again. "You didn't have to say anything, Severus. The look on your face was more than enough for me. Now please, just let me go. I'd like to have a lie down in my room." Hermione pushed away from the wall and tried to get by Snape's outstretched arms.

"Hermione," he said, his voice cracking as she tried to get away. He could not bear the thought of her walking away from him, not now and not ever. Not knowing what else he could do, Severus grasped Hermione by the shoulders and pulled her into a tight embrace. He rested his chin atop her head and held her as she beat her fists against his chest.

"Please let me go," she wailed, her voice muffled. "I understand that you don't love me--"

"Stop, Hermione. I do. Merlin, but I love you," he replied, his arms wrapping around her even tighter. He kissed the top of her curls. "I never dared to hope that you would love me."

Her sobs lessened and she stopped beating him. She drew in deep, calming breaths of the soap and sweet grass that always followed him. Her arms grew lax and she put

them around his waist. "Oh, Severus, please don't say that if you don't mean it."

Severus squeezed her gently. "But I do, my little darling. I love you desperately. You have helped me to deal with Samantha's loss. You have become a mother to my daughter. You are everything I could ever hope to have. You are so much more than I could ever deserve." He ran his fingers through her hair, savoring the silky feeling as the curls slipped between his fingers. The faint scent of perfume wafted around him as he held her securely.

Hermione looked up into his eyes, searching for the truth in them. The corner of his mouth curled upward slightly and he willed his eyes to show her everything he couldn't say. She stared at him for a long while before a faint blush crept over her cheeks and her eyes glistened with tears once more.

"Let's go have some breakfast," he said, entwining his fingers with hers. They made their way back to Snape's quarters, where Andromeda was sitting quietly at the breakfast table with her rabbit and Hatter purring at her feet.

"Meda," Hermione whispered as they entered the kitchen. The little girl leapt down from her chair, making Hatter hiss in fright, and ran into Hermione's open arms.

"Mummy Herminny!" she squealed, clutching Hermione as if she hadn't been by in days. Hermione cried softly as she hugged Andromeda close, feeling her heart beating in time with the racing beat of the little girl's. Andromeda's breath came in gasps as she, too, began to cry.

"Oh my darling," she whispered, stroking Andromeda's hair soothingly. She kissed her cheek softly. "My darling 'Meda, what's wrong?"

Andromeda hiccupped and turned her tear-streaked face toward Hermione. "I thought you were going to weave us." She began to sob again and buried her face in Hermione's neck. "Don't weave us, mummy!"

Hermione turned her head to Severus, who was watching the scene from the doorway. They looked at each other for a long moment before he nodded curtly. "Never, my 'Meda. I will never leave you. No matter what."

It took several minutes for Andromeda to stop crying, once she was certain that Hermione wasn't going to leave. She grasped Hermione's hand in her own and refused to let her out of her sight at all. And so they found themselves in the sitting room, the battered copy of *Alice Through the Looking Glass* in Severus's hand and Andromeda curled up in Hermione's lap. Hatter was stretched out on the hearthrug, basking in the warmth from the fire.

Two pale figures watched from the corner, their presence hidden by the flickering flames, as the couple snuggled together with the little girl between them. The pale woman smiled almost sadly, a silvery tear streaking down her cheek, her eyes fixed on the little girl in the other woman's lap. The pale man put his arm around the woman and kissed the top of her head. "Everything will be fine now, Samantha."

"I know, Sirius. But I will miss them all the same," said Samantha sadly.

Sirius looked at the family on the sofa, all loathing for Severus Snape swept from his heart by the woman next to him. He only wished he had known Samantha Cole Snape in life rather than in death. "This isn't goodbye. You may not be able to visit Severus and Hermione any longer, but no one said you couldn't visit Andromeda."

A smile spread over the woman's face as she floated over to the sofa and, unnoticed by either of the adults, kissed her daughter softly on the cheek. The little girl grasped in the air in her sleep, as if she could feel her mother's presence so near. Andromeda mumbled "Mummy," to which Hermione stroked her hair and whispered, "I'm right here, darling."

Samantha straightened and returned to Sirius in the corner. "I suppose I could, but I think my work here is finished."

And with that, the pale figures dissolved into silvery vapor and never again emerged from behind the veil.

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**Notes from The Mistress:** The epilogue is on the way. I'm sorry for the rating change, but I thought this was a nice way to end the story without the NC-17 rating. Sorry if I have disappointed any of you, but I promise I will write a few one shots of pure smut to make it up to you!