

When The Present Turns Into The Future

by ancientgirl

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What Happened to the Potions Master?

Chapter 1 of 18

Not HBP compliant Just before the final battle takes place, Severus is hit with a dark curse and he is asleep for ten years. What's happened since he's been asleep?

I hadn't planned on posting this so soon, but I decided to get it up to see what you all think about this. I hope you enjoy what I have so far.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thank you as always to my wonderful beta, June.

What Happened to the Potions Master?

"Albus, there has to be a way to locate him." Minerva knew it was futile, but she needed to get the Headmaster to calm down.

"Minerva, he has been gone for over a week. We have tried everything. Not even Lucius knows what happened to him after the last meeting."

Severus Snape, master of Potions and aspiring Defense Against the Dark Arts professor, had been missing for eight days. It was late May and Voldemort had called all of his Death Eaters for a meeting to plan the final stand against those in the wizarding world who were not worthy of his reign. Severus had stood alongside his friend and fellow spy Lucius Malfoy, as the Dark Lord outlined his plans. After the meeting Voldemort called Severus to a private audience. It was the last time Lucius saw Severus.

Now it was eight days later and Albus was pacing his office. The Order had tried everything they could think of to locate Severus and still he was lost to them. As Albus walked to his desk, Mr. Filch came rushing past the gargoyle.

"Professor Dumbledore, we've found him!" Filch quickly turned back towards the gargoyle, knowing that Albus and Minerva were following him.

Severus had been found by Hagrid, who was in the Forbidden Forest looking for a unicorn that had strayed from his holding pen. The groundskeeper came upon the Potions master's body propped against a large rock. Severus was alive but looked as though he'd been badly beaten. The half-giant immediately picked him up and took him to Poppy, passing Filch along the way and sending him off to collect the Headmaster.

Albus came through the doors of the infirmary and stopped dead in his tracks. The look on Madam Pomfrey's face told him that whatever had happened to Severus, it wasn't good.

"Poppy, is he...?"

"No, but death might have been a merciful thing," said Poppy sadly.

Albus and Minerva looked at one another, horrified.

"Is he afflicted with something incurable?" asked Minerva with concern.

"His body will heal," Poppy said as she looked to the bed where Severus was lying. "But his mind is...frozen."

"Frozen?" asked Hagrid, not quite knowing what the witch meant.

"Yes, there is no activity. It is similar to what Muggle doctors call brain death, a descriptive term. It's as if someone put his brain on stasis. His mind is alive, but there are no thought patterns. Even comatose patients have some kind of activity, but Severus has nothing."

Albus approached the bed slowly. He loved Severus like a son. The man had a deplorable childhood. After he left Hogwarts he became a Death Eater, only to regret his decision soon after receiving the Dark Mark. When he came back and asked his former Headmaster for help, Albus took him under his wing. Severus became his most trusted confidant and friend. Albus leaned over the bed and brushed the hair back from Severus' forehead.

"Is there anything we can do to help him recover, Poppy?"

"I have picked up a magical signature, but cannot trace it. I can tell you that it is a curse of the darkest form. But I know of no cure for something like this. I doubt that there is any cure." Poppy said as she and Minerva walked to the edge of the bed.

It was decided then that Severus would be kept in his rooms. For security reasons, no one in the school other than those present Albus, Minerva, Poppy, Filch and Hagrid would know that Severus had been found. As for the Order, they would be told that very evening.

As the Order members met that night at number twelve, Grimmauld Place, the mood was somber. In attendance were Arthur and Molly Weasley, along with Fred and George and Ginny. Ron, Harry and Hermione were also in attendance. Remus sat behind the couch with Tonks. Lucius Malfoy stood next to the fireplace alongside his son, Draco. Narcissa had been found dead the past summer; it was Lucius' belief that she'd been found out as a spy. Lucius was spared her fate, as he made a point to continually try to keep himself clear of suspicion.

Harry, Ron, Draco and Hermione were in their sixth year at Hogwarts. Times were dangerous and it was believed that they should be included in the planning of the battle to come. They were allowed to join the Order, as was Ginny. There was a silence in the room as everyone present wondered what would happen now that there was only one person to take on the burden of spying on Voldemort.

Ginny looked at Lucius feeling his pain. His cool demeanor gave little proof of how nervous he was at that moment. His friend was lying in his dark room, dead to the world. It was now up to Lucius to carry on with the dangerous task of collecting information. He had no one to watch his back. Next year his son was expected to take the Dark Mark. He'd hoped that they would bring the Dark Lord down before then. But now it seemed that Draco would meet his father's fate.

As they all sat in the small living room, none of them had any idea of their future. What would become of them?

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Five months later, Voldemort was defeated. During the final battle, with the help of the Order and Lucius' information, Harry and Albus rid the wizarding world of the Dark Lord.

The battle was hard and took many lives on both sides. It left the Weasley family with two less sons; Bill was killed early on in the battle, while Percy died defending Voldemort. Ron survived, but he didn't escape harm. Physically he was fine, but he had been hit in the head during a scuffle with Crabbe senior. For the most part, he looked normal and went about his daily life like he always had. But Ron now experienced moments in which he would often yell out obscenities and odd claims. It was necessary for him to take a daily potion in order to control his outbursts.

Draco and Hermione had fought side-by-side, and it was Draco who attended to Hermione's leg after it was hit with a slicing hex.

Ginny was thought dead for several hours, until Lucius found her under the rubble of the east tower of Hogwarts. As he brushed the dirt from her face, Ginny's eyes began to open. She blinked several times trying to focus on her rescuer.

"Am I dead? Are you an angel?" she asked quietly.

Lucius simply chuckled.

"I can hardly be mistaken for an angel, Miss Weasley." He gathered her into his arms and carried her to the still intact hospital ward.

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The years passed for them all. Harry, Draco, Hermione and Ginny graduated from Hogwarts. Upon graduation Harry took on the burden of taking care of Ron, who finished his education under private tutelage. Arthur became the Minister of Magic and Molly had her hands full with her grandchildren. Fred and George married twins from Beauxbatons; they each had triplets. Charlie married a Spanish witch and had two children of his own. The family was notified a month after the final battle that Percy had been married to a Death Eater who had borne him a child. The Weasleys decided to take the little girl into their home and raise her as their own. The mother of the child was never known to them, but she died in Azkaban, along with many other Death Eaters, who were given the Dementor's Kiss.

All the while, those who survived went on, living and trying to make the world better than it had been during those trying years. All but one man.

Severus Snape lay in his bed for ten years. He changed very little. Albus and Minerva visited him often, making sure they kept him up-to-date with the happenings inside and outside the castle. Severus never heard it, though. His mind was as still and quiet as the deepest chasms in the earth. Until one day, the wheels began to turn and the images once again began to form inside his head. All those years, he'd had not one dream, not one thought; and now it was though the dam had burst and soon he would wake from his long sleep.

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It was already proving to be a busy day that morning Severus woke up from his curse. It wasn't even eleven o'clock and already Madam Pomfrey had her hands full in the infirmary. Madam Hooch's Quidditch practice turned out to be a re-enactment of Waterloo, and several Ravenclaws and Gryffindors wound up needing medical attention.

Hermione Granger strolled into the now full ward and dropped off a much-needed supply of Blood-Replenishing Potion as well as some Skele-Gro. Hermione had graduated with her Potions Mistress degree six years earlier, and immediately accepted the position of Potions professor at the school.

"Hermione, thank goodness you're here," said Poppy as she tried to catch her breath. "It's time to give Severus his strengthening potion, but I've got my hands full here. Would you please be a dear and take it down to him?"

"Of course. Shall I also begin his exercises?" asked Hermione. When she began working at the school, she offered her help in taking care of her former potions professor. Even though he hadn't participated in the final battle, his influence there had been felt, and his work for the Order was known throughout the wizarding world. She sometimes laughed to herself, wondering what her snarky cold professor would think of his post-war image.

"No, thank you," Poppy said. "I think I can manage his exercises for him by this afternoon. Besides, the potion needs to be in his system for a bit before I can begin working

on his muscles."

Hermione nodded and took the potion the medi-witch handed to her. She walked down to the dungeons and entered Severus' rooms. They had all kept his rooms much the same way he had. All of his things were in the same spot and his rooms were cleaned on a regular basis.

In the bedroom, Severus was lying in his four-poster bed. His hair was always washed and combed, and his clothes always new and clean. Albus decided to keep him dressed in his favorite frock coat and black robes.

Hermione set the potion on the night table next to the bed and sat down next to Severus. She liked to come down and keep him company sometimes. Yes, she knew he couldn't hear her as she read to him, but there was something comforting in being in a room with him. It didn't make her feel so...alone.

"Good morning, Professor." So many years had passed, and still she couldn't bring herself to call him by his given name. Somehow it just didn't feel right, since he'd not given her permission to do so.

"I've come to give you your strengthening potion." Hermione tilted her head a bit as she looked at him. She studied his face closely. He'd hardly changed in ten years. "I never thought you so handsome when I was in school, but I think I've grown quite fond of your features."

Severus tried desperately to make out the words being spoken to him. He realized that he was in some sort of dormant state, but wasn't sure if it had anything to do with the beating he took at the hands of Voldemort or if Poppy had given him something to help him get well. He'd remembered very little. Thinking back now, after his beating at the hands of the Dark Lord, he blacked out. He had no memories of what happened next.

Hermione held his head slightly up as she poured a bit of potion into his mouth, then gently massaged his throat so that he could swallow. As she did so, she realized she felt movement from him. She placed the potion back on the night stand and leaned close to him. During his time asleep, he never moved.

"Professor?" She listened, and heard him moan softly. She gasped in surprise then quickly rose from the bed. "You're alive! I mean, well, you weren't dead, but...oh, I don't know what I'm saying. I'll be right back." She turned and started to run out of the room but turned back to face him. "I'm going to Floo Albus, then Poppy oh, and Minerva!" Hermione ran to the Floo and began calling for Albus.

"Albus! Come quickly to Professor Snape's rooms! He's awake!" She heard scuffling on the other end and stepped back as the older wizard came stumbling through the Floo.

"Has he said anything?" asked Albus as Hermione helped him to his feet.

"No, I was giving him his strengthening potion and I felt him moving. Then I heard him moan. Albus, do you think he will actually wake up fully?" asked Hermione expectantly.

"We can only hope." He patted her on the shoulder, "Please, go and fetch Poppy, and notify Minerva."

Hermione nodded and then ran out the front door. She could have Flooed to the hospital wing, but her stomach was doing flip-flops. She knew if she Flooed in this condition, she would surely get sick.

Albus walked into Severus' bedroom hoping against all hope that his young friend was indeed finally waking up after so many years gone. He approached the bed quietly. He sat down and placed his hand on Severus' shoulder. He then heard a moan.

"Severus, Severus, can you hear me?" he asked softly.

For several minutes all he heard was a muffled voice which was slowly becoming clearer. Severus finally heard Albus calling to him. He moved his head slightly toward the old man's voice, then slowly opened his eyes. Everything was blurry, but he could make out the outline of a person. Before he could manage to get any words out, Albus stood.

Poppy, Minerva and Hermione all rushed into the room. Albus stood and motioned for Poppy to come towards the bed.

"Has he said anything?" asked Poppy.

"No, but he appears to be trying to communicate," answered Albus.

Poppy nodded; she then waved her wand over Severus' body. There was a slight change in his constitution. The once grayish light was now closer to white. Severus' eyes were now open, and he was blinking quite a bit.

"Severus, can you try to speak?" asked Poppy.

"He...knows," said Severus, his voice hoarse from so many years of not speaking. He looked around the room, and his eyes were finally beginning to focus. He saw next to him Poppy, who had taken care of him after so many meetings. He turned his head towards the foot of his bed and saw Albus and Minerva. They looked older to him for some reason; perhaps they had worried about him too much while he was gone. He then noticed a young woman standing just off to the side of the two. Before he slipped back into unconsciousness his last thought was of how pretty she was.

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Well, there you have it. I hope you enjoyed this chapter. I'm hoping to make this a humor/romance so a bit of OOC might be happening here. I hope to have the second one up soon.

The World Has Changed

Chapter 2 of 18

Severus wakes up to a changed world.

Thank you to those of you who have taken the time to read this and review so far. I hope you continue to enjoy this. When I started posting I hadn't figured out any real plot, but I've come up with something that I hope you all find interesting.

I have to apologize first though, but my computer here at work is acting funky, so I may have to come back later and fix a few things as far as characters and genres.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

As always, a huge thanks to June for her beta work.

The World Has Changed.

Severus spent the better part of that afternoon sleeping. When he finally woke up, he heard a conversation going on in the next room. He slowly stood and began to walk shakily out of his bedroom. He was able to stand and walk thanks in part to the potions he'd been given but also the exercising and massaging of his muscles, which Poppy had faithfully performed for ten years. As he approached the living room he heard the voices and what they were saying more clearly.

"I can't even imagine how he will take all of this in," said Minerva.

"It will be quite a shock to him. But, I imagine some things will be welcome," added Poppy.

"If only he'd been able to hear us all this time," said the voice of a young woman. Severus deduced it was the young woman he'd seen standing next to Albus and Minerva earlier. "It's just been so long."

Before anyone else could say anything, Severus emerged from the hallway. They all looked his way.

"Severus," Albus said as he rose from his spot on the couch and rushed towards Severus. "You really shouldn't be walking about like this."

Severus waved his hand.

"Albus, I'm fine." His voice was still slightly hoarse. "I just need to move around a bit. I feel as though I've been sedentary too long." Severus didn't notice the worried looks exchanged by the others in the room.

"Severus, you said earlier, 'He knows.' I'm assuming you were speaking of Voldemort," said Albus.

"As evidenced by the state in which I was found, you can probably guess that the Dark Lord is aware of my duplicity." Severus rubbed his eyes with his fingers. "I am afraid that I am no longer useful to the Order."

"Professor, perhaps you should sit down," said Hermione.

Severus looked at her. He studied her face. She looked familiar but he didn't quite know where he had seen her before.

"As I said before, Miss..."

Hermione looked toward Albus. The old man bowed his head and rubbed his forehead. Hermione looked back to Severus.

"Granger, sir."

Severus blinked, and cocked his head.

"Granger?" He looked to Albus. "I had no idea that Hermione Granger had a relative here."

"She doesn't, sir. It's me...I'm Hermione Granger."

Severus felt as though a bucket of ice water had fallen on his head. He looked at everyone in the room, and then backed himself into a chair that happened to be behind him. He fell heavily on the chair and buried his face in his hands. He could feel his heart beat faster as he began to wonder if it was possible that he was in some other realm of consciousness. Could it be that he was still asleep and this was just a dream? He shook his head as he realized this was too vivid to be a dream. He lifted his head and looked around the room once again. He studied the young woman. He remembered Hermione Granger when he last saw her, as a sixth year student. She hardly looked like the woman he saw in front of him now. *'No,'* he thought, *'this can't be.'*

"How...how long have I been asleep?" he asked, not really wanting to know the answer.

Albus sighed heavily, "Ten years."

Severus leaned forward and held his head in his hands. He willed himself to stay calm. He'd been asleep for ten years! But he really hadn't been sleeping, not really.

"Severus, when Hagrid found you that day in the woods, you were beaten very badly," Poppy said gently. "I mended your broken bones and checked you for further internal damage. I saw then that there was a curse placed on you. I think you may have woken up now because it has taken all these years for its properties to wear off." Poppy had spent two years researching possible causes and cures for Severus' condition. Much of what she learned made her conclude that whatever curse had been placed on Severus, if it was the work of Voldemort, then with the death of the caster, the curse itself would slowly wear off. Voldemort was a powerful wizard. It was no surprise that it had taken the dark-haired wizard ten years to finally wake up.

"I still don't really know what kind of a curse it was other than it was a dark curse, and most probably something Voldemort placed on you," the medi-witch further added.

"I don't even remember escaping from him," said Severus. In fact, he hadn't really escaped that day; Voldemort ordered Wormtail to take Severus to the Forbidden Forest. Instead of leaving him deep within the forest where his body would never be found, the stupid rat-like wizard dropped him off close to the edge of the forest and thus saved Severus' life, without even realizing it.

"Severus, how do you feel?" asked Minerva. "Physically...that is."

Severus looked down at himself. He had to admit, for someone being almost dead to the world for the last ten years, he felt and seemed to look rather well.

"I feel tired, but for the most part I feel fine." Severus stood and stared into the fireplace. He looked down at his left arm and began to roll up his sleeve. He held his breath until he saw what he'd hoped to see. His Dark Mark was still there, but it was faded. It looked like what Muggles might describe as a watermark. He quickly turned, looking hopeful.

"Yes, Severus," Albus said with a nod. "He is gone. Five months after we found you, Harry and I along with the rest of the Order rid the world of his poison."

"And...what of Lucius?" Severus hoped his friend was still alive.

"Lucius is alive. He'll be very happy to know that you are awake, sir," said Hermione happily.

"If I might ask, Miss Granger, what is your role here?" While he found himself appreciating her beauty, he still thought of her as a child and therefore saw that she had no place in his rooms or the present conversation.

"I teach potions, sir. I'm...I'm a Potions Mistress," said Hermione proudly.

Severus arched a brow. He stared at Hermione for several moments. His former student had grown up to be a Potions Mistress and taken over his position. He'd have to talk to Albus about that. He wanted his job back. Then again, this might be the opportunity to get the job he's always really wanted. He decided his current thoughts could wait. He needed to know what else he'd missed.

"Harry and Draco are both Aurors. Ron, well...he didn't do very well during the final battle. He received a bad blow to the head and lost some of his mental faculties," said Hermione, trying to enlighten her former professor as to what her friends were doing.

'Weasley has lost some of his mental faculties? How did anyone even notice the difference?' thought Severus.

"The Dark Lord dead, you Miss Granger now the Potions professor, Potter and Draco Aurors." Severus looked towards Albus once again. "Good lord, Neville Longbottom isn't the Minister of Magic, is he? I may just go back to sleep for another ten years if he is."

Albus chuckled. "No, Severus that won't be necessary. Arthur is the Minister of Magic."

While Albus seemed amused by Severus' comment, he didn't realize that his former Potions professor was serious. Severus knew he would have to keep an open mind in the days and weeks to come. The world had changed quite a bit.

'This is going to take some getting used to,' thought Severus as he started to make his way to the bathroom, which he realized he needed to use very badly.

"If you will all excuse me, I think I would like to use the loo and take a very long hot shower."

Everyone in the room knew that this was their cue to leave. They understood that Severus most probably wanted some time alone with his thoughts.

"Of course, Severus." As Albus stood to leave, Severus caught him by the arm.

"Albus, how was my absence explained all these years?" asked Severus.

"You were left for dead in the Forbidden Forest, so we felt it best to let Tom believe he'd won so that he wouldn't seek you out, but after the final battle, you were no longer in danger. After our victory over Voldemort, we thought it best to tell the rest of the population the truth of what happened to you." Albus patted Severus on the shoulder. "You may not have actually been in that battle, Severus, but your work for the Order helped us win in the end. Your presence was certainly felt there on that battlefield. You deserved just as much praise as those who were physically there. You now have a very good reputation as a war hero. I am certain that many will be curious about the curse you were under at the beginning, but things will die down and you can live your life just as you always did."

Albus smiled and left him alone.

Severus didn't like being the center of attention. While he'd always wanted the recognition he deserved for all of his years of sacrifices, he never wanted people pointing at him or following him around like a celebrity. He shook his head and hoped that he would be able to just blend into the rest of society, like he always had.

He took a long shower and walked out of his bathroom in his robe. He had plenty of time before dinner. He decided to make his first appearance in public in ten years, but before that a nap was in order. He lay down on his bed and began to drift away wondering what the next few days would bring.

Severus fell asleep within minutes of lying down. Suddenly, his eyes opened and he looked around his room. He sat up cautiously and slowly got out of bed, and then walked to the large mirror that stood against the wall of his bedroom. Severus stripped off his robe and stood in front of the mirror admiring his form. He was thin, but well built. His muscles hadn't dissipated during his sedentary ten years. He looked at his flaccid penis and cocked his head; he was large, very large. He smirked, then looked at his face in the mirror. He raised his hand slowly and touched his image then began to chuckle.

His quiet chuckle slowly turned into a maniacal sounding eerie laugh as his hand quickly withdrew from the mirror's surface. He took a step towards the mirror.

"All this time, and they never knew," he said as he smiled into the mirror. "Oh, Severus, I am going to enjoy being you so very much."

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I want to address the easiness some of the characters have in now saying Voldemort. I'm thinking since he was taken out of commission for what seemed for good, people felt they no longer needed to fear him or his name.

I hope you enjoyed this chapter. Thanks for reading.

A New Body For An Old Enemy

Chapter 3 of 18

Severus begins his new life as an old enemy bides his time.

I'd like to thank everyone who has reviewed this story so far. I appreciate the wonderful comments and am very happy at your response to this story.

I hope you all continue to enjoy it.

I thought I would update before the weekend started.

All canon characters belong to JKR. All I get are your kind words.

Thanks to June for all of her help and suggestions.

Chapter 3 A New Body For An Old Enemy

Ten years earlier

Voldemort sat on his throne staring down at the unconscious body of his only direct contact to Harry Potter.

He knew Severus to be a powerful wizard who could hold his own, but he needed to make sure he would survive the coming battle. For several days he'd been thinking of which of his Death Eaters he would grant the ultimate honor: the honor of being his next body.

Voldemort wasn't delusional. He knew that he had to take any and all necessary precautions, in case he lost the battle, and that his Horcruxes were being destroyed by Potter and his friends. He feared that they had all been destroyed already.

Severus had always been one of his most loyal followers and he suffered daily having to deal with the twinkling old fool, Albus Dumbledore. It would be a great honor for Severus to give up his body in order for his lord to live again, even if he didn't even realize what was happening to him. No one would ever suspect that Severus Snape was a Horcrux

"Wormtail, take Severus to the Forbidden Forest."

Peter laughed, "Shall I place him near the cave where the manticores dwell?"

Voldemort backhanded him viciously.

"You fool! I do not want him harmed further. His body must be placed in a hidden spot which I will give you directions to. He will sleep and his body will be at rest." Voldemort approached Severus' body and stroked his hair.

"If I should perish during the final battle, I shall return, Peter. I shall bury my soul inside this body and when the some time has passed, when the world thinks itself safe, I shall come back."

Voldemort didn't care if all of his followers were killed or sent to Azkaban. As far as he was concerned, he would eventually gather more. After all, Severus would most likely be welcomed back to Hogwarts with open arms. What better place to recruit new followers than a school with plenty of young minds to mold.

Peter did as he was told, to a certain degree. He couldn't find the precise spot his master had shown him on the map he'd given him. Peter was in such a hurry to get back to Voldemort that he unknowingly placed Severus' body in a spot where Hagrid often passed while walking through the forest.

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Now standing in Severus' bedroom, Voldemort was amused that he'd woken up on a bed and dressed in a bathrobe. He concluded that the half-wit Wormtail placed the Potions master's body in an open spot; the Gryffindor had never found the crypt that was meant to keep Severus' body in its pristine state.

Actually, Peter had done Voldemort a great service. The Dark Lord's plans were working out better than he'd originally anticipated. His only problem was that he, as of yet, did not have full control of Severus' body or memories. Had he been laid in the crypt, Severus' soul would eventually have weakened enough for Voldemort's soul to simply engulf and devour it. Severus would die and Voldemort would live again in the Potions Master's body. However, he was in Hogwarts; he had no doubt of that. Most probably he'd been taken care of by the staff and been given potions to keep his body healthy. The connection to the world and those around him was never severed. Those who cared for Severus kept his soul alive and grounded without even knowing it. This worked in Severus' favor.

Voldemort knew that he would have to bide his time until he could become strong enough to take over the body completely. He walked back to the bed and laid himself down, falling asleep as quickly as Severus had done so earlier.

When Severus woke after ten years, he thought that Voldemort had known of his spying, but in reality the Dark Lord did not. It was the fact that Voldemort thought him to be a faithful servant that actually put Severus in the position he'd been these last ten years. His duplicity had never been found out.

What Poppy picked up when she first examined Severus' body was in fact Voldemort's soul. She could not have known it wasn't just remnants of a magical signature; she had no experience with Horcruxes.

Severus continued to sleep for several hours. When he woke he found himself naked on his bed. He found this odd since he had been wearing his robe when he initially lay down for his nap. Shaking his head, he thought perhaps he'd just gotten restless and somehow shrugged it off while sleeping. He'd always slept in the nude anyway. Not thinking further about it, he got up and dressed for dinner.

Instead of walking into the Great Hall through the teachers' entrance, he decided to make a grand entrance. Severus really couldn't resist. He couldn't wait to see the shocked faces of the students as he walked up the aisle to the High Table. As he predicted, once the doors opened and he stalked in with his billowing robes following him, all he saw out of the corner of his eyes were shocked faces. He also heard mumbblings of "we never thought we would ever see him," or "he's a scary one, just like my parents said." He smirked and continued on his way.

Albus made the announcement to the rest of the staff just after he'd left Severus' quarters that morning. They had all been very excited and happy that he was back from his deep slumber.

Severus strode up the steps and towards his old seat. It was empty, something Albus always insisted on. No one had ever taken Severus' old seat at the High Table in ten years. Along the way he greeted Albus, Minerva, Filius, Hagrid, and the rest of the staff. When he got to his place he noticed that Hermione would be sitting next to him. Deciding that perhaps it might be good to have someone to fill him in on the happenings on the wizarding world during his down time, he sighed heavily and hoped she had matured enough to hold an intelligent conversation as an adult.

"Good evening, professor," said Hermione cheerfully.

Severus looked down at her smiling face.

'*Cheerful little witch,*' he thought, a bit amused.

"Good evening, Miss...I mean, Professor Granger," he said.

Severus sat down and looked up to find the entire student body looking his way. But after he gave them one good scowl, they all turned away and began talking amongst themselves. He heard Hermione's gentle laugh next to him.

"You certainly haven't lost your touch, sir."

"Just like riding a broom, you never forget," he said. They both sat in silence until a large hawk entered the Great Hall. Severus recognized it immediately; it was Hector, Lucius' hawk. Hector landed on Severus' shoulder and rubbed his head against the Potions master's temple; he'd always been a very caring and friendly bird to those he knew.

Severus smiled and rubbed Hector's head, then took the note from his claw. He gave Hector a piece of sausage and opened the letter:

My dearest friend:

I cannot begin to tell you how long I have waited for this day to come. Severus, I never gave up hope that you would one day return to us, my friend.

I am currently in Brussels on business and cannot leave at this moment. I will be traveling back home tomorrow, however, and would like to see you. If you are feeling up to it, I would like to stop by Hogwarts and see you. Or perhaps you can come by my home and spend the weekend. We have much catching up to do.

Let me know via Hector.

Your friend,

Lucius

Severus folded up his note and looked towards Hermione.

"Professor Granger," he began.

"Please, call me Hermione," she said.

"I suppose there is no longer the need for such formalities. You may call me Severus then." He noticed Hector now hopped his way towards Hermione. "What day of the week is it today?"

"It's Friday," she answered as she petted Hector. "Lucius must be very excited."

"He is. How did you know this note was from him?" wondered Severus.

"Well, one, he's the only person Albus has contacted so far about your recovery besides staff, and two, I know this is Hector, his hawk."

"Hector is only taken with those he knows well. How well do you and Lucius know each other, if I may ask?" Severus was beginning to realize he'd missed more than he originally thought.

"I should probably fill you in on some things, shouldn't I?" Hermione turned her body slightly in order to face him better. "Lucius remarried about four years ago."

Severus' eyebrows shot up.

"I never expected that. After Narcissa was killed he said he would never marry again."

"Well, he fell in love," Hermione said as she smiled.

"And who is the lucky woman?" Severus hoped that his friend hadn't married someone just for the sake of company. Lucius never liked being alone, and Severus was afraid he might have married some big-bosomed tart with the IQ of a gnat.

"Ginny Weasley," answered Hermione.

Severus stared at Hermione and sat back, trying to remember the youngest of the Weasleys. Ginny was an intelligent girl, not overly studious but certainly smart enough make a way for herself in the world.

"She is very much his junior, but if she makes him happy and vice versa, then I am happy for them both." Severus laughed. "Funny, I always thought she and Potter would marry."

"Oh...um...no, they, well, Harry went in another direction when it came to relationships," said Hermione.

"Oh, and what direction is that?" asked Severus.

"The direction of Draco Malfoy," said Hermione.

Severus sighed. "I suppose that shouldn't shock me. Their fights always did look more like foreplay than anything else."

They finished eating their meal with Hermione giving Severus bits and pieces of what was happening around the wizarding world. Much to Severus' surprise, things really hadn't changed much, other than the fact that Voldemort was gone.

One thing that had changed was that werewolves and vampires were given their place in society. This was mostly due to Arthur Weasley's crusade for equality for those who through no fault of their own were turned into such creatures. It was still difficult for some people to accept, but for the most part, much of the wizarding world had always felt it unfair to treat fellow wizards like animals, simply because they were at the wrong place at the wrong time and bitten by either a werewolf or a vampire.

As they finished their meal and stood away from the table, Albus walked towards the two.

"Severus, I trust that Hermione here has given you a summary of some of what you have missed?" asked Albus, with that knowing smile Severus had almost forgotten.

"Yes, Headmaster, she has been quite the chatterbox," Severus said as he looked back at Hermione who was now scowling at him.

She shook her head and decided to let it be, he'd never change. Albus laughed and was then joined by Poppy and Minerva, and the rest of the staff. Everyone wanted to know how he felt and told him how much they had missed him. But soon enough Poppy was shooing everyone away.

"Now you all let Severus alone. He needs his rest still," Poppy said as she took Severus by the arm and guided him away from the others. "Severus I want you to stop by my office tomorrow morning. I need to give you a thorough checkup."

"Poppy, I am perfectly fine," said Severus as he began to walk away.

"Severus Snape, you come to my office first thing in the morning. Do I make myself clear?" Poppy now stood in his path, hands on her hips.

Defeated, Severus looked down at the witch. "Very well, I will be there at ten o'clock."

Severus managed to catch up with Albus who was walking back to his office.

"I see Poppy managed to talk you into an examination," said Albus.

"Yes, it was either agree or have her hounding me for the next week," Severus answered as he walked alongside Albus.

"She is just worried about you, my boy. We need to make sure you are better. Now, I gather you wish to speak with me about something?" Albus knew full well that Severus was going to ask him, not for his old job back, but the Defense Against Dark Arts position.

"Well, it is quite obvious that you no longer need me to teach potions, since it seems that you have a competent replacement."

"Ah, yes." Albus walked alongside of Severus and watched him out of the corner of his eye. "Professor Granger has done a wonderful job these last few years. You know, she teaches very much like you."

Severus looked at Albus surprised. He would have thought she would have been more lenient, yet he just now found out she apparently ruled with an iron fist.

"At least she's not allowing the dimwits to walk all over her." They continued to walk until they reached the gargoyle. "I actually wanted to ask you about the..."

Albus held his hand up to stop Severus from speaking.

"Severus, we currently have no permanent DADA professor. Would you like to take the position?"

Severus blinked several times rapidly.

"Yes," he said.

"Very well. There is only one week left in this year's classes, but you can begin your preparations for next fall's influx of students."

Albus took the stairs to his office, leaving the dumbstruck Severus at the landing.

"That was too easy, but I won't press my luck. I think sleeping ten years was the best thing to ever happen to me." Severus said to himself, as he smiled and walked back to his rooms with an extra spring in his step. Not only had he woken up to find out Voldemort was finally dead, but he found out his best friend survived the war, he no longer had to teach potions to dunderheads, and he got the position he'd most coveted ever since he started teaching at Hogwarts. What more could a snarky ex-Death Eater ask for?

The next morning, Severus had breakfast in his rooms, and gathered a few things for the weekend. He then went to see Poppy.

She examined him much the same way she had examined him when he was first discovered ten years earlier. She frowned when she captured the same magical signature.

Severus noticed her troubled look.

"What is it?" he asked.

"You're fine, but I'm still capturing that magical signature. It should have dissipated by now. It's been ten years." She placed her wand on the table next to the bed and stepped back to allow Severus to stand.

"Dark spells often capture the caster's essence. It's a bit different than the usual signature. Whatever it is, Poppy, I am sure it will fade in time," Severus said. "Now, if you are finished, I would like to continue with my plans for today."

"Oh, go on then," Poppy huffed. "I think I liked you better when you couldn't talk back."

Severus smirked as he walked out of the hospital wing. It was always so easy to get under Poppy's skin. He went to his rooms and gathered his things. Instead of Flooing he decided he'd Apparate to Lucius' home.

When he arrived at Malfoy Manor, he noticed the home looked slightly different. There were more flowers in the front garden, and the stones looked lighter. He walked up the stone path and knocked on the heavy doors.

After a short wait, he heard someone speaking behind the door.

Lucius was in the sitting room when he heard knocking. He immediately set his book down and ran to the door.

"It's all right, Dari. I've got it. You finish preparing lunch," Lucius told the house-elf who did as she was told as he approached the door and opened it.

"Severus!" Lucius stepped forward to embrace his friend. After several hard pats on the back by both men, they smiled and stepped back to give each other a lookover.

"Good gods, man, don't you ever change?" asked Severus.

"Well, one of the perks of having such blond hair, you can't see the grays."

Lucius and Severus shook hands, and Lucius pulled his friend inside. In his excitement at seeing his friend after so many years, Lucius decided to ignore the odd feeling he had when he took hold of Severus' left hand.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

I hope you enjoyed this chapter. I've begun writing the next one and hope to have something to post very soon. Thank you for reading.

Odd Behavior

Chapter 4 of 18

Severus visits Lucius for the weekend, and Lucius begins to notice something odd.

I'd like to thank those who have taken the time to read and review this story so far. Thank you for all of your comments.

All canon characters belong to JKR. My only payment is your reviews.

Thank you to June for helping me with this and for all of her suggestions.

Chapter 4 Odd Behavior

Lucius and Severus walked together into the Malfoy Manor sitting room. They sat opposite each other next to the fireplace and Severus looked around the room.

"You've certainly changed things around here. It all looks so...comfortable and inviting now," said Severus.

Lucius looked around the room and smiled.

"Yes, it was all so sterile before, although I didn't even notice until Ginny moved in," Lucius said as he looked back at Severus. "I'm sorry, you do know I married Ginny Weasley, don't you?"

"Yes, Hermione informed me just yesterday, along with a few other things." Severus smirked. "I must say I never expected you to marry again. Especially to Ginny Weasley. She's quite young."

Lucius chuckled. "Well, I didn't marry an eleven-year-old, Severus. She's grown to be quite a beautiful woman. After the final battle when everyone thought she was dead, I found her in one of the towers and took her back to the hospital wing. She was still very young, only fifteen at the time." Lucius stood and opened the French doors leading to the gardens.

"I continued to visit her after she recuperated, and when I visited Draco at the University I often ran into her. We developed a friendship, and then one day I realized she wasn't a child anymore. I hadn't seen her for several months at one point, and then one day I literally walked right into her at the Ministry." Lucius walked back to his chair and sat down in front of Severus again.

"Ginny had me quite speechless for several moments; I knew right then and there that I would make her my wife. Thankfully she felt the same way, and here we are."

"I'm happy for you, I really am," said Severus.

"Severus, I just can't believe you are really here. What happened to you that day? We searched for days." Lucius leaned forward, trying to get closer to his friend.

Severus shook his head. "I don't really know very much about it. I was called into the throne room. Wormtail was there, as usual with his nose halfway up Voldemort's ass, then suddenly I blacked out. Every so often I would wake up only to realize I was being kicked and beaten. But, I would just black out again. The next thing I knew, I was in my bed at Hogwarts."

"Poppy said that your brain was in stasis, that you had no thought patterns. Is that right? Did you not dream anything?" asked Lucius in wonder.

"I can't say that I did. It's all just one blank space. When Albus told me I'd been asleep for ten years I couldn't believe it. But looking at Hermione, I knew it had to be true. One minute she's an annoying sixth year student and the next minute, she's a Potions mistress and has taken over my job."

"Yes, I imagine that was quite a shock," agreed Lucius as he laughed.

"There was one shock that was quite a welcome one. He's gone," Severus stated, knowing Lucius would know who he was talking about.

"We finally did it. In the end Albus and Harry took him on. He never stood a chance." Lucius then looked pensive. "One thing has always bothered me about that day, though."

Severus looked at his friend with a worried expression.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Severus, when the time came, he looked... almost serene, as though he'd expected it. I saw him as he was dying and the look on his face was one of, 'I know something that you don't,'" Lucius said as he shook his head. "Perhaps I just imagined it. Either way, it doesn't matter now. He's gone."

Just then, Ginny walked into the room. She was smiling and wobbling slightly.

"Severus!" She approached Severus and happily kissed him on the cheek. "I can't tell you how happy we are that you're here."

Lucius saw the shocked expression on the Potions master's face and laughed.

"Ginny, darling you'll have to give Severus a moment. The last time he saw you, you were a fifth year student who called him 'sir.' He's not used to seeing a former fifteen-year-old student now a grown-up and very pregnant married woman."

Ginny looked worried. "Oh, I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking, please forgive me." The last thing Ginny wanted to do was offend her former professor. After all, he was her husband's oldest and closest friend, and an Order member.

"It's quite all right, uh...Ginny. There are many things that will take some getting used to now in my life. By the state of your condition, congratulations are in order."

"This is our first. We're hoping for a boy," said Lucius.

Ginny patted Lucius' shoulder lovingly.

"He's hoping for a boy. I want a girl. Although he would most probably spoil any girl we have rotten, and I won't have any of that." Ginny gave Lucius a Molly Weasley look the kind that said "I won't have any of that" then walked towards the hallway. As she left the sitting room she called over her shoulder, "I'm going to check to make sure your room is ready, Severus, and then we can all have some lunch."

The two men continued reminiscing and catching up on what had been happening in the wizarding world. Lucius now owned several Muggle electronic firms which he ran with the help of Draco and Harry. Even though they were Aurors, they had plenty of down time and were able to help Lucius with his business. Thankfully, the wizarding world was calmer than it used to be. He admitted to being upset when he first found out his son was never going to give him a grandchild and carry on the family name, but eventually realized that Draco was merely following his own path in life. Then of course when Lucius married Ginny, he knew that he would have more children who would have children of their own. The Malfoy line would not die out with his firstborn.

As evening drew near, Severus found out that there was more company coming. Draco and Harry were expected to stop by for dinner, with Ron Weasley in tow. Apparently it was the custom for the three young men to come to dinner either on Saturday or Sunday. Draco was eager to see Severus, so Saturday dinner it was. Hermione also came to dinner often, but since she spent much of her time grading papers and getting new lesson plans together, she didn't stop by as often. Severus was surprised to find himself hoping she would come by. He hadn't had a chance to speak with her very much and was curious to talk to her in a more social setting.

Severus made his way downstairs. He noticed Ginny passing quickly, walking into the living room. For a brief moment he grabbed onto the railing and stopped.

At that moment, Voldemort surfaced. He took a deep breath and his nostrils filled with a scent he hadn't encountered for many years.

"Ginny," he whispered. He continued to walk down the stairs but only for a few seconds; he wasn't strong enough to continue and was pushed back into the darkness.

Severus again returned to himself. Severus shook his head and looked around. He'd blacked out for a bit, but seemed fine. He wasn't dizzy, nor did he feel like he would pass out. Severus knew that it would most likely take some time for his body to return to normal. He'd been feeling strange since he awoke from his ten-year slumber and he decided that some research was needed. As soon as he returned to Hogwarts he would make use of the Restricted Section in the library and research the curse he'd been hit with.

As Severus reached the bottom of the stairs, he heard several voices coming from the living room. He walked in and saw three young men speaking with Lucius, and Ginny sitting on the couch next to Hermione. They all looked up as soon as they noticed Lucius looking his way.

"Severus, just in time," Lucius stated.

Draco immediately walked towards Severus and embraced his godfather.

"You're back, I can't believe you're back," said the young wizard with tears in his eyes.

Severus slowly wound his arms around the young man; he was not comfortable with the open display of emotion, but this was his godson. A young man that he now realized had grown into a handsome wizard.

Severus pulled back and looked at Draco. "I can't believe how you've grown. You look just like your father," said Severus, just before he noticed Harry approaching him.

"Good to have you back, professor," said Harry, with his hand outstretched.

Severus gazed at the young man who now more than ever resembled his old enemy, James Potter.

"Harry, thank you. I hear you and Draco are Aurors," Severus said as he shook Harry's hand.

"Yes, for the past seven years now," answered Harry.

Ron also approached Severus and congratulated him on his return. After a few more brief words, they all walked quietly to the dining room and sat down to dinner and continued their conversations.

"So how does it feel to wake up after ten years?" asked Draco.

"Quite frankly, it's like some odd dream. I can't get over some of the changes around me. For the most part things aren't very different, but I look at you all and the reality of what happened to me is all too obvious."

"You'll get used to it all," Harry said confidently.

"I have no choice but to do just that," Severus answered then looked to Draco once again. "What exactly do your Auror duties entail?" he asked as he took a sip of wine.

"Bugging Harry all night!" yelled Ron suddenly.

Severus coughed and sprayed wine all over himself as Lucius nearly choked on a piece of chicken he'd been chewing.

"Ronald!" yelled Ginny.

Hermione looked at Harry and Draco.

"Didn't you give him his potion before coming here?" she asked accusingly.

Harry looked to Draco.

"We took him to St. Mungo's today. You know we can't give him your potion when we take him there," Harry said to Hermione, as Draco helped Severus get some of the wine off of himself. Ginny was also doing her best to make sure her husband didn't asphyxiate on his food.

"We had to give him the medicine the healers gave him," stated Draco.

"Well, it's obviously not working," managed Lucius as he wiped his mouth and took a drink of water.

"I'm sorry, Professor, he's usually not like this," said Harry.

Severus looked at Ron, who was acting like nothing had happened.

"Is he normally more...subdued with his choice of words?" asked Severus, still looking at Ron.

"When he takes the potion I developed for him, yes," Hermione explained. "But he still needs to go and see the healers. He can't take my potion when he's examined by them."

"If your potion works better for him, then why don't you market it and offer it to others who suffer from his malady?" asked Severus.

Hermione shook her head.

"It's still not perfected. It works well enough, but it makes him very lethargic. He's like a zombie at times. I've been working on it off and on but...I just...I," she bowed her head and wiped a tear threatening to escape the corner of her eye.

"It's all right, Hermione. We know you are doing what you can. You have a job that keeps you very busy," said Ginny, trying to console her friend.

From teaching her for six years, Severus knew Hermione to be a very dedicated and smart young woman. He also knew that she cared deeply for her friends.

"Perhaps there may be something I can help you with," he said, looking Hermione's way. Hermione lifted her head and looked at him with sparkling eyes. "Maybe if I looked at your notes, I would be able to see if you missed anything."

At this Hermione smiled.

"If it's not too much trouble, yes, I'd like that. Thank you, Severus." She smiled at him and he felt something inside of him stir.

They all remained silent for a few seconds, then resumed their meal.

The rest of the evening was thankfully free of any further outbursts from Ron. After several hours of catching up, Draco, Harry and Ron headed home. Hermione stayed a while longer but spent most of her time with Ginny, where they took the opportunity to discuss the Potions master's return.

"I couldn't believe it when Lucius told me, Hermione," said Ginny, as she sipped her hot chocolate.

"I couldn't believe it myself. I was giving him his daily strengthening potion and he began to stir. I thought I was imagining things at first, but no."

"Do you think he'll want his old job back?" questioned Ginny.

Hermione's eyes opened wide, "I hadn't thought of that. I wouldn't blame him if he did, but Ginny, I love my job." Hermione was curious if Severus had already spoken to Albus regarding taking up his old position. She'd hoped that the fact that neither man had said anything to her about it, meant she had nothing to worry about.

"Well, Lucius told me that Hogwarts was going to lose its DADA professor at the end of the term." Ginny thought that telling Hermione what Lucius had confided to her a few days prior would help ease her mind.

"I wondered if Professor Stump would continue teaching after his accident," mused Hermione.

"Well, at least now Stump isn't just his last name," Ginny said as she gave Hermione a weak smile.

"Ginny, that's horrible! The man's lost half his leg."

"Oh, Hermione, it'll grow back. The spell was only temporary. And besides, what kind of a DADA teacher is he that he can't even prevent himself from being hit with a Limb Deflating Hex when he's teaching shield charms to third years."

They laughed and continued to talk until it grew late. After Hermione decided to just Floo back to her rooms instead of Apparating, she and Ginny walked back to the living room where the large fireplace was located.

"Thank you for having me, Lucius. I think it's time for me to get back to my rooms." Hermione kissed Lucius on the cheek, then Ginny.

"You know you are welcome here any time, Hermione. Thank you for stopping by," said Lucius.

Hermione looked towards Severus.

"I'll see you back at Hogwarts, Severus." She smiled, took a handful of powder and disappeared.

"Well, I'm tired. I think I'll go to bed. Goodnight, Severus, Lucius." Ginny kissed Lucius lightly on the lips, then whispered in his ear, "Don't be up to bed late, love." She walked out of the room and up the stairs.

Lucius smiled after his wife.

"Draco certainly has grown up to be a fine young man," noted Severus.

Lucius turned to look at his friend.

"Yes, he has. I'm very proud of him. He and Harry manage to help me run my companies while keeping their duties as Aurors and caring for Ron Weasley. Thankfully the wizarding world has been quiet for many years. Being an Auror doesn't require fulltime duties as it used to." Lucius poured two glasses of brandy and handed one to Severus.

They sat down next to the fire.

"You really have taken his relationship with Harry well," Severus said as he took a sip of brandy.

"I didn't at first. But, I realized that if I didn't support his decision, I might lose Draco. And Harry really is a good balancing influence for him. The relationship seems to work, so who am I to say anything about it."

They quietly sipped their brandy, when Severus began to feel tired. He suddenly lost consciousness, never realizing what was happening to him.

Voldemort became aware that he was sitting next to a fire and sipping some type of alcoholic beverage. He looked across from him and saw Lucius and smiled. He remembered seeing Lucius being held by Order members during the final battle. What he didn't realize was that Lucius was working for the Order and he was being held up by some of his fellow members after being hit with a Slicing Hex.

"I am so glad you lived, Lucius," Voldemort finally said.

Lucius chuckled at hearing Severus' voice. "So am I. There were moments, before and during the final battle, when I didn't think I would come out alive." Lucius closed his eyes thinking back to those unsure days.

"I admit to feeling the same way at times." Severus' voice suddenly took on a dark quality.

Lucius opened his eyes and looked at him, as Severus' eyes stared into the fire.

"Although had things worked in my favor from the beginning, there would have been no need to question myself in the end."

"Question yourself? Severus, whatever are you going on about?" Lucius wasn't sure what to make of Severus' words.

As though snapped back into reality, Severus turned to Lucius, blinking wildly. He'd come back to himself.

"I'm sorry, Lucius, going on about what?" Severus asked.

Lucius shook his head. "Nothing, never mind. I think we should go to bed. It's been a long day."

They finished their drinks and walked up the stairs. As they bid each other goodnight, Lucius watched as Severus went inside his guest room. He wondered what Severus had meant before. His words didn't make sense. Lucius hoped that Severus' mind hadn't suffered any ill effects due to the curse he'd been under. His friend would have to be watched closely.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

I hope you all enjoyed this chapter. As you can see, Lucius is beginning to notice something odd about Severus.

Little things

Chapter 5 of 18

Lucius notices something odd and Voldemort gets bolder.

Thank you to all of you who have taken the time to read and review this story so far. I appreciate all of your wonderful comments.

I've got another chapter ready as you can see, so enough talk.

All canon characters belong to JKR. I make no money from this.

Thanks again to June who I could not do this without.

Chapter 5 Little things

The rest of the weekend went by without incident. Lucius watched Severus closely. There was an odd pull Lucius felt whenever his friend was nearby. He couldn't explain it, but thought perhaps it was due to the fact that they were both the only two original Death Eaters to have served Voldemort to be left alive and free. All others had either been given the Dementor's Kiss while in Azkaban, or they died on the battlefield. Lucius thought there might be some sort of unknown connection between him and Severus due to the Dark Mark they still bore. A Mark that Lucius was also now becoming concerned with.

After Severus went back to Hogwarts Castle on Sunday evening, Lucius sat in his study with the door locked and warded. He examined his Dark Mark; it had been almost invisible for the last ten years, yet now he could plainly see a faint outline. He wasn't sure what it meant, other than it might have had something to do with Severus' recovery. For now, he would keep quiet. So much had happened over the last three days; maybe he was just imagining things.

For his part, Severus arrived at Hogwarts relaxed and ready to begin planning his DADA classes for the coming school year. As he walked down to his rooms in the dungeons, he ran into Hermione who was on her way down from the library.

"Hello, Severus. Are you just coming back from Malfoy Manor?" she asked as she tried to keep the stack of books she carried from falling. Severus reached and took three volumes from her. She smiled. "Thank you."

"Why don't you just levitate these down here?" asked Severus.

"I like carrying books." They walked down the cool hallway quietly. Hermione decided this might be a good time to ask Severus if he was planning on asking for his old job back. "I was wondering if I could ask you something."

"You ask a question?" he said playfully.

She rolled her eyes and smiled. His long sleep seemed to have mellowed him slightly.

"I wondered what you were planning on doing now that you are back." Hermione bit her lip and looked at him nervously.

They stopped and Severus looked down at her. She was shorter than him; the top of her head just about reached his shoulder.

"I'm going to continue teaching. What did you think I would do?" he said, knowing she was inquiring if he would be taking his old post.

"Oh." She hoped that he'd be teaching the DADA position, and not want his old post back. "I suppose you want to go back to your old position, teaching potions then." She asked, sounding a bit dejected.

He smirked. "I have no interest in my old post. I had to deal with trying to keep these incompetents from blowing their own heads off for almost twenty years, Hermione. I will be teaching something safer, Defense Against Dark Arts."

Hermione raised her eyebrows in surprise.

"You think teaching them Defense Against Dark Arts is safer?"

"You've only been teaching potions for six years. Wait another six and then ask me that again." They arrived at her door and he placed her books back on her pile she was carrying. "Goodnight. I shall see you in the morning." With that he swept down the hall to his own rooms.

Severus walked down the hall, robes billowing behind him. The dark-haired wizard stopped just before he entered his rooms and looked back. He was no longer Severus; Voldemort was now infiltrating his consciousness easier. While he was still too weak to take over Severus' body completely, it was getting easier for him to slip in and out and take Severus' place. Voldemort watched a small young witch trying to enter her rooms. She was carrying several large volumes in her arms. Voldemort wondered who she was; she was quite pretty and young, but the best part was that she looked very innocent.

He decided to take advantage of his possession of Severus' body. Hoping that he could keep himself in it long enough to establish who the young woman was, he walked back towards Hermione and stopped just behind her.

"You seem to need help," he said.

Hermione turned quickly. Not expecting him or anyone to have come up behind her, she dropped her books.

"Severus, you scared the devil out of me." Her heart pounding, she bent down and began to gather the books. Voldemort-as-Severus bent down to help her quietly. "I know, I know, you don't have to say it. Why don't you just levitate them or open the door with your wand. I really don't mind doing things without magic. After all, you know I'm used to it." She laughed quietly.

"You should try it, you know, Severus. It's really not that bad. I remember one summer I spent home with my parents, I didn't use one bit of magic to do anything. I guess that's one of the advantages of having Muggle parents. I know sometimes things are harder to do, but I suppose I get a certain sense of accomplishment doing them this way."

Hermione never noticed the stiffening in Severus' body when she said the word "Muggle." He handed her the books when he stood and continued to stare wordlessly at her.

'Well well, a filthy little Mudblood,' thought Voldemort.

Hermione managed to turn the door handle and open the door to her rooms. She turned to him and smiled.

"Thank you again, for your help."

Voldemort knew he couldn't do anything to her here in Hogwarts, with all its protective wards, house-elves, and ghosts. He also wondered how it was that the Mudblood was on such friendly terms with Severus. He further wondered if perhaps he could have a little fun with her. After all, he would take over Severus' body on a fulltime basis very soon. He never liked the thought of having sex in his serpentine-like body. But Severus had a body he could have a good time with.

The woman he really wanted was Ginny. She was a pureblood after all, but there was nothing wrong with having a toy in the meantime. He smiled and placed his hand on the door frame.

"It was my pleasure, Miss..." He caught himself, realizing he didn't even know her name.

Hermione laughed. "Oh, are we back to Miss Granger? I suppose it will take getting used to calling me by my first name. But I would rather we remain on first-name basis. Hermione isn't so hard to say, is it?"

Voldemort-as-Severus smiled. "No, Hermione is not hard to say at all." The low purring manner in which he mentioned her name had her quivering. Had it not been dark in her doorway he might have seen her blush. He did however sense it. There was a heat emanating from her that he felt, so he knew that he'd gotten to her with those few words. She would be a very easy target. Seducing her would be quite delicious.

"Th...thank you again, Severus." Hermione closed the door and dropped the books at her feet. She felt her face and knew she'd have to take a very cold shower. The way Severus looked at her, and the way he said her name made her wonder if he was making a pass at her. But then, what else could it have been?

On the other side of the door, Voldemort smiled evilly. Had anyone passed at that moment they would have seen what seemed to be a flicker of fire in the Potions master's dark eyes. Feeling himself slipping, he walked back to Severus' door.

Once there, Severus returned to consciousness in his body and opened the door as though nothing happened. The entire incident with Hermione was unknown to him.

It had only taken Voldemort a few days to make Severus' possessions seamless.

The next morning at breakfast, Severus asked Hermione for her notes on the potion she'd been making for Ron. Hermione felt her face warm as soon as he said her name and hoped he didn't notice. He did.

After breakfast, they walked down to Hermione's office together. Severus noticed Hermione stealing glances at him as they walked quietly, and every so often she would brush up against him slightly. He immediately caught on, of course. She was young and probably spent most of her time after Hogwarts studying to get her Potions mistress certificate. No doubt she hadn't dated much, so she wasn't in tune with the fine art of subtlety. Still, he thought it was amusing that she was trying to get close to him.

When they arrived at Hermione's office he looked around. It used to be his office when he taught Potions. She'd made some changes, adding a very comfortable looking couch as well as a few feminine touches a vase here, a few curtains there. He looked at her as she shuffled through the papers on her desk, trying to tidy the place up. It seemed she was slightly disorganized when it came to her desk, which was fine, since he tended to be the same way. Actually, his was a disorganized mess. He knew perfectly well what was on his desk, it just looked like hell.

He noticed Hermione looking through a small flat box behind her desk. He took a moment to study her features better, since she didn't know he was looking at her. But she did know.

Severus realized that it was getting easier and easier to think of her as a woman and not as a child or his former student. Her face had matured as well as her body. Hermione was a woman, and a pretty one, he decided. He took a seat on the couch and thought a bit more about her. The war had been over for ten years. The wizarding world was calmer and safer than ever. She also didn't seem repulsed by him. Actually, now that he thought about it, she smiled at him quite a bit. Perhaps he would attempt to flirt with her and see if she would reciprocate. Then he would know if he could go further. She was intelligent and responsible and if she accepted his advances, then he might at long last be able to have an open relationship with a woman. That was something he'd never been able to do in the past. Being a spy didn't make it easy for a man to have a relationship with a woman.

He'd seen what losing Narcissa did to Lucius. His friend had been devastated at the loss of his wife. Their marriage was an arranged one, but they both grew to love each other deeply. Narcissa could be snobbish at times, but she was always there whenever someone needed help.

"Here it is," Hermione said as she held up a yellow file and walked towards Severus.

He was jolted from his reverie and looked up at her as he took the file from her hands. As he did, their fingers lightly brushed against each other. Severus looked into Hermione's eyes.

She laughed softly, then tucked a long curl behind her ear. "I hope you can find where I've made my mistake."

"Nonsense," Severus said as he stood. "I'm sure there are no mistakes. Creating a potion for a specific ailment or person takes time. I'm sure all of your ingredients are correct. I'm guessing all you need would be a slight change in some measurements and brewing time." He smiled genuinely at her, hoping to ease her nervousness.

Hermione looked at him closely. The night before, when he came back to her door, he smiled at her, and he seemed almost predatory. Today, he seemed different; his eyes and posture were more relaxed.

"Anything you can add or change would be so helpful." Hermione walked to her desk and continued to shuffle papers around. Just standing next to him was giving her butterflies. "I hope you weren't put off by what Ron said. He can't help it."

"I know it isn't his fault. Actually, it wasn't any different than the things he used to say." His words didn't have any bite, and Hermione laughed.

"Somehow I always thought you would be the one to notice something like that."

They stared at one another uncomfortably for a few moments, then Severus waved the file in front of him and began to walk away.

"I suppose I should leave you to your grading, Hermione. I'll have a look at this today and let you know if I can help you work something out during lunch." He opened the door and walked out, not turning back to look at her. "Have a good morning."

Hermione sat at her desk and rested her chin on her hand. She looked in the direction he'd just gone. She imagined herself sitting with him in her favorite bookshop just down the street from her parents' home. In her mind's eye, she and Severus would be talking about books and theories and sharing some biscuits. Would he ever be interested in doing something so mundane with her, she wondered.

She shook her head and decided to get on with her grading. School would be out soon, and she wanted to make sure she wasn't sending out final grades at the last minute. Deciding the best thing to do would be to just let things happen, she dipped her quill in red ink, and began to scratch away.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

That's it for this chapter. As you can see, Voldemort is getting better at coming through, and both he and Severus have their sights set on Hermione.

I'm hoping to have chapter 6 finished soon and ready to post by the end of the week.

Thank you for reading.

That Can't Be My Friend

Chapter 6 of 18

Voldemort gets bolder and Lucius isn't the only one that notices something is going on.

I wasn't planning on adding this chapter until tomorrow, but I'm leaving pretty early for a long weekend and decided to just go ahead and post it tonight. I plan to do some writing over the Memorial Day holiday so hopefully I'll have plenty of chapters for June to have a look at.

I'd like to thank everyone who has taken the time to read and review this story. I really appreciate all of your wonderful comments.

All canon characters belong to JKR. All I get from this are your lovely reviews and a big smile on my face.

Thanks go to June for all of her help and suggestions.

Chapter 6 That Can't Be My Friend

Severus spent most of the morning looking over Hermione's notes on the potion she'd created for Ron Weasley. As he suspected, all of the ingredients she used were correct; however, the order in which they were added to the potion and the amounts used needed some slight tweaking. As he studied the potion, he realized she really was a brilliant young woman. It took some Potions Masters and Mistresses years and years to begin developing their own potions, and according to the date on her notes, Hermione began not two years after receiving her certificate.

He made some notes for her to look at and began to walk to the Great Hall. He thought he would offer to help her fix the potion, and wondered if she would accept his help. If she did, it might be a good opportunity to get to know her better.

As Severus walked to the Great Hall, he remembered that he wanted to check out some books in the library to research the curse he'd been under. He looked at his pocket watch; there was time enough for him to have a look at a few books, and then go to lunch.

When he arrived at the library, it was empty. Madam Pince had a sign on her desk, saying that she was having lunch. Noting the time posted on the sign he realized he had just missed her. This meant that no students were allowed to pass through the doors. Severus smiled; he'd have the library all to himself. He walked to the Restricted Section and picked out a few books that he knew held old dark spells, and sat down on one of the large tables next to the window. There he sat and began to look through the books.

This was the perfect moment for Voldemort to make his move. He was beginning to feel when Severus was relaxed and in a calm state. Voldemort was getting to the point where he felt he would soon be able to control the length of time he took over Severus' body, but he wasn't quite there yet. It would make things easier though once he was finally in fulltime control. Until then, he'd wait; he was good at waiting. Even though he'd managed to speak with "the Mudblood" the night before for a short while, that appearance alone exhausted him. However, he felt himself growing stronger.

Voldemort looked around. He was in the library, and realized he was in the Restricted Section. He looked down at the table and noticed the book Severus had been looking at. He laughed.

"Trying to figure it all out, eh Severus?" He marked the page and then closed the book and replaced it on the shelf, but he left the other books unopened on the table. Books were commonly left on the tables, and he was too lazy to replace all of them. "By the time you realize what's happening, Severus, it will be too late for you, and that pretty little Mudblood."

Voldemort walked out of the library. He noticed the time on the clock sitting on the desk as he left. It was lunchtime and no doubt the castle staff as well as the students would be in the Great Hall. As he walked down the hall, his thoughts were on Ginny. While he hadn't thought about it before, he wondered now why he picked up Ginny's scent earlier. He'd surmised that a day had passed, perhaps two. He knew that he had been at Lucius' home after he encountered Ginny's scent.

He thought hard and realized that as he spoke briefly with Lucius, Ginny had to have been there. Her scent was all over the room; he could smell her as well as the baby he now realized she was carrying. He then laughed. 'Of course!' he thought to himself.

Lucius had always been such a cunning Death Eater. No doubt he talked his way out of Azkaban, just like he'd done in the past. He most probably seduced the young Ginny Weasley and married her in order to look as though he'd reformed.

"Oh, Lucius, you are truly one of a kind," Voldemort mused aloud. There was little doubt in Voldemort's mind that Lucius cared nothing for the woman. It would be easy to take her away from him. As a matter of fact, he was sure that Lucius would most probably offer her freely once he told him who he really was.

Voldemort walked to the Great Hall quickly.

When the doors opened Hermione noticed it was Severus.

Albus also looked up to see Severus stalking down the aisle. He began to feel an odd foreboding suddenly coming over him. Not realizing he'd been ignoring Minerva's question, he stopped staring at the oncoming DADA professor.

"I'm sorry, Minerva, what did you say?" Albus asked the witch next to him.

"Honestly, Albus. I don't know where your mind is today. You've been acting odd all morning. What's the matter with you?" asked a ruffled Minerva.

"Just the usual end-of-school-year thoughts." Albus patted her hand and continued on with his lunch. As Severus walked past him, he closed his eyes. There was a chill in the air. It was an odd thing, Albus thought. He nodded to Severus as the younger wizard looked at him, smirked, and nodded. Albus frowned, and looked back to his plate. Something was off.

"Did you have any luck with the file?" Hermione asked Severus as she took a bite of her fish.

Voldemort looked to her, and then adjusted his seat so that he was a little closer to the table. He tried to remember if there was anything on the table in the library, earlier. 'The file,' he thought. 'Ah, yes.' He did recall seeing something else on the table.

"Yes, I had some luck. Perhaps I might drop it off to you later?" he asked.

"I have some free time before my final class." Hermione was excited. It seemed he'd found where she could improve on her potion for Ron. "Is three o'clock all right?"

"I have no other plans, three is fine."

As Voldemort began to fill his plate, Lucius' hawk flew into the Great Hall. Instead of landing on Severus' shoulder as he had done previously, the hawk landed on the edge of the table. He looked at the dark wizard as though he wasn't sure who he was. Hermione looked from the hawk to Severus. After several moments, Hector approached Severus. He knew that there was something odd about Severus, but couldn't quite grasp what it was. Animals were very much attuned to those close to them. This man had the body and face he recognized, but there was something about his aura that bothered Hector. Still, he was here to deliver a note, and that's what he would do.

"Hector is acting a bit odd," said Hermione. "What do you suppose is wrong with him?"

Voldemort narrowed his eyes at the bird, and slowly reached for the note. Hector held out his leg and allowed the man to take the note, then hopped back away slightly.

"Perhaps he's under the weather." Voldemort knew perfectly well what was wrong with the bird. He knew who it belonged to, and he also knew that the hawk was suspicious of him. He unrolled the small scroll and began to read its contents:

Severus,

I will be accompanying Ginny and her mother to Hogsmeade this afternoon in order for them to finish buying a few things before the baby's arrival.

Do be a good friend and HELP ME! Perhaps we can have some drinks at the Three Broomsticks while they do some damage to my vaults.

Send along your answer with Hector.

Your desperate friend,

Lucius

Voldemort looked to Hermione. "Might you have something to write with?"

"Yes." Hermione reached into her pocket and took out a pen and handed it to him.

"Lucius has asked me to accompany him to Hogsmeade. It seems he wishes to avoid being dragged about the town by his wife and mother-in-law." He wrote a note to confirm that he would meet Lucius, and placed the note carefully back onto the hawk's leg. Hector immediately flew away, not looking back.

"Oh, that's fine. Maybe we can meet this evening?" she asked hopefully.

He slowly turned his head and looked at her, his eyes resting on her lips, which she was unconsciously licking.

"Yes, this evening would be more...convenient." He would have to make it a point to be there. He looked down at his place and decided it was best to get back to the library. He didn't want to push his luck, and he felt his control of Severus' body slipping.

"I just realized that I have forgotten something in the library. I shall see you this evening, Hermione." Voldemort made sure to let her name roll off his tongue with a slight rumble, one she instantly felt in her belly. He thanked the gods that Severus had the kind of voice that could turn a woman's insides into a volcanic inferno. Voldemort could almost see the heat rising off of Hermione's skin. He stood and walked quickly out of the Great Hall, with two pairs of eyes watching him but for different reasons.

Voldemort quickly walked back to the library. He went directly to the Restricted Section and took out the book Severus had been looking through and opened it to the page he'd had opened. He then sat down. He felt himself growing weak and briefly wondered if he should scroll a message down to alert the real Severus of his meeting with Lucius. Unless he gave him some notice about it, no doubt Lucius would mention something about him not showing up. "Think, dammit, think," he muttered to himself. He quickly conjured a piece of parchment and wrote a note

Remember to meet Lucius at the Three Broomsticks today.

He then placed the note into his pocket next to the pocket watch. Not bothering to think more of it, and hoping that Severus would just think himself getting forgetful, he sat quietly until the real Severus took over.

Severus was in control of his body once more. He stared down at the page and decided to check out the book. It would probably serve to at least steer him in the right direction. He put the other books back on the shelf and took Hermione's file along with the book to check out to Madam Pince's desk. He was going to write her a note but as he approached the librarian's desk saw that she was back.

"I was going to leave you a note," said Severus. "I thought you had gone to lunch already."

The witch looked at him over her glasses. "I did go to lunch, I've returned."

Severus looked at her oddly. He knew he couldn't have been there for more than a few minutes, and her sign indicated that she had just left. *'She must have inhaled her food,'* he thought.

"Well, I'm checking this out. I will return it in a few days." He showed her the book and she made note of it. Severus turned to leave and decided to look at the time. He was shocked to see that it was twenty-five minutes past the time he'd arrived at the library. He stopped and leaned back against the wall next to him. He then looked down and saw a note on the ground next to him. He picked it up and read it.

"I don't remember writing this." He felt a chill run down his spine. Something strange was happening, but he couldn't put his finger on it. He was losing time, yet he didn't feel like he'd blacked out, not like when he was at Lucius' home.

"What's happening to me?" he whispered to himself. He walked to his rooms and decided to write Hermione a note. He'd take her file and leave it in her office, with a note on top of the file. He felt off-kilter and didn't want to talk to her at the moment. He scribbled a note that he was going to meet Lucius and that he would talk to her about the potion that evening.

Thinking that a walk around Hogsmeade might do him some good, Severus left quickly. He needed to get away from Hogwarts for a few hours and get his head straightened out.

Severus Apparated to the Three Broomsticks. He ignored the stares and whispers and walked to a table in the back, and immediately ordered a firewhisky. Lucky for him Rosmerta wasn't there or else she would have talked his ear off, and he certainly wasn't in the mood for that.

After nearly half an hour Lucius walked through the doors. He looked around and spotted Severus in the back and walked towards him.

"Ah, there you are. I've been looking for you, Severus." Lucius sat down and motioned for the waitress. "I gather you didn't get my last message on when to meet. I was here earlier and thought you might be walking around." Lucius draped his cloak on the chair next to him and set his cane against the table.

Severus shook his head. He wondered if he should tell Lucius something odd was happening to him. But then he thought better of it. Lucius would worry, and he had enough to worry about with Ginny getting so close to having the baby.

"You know, Hector was acting a bit odd when he came back from Hogwarts." Lucius ordered a vodka martini then looked back to Severus. "Did you notice anything strange about him when he delivered your note?"

Severus gulped down what was left of his firewhisky as he realized that whatever note Lucius had sent with Hector, he didn't remember getting it.

"He...he seemed fine." Severus tried to keep his cool. He'd been a spy for many years, so he had that on his side.

The two men sat and talked for several hours, after which Severus decided it might be a good idea to ask his friend if he could confide in him. Before he could have the chance, it was time for Voldemort to make another appearance.

When Voldemort came through, he'd hoped to be with Hermione, but he'd miscalculated the time. As it turned out he was sitting once again with Lucius.

"I almost forgot to tell you, it turns out that I'm going to be a grandfather after all," said Lucius as he swirled his olive in his martini glass. "Draco and Harry are adopting a baby."

Voldemort spewed the contents of his mouth all over the table.

"Severus, are you all right?" Lucius stood and began patting Severus on the back as he coughed.

"What the bloody hell?" thought Voldemort. He managed to control his coughing and wiped his mouth along with his coat.

Lucius cast a Scouring Charm on the table and sat back down.

"I'm sorry; it must have gone down the wrong way." Voldemort cursed himself. Another reaction like that and Lucius would surely think something was amiss. "A baby, you say?"

"Yes, a little orphan. His parents died last month in some cruise ship disaster in the Muggle world. It turns out the little one is a wizard. He was found by the Ministry Child Services Department."

Severus' face twisted in disgust, something Lucius immediately noticed.

"How...nice for the little...child," managed Voldemort. He waved his hand and called for a drink. The waitress set down another firewhisky in front of him and he took a long sip. "Although, I'm a bit surprised at you, Lucius."

Lucius set down his glass and leaned back in his chair.

"And why is that?"

"A Muggleborn child? I thought you of all people would want only a Pureblood in your family."

Without realizing what he'd just done, Voldemort succeeded in alerting Lucius for certain that something was going on with Severus.

The Severus that Lucius knew would never talk like that. But Lucius had no idea just exactly what was happening; perhaps this was just a side-effect of the unknown curse Severus had been under for ten years. Thinking it would be best to just let the conversation run its course; Lucius did what he did best. He skirted around the subject entirely.

"Well, you know, we must all do what we must when we live in the public eye." Lucius smiled and called for the check.

At that moment, Ginny was walking in. Molly had to Floo back home immediately, after Fred and George managed to find her and told her that both their twins had set fire to the Burrow's garden.

Happy with Lucius' explanation, Voldemort noticed Ginny approaching them. Both men stood when she reached the table.

"Back so soon?" asked Lucius, trying to sound unperturbed.

"Well, something about the two twins and fire. Mother had to go back home." Ginny kissed Lucius on the cheek, and looked to Severus.

"Ginny," said Voldemort. His eyes grew darker for a moment, as Ginny reached to take his hand.

"Severus." She looked at him questioningly. For a moment she thought she had seen something in his eyes. She felt a shiver as he took her hand; coldness filled her body.

Lucius noticed her face pale slightly.

"Ginny? You don't look well," he said to his wife.

"I'm just a bit tired, that's all. Maybe I should be getting home." Ginny wrapped her cloak around herself tighter as Lucius held her close to him.

"Severus, I'm sorry, but I should take her home." Lucius gathered his cloak and cane. "I'll speak with you this week." He turned and walked away with Ginny in tow. He paid their bill on his way out.

Voldemort followed them out the door soon after. He walked down to the Apparation point and went back to Hogwarts. He knew that Severus would no doubt wonder how he'd gotten back to school, but a bit of firewhisky on his cloak should do the trick. Severus would assume he'd had too much to drink, that's all.

When he returned to Severus' rooms, Voldemort realized he would most probably not be able to make the meeting with Hermione. He was surprised that he was still there; this was the longest time that he had actually been in Severus' body. But he was tired, and knew that Severus would emerge soon and he would have to fall back once again. Voldemort wondered why Lucius would allow his son to adopt a Muggleborn child. What's more, he couldn't understand the fact that Draco Malfoy was gay and with Harry Potter of all people. No matter. When he took over Severus' body for good, all would be righted.

By his calculations he would be in full possession of this body before long. And when he did, there would be no stopping him this time.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

I hope you all enjoyed this chapter and that the changing back and forth isn't too confusing. I'm trying to keep it as clear as possible.

Thank you for reading.

Getting Close To Hermione

Chapter 7 of 18

Severus and Hermione seem to have more in common than they both thought.

Sorry its taken me longer than normal to get this chapter up, but my long weekend consisted of reading and drinking. Not in that order.

I've tried my hand at some lemons, maybe more like strong lemonade, but I'm pretty satisfied this time.

All canon characters belong to JKR

Thanks to June for all of her help and suggestions.

Chapter 7 Getting close to Hermione

Severus woke up on his living room couch. He felt slightly dizzy as he sat up and looked around the room. He looked down at his cloak and smelled firewhisky.

"At least this time I know why I blacked out." He stood up and felt his head pounding slightly. Obviously he'd had too much to drink with Lucius. He also missed lunch, at least he thought he did, so no doubt that added to his current state. He walked to the bathroom and stripped his clothing off and turned on the shower. As he let the steam form, he went to the medicine cabinet and looked for some Hangover Potion, something that had an eternal shelf life. Severus remembered he'd always kept at least a bottle or two for those times when he drank to help him forget the death and chaos he'd witnessed during a raid. Luckily for him, there was one bottle, which he greedily drank down. The relief was instant. Once his head stopped pounding he got into the shower.

"What time is it?" Severus called out. When he'd first arrived at Hogwarts as a teacher, he charmed one of the stones making up the shower wall to show the time of day. That way he would know how much time he had to shower and get ready for class. He had similar objects around his rooms charmed the same way. It was now a quarter to eight in the evening.

"How long did I sleep?" he wondered aloud to himself. He washed his body slowly, thinking about the last several days. He'd never felt the loss of control over his own mind as much as he had at that moment. He knew that the last time he'd been suffering had to do with Voldemort's curse from ten years ago. He had to find out what had been done to him, but where to start?

Severus had always been a private man, with private feelings and thoughts. When he had a problem, he always tried to figure it out on his own, asking for help only when he'd come to some impasse and could no longer find a solution on his own. As he held his head under the warm shower, his thoughts began to turn to Hermione and, as if on cue, he began to harden. He looked down at his fast approaching hard-on and sighed.

"Well, at least I know something is working the way it should." He closed his eyes, leaned his forehead against the cool stones and began stroking himself. Before he had been cursed, it had been over five years since he'd bedded a woman, so his last sexual contact was now fifteen years ago. If he was honest with himself, there had never been anyone he was interested enough to even try to have sex with. When he was a young wizard, sex was sex; it didn't have to mean anything or feel any particular way other than good. But as he grew older and when he began spying, his outlook changed. The few women he encountered bored him to tears. He realized he needed an intellectual connection as well as a physical one, and finding that was about as easy as finding the a virgin in a whorehouse.

After several years of looking for a connection with a woman, he just stopped looking. He realized that the position he was in wasn't conducive to having any type of a relationship, good or bad. Now standing in his shower, pumping himself dry at the mere thought of Hermione Granger beneath him, he realized that it was time to live again and seek out the pleasures he had so long denied himself. There was nothing wrong with wanting Hermione. She was a twenty-six year old woman after all, and even though he was nineteen years her senior that really wasn't much of an age difference, not in their world.

Severus Snape may not have had the pleasure of indulging himself with the soft and willing body of a woman for over fifteen years, but he still knew when a woman wanted him. He had a feeling that Hermione would be receptive to his advances. He'd make it clear to her that it would not just be casual sex, since he genuinely liked her. She wasn't a sixteen-year-old girl anymore and she had grown into a responsible adult. Hermione might be someone that he could consider a friend and maybe someday, something more than that. He wondered if Hermione would indulge him in the "something more" part sooner than later.

After his shower, he dried off and dressed in his usual attire, sans the black frock coat. He then walked a few steps down the hall and knocked on Hermione's door.

"Severus, come in, have a seat" she said as she stepped aside and allowed Severus room to walk in and sit down. "I wondered if you might have forgotten about stopping by." Hermione got the file from her desk and sat next to Severus.

"No, I didn't forget. I...had taken a nap when I came back from Hogsmeade." Severus leaned back against the couch and made himself comfortable.

"I was reading some of your notes and made a few notations of my own. Would you mind looking them over? I think I figured out where I went wrong." Hermione handed him the file.

Severus looked at it. He smiled as he read her new formula.

"This looks correct. Will you be brewing it soon?" he asked.

"Yes, this evening," Hermione shyly looked down at her hands, as she played with the corner of her blouse. "I was wondering if you might...well, if you might want to... brew with me."

Severus stood and offered her his hand. Hermione allowed him to lift her slightly; she placed her hand on his chest lightly as he stared down at her. Their faces were inches from each other.

"I would love to...brew with you," said Severus, not realizing how hoarse his voice sounded.

Hermione began to raise herself up on her toes so that she was a hair's breath from his lips, when they heard a voice coming from the Floo.

"Hermione! I've got niblets in my poo!" Ron was making his nightly call.

Both Hermione and Severus jumped away from each other. Hermione caught her breath and rushed to the fireplace.

"Ron, that's...nice." Hermione looked over to Severus who looked flushed as he began to unbutton his top coat button. "How was your day?"

"Not bad," said Ron casually. "Harry had to go and check one of the offices in the States. He came back with some corn on the cob." Ron laughed. "I didn't know if I ate it I'd have corn in my poo! Do you want to see?"

"No! Thanks, but I believe you," said Hermione quickly.

"Okay, I'm tired; I'll talk to you tomorrow." Ron waved then leaned forward slightly. "Oh, night, professor." Then he cut the connection.

Hermione turned quickly and noticed Severus standing behind her.

"Sorry, Ron calls me every evening. His potion wears off about this time," she said as she stood.

Severus smirked.

"Am I to understand then that we should have no more interruptions regarding poo?"

She laughed. "No more poo, I promise."

With all talk of poo forgotten, Hermione showed Severus to her private lab. When she'd moved into her rooms, Albus helped her add an extra room so that she could use it as a private lab, for her own experiments.

Severus was impressed with the layout of the lab. Hermione had her ingredients and other supplies set up much in the same manner as he'd had his own, which made him smile. Albus had told him that Hermione taught her Potions class the same way he'd done so when he taught, and now seeing her lab made him realize that perhaps they had more in common than he initially realized.

"Severus?" Hermione had been calling his name for a while as he was looking around the room. "Severus."

He turned to her. "I'm sorry," he said as he leaned back against the counter; she'd never seen him so relaxed. "How do you wish to begin?"

Hermione realized he was allowing her to take control. She wondered if he would have ever allowed this had he never been put under that curse. She then thought he would. After Voldemort had been destroyed, Severus would surely have been able to relax enough to allow others to take the lead. Her mind then briefly wondered if he would allow her the same control in the bedroom.

Severus smiled as he saw her cheeks redden, knowing what she was thinking.

They both began the task of making the potion for Ron. It consisted of actually two different potions, both of which had to be made at the same time to be combined at the end. That had been part of her earlier mistake. Hermione had made the first potion and then the second potion afterwards; as it turned out, neither potion could sit while the other was being made. Also, one potion's ingredients had to be prepared with metal instruments, and the other with wooden ones. There even had to be a wooden knife to slice those ingredients.

"All right, I'll take the metal," said Hermione.

Severus arched a brow.

"It seems then that I have wood." He smiled.

She turned quickly and began to gather what she needed. She was so nervous that she forgot to fill her cauldron with warm water.

"Severus, would you...fill my cauldron?"

His original smile never wavering, he purred, "I would love to...fill your cauldron."

She knew that it would be a long evening. As they worked on the potion, Hermione told Severus what she'd been doing, briefly albeit, in the last ten years. He felt he knew a bit more about her now. He also opened up a bit more to her, allowing her to ask him questions regarding his life before and during his days as a spy.

After two hours of chopping, blanching, waiting, sneaking glances, pouring, smiling, stirring and finally simmering of both potions, they finished together.

"Severus, I have an alabaster bowl in the cupboard next to you," said Hermione. Both potions needed to be poured into the alabaster bowl simultaneously, another mistake Hermione had made previously. As they both poured their cauldrons the combining liquids turned light lavender.

"I think it's perfect now," Hermione said as she beamed.

Severus leaned forward and took in the scent of the potion. It smelled of honey, vanilla and a bit of freshly cultivated fennel seeds.

"The true test will be when you give it to Mr. Weasley. Would you like for me to help you bottle this?" He'd hoped she would say yes. He wasn't quite ready to leave her just yet and was fairly sure she felt the same way and would allow him to remain there.

"You've already done so much. This is no longer a two-man job. I don't want to impose on you any further and keep you from anything." She was confident he would want to stay with her. They'd spent the last two hours talking, flirting and brewing, and she hoped he wasn't tired of her yet.

All the while they'd been working on her potion, Voldemort kept trying to break through past Severus' soul. The DADA professor seemed stronger than he had before. For whatever reason, something was keeping Voldemort from coming to the surface. The Dark Lord wondered if Severus was now with Hermione. There was still no way he could gauge Severus' emotions or even read his thoughts, but Voldemort now wondered if that might have anything to do with why he'd not been able to surface. The only thing the Dark Lord could do was sit and wait something he was tired of doing.

What Voldemort didn't know for certain was that Severus was indeed being affected by Hermione. Not only was she stimulating Severus intellectually, but physically as well. Severus was a man after all and a man who desperately needed...no, wanted the company of a woman at that moment. Severus was free, and could enjoy a woman's company in every way and not have to worry about anything violent happening to his partner. During their conversation Severus decided that he wanted Hermione. He wanted her in his bed very badly. He no longer saw her as his student. She was a woman, and from the moment he woke up from his ten-year sleep and saw her, he'd felt a stirring in his soul.

As they bottled Ron's potion into small vials, which Hermione would take to Harry and Draco, she wondered if she should make her move. Had it not been for Ron's interruption, she might have kissed Severus earlier; right now, Hermione felt she'd been left high and dry. She looked over her shoulder and noticed Severus carefully measuring each ladle into a small vial. When he finished, Severus turned to face Hermione, who he realized had been watching him.

"Was there something you needed?" he asked.

"Yes," Hermione said as she walked towards him slowly. "I needed this." She then wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him softly on his lips.

Severus in turn wrapped one arm around her waist, then slid his other hand up her back and buried his fingers in her long thick curls.

They kissed for several moments, neither wanting to pull away from the other. Severus then blazed a warm trail of wet kisses down Hermione's neck as she pulled his body closer to her own.

"Was there something that you needed from me, Severus?" she asked breathlessly.

Severus lifted his head from the valley between her breasts and looked into her half-lidded eyes. Her lips were red and slightly swollen, her hair a tangled mess, and her cheeks flushed.

"I need...I need..." He caressed her cheek as she closed her eyes and leaned her face into his palm.

"Yes?" she asked, her voice barely a whisper.

"No," he said as he continued to stroke her face. All of his life he'd wanted to feel this. To feel a woman who truly welcomed his touch, for no payment other than the warmth and companionship he could offer. Love was a deep feeling, a feeling so close to its partner, hate. Love could be felt in so many levels just as hate. His entire life, hate had been so easy to come by and allow into his heart, but what of love? How many of the different levels of love could he experience with Hermione, he wondered.

Finally letting his guard down, after so many years of building walls and standing at the gates of his heart, with a sword in hand not allowing anyone to trespass, he would allow himself a moment of vulnerability, and hope to not regret what he was about to do.

"I want... to feel you love me," he finally said.

Hermione opened her eyes, which glittered with the reflection of the candles surrounding the walls of the small room. She could feel the energy coming from him, and the

At Last The Truth

Chapter 8 of 18

Finally everyone learns the truth about Severus' strange behavior.

Thanks to all of you who have taken the time to read this story and review it. I appreciate all of your comments.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thanks as always to June for all of her help.

A/N: There is a rape scene here and it involves Hermione and Voldemort-as-Severus. If you cannot read it, go to the last eighteen paragraphs of this chapter. I will indicate with an asterisk when the scene begins and ends so that you can skip it altogether if you feel you can't read it.

Chapter 8 At Last The Truth

Two weeks passed and Severus had no more memory lapses. He thought that whatever had been happening to him was his body and mind getting used to his being woken from the curse. In truth, it was Voldemort who was making plans that kept him from losing time like he'd been doing.

Voldemort was strong enough to feel on occasion feel Severus' emotions as well as have glimpses of his daily activities through the DADA professor's eyes. He noticed Severus visiting Hermione quite a bit. It bothered the Dark Lord that Severus was spending so much time with the Mudblood. He desperately needed to be able to look into Severus' mind to know what he was thinking. Perhaps there was a way Voldemort could control him while he figured out a way to do away with Severus' soul.

As Voldemort plotted his downfall, Severus was enjoying his life for once. His relationship with Hermione was getting stronger by the day. They often went to Hogsmeade and Diagon Alley to browse the bookshops and have dinner. They also took to visiting Lucius and Ginny quite a bit.

The potion that Severus and Hermione had made for Ron worked so well that young Weasley was able to begin fulltime work at the Ministry with his father. While he still lived with Harry and Draco, the potion allowed all of them the freedom that had eluded them since Ron's injury. The only fly in Severus' ointment was the nightmares he was now having on a nightly basis - visions of Voldemort returning and trying to take back all of the peace and order that had been restored upon his death. What disturbed Severus the most, though, was why he would even dream about the Dark Lord. Even when Severus was in his service he never dreamed about him directly. No potions would help either. He'd taken Dreamless Draught on several occasions and still the dreams would persist.

As for Lucius, all seemed fine, but for the nagging feeling that continued to disturb him regarding his Dark Mark. In the past weeks his Mark had grown darker. It was getting increasingly difficult to hide it from Ginny. She had already begun to question him wearing pajamas to bed as well as the long-sleeved shirts he'd started wearing so often. He told her that he just wanted to keep warm, so his wife asked him why he simply didn't cast a warming charm on himself.

"You're the one who always says I shouldn't use magic so much," Lucius huffed at her one day. But he was starting to tire of lying to his wife. He was afraid that at some point she might suspect him of having an affair, since he'd also taken to not allowing her to shower with him. Disillusionment charms never worked to cover up the Dark Mark so he didn't even bother.

Lucius wasn't the only one keeping something from his beloved. Ginny was growing very worried about what she'd seen in Severus' eyes the day she'd walked into the Three Broomsticks to meet him and her husband. Blaming it on her pregnancy hormones, she shrugged it off and tried not to think on it much.

As Friday afternoon quickly approached and the school term had already ended, Hermione was free from her teaching duties. Albus and Minerva were making their yearly plans to travel to the Himalayas for a few days; and taking their cue, Severus decided a few days away from the castle might be good. Albus had informed him a few days after his waking that his home at Spinner's End was just as he'd left it. In fact, during his tenure down in dreamless land Spinner's End had become quite the posh place to own property. Albus and Minerva made sure that Severus' home kept up with the times. Deciding it was time to visit his home, Severus thought he would ask Hermione if she might consider spending the weekend there with him.

Thus far Severus and Hermione had only spent a few nights together. Not wanting to move too fast, both decided to just enjoy one another as friends with benefits. But secretly they both realized they wanted more. A weekend together would be a good way for Severus to show Hermione he was willing to commit to something more serious and perhaps permanent someday.

Severus walked to Hermione's rooms and knocked on her door.

When she answered she was dressed in a pair of loose-fitting cargo pants and a tank top.

"Severus!" She wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him. "I thought we were going to meet in your rooms."

He knew he would never grow tired of her greetings. Hermione was always so happy to see him, even when she was having a bad day; her joy at seeing him reflected in her eyes.

"I thought I would surprise you," he said.

She let out a squeal as he picked her up and walked to the couch.

"I've decided to see what Albus has done to my home at Spinner's End. Are you up to spending an entire weekend in my company?" he asked as he sat with her on his lap.

"I'm always up for spending time with you. And you know, you might be surprised when you see your home." She smiled knowingly. For the last five years she'd taken to accompanying Albus and Minerva on their visits to the Snape home. Much of the decorating was her doing. She hoped he would be pleased.

"You have been to my home?" asked Severus, surprised that she would have ever even been interested.

"Yes, I hope you don't mind but I did a bit of decorating for you. I think you'll like it." She kissed his cheek and began to run her hands down his chest.

He stopped her hand from going further and kissed her palm.

"My dear, much as I would love to go further, I think if we start, we will never get out of here today."

Hermione laughed, although she knew he was right - that when they got started, their lovemaking lasted for hours. She kissed him one last time and went to her room to pack.

Severus in the meantime Flooed Albus and let him know he would be spending some time at his family home, to contact him there if anyone needed him.

They gathered a few things from the Hogwarts kitchen and made their way to the school gates. Once off the castle grounds they both Apparated to Severus' home.

When they arrived at Spinner's End, Severus looked confused.

"What's wrong, Severus?" asked a concerned Hermione.

"I don't understand. This should be the spot, but I don't see the house. I must be off by a few streets." He looked around at the homes. Most were Victorian-style, except for the one they stood in front of. It was a Tudor-style home with a plush garden that would have been the envy of Marie Antoinette.

"Severus, this is your house," said Hermione as she gestured towards the home.

Severus looked at her, then at the large house. He slowly walked up the stone pathway. He noted the herb garden at the edge of the fence. There were also many plants which he knew were not native to the British Isles.

"Do you like it?" asked Hermione, hoping his silence meant only that he was just taking in all of the wonderful changes.

"It's...wonderful." Severus looked at her and kissed her. He knew that she had much to do with the way it looked. He would have to remember to thank Albus as well as Minerva, although not in the same fashion.

Hermione smiled and took hold of his hand. She proceeded to drag him into the home and take him room to room, showing him all the wonderful things she, Albus, and Minerva had done.

They had all taken his taste into consideration when they updated his home, making room in the cellar for a fully-stocked potions lab as well as making sure the rooms were comfortable and filled with books and tasteful decorations.

Hermione guided him into the garden, where she had been cultivating a rather impressive vegetable garden. Deciding they should use some of the newly-grown carrots, tomatoes and beets for their dinner, they began to gather some up in a small basket.

After dinner they sat in the living room, in front of a large fire. Sipping their wine, Severus realized that he was now in his home and so he could take up where they had left off that afternoon. They walked to the upstairs master bedroom and spent the next three hours making love. As they finally began to fall asleep in each other's arms, Severus decided he would ask Hermione if she wished to move in with him. He wasn't sure if either of them were ready to take the step of marriage, but thought living together was as close as they could come for the time being.

Once asleep, Voldemort felt that he could finally make his move. He'd been gathering his strength all day. He knew however that he had to make this count. Severus was strong now because he was happy, and Voldemort needed to make his move in order to weaken Severus' emotions and soul by making him miserable. The Dark Lord moved through Severus' consciousness and finally made his way to the surface. Voldemort was again in control of Severus' body, at least for the time being. He felt a body next to Severus'; looking to his right Voldemort noticed a mass of curls on the pillow. He breathed in and noticed the scent of vanilla; he knew it was Hermione. He grinned.

"It couldn't have been any better if I'd planned it myself," Voldemort whispered. He moved silently and without waking her, moved Hermione on to her back. He then positioned himself between her legs and took hold of her wrists. Gently he held them over her head and then he began to nibble on her nipples. He felt her stirring under his ministrations.

'Good,' he thought.

Hermione's eyes fluttered open. She felt a tingling sensation at her core, and moaned softly.

"Severus," she whispered. Suddenly she was jerked up to a sitting position. She screamed in surprise, now fully awake, she looked at Severus who held her gaze.

"Severus, you're hurting me," she said as his hands tightened around her wrists.

There was a darkness that she felt now, emanating from him; it was something she'd never felt before in his presence.

Voldemort-as-Severus laughed a deep low laugh, not sounding like the DADA professor at all not the man Hermione knew and loved.

"Aren't you pretty when you are frightened," Voldemort said, as Hermione realized that she truly was frightened. His face twisted in disgust as he looked at her naked body, trembling under his gaze. "I should never have soiled myself with you. But since I am already covered in filth, I may as well get my fill before I kill you."

Hermione's eyes opened wide as "Severus" pushed her back onto the mattresses. His jutting erections now placed at her entrance, she tried desperately to push him off of her as he laughed.

"You can't possibly think you are going to fight me. I thought you were supposed to be smarter than that." Voldemort then took both her wrists in one hand and held his other hand at her neck. "But what more should I have expected from a Mudblood."

Tears were forming in Hermoine's eyes. "Severus, please. I...I thought..." She could barely speak as his hand was now becoming tighter around her windpipe.

"You thought what? That I wanted you?" Voldemort laughed. He liked the way Severus' voice sounded when he laughed at her this way. "I could no more want you than I would want to grow a horn in the middle of my forehead." His eyes now swept her nude trembling body. "There is something I want though; something I will have my fill of before I do what should be done to all of your kind."

He drew back slightly then pushed into her violently.

Hermione screamed as his length penetrated her. She wasn't ready and was beyond frightened. She felt pain all over her body, as though a lightning bolt had shot through her. She then felt a hard slap across her face.

"Be quiet!" growled Voldemort as he continued to savagely thrust into her.

Hermione cried, as she felt the metallic taste of her own blood. She tried to make him stop; she twisted her body but he was too heavy for her.

He then stopped and moved aside, then turned her over quickly so she was on her knees. As he pulled her arms behind her back, he leaned forward and whispered into her ear.

"Your pussy isn't tight enough, Mudblood. I think I need something more." Voldemort then took hold of Severus' dripping cock and entered Hermione's anus. She screamed so loud she felt as though her throat was on fire. "Yessssss, that's better."

Voldemort rode her hard, so hard that he noticed specks of blood on Severus' penis. After a few strokes he came and fell on top of her. He held her firmly although there was no need, since Hermione had fainted. Too tired to continue his plan of killing her, he rolled off her body and fell into a deep sleep. He'd wasted too much energy and was now confined to the deep well he'd been inhabiting in Severus' body.

When Hermione awoke a few moments later, she was in incredible pain. She crawled out of bed, sobbing. She looked over on to the bed and noticed Severus sleeping. How could she have allowed herself to care for him? What had she done to make him lash out at her? Most of all, how could they have all been so wrong about him? He'd raped her, called her a Mudblood, and threatened to kill her. All she knew was that she had to get out of there, fast. She managed to shakily get to her feet and took a robe that was draped over a chair. As quickly as she could, in the pain she was in, she walked downstairs and went outside. She fell to the ground and Apparated to the Malfoy estate. She appeared at the front door and began pounding as hard as she could.

Lucius and Ginny were still in the study and getting ready to walk upstairs to bed when they heard a pounding at the door. Before Dari, the head house-elf, reached the door, Lucius waved her away, curious to know who would be knocking on his door at this late hour.

"I'll answer it, Dari." Lucius opened the door.

Ginny, who was just a step behind him, gasped.

"Oh my God, Hermione!" Ginny looked at her friend in horror.

Lucius bent down and carefully helped Hermione stand and walk through the door.

"Hermione, what happened to you?" he asked. He thought she looked like she'd been run over by a herd of Hippogriffs.

Hermione winced as she tried to walk, her sobs, echoing down the halls.

"Lucius, she's bleeding," said Ginny as she helped Hermione lie down on the couch in the living room.

"Dari!" yelled Lucius.

The small house-elf appeared. Dari's ears shot straight up when she saw the woman on the couch, crying and bleeding, in obvious distress.

"Dari, she needs medical attention."

House-elves had great magical healing powers. Dari had also been trained to heal humans. Since Ginny was so close to giving birth, Lucius wanted Dari to know all she could about helping deliver a child, just in case they couldn't make it to St. Mungo's. The small elf approached the crying woman and looked her over. She placed her hand on Hermione's cheek and immediately the swelling went down. Dari then began the task of healing the rest of her injuries.

"Hermione, what happened?" asked Ginny, as she and Lucius kept watch on Dari's actions.

Hermione cried for several moments, until she was finally able to form words.

"Severus," she inhaled sharply as she felt her torn anal tissue being healed. "He...he..." She couldn't bring herself to even form the words.

"Severus did this to you?" asked a shocked Lucius.

Hermione sobbed, "He...he hit me and called me a...a Mudblood. And...and he said he would," Hermione covered her face with her hands. "Oh god, he said he was going to kill me."

"God damn him, God damn him!" Lucius spun around and grabbed a handful of Floo powder. He turned to look at Hermione. "Where is he?"

Hermione hesitated, then told him they had been staying at his family home in Spinner's End.

Lucius knew the house well; he'd helped pay for many of the improvements. The Floo at the Snape home had been connected to the Floo network when the renovations began, and it was easily accessed via the Floo. Lucius stepped into the Floo and threw the powder.

"Severus Snape's home," growled a furious Lucius.

Back at the Snape home, Severus woke up from yet another nightmare. Before he could even realize he was alone in bed, he felt himself being dragged violently from his bed.

"You son of a bitch!" yelled someone.

Then Severus felt a hard fist against his face. He was knocked back against the wall.

"Lumos!" said the voice.

Severus blinked several times, and realized it was Lucius standing over him.

"What the hell is the matter with you?" asked a confused Severus.

"Me? What's the matter with me? What the bloody fuck is the matter with you? How could you do that to her!" Lucius picked Severus up off the floor and threw him back onto the bed.

Severus landed hard then realized Hermione was gone. He looked down at the bed and saw blood spots.

"Where is Hermione?" Severus asked, now more confused than he'd been since waking up from his curse.

"After what you did to her, where the fuck do you think she is? Did you think she would be here?" Lucius was furious. He'd grown to love Hermione like a sister in the years since the war. He was blinded by rage and was close to beating his friend within an inch of his life. But Lucius held himself back. For weeks he knew there was something going on with Severus. What his friend had done to Hermione was the final straw.

Severus stood and put on his trousers. He ran his hands through his hair. He didn't even want to think of the possibility that he'd done something to Hermione. He sat on the bed, and looked up at Lucius.

"Lucius, you have to believe me. I have no idea what you're talking about. Please tell me Hermione's all right," he begged.

Lucius' stern face softened slightly. He noticed tears forming in Severus' eyes. Could it be that his friend had no idea what had happened?

"She's at my home. Ginny is taking care of her."

"Why, what happened to her?" asked Severus desperately.

"You beat her and called her a Mudblood. Then...you raped her, Severus," said Lucius soberly. "Anally."

Severus felt the bile rising from the pit of his stomach. How could he have done such a thing? He cared for her, possibly even loved her. He felt numb.

"Severus," Lucius sighed. He sat on the chair in the corner. "No more lies now, no more secrets."

Severus stood and began pacing. He sighed heavily, knowing he needed to get help.

"I've...I've been losing time. For almost a week after I woke up, there were times when I would wake up somewhere and not know how I got there." Severus looked at Lucius, fully expecting him to laugh at him. "The day I was with you at Hogsmeade, Lucius, I don't remember coming home. I woke up on my couch. I thought I'd drunk too much, but now, now I wonder."

Lucius looked at him, thinking back on that day. Severus had said some strange things. At the time he thought it odd, but now he thought that perhaps there was more going on than either of them realized.

"And something else," said Severus.

"What?" asked Lucius as he stood and walked to Severus.

"I've been dreaming of Voldemort."

Lucius' eyes widened. He tore his cuff loose and rolled up his left sleeve. There, his Dark Mark was now darker than ever.

Severus looked at his own arm; there was no Mark. He touched the spot where at the very least he should have had a trace of it, yet there was nothing there. Severus backed up slightly and turned around. He ran his hands across his face, as though that would wake him up from this nightmare.

"Severus," said Lucius.

It all finally began to make sense. The torture he'd endured from Voldemort. All of the years he lay dormant under the curse, with not so much as even a trickle of thought coming from his brain; the time lost; Poppy finding a "magical signature" from the curse even after ten years; why he hadn't been killed. And now, calling Hermione a Mudblood, he then remembered what Lucius had said about Voldemort having a "knowing" look as he died. Severus turned and looked at Lucius.

"My God, Lucius, he's inside of me."

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

I'm sorry if I dissappointed some of you with the rape scene. While I hated to have done that to Hermione, I felt it was important to the story. Something major had to happen for them all to finally realize there was something going on with Severus and for them all to realize it was Voldemort's doing. I want to remind you all that I have always planned on a happy ending to this story and it will have one, so don't worry about how dramatic it gets.

Understanding

Chapter 9 of 18

Albus gets involved and Hermione finds out the truth about Severus.

I'd like to thank you all for your continued support. I was a bit nervous about the last chapter but I felt it had its place here. I appreciate all of your comments.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thanks as always to June for all of her wonderful suggestions and all of her help.

Chapter 9 Understanding

Lucius took a step back from Severus. He thought back on what Severus had said the night he came to Malfoy Manor after initially waking up from the ten-year coma. Lucius then thought about the comment Severus had made at the Three Broomsticks regarding Draco and Harry's Muggleborn baby.

"Good lord, what a mess," was all Lucius could say.

"Yes, a mess of epic proportions," Added Severus as he sat down on the edge of his bed.

"Severus, are you absolutely sure? Can you...feel him inside of you? Sense him?" wondered Lucius.

Severus shook his head.

"No, but if he's able to take over my body, then I should be able to find a way to find out what he's planning." Severus looked at the spots of blood on the bed. "Lucius, did I hurt Hermione very badly? Will she be all right?"

Lucius sat down next to Severus. "It was your body, but you didn't do that to her. Severus, you weren't in control of yourself. The Dark Lord is the one who did those horrible things to her; don't blame yourself."

"How can I not blame myself? Hermione will never forgive me, Lucius, never!" yelled Severus. "I have to see her."

"No, Severus. Look, Hermione is an intelligent woman. She's frightened and hurt, so give her time. I know you are worried about her, but Ginny is with her and will take care of her. Right now we need to figure out what to do about you...and him. Besides, we don't know when he will manifest himself again. He means to kill her. For now you have to stay away from Hermione." Lucius felt bad for both Severus and Hermione. For the first time in his life, Severus seemed truly happy. He and Hermione made a wonderful couple and were very much alike. It tore him up to see that something like this was happening.

Severus hoped that Hermione would forgive him someday, but he also realized it wouldn't be a good idea to see her for a while. If Voldemort had already tried to kill her, then he might actually succeed the next time. They had no idea when the Dark Lord would turn up again in Severus' body, but that was the first thing they needed to figure out.

"Albus," Severus said as he rose and started to walk out of the bedroom. "We're going to need his help." Severus practically flew down the stairs, with Lucius following close behind him. He opened the Floo connection and called out Albus' name. He'd hoped the old wizard hadn't left yet.

Albus and Minerva liked traveling at night, and when Severus had left Hogwarts they'd planned on leaving that evening. As luck would have it, though, Minerva had a bit too

much curry with her supper, and she was nursing a sick stomach in the infirmary. She and Albus had postponed their trip for the next day.

"Severus? What on earth are you doing up this late?" asked Albus when he saw Severus' head appear in the Floo.

"Albus, can you come through? We need to talk," said Severus.

Albus crinkled his brow and leaned forward slightly.

"What's happening?"

Lucius then popped his head into view.

"Albus, please, this is extremely important."

Now Albus was beginning to grow concerned. He knew that Severus had gone to his own home with Hermione. Now he was calling him in the middle of the night with Lucius next to him.

"I'm coming through."

The two ex-Death Eaters stepped back and allowed Albus to walk through the fireplace.

The Headmaster was startled to see Severus with only his trousers on, and a bruise on his cheek. Albus looked over to Lucius, then back to Severus.

"What happened here?"

Lucius stepped forward and held out his left arm.

Albus looked on wide-eyed, knowing that the Dark Mark had previously been barely visible.

"He's alive, Albus. He's been here all along. That's why our Marks never faded entirely," said Lucius as he looked from Albus to Severus.

Albus looked over to Severus who sadly nodded.

"Severus, this is most distressing," said the old wizard as he sat down. Albus immediately knew that the odd behavior he witnessed from Severus, and the feeling he'd gotten that day he observed his old Potions master in the Great Hall, meant only one thing. "Tom." He then noticed that Hermione wasn't there and began to worry. Had Tom Riddle killed her?

"Where is Hermione?" Albus asked.

Severus shook his head and began to look around the room for something to drink. Lucius went to the sideboard and began pouring his friend a brandy.

The two men explained what had transpired that evening.

"She will never want to look at me again. I've...hurt her," whispered Severus dejectedly.

Lucius took Severus by the shoulders and began to shake him.

"No! You did not do that to her, do you understand me? It was that monster who hurt her. Stop blaming yourself, Severus."

Severus shook himself loose and turned away from both men.

"It was my body and my face, Lucius! Don't you realize Hermione will think about what happened to her every time she looks at me, even if it wasn't actually me doing the deed?"

This time it was Albus who tried to shake some sense into Severus.

"Listen to me, Severus. You cannot allow Tom to do this to you. He is breaking you down; this is what he wants, what he needs. There is a reason why he has not completely taken over your body. I gather it has something to do with your state of mind. Tom will use this to gather strength; it is how he works, you know that as well as I do. Hermione is strong. Right now she is hurt, physically and mentally, but she will eventually know the truth. She is a good and kind woman, Severus; she will understand, of that I have no doubt."

The three of them sat at a small table in the kitchen. It was barely midnight, but there would be no time for sleep that night. Albus knew that something needed to be done immediately. From the beginning of time, the world had always been a dangerous place. A new dark wizard or Muggle could come forth at any time for any manner of evil. Even while Voldemort was seemingly dead, someone else could eventually attempt to take his place, just as Voldemort himself arose after Grindelwald. Thus, the Order of the Phoenix had never stopped existing after the final battle.

They needed to contact some of the members of the Order. Albus called Minerva first and gave her the task of actually contacting some of the Order members Arthur Weasley would need to be notified for certain, as would Harry. The Order meeting would occur in less than an hour, at one o'clock in the morning. This would barely allow Lucius time to go back home and speak with Ginny and Hermione, to explain what happened with Severus. Before Lucius left, Severus pulled him to one side.

"Please, Lucius, tell her that I'm sorry, make her understand," pleaded Severus.

Lucius nodded and made his way outside to Apparate.

~ * ~

Lucius arrived home and immediately went to the living room, where he'd left the two women. Hermione was lying on the couch with Ginny sitting next to her. Both women were talking in hushed tones, then looked up as soon as Lucius walked in.

"Lucius, did you speak to him?" inquired Ginny, as she noticed her husband's slightly bruised hand.

Hermione immediately sat up. Her eyes were red and swollen from crying.

Lucius approached the two women, and then sat on the marble coffee table.

"Hermione, have you noticed any odd behavior coming from Severus lately? Anything out of the ordinary?" asked Lucius.

"No, nothing other than...other than what happened tonight." Hermione looked down at her blanket. "He's been so kind and gentle with me. I thought he...cared about me. It was like he was a different person all together."

Before Lucius could begin to talk, Hermione looked at him.

"Wait, there was a moment," she started saying.

"A moment?" asked Lucius.

"Just after he woke up from the coma. One night I was bringing some books down from the library. He helped me walk to my rooms, but then when I got to my door he left me with the books and went to his own rooms. A few moments later he popped up behind me, asking me if I needed help again. There was this look in his eyes, almost predatory. It excited me, but there was something also menacing about him."

"Lucius, what's going on? What did Severus tell you? Why did he do this to her?" asked Ginny.

"The curse that Severus was under wasn't just some ordinary sleeping curse. All this time, we thought Voldemort was gone, that we did away with him during the final battle. In reality, he's never been gone. He's been here all this time, just in hibernation," said Lucius.

The two women looked at him in confusion.

"Hibernation?" asked Ginny. "Lucius, what on earth are you talking about? We all saw him die."

"We saw his body die, Ginny." Lucius looked from Ginny to Hermione, whose expression went from confusion to revulsion.

"No, I'm going to be sick..." She tried to stand but was still slightly weak.

Ginny moved aside as Lucius transfigured an ashtray into a small bucket. She looked at her husband. She knew in her heart that Lucius was right but she didn't want to hear the truth. Ginny remembered the coldness she felt when she saw "Severus" at the Three Broomsticks. There had been something evil in his eyes that she hadn't wanted to think about, not when her life was perfect and she had a baby coming soon.

"Lucius, you can't possibly be saying..."

"I am. All these years, he's been waiting. We don't know exactly what his plans were or are, but knowing how he worked in the past, I gather he didn't expect Severus's soul to survive for ten years."

Hermione leaned back against the couch as Ginny wiped her brow with a damp cloth.

Lucius Scourgified the bucket and moved it to one side.

"Hermione, are you all right?" asked Lucius.

She looked into his ice gray eyes full of concern.

"No," she said as she shook her head. "I'm not all right. I feel dirty...like I'll never be clean again. To know that it was Voldemort makes me want to scrub every inch of my skin from my body."

"Hermione, Severus well, he wanted me to tell you that he was sorry."

Hermione's eyes began to tear up. "Oh God, how can I ever look at Severus again?" She began to sob. "I know, I know it wasn't him, but it was his body, his face, his eyes looking at me with such disdain, such anger."

"Hermione, this will all take time to figure out. For the time being, you shouldn't see one another. Voldemort meant to kill you, and he may try again if he gets the chance. We need to find out more about this entire situation. You're free to stay here at Malfoy Manor as long as you wish; in fact, it might be a good idea," said Lucius, as Ginny smiled and took hold of her friend's hand.

"Please stay for a while, Hermione. You can help me get the baby's room ready."

Hermione looked at Ginny and Lucius. She had no family left in the Muggle world. Her parents survived the war, but were killed several years later. They were the victims of a terrorist attack on a civilian airplane heading towards India. Had it not been for her friends, Hermione might have given up her dream of becoming a Potions Mistress. For a while after her parents died, she thought about continuing their practice and becoming a dentist, but Ginny convinced her that her parents would have wanted her to follow her own dreams.

"All right, I'll stay for a while. It might be nice to just be away from the castle for a bit."

"Excellent." Lucius stood and called for Dari. "Dari, make up the guest room for Hermione. She will be staying here for a while."

The house-elf smiled and popped out of sight, relieved that Hermione looked much better now.

Lucius then turned and looked at the two women.

"I need to get back. Albus called a few of the Order members for a meeting in a few minutes, and he is with Severus now. Hopefully we can figure out what our next step is."

Hermione wanted to ask about Severus but wasn't sure if she should. It felt odd inquiring about the man who'd just raped her, but now she knew that her rapist really had been Tom Riddle. Just as it had been Tom Riddle and not young Ginny who had done those awful things the year Harry found the Chamber of Secrets. It hadn't been Ginny's fault then, and it wasn't Severus' fault now. But Hermione knew this only in her head; it would take her time to deal with her emotions. Lucius was right, she couldn't see Severus now.

"Is Severus all right?" she finally asked, not wanting to look at either Lucius or Ginny.

"It's okay to ask about him, Hermione. Severus cares for you," Ginny said gently.

"I want to believe that, I do believe that, it's just...why did this have to happen. We were happy." She felt as though she were in some nightmare. One moment they were happy, loving one another, making each other feel like nothing else mattered. Then the next minute she was thrown into a dark world with nothing but pain and regret.

"I've never seen him as happy as I have these last few weeks. Severus would sooner cut off his right arm than to hurt you, you have to know that. I know this is difficult, and no one is pressuring you, least of all Severus. He just wants you to know he is sorry for what happened. He does care for you, Hermione." Lucius then leaned down and kissed Ginny on the lips, then kissed Hermione on the forehead. "Don't wait up for me, you two get some sleep." He then turned and walked out of the room.

"You're very lucky to have someone like Lucius, Ginny," said a forlorn Hermione.

Ginny patted her hand.

"You may not think it now, but when all of this is over, you'll see that you're lucky as well, Hermione."

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

I'm not sure how some of you might feel about Hermione's reaction, but it made sense to me. While I didn't see her wanting to run into Severus' arms and forgive him, she does understand that it wasn't him. What she will have to do is try to separate the actions of Voldemort from the body he was using at the time he raped her.

Thank you all for reading and I hope you enjoyed this chapter.

I feel the need for a little humor though, so I may try to inject some of that in the next few chapters.

And Now We Plan

Chapter 10 of 18

A bit of planning and a confession to a friend.

Thank you to everyone who is still keeping up with this story. I appreciate all of your wonderful comments and your encouragement.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thank you to June for all of her help and suggestions.

Chapter 10 And now we plan

Back at Snape's home in Spinner's End, Severus sat in the small library on a large green leather chair facing the fireplace. He'd been staring into the flames since Lucius left. He'd been sitting alone for almost an hour, since Albus had contacted Arthur, Harry, Draco and a few other members of the Order from the living room Floo.

"Severus," called Albus from the door.

The dark man turned slowly.

"Yes, Albus?" he asked quietly.

"They're here. We should begin." Albus waited for Severus and they walked to the living room together.

Lucius had returned and sat on the couch along with Draco and Harry. Arthur and Remus had taken a few chairs from the dining room and moved them into the living room. Tonks stood behind Remus, and Kingsley Shacklebolt stood next to the fireplace. They'd already been informed that Severus had woken from his coma, and all had paid him visits during the last several weeks. Everyone present, save for Lucius and Albus, wondered why they'd been summoned at such a late hour.

"Thank you all for coming on such short notice and at this late an hour," said Albus as he looked around the room.

"You sounded quite serious, Albus," observed Arthur.

"This is indeed very serious." Albus sat down but Severus remained standing. "There is no other way to say this other than to just come right out with it. I am afraid that Voldemort has returned."

There were several quite audible gasps around the room.

"How? When?" shouted Harry as he stood.

"Harry, please, I must ask that you remain calm. This is no time for any of us to fly off the handle," said Lucius.

Draco took Harry by the arm and pulled him down on his spot next to him.

"He has been here... all this time he has been among us, and we only now realized it." Albus looked to Severus.

Immediately everyone's eyes fell on the dark-haired wizard.

"Severus? What have you to do with this?" asked Remus as he stood and approached Severus.

Severus sighed heavily and looked into his eyes.

"He has been inside of me all of these years I was in the coma, that's what I have to do with this," said Severus.

"We killed him," said Harry, again standing and now approaching Severus and Albus, "We saw him die."

"No, Harry. You know as well as I do that it is very easy to see the body perish, yet the soul may remain unseen, just as it happened the night your parents died. I believe that when Severus was found that day ten years ago in the Forbidden Forest, there was already a curse on him one that would allow his body to receive Tom's soul upon the death of Tom's body."

Severus had spent much of his time in the library thinking back on the day he was tortured and left for dead. Like Poppy, he'd thought it was just a curse that caused the coma. Much to his horror, he knew now that he had company.

"This is like a nightmare," said Harry as he sat down heavily.

"You have no idea," affirmed Severus.

~*~

Back at Malfoy Manor, Ginny walked Hermione to her room.

As Hermione sat on her bed, she wondered about Ginny. The redhead had been oddly quiet tonight regarding Severus' possession. She'd experienced the same thing during her first year, and by the very thing that now occupied Severus' body along with him.

"Ginny, what was it like, when it happened to you?" asked Hermione.

Ginny had spent many years trying to forget the horror she'd felt when she realized Tom had been using her to do those horrible things. Not to mention the fact that her possession was due to the diary that her own husband had slipped into her cauldron while at Flourish & Blotts.

Ginny had never really spoken in depth to anyone about the time Tom Riddle had possessed her body. Not even to her husband, but then he never asked her. Lucius had always told her that if she ever felt the need to tell him he would listen, but if she wanted to keep that secret to herself he would understand. Now Hermione sat next to her on the edge of the bed, wanting to know what it was like. Perhaps, Ginny thought, it was finally time to talk about it. Maybe then she could bury Tom's memory.

"I honestly don't remember much, Hermione. But there were things...things I could see him do, but it wasn't him doing them. It was me. It was my body, my hands, my face I saw in the mirror. But I couldn't control myself. I remember when you first showed me a video camera. When I looked into the viewfinder, that's how it was, Hermione. Like I was looking at the world through a viewfinder." Ginny stood and walked to the window. The moon was bright and she could see the gardens below, glowing and glittering as the fireflies made their way around the bushes and flower beds. "I had no control. I carried him inside of me, feeling his evil coursing through my veins, not knowing when I would go to class one minute and turn up in my room the next. I lost so much time."

Ginny then turned and faced Hermione. "Sometimes I think that he never truly let go of his hold on me. Sometimes...sometimes I feel like he's still here. Like he's waiting to take me once and for all. I fear him still; I have nightmares." She walked towards the bed and sat down next to Hermione once again.

"Hate Tom, Hermione. Despise him; kill him over and over again in your mind. But don't blame Severus for what happened to you. It was no more his fault than it was mine for opening the Chamber of Secrets."

Hermione nodded. Ginny was right, Severus wasn't to blame. She knew that, she'd known it since Lucius came back from Severus' home and informed her that it wasn't him who had done those horrible things to her. Still, it wouldn't be easy seeing him. Would she feel Severus touching her and loving her, or would she see Voldemort raping her?

"I think we both need some sleep," said Ginny, looking at the clock on the nightstand. It was past one o'clock in the morning, and she was tired. The baby had been kicking ever since Lucius left, protesting that he or she hadn't gotten their nightly lullaby from their father.

Hermione tucked herself under the soft comforter. She thought on what Ginny had said to her and how she was feeling about Severus at that moment. The pain she'd felt earlier was something she hoped never to feel again. *He* had caused it. Voldemort, not Severus.

"Severus," she whispered as her body gave in to exhaustion.

~*~

Back at Severus' home, most of the Order members had already left with their assignments. Arthur would make use of the Ministry archives to see if there were any instances of such a thing happening in the past, of one wizard's soul inhabiting the body of another. Tonks, Kingsley and Remus would each make use of the library restricted sections in each of the wizarding schools in Europe. Albus went back to Hogwarts to pen a request for assistance from Madam Maxime of Beauxbatons. He also sent a request to Alexander Alkov, the current Headmaster of Durmstrang; their former headmaster Igor Karkaroff died in the final battle ten years earlier.

Harry and Draco stayed behind along with Lucius. Harry was curious about why Hermione wasn't there. She was the best person at research that he knew, and besides, she'd told Harry that Severus invited her to his home that weekend. During the meeting it was said that Lucius witnessed Severus' possession by Voldemort, and it seemed as though Hermione hadn't even been there at the house.

"Severus, I thought Hermione was going to be here this weekend," said Harry.

Lucius looked at Severus wondering how much of what happened that evening should they tell him.

Severus looked at Harry soberly.

"We didn't want the rest of the Order to know, but the fact is, Hermione was here earlier tonight. I...Voldemort almost killed her. She was able to get away and Apparate to Lucius' home."

Harry stiffened at how easily it would have been for Hermione to have been killed. He looked towards Lucius.

"She's all right, isn't she?" he asked frantically.

"Yes, Harry, she's fine. I left her with Ginny. Hermione will be staying with us for a while."

"We thought it best for her to stay away from the castle for a while," said Severus.

"That's a good idea," agreed Harry.

Draco took Harry by the hand.

"Maybe we can stop by the house tomorrow, and say hello," Draco told Harry, then turned questioningly towards his father.

"Of course, come by for lunch," said Lucius, hoping the two young men wouldn't come by any sooner. He would need to let Hermione know that nothing had been said about what really happened to her that evening.

The two young men nodded then left, deciding to Apparate instead of using Floo travel. They left Ron back at home taking care of Harry and Draco's new adopted baby, and they didn't want to take the chance that the two were waiting up for them near the fireplace in the living room. Once baby Godric woke up, it was hell to get him back to sleep again.

Lucius sat down on the couch and rubbed his weary eyes. Severus walked to the sideboard and poured both of them a brandy, then moved to the couch and joined the blond wizard.

"Now that I know he's inside of me, I may be able to figure out when he will try to possess me." Severus took a sip as he stared at the coffee table.

"Is there a way you can use your Legilimency skills, internally?" asked Lucius.

"I don't know. That's a skill used to read someone's thoughts outside your own head, not inside. But, I suppose I can try it. I need to know what he's planning and when he plans on doing it."

"There is one thing we need to do before anything else," said Lucius. "We need to know when it's you and when it's him. He's done a very good job so far skirting around us all. But he's made a few mistakes. There were moments, things you wouldn't normally say that he would say."

Severus turned to Lucius.

"Severus, he never knew that we deceived him by being spies. He thinks we were faithful to him, and that we still are. We all know what to look for now. It will be quite easy to differentiate you two."

"I would hope so," huffed Severus. He already felt bad enough about the evening's happenings. The last thing he wanted to hear was that nobody would be able to tell the

difference between him and a mass-murdering racist wanker.

Lucius rolled his eyes. He knew that both Hermione and Severus had been through the wringer that evening. It was understandable that Severus would be a bit testy.

"Will you be staying here the rest of the weekend?" asked Lucius.

Severus shook his head. "No, somehow it's not the same now that...never mind." Severus was going to say that it wouldn't be the same if Hermione wasn't there with him at Spinner's End. After all, she was the one who had overseen most of the decorating and assisted in keeping the place looking like it was still being lived in.

Lucius looked at him thoughtfully, knowing what Severus had been about to say. But instead of saying something, he decided to let it go.

"Do you want me to stay or maybe accompany you to Hogwarts?"

"I'll be all right, Lucius. He can't cause any harm if he's alone in my home; he doesn't know my passwords. Besides, I think he will most likely seek out familiar faces, try to endear himself to those around me. I doubt he will try to harm anyone else, especially when he finds that Hermione is neither here or at the castle. I've no doubt he will be inquiring on her whereabouts."

"This is Voldemort we are talking about Severus." Lucius knew that his friend had to remember the danger the Dark Lord could cause, especially on his own.

"I know, but I believe that right now he is making preparations. He can't afford for anyone to be suspicious of me. He already made the mistake of harming Hermione. He will be more careful in the future."

"I need to make sure there are wards up around the estate. You know you will have to stay away from my house while Hermione is there, don't you?" asked Lucius.

Severus looked at Lucius. "If you see me there, you will know it isn't me."

They agreed to meet in the afternoon at Severus' rooms at Hogwarts, after Lucius researched a few books. Then Lucius left.

Severus walked up to his room and looked at the bed. He grimaced and walked back out. He couldn't bring himself to sleep in the same bed in which he'd no, in which *Voldemort* had attacked Hermione. He would sleep in the guest room.

~*~

The next day Severus made his way back to his rooms at Hogwarts. The first thing he did after unpacking was go to Albus' office to let him know he was back. The two men sat in the Headmaster's office pouring over some of Albus' oldest and rarest spell books. While the Hogwarts library held many ancient tomes that might help in finding a way to get Voldemort out of Severus' body without harming the Potions Master, someone had already taken up that task. Remus was currently holed up in the Restricted Section of the library.

As the day wore on and the afternoon sun was moving across the sky, Harry and Draco decided to visit Hermione after lunch. They left baby Godric with Molly, while Ron helped Arthur comb through some of the Ministry Archives. The elder Weasley had been Minister of Magic now for over eight years and thus had privileges not held by many other wizards or witches, even those who worked at the Ministry. He had free reign in every department. One good thing was that Arthur, unlike some of his predecessors, didn't abuse this privilege. Arthur would go into the Department of Mysteries and bring out scrolls to a small desk just outside the entrance, all in the open. He and Ron would search through them and make notes, and then Arthur would go back for more.

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At the Malfoy home, Lucius was gone, having slept only a few hours. He'd left early to go to his other home in France, where he knew of several old books that might help Severus. But first, Lucius had informed his wife and Hermione of all that was said at the Order meeting, telling Hermione to keep on guard because Severus was not allowed at Malfoy Manor. She appreciated the fact that the other members weren't aware of the whole story, only Albus. Still, it had been an uneasy night, and neither she nor Ginny had slept enough hours, so they tried to go back to sleep after Lucius left.

The house-elf woke them only after Harry and Draco arrived. The men waited in the living room for Ginny and Hermione. Both women came down wearing housecoats. It was obvious they'd only just woke up.

"Don't tell me you two were still sleeping?" asked Harry, trying to sound cheery.

Hermione and Ginny smiled.

"What are you two doing here?" asked Ginny.

"Can't we pay our two favorite ladies a visit?" chided Draco.

Ginny rolled her eyes and swatted him in the shoulder playfully. Draco and Ginny had briefly dated after she graduated from Hogwarts. That was when both he and Harry were still trying to figure out that they liked one another. She had a good relationship with her stepson and often liked to spend an entire day shopping with him in Muggle London.

"Have you had lunch?" asked Ginny.

"We actually had a late breakfast," said Harry. He then looked towards Hermione who hadn't yet looked him straight in the eye. "Hermione, I was hoping maybe we could talk for a few minutes."

Hermione looked at him then looked to Ginny. She knew that Harry would try to find out what really happened, but there was no way she would ever be able to tell him. Not so much because she knew that he would immediately blame Severus, even though Severus had no part of what happened other than his body being there. But this was something she just felt she needed to keep from Harry. There was no need for him to know all the details. It happened and nothing Harry could do or say would take away the feeling of disgust she felt at that moment.

"All right, Harry. Let's go into the study then." Hermione walked towards the study with Harry following her.

Draco and Ginny stayed behind looking worried.

"I don't want to pry, but there's more to what happened at Severus' home than we were told, isn't there?" he asked.

Ginny smiled sadly and wove her arm around his. "Why don't you come to the kitchen with me? You can watch me eat a peanut butter and ham and cheese sandwich."

Draco crinkled his nose as he walked with her to the kitchen, knowing she'd told him all he needed to know. The subject was closed.

In the study, Harry sat on the couch, as Hermione sat across from him in Lucius' favorite leather chair.

"So, what did you want to talk about?" asked Hermione.

Harry studied her. She looked relaxed, but he didn't know that she'd taken a calming potion as soon as she woke up, when she felt herself still a bit on edge.

"Well, I just wanted to make sure you were okay. Severus told us that Voldemort tried to kill you through him."

"He did, but I was able to get away. I...I was walking to my room and had my wand in my hand. When I noticed Severus acting odd I made sure to keep a distance from him. As soon as...as Voldemort possessed him, he chased after me and...well, I ran for my life."

Hermione's eyes were moving from Harry to the cushion next to him. She hoped he didn't notice but he did. After being her friend since they were children he knew that she wasn't a very good liar.

"Is that all that happened? He chased after you?" asked Harry incredulously.

She then gave him a look he'd also come to know during their friendship. It was the "don't question me" look.

"Yes, Harry, that's what happened. If you came here to annoy me then you shouldn't have bothered coming." She rose and started for the door.

Harry stood quickly and caught her before she ran out of the room.

"I'm sorry, please, Hermione. Look, it's just, well; I want you to know that if you need to talk about anything, you know you can come to me, okay?" He'd hoped he hadn't offended her or angered her with his suspicions. That was one of Harry's faults; he was a very suspicious person. But he had every reason to be. There had been so much kept from him when he was growing up, it was natural for him to question everything.

"I know you're just being protective, Harry. But really, I'm fine." She hugged him and they went off in search for Draco and Ginny.

The two young men were only there for less than an hour and quickly went off on their way. As they walked toward the door, Draco and Ginny went ahead of them. Harry stopped for a moment and turned towards Hermione.

Hermione looked at her friend and smiled. "Run along now, Harry. Draco is waiting for you. I'm fine, I promise."

Harry kissed her on the cheek, and then walked outside.

Draco was saying goodbye to Ginny as he looked and saw his lover approaching.

"Ready?" asked Draco.

Harry nodded, then kissed Ginny on the cheek. He and Draco turned to leave. As they walked to the edge of the property Draco noticed Harry being pensive.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"I think there's something Hermione is not telling me. Voldemort did more than just try to kill her," said Harry.

Draco stopped, then took Harry by the arm and turned him towards him.

"Leave it be, Harry. Hermione is a grown woman, and she's allowed secrets of her own. Whatever happened, it's her business, and she is dealing with it the way she sees fit. We can't always know everything about those we love. There has to be something we can keep to ourselves."

"But..." Harry protested.

"No, Harry. Whatever it is you think she might be keeping from you, she's not telling you for a reason. How would you feel if our friends and family insisted on knowing every detail about our lives?"

Harry averted his eyes. He knew that Draco was right. Whatever happened was something Hermione didn't want him to know, for her own reasons. He would allow her her privacy, just as she had always allowed him his.

"You're right."

Hand-in-hand, they walked past the gates of the Malfoy estate and Apparated home.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Some of you might have wondered why Severus believed Voldemort to be harmless alone. It's not so much he believes him harmless, but as I explained, the last thing he needs is to call attention to himself, and he's already made that mistake. A mistake he will have to figure out how to correct.

There wasn't too much action here, mostly planning and talking, but I think chapters like this are needed sometimes.

I hope you enjoyed this. Thank you for reading.

Being Severus For A Day Or Two

Chapter 11 of 18

Voldemort is back for a day or two. However, he will soon be rethinking his decision to have taken Severus' body.

Thank you to those of you who have taken the time to review and comment on this story. I really appreciate you all taking the time to read this.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thanks as always to June for her help and suggestions.

Chapter 11 Being Severus for a day or two

Saturday flew by in a haze of spell books and ancient scrolls. Lucius sent word from France that he would not be able to meet Severus that afternoon as he wanted to

travel to his home in Bavaria. He remembered he had several volumes there belonging to his great-grandfather that might be useful. The two friends both agreed to meet Sunday morning at Hogsmeade instead.

Severus and Albus spent most of the day in the Headmaster's office while Remus looked over as many books as he could in the school library. Nothing had been found in either collection, so it was decided that Remus would come back the following day. Albus told Severus he would continue to look through his own collection of magical books and sent Severus to his rooms to get some rest. It had been a very difficult two days for the younger man.

Severus also wanted some time alone, in the hopes that he would be able to figure out what Voldemort was up to. As he sat in his room, he thought back on the last few weeks. He decided he'd been able to keep Voldemort at bay simply because he'd been happy in his relationship with Hermione. But now things were different. She might never even want to see him again and that made him quite unhappy. He closed his eyes and took several deep breaths; after several minutes he began to relax. As a young man he'd taken up meditating. He'd practiced it during the years as a spy as a way to free himself of the anger and guilt of what he had done, and what he was still doing in the name of the Order, as well as to maintain his Occlumency shields.

As he felt his body becoming lighter, he realized that he could indeed feel Voldemort inside of him. He felt the darkness that he himself had let go of so many years ago, yet he felt it now, only because it belonged to his unwanted "roommate." He imagined himself an observer of a play in his mind, he sat in a small dark auditorium, with not even so much as a pinprick of light. Then he heard a murmuring coming from behind him. He walked towards the sound until he suddenly collided with something. He placed his hands in front of him and felt a wall. As he placed his ear against the wall he heard Voldemort's voice.

"Come to play, Severus?" asked the voice.

Severus immediately became incensed at the carefree sound in the other man's tone. He wanted nothing more than to tell him to go fuck himself, but thought better of it. If he lost control of his emotions and made Tom angry, he'd never get anything out of him.

"More like, seeking knowledge," he said instead.

"Ah yes, knowledge. You always were the scholarly type, Severus, always wanting to know more about everything. I suppose you're wondering what I'm doing here," said Voldemort. He sounded quite bored which served only to anger Severus even more.

"You can't begrudge me wanting to know why I was beaten within an inch of my life, then thrown into the Forbidden Forest left for dead. Only to awaken ten years later to find you inhabiting my body."

"Yes, well, you see that was a mistake you being found, that is. I blame the idiot, Wormtail, for that. You were supposed to be left in a small cave. I'd given Wormtail the instructions of how to get there, but my mistake. I actually mistook him for someone with a brain and a sense of direction. You are here because your soul was not allowed to die. Had you been left where I originally intended, I would have had an empty body to accommodate myself in. But you were found and taken to Hogwarts, where you were cared for by those idiots whom you'd fooled into thinking were your friends."

Here is where Severus couldn't hold back any longer.

"They were my true friends, and still are. I could have easily been taken to some cold ward in St. Mungo's, but they kept me here. They cared for me and it is because of them that I am still here. My question is: why are you still here?"

Voldemort grew angry. Severus had never shown him such disrespect.

"How dare you speak to me like that. I chose you! You should be thanking me, that I would allow you the privilege of providing your body so that I may live."

Severus began to laugh, the first time anyone had ever laughed at the Dark Lord to his face.

"Privilege? Is that what you call what you did to me? How deluded you have always been. And here I thought you'd discovered me as a spy. Instead, you were rewarding me for being a faithful servant," spat Severus.

Voldemort lunged at him, rather the sound of his voice. He found himself in the same predicament as Severus and also hit a wall.

"You ungrateful bastard," seethed Voldemort. "Against my better judgment I allowed you to enter the ranks of my Death Eaters. I should have known someone like you wasn't worthy of being my servant. Your heart is just as tainted as your blood."

"You should talk about tainted blood. You go on about Pureblood wizards and witches being the only ones worthy of practicing magic, of living this world. You who are no better than me thinking you deserve more respect."

Voldemort now realized that he wasn't going to win this one with respect for his blood. It was obvious to him that he'd lost Severus long before the war. The Potions master had just confessed to being a spy, and thus asking him nicely to vacate his body wouldn't work. Voldemort was going to have to fight for it.

"I wonder, Severus, how is Hermione these days?"

It was Severus' turn to lunge towards the voice that now taunted him. It was still frightfully dark, yet as his anger grew there came a sort of illumination. The black now turned to lighter tones of gray and red. He pounded his fist at the wall that separated him from Voldemort, wanting nothing more than to wring his neck, something he couldn't do in this place that was only inside his mind not a physical reality.

"I'll kill you for what you did to her, you filthy animal!"

At this the Dark Lord laughed. "Silly Severus. You can't kill me. Not unless you want to die yourself." Now he pretended to sob. "Think of how poor Hermione will feel if she loses us. Then again, she might not even care. After all, I did give her a rather good pounding."

It was now that Voldemort made his move. Severus' uncontrolled anger was enough to give him the power to take over his body once more. With one good jolt, he found himself once again in control of Snape's body. Quickly, Voldemort stood and strode to the mirror. He noticed his face had a slight bruise, no doubt due to the Mudblood trying to defend herself. He smiled, remembering Severus' reaction after what he last said.

"Oh Severus, so easily rankled." He patted his body and found Severus' wand. A quick spell took care of the bruise. When he looked at the time he noticed it was now Sunday morning.

Severus had meditated for a short time, but his time inside of himself confronting Voldemort took longer than he'd realized.

Voldemort of course wouldn't have realized how much time passed, since really time meant nothing to him once he was deep inside of Severus' body; those ten years in an unconscious state only meant he had ten years' knowledge to catch up on. The bits of Severus' life he'd picked up now and then in the past weeks hadn't given him any indication of time one way or the other.

Voldemort-as-Severus once again stepped outside Severus' rooms. He began to walk down the hall and stopped as he heard what sounded like Muggle balloon springing a leak.

"Psssst!"

Voldemort turned several ways looking for the source of the noise.

"Pssst, Professor," called someone from the far corner of the hall.

Voldemort approached slowly.

"Who's there?" he asked.

"It's me, sir, Mr. Filch." Filch slowly walked out of the niche in which he was hiding and looked both ways. "I was wondering, if you, um...had that thing you were going to give me."

Voldemort looked down at the scraggly looking man. "Thing?" he asked.

Filch looked around again. "Yes, you know *thething* you said would help me with the ladies, sir?"

Voldemort arched a brow, "Oh, yes, *that* thing." He cleared his throat wondering just what the hell the other man was talking about. "...I'm not quite finished with it. You see, I'm, uh...I'm still missing a...key ingredient to finish making it...the, thing that you wanted."

"Ah, right, no worries, sir." Filch smiled, a smile that made even Voldemort cringe. "I'll leave you to it then. I'll come by tomorrow maybe?"

"Yes, tomorrow, it should be all finished tomorrow." Voldemort swept past the odd man.

"I'll see you tomorrow then!" yelled Filch.

Voldemort walked a little faster wanting to get away from the man as fast as possible. As he rounded the corner he was met with yet another staff member. She looked to be dressed as some sort of nurse or medi-witch. He thought hard to see if he'd heard her spoken of before. Then remembered her face slightly. She looked older now, but he thought he remembered her name now too Poppy something or other.

"Severus, I'm glad you came back early. I was hoping you had," Poppy looked around to make sure no one was around. "I was hoping you had the... um...*thing* we spoke about the other day."

Voldemort's eyebrows shot up. *'What the hell?'*

"You said you would have it ready by the weekend," whispered Poppy.

"Yyyeeeeeesss, yes, I remember, but ah...I realized I'm missing a key component for your...item."

Poppy smiled, "Oh well, then perhaps tomorrow I can stop by and pick it up?"

"Perfect, tomorrow then. I'll be waiting." Voldemort quickly moved around the medi-witch and walked even faster. He had to get out of the castle before he was accosted by some other fruit loop not worthy of his time. As he walked down the steps that led to the school gates, he thought he was home free, until a mountain stepped in front of him.

"Hello there, Professor," said a cheerful Hagrid.

Voldemort stopped and slowly looked up at the half-giant. He swallowed hard.

'Good lord, he's as big as the castle,' thought Voldemort. He took a step back from the hairy man, and then remembered him to be the stupid oaf Hagrid. The schoolboy Tom Riddle had gotten Hagrid expelled from Hogwarts, by accusing him of using his Acromantula Aragog to kill that moaning chit Myrtle.

"I was hopin' to get ya before ya went off," said Hagrid as he looked around. "I wondered if you had...uh..."

Voldemort sighed. "The thing?"

Hagrid smiled and nodded.

"No, I don't have it, I am missing an ingredient. Come by tomorrow and it will be ready for you," said Voldemort as he walked past the odd hairy giant.

"Thank you, Professor!" yelled Hagrid after him.

Frustrated beyond belief, and wondering just what Severus could possibly be giving these odd people, he Apparated to Hogsmeade. Voldemort walked down the street towards Flourish & Blotts, muttering the entire way how if people knew what bloody morons the staff at Hogwarts were they wouldn't send their children there.

As he approached the doors of the bookstore, he heard his name being called. He turned and saw Lucius.

"Severus!" Lucius waved to him and crossed the street. "There you are."

"Lucius, if you are going to ask me for *thething*, whatever *it* is I don't have it and won't have it until tomorrow."

Lucius furrowed his brow. "Good heavens, Severus, what are you talking about?"

Voldemort shook his head and waved dismissively. "Nothing, I'm sorry. I just had a difficult time getting out of the castle, that's all."

Lucius tapped his cane on the ground and smiled.

"I know what that's like, to a degree. I almost missed our appointment today. Who knew that pregnant women could be so...amorous."

This piqued Voldemort's interest. If Ginny was to be his, then this was good information to know. Soon it would be him enjoying the pleasures of Ginny's body, pregnant or not. He looked at the blond wizard, wondering if he should just kill him and be done with it, or if he should allow him to serve him once more.

Lucius was the only person left he could trust. The servant had never hesitated in all the years he was a Death Eater, to follow an order.

As they walked, Lucius noticed something odd. Severus hadn't asked about Hermione, which was something he expected his friend to do first and foremost.

"I almost forgot. Draco wanted to send his thanks for the cream you sent for the baby's rash."

"It was no problem," said Voldemort quickly.

Lucius continued to walk along with him, now knowing for certain that it was not Severus he was talking to. The real Severus had sent the baby vitamin potion, not cream for a rash. Lucius wondered if he should make Voldemort aware that he knew it was him or wait and see if he said anything. Better still, maybe the best thing to do was play right into his hands.

"You look like you need several drinks. Why don't we have a few and remember the good days when things were less complicated." Lucius opened the door and allowed

the man inside; now knowing this was Voldemort-as-Severus. They walked to a table in the back set apart from the rest and sat down.

"I have noticed that things now have changed quite a bit," agreed Voldemort hesitantly.

Lucius sighed as he waved at the waitress. He ordered them two firewhiskeys to start.

"It's rather early to be drinking something that strong," said Voldemort. He'd never been much of a drinker and remembered the last time he came here with Lucius.

"Oh, come now, Severus, you can't be serious. I remember you practically lived on coffee and firewhiskey during the school year. Teaching all of those infernal Mudbloods isn't easy, after all." Lucius could drink just about anyone under the table, even though Severus wasn't far behind. But this wasn't Severus. And Lucius Malfoy was determined to get answers.

A large bottle of firewhiskey was placed in the middle of the table along with two tumblers. Lucius poured them both a fair amount and slid one glass in front of Voldemort. Picking his own glass up, he smiled.

"Cheers."

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Severus is helping his friends out by making them some special potions for them, so they really are asking him for their stuff. Too bad Voldemort has no clue. I thought I would fluster him a bit. He needs some aggravation.

Lucius will get him nice and drunk, it will serve its purpose. You know how some people get very talkative when they are drunk, especially people who aren't used to drinking.

The HP books haven't given Poppy Pomfrey's age, but she was the school nurse when Remus Lupin began attending Hogwarts (1971), so it's possible she was a student when Tom Riddle attended (1938-1945).

I hope you enjoyed this chapter. Thanks for reading.

Hermione And Lucius Move To Take Control

Chapter 12 of 18

Hermione and Lucius are tiring of Voldemort's game, and both begin to take action.

I apologize for the short length of this chapter, but due to my not paying attention, I lost a huge chunk of it. I managed to remember the finer points of it and here it is.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thanks as always to June for her help and suggestions.

Chapter 12 Hermione And Lucius Move To Take Control

Hermione and Ginny had spent the better part of Sunday morning decorating the baby's room. Ginny was hoping their child would be a boy, but she knew that Lucius wanted a little girl. He already had a son and he often said in tender moments that he wanted a daughter to spoil. As Ginny now napped, Hermione took advantage of the Malfoys' large library. She'd done a lot of thinking and knew that if she and Severus were ever going to be happy and be able to move on with their lives, Voldemort had to vacate Severus' body.

She settled herself at a table next to the large picture window. She'd decided to focus on four large books two looked to be from sometime in the mid-seventeenth century, one looked to be dated even earlier. These books' bindings were clearly handmade. The fourth book was written in the twentieth century. Most modern books didn't have the older more dangerous spells, but the author's name caught her eye. Fabian Delcalvo was renowned for his knowledge of the Dark Arts. She thought perhaps there was something that might at least give her a clue as to where to begin looking.

After three hours of searching, all Hermione managed to figure out was that Severus wasn't a Horcrux. If he had been unfortunate enough to have had that fate befall on him, for certain he was lost.

In her research this morning, she'd found only two curses that were similar to the one Severus had been hexed with, but both were meant to be only temporary the person inhabiting the host body was only doing so because of damage suffered to his own body. So far, she'd located only one recorded instance of that happening. During 312 AD the soul of a Roman general in the army of Constantine the Great was temporarily placed in the body of his youngest son, while his own body recuperated from a particularly fierce battle. After several days his soul was transferred back to his now healed body, and he once again was able to continue his emperor's campaign against Maxentius at the battle of Milvian Bridge. That win resulted in Constantine being proclaimed ruler of the entire Western Roman Empire.

Frustrated, Hermione pushed herself from the table and began to pace. More and more it looked as though the only way to get Voldemort out of Severus' body was to either ask him nicely or...or remove Severus' soul. But she liked Severus' body, in fact she loved it. She closed her eyes, the memory of the rape just a few days before still embedded in her mind.

"No, Hermione," she whispered to herself. "That wasn't him. That wasn't Severus."

She leaned her forehead against the stone slab that was part of the large fireplace, as she thought back to those first days after Severus awoke from his ten-year coma. Hermione recalled the day they first made love, and saw in her mind Severus' obsidian colored eyes as he told her he wanted to know what it was like to be loved. She showed him that night, and as the days passed and they both became closer, she knew that what she felt for him was deeper than anything she'd ever known.

Though she still held the image of their last loving encounter, it was of little comfort now. She also couldn't push back the pain she felt when Voldemort beat her and cursed her for even existing.

Lucius had told her that he would be visiting with Severus this morning. He also told her that should Severus even approach the property at any moment, to immediately alert the Order, as it wouldn't truly be Severus.

Hermione now turned back to the books she'd abandoned a few moments before. The war was over; it had been over for almost a decade. For all the years Severus had suffered at the hands of the Dark Lord, his only reward was the solid gold Order of Merlin, First Class hanging in his office. Even though he hadn't participated in the final battle, his work for the Order was recognized.

How she wanted to look into his eyes and tell him she wanted to spend her life with him. She wondered now if that would ever happen. Severus should have been living his life happily, finally free of Voldemort, but instead the very man they all thought they'd rid the world of, was now inhabiting the body of the man she knew she loved.

She looked at the books on the table once again, and thought this time, Voldemort wouldn't take Severus away, not from her or his friends.

"You can't have him, you bastard, not this time," she said, then opened the books and continued her search for a solution.

~*~*~

At the Three Broomsticks, Lucius and Voldemort, who had taken over Severus' body earlier, had been sitting at the Three Broomsticks for three hours. In the time they were there, they had gone through two bottles of firewhiskey, one small yet potent bottle of tequila, and a large pitcher of Bloody Mary's. While Voldemort did his best to keep up with Lucius, he hadn't noticed that the blond man had been covertly snacking during the entire time they'd been drinking. Even though Lucius could hold his liquor very well, eating helped to keep him from getting too loopy, as Ginny would say. Voldemort did not know this trick, having never been much of a drinker when he'd had his own body.

"So, what do you really want to do, now that you're back? I'm sure you have some sort of a plan." asked Lucius, hoping that the temptation to brag would be too much for the inebriated Voldemort to keep to himself. Lucius saw a gleam in Severus' eyes. He knew Voldemort would now spill, at least he hoped it would be information and not the contents of his stomach.

"Plans...yes, I have so many plans." Voldemort-as-Severus took another drink of the red concoction. "This time, I'm going to do things right. You, Lucius," he said as he pointed towards Lucius, "you have always been faithful. You never questioned anything asked of you; instead, you acted and did what needed to be done." Here he swayed a bit as he leaned forward slightly.

"Look at how strong I am now." Voldemort patted his chest. "I will be rid of him soon, and then I will start anew. And this time I will have you by my side again. You and your lovely wife."

Lucius' smile faded. Voldemort downed his drink quickly, not noticing the black expression on the face of the other wizard. When Narcissa was found murdered in their home he was convinced it had been the Dark Lord's doing. And now Lucius could see that Voldemort wanted Ginny. Lucius loved his wife more than life itself, and the fact that she was now pregnant with his child deepened his love for her. He held himself in check. At the risk of harming Severus, he couldn't do anything to Voldemort at this moment.

"You'll be rid of who soon?" asked Lucius.

Voldemort-as-Severus looked around the Three Broomsticks. It was getting harder and harder for him to focus. He felt Severus trying to come through, yet was able to keep him down. He looked at Lucius. He'd always found him to be a handsome man. Knowing now that Severus was a traitor to him, he wished it had been Lucius' body he'd taken. But if he had, then who would be left to serve him now?

"What did you say, Lucius? I'm feeling rather odd right now, not in complete control."

The blond wizard smirked inwardly. 'Good,' he thought.

"Lucius, I see what has happened to this world, and I don't like it."

"Times change, and the world must change with the times. Surely you can't think it's that bad. It could be worse," said Lucius.

Voldemort nodded.

"I can't see how. If I had my way, I would finish off all of them. Squibs, Half-Bloods, Mudbloods..."

"And what of Hermione? I know she is regrettably tainted by her blood, but she has proven to be a very intelligent witch." Lucius was outwardly calm but seething inside. He no longer believed the things he used to. When he began to court Ginny, there were many occasions when Hermione would accompany them to dinner or a Muggle movie. As he got to know her he realized how truly wrong he'd always been. Hermione was a bright and caring woman. Her powers equaled if not surpassed some of the purest of the pureblooded people he knew. Lucius often looked back on his life and realized how wrong he had been. He hated coming down to the level he was at now, as he was tiring of this charade that he hadn't played in ten years. He needed to get Voldemort talking, and this was the only way.

"Bah, she will never be good enough." Voldemort laughed. "Well, no, she was good for something."

Lucius stood quickly, and walked to the bar. He had to get away from the table. He felt the urge to grab the other wizard by the neck and choke Voldemort out of him if need be. Lucius ordered two lagers and willed himself to calm down. He threw down a few knuts on the bar and walked back to the table. He placed the lager in front of Voldemort who was looking at him oddly.

"Why did you get up so quickly?" asked Voldemort-as-Severus. He could barely focus. His eyes narrowed as he tried to turn the two blond wizards in his sight into one.

Deciding to confront Voldemort once and for all, Lucius leaned forward. "Enough of this," said Lucius. He pulled back the sleeve, the Dark Mark now as vibrant as it had been ten years before, and looked into the black eyes of his friend, only his friend was nowhere near the surface. "What's really going on here...my Lord?"

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Sorry for the cliffy, but I should have more this week. I hope you enjoyed this chapter, thanks for reading.

The Mind Is An Open Book

Chapter 13 of 18

Hermione finds out the truth about Severus' hex and Lucius takes Voldemort back to Hogwarts.

I'd like to thank all of you who have taken the time to read this story and review it. All of your comments mean a lot to me.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thanks to June for all of her help and suggestions, and also the title to this chapter.

Chapter 13 The Mind Is An Open Book

Voldemort-as-Severus stared at Lucius, the cold black eyes assessing his servant. It had shocked Voldemort when he'd heard the man across from him refer to him as "my Lord." Severus' lips curled up into a sinister smile.

"You always were so very smart, weren't you?" Voldemort leaned back, still trying to keep himself from falling. He felt dazed, no doubt due to all of the alcohol he'd consumed here at the Three Broomsticks. Severus may have been a drinker, but it had been many years since he'd had this much. It was no wonder his body wasn't doing well.

"Surely you also remember my impatience, my Lord," said Lucius, as he rolled his sleeve back down. "I saw you die. Why did you not contact me once Severus awoke?"

Voldemort shook his head. "I...I tried. When I was in your presence, I wanted to tell you, but the time was never right."

"It rarely ever is right for these sorts of things," Lucius said smoothly, as he took a sip of his lager. He maintained the bored expression on his face, and never took his eyes from Severus' face.

"Severus betrayed me, Lucius. Are you a turncoat as well?" Voldemort wondered now if Lucius had also been working as a spy. After all, he'd never suspected Severus of such a thing, so who was to say that Lucius hadn't turned on him as well. The two wizards had always been good friends and were often seen together.

His expression blank, Lucius looked into Severus' eyes. "I assure you, my lord, I have always been your faithful servant."

Lucius knew that he needed to be very convincing. Voldemort needed Severus' body, but the blond wizard could very easily be killed by the man now sitting across from him if the Dark Lord thought for a moment Lucius had also betrayed him.

Voldemort snorted. "I certainly hope you are being truthful, Lucius. I would hate to have to kill my only surviving Death Eater," he said as he smiled. "Severus no longer counts, and besides, he will die soon anyway."

Lucius took hold of his cane, which he'd been keeping between his knees. He wrapped one hand around the snakehead top, just in case.

"How is he to die?" asked Lucius.

"When I become stronger, I will be able to keep his soul trapped within this body. It was the contact with those fools at Hogwarts that kept him alive all these years. Instead of letting his soul wither away, they kept him grounded. But soon, I will be able to permanently keep him from surfacing. I am devoid of compassion or human kindness. I do not feed on it like the rest of you."

Lucius furrowed his brow.

"I care nothing for love. I do not need it nor do I want it." Now Voldemort's eyes took on a faint red glow. "What I want now is power. I want what was taken from me. I have a body with which to gain this power back. My Death Eaters are all gone, but I do not need them. I can gain new followers. You say this world has changed, Lucius, but I doubt that. I can feel the hate that surrounds us. The ground trembles from it, the air stinks of it. Potter did me a favor, Lucius. This...this is my time."

'He's stark raving mad,' thought Lucius. "What will you have me do then?" he asked, trying his best to keep his voice from trembling.

"First and foremost, I want Potter dead. I cannot take the chance that the infernal prophecy can still be carried out." Voldemort began to stand, then felt the room spinning. He dropped back down on his chair and held his head for a moment. "I want you to kill Potter. If you do this, then I will know for certain that you have never betrayed me and that you still remain faithful."

This time, when he stood, even though he swayed slightly he was able to keep himself from falling back down. Voldemort looked down at Lucius, whose face throughout their entire conversation had remained impassive.

Lucius knew that he couldn't let him out of his sight, as long as he remained Voldemort and not Severus.

"I'm going back to Hogwarts, Lucius. I can't think straight. I need something for this headache I'm getting." He started to walk away when Lucius stood and grabbed him by the arm.

"Let me accompany you, my Lord. If you try to Apparate you'll splinch yourself." Lucius was relieved when the other man nodded. The blond wizard paid for their drinks.

They walked out of the Three Broomsticks together and down the street. Lucius placed his hand on Voldemort's shoulder and they Apparated.

~*~

Back at Malfoy Manor, Ginny had woken up from her nap and joined Hermione in the library. Even with two of them looking through the books, nothing they came across helped them find the answer to Severus' dilemma.

As they both sat at the table next to the window, Ginny saw the green flames of the Floo come to life.

"Lucius? Ginny?" called out Arthur Weasley, the Minister of Magic.

"Lucius isn't here. Daddy, what's wrong?" Ginny asked as she walked to the Floo. She had noticed a slight tone of nervousness in her father's voice.

"Oh, Ginny, thank goodness you're there. I think I've found something, but..." Arthur hesitated.

"But what, Arthur?" Hermione walked over and stood next to Ginny.

"Hermione, oh dear, you're there as well."

"Daddy, what's going on? What did you find?" asked Ginny.

"Whatever it is, I hope it's not the answer we're looking for," said Arthur sadly. "Ron helped me most of this morning and afternoon. We think we've found something, but it's very old and dark, and must remain here at the Ministry."

Ginny and Hermione looked at one another. "I should stay here at the house, in case Severus shows up. You go, Hermione."

"I'm coming through, Arthur," said Hermione.

Hermione walked through and appeared in Arthur's office at the Ministry.

The Weasley patriarch sat at his desk, while sadly staring down at an open book.

"Arthur?" Hermione approached him slowly. "Where's Ron?"

He looked up at her and stood.

"Hello, dear." He walked to her and kissed her cheek. Arthur ignored her question about Ron, who had decided to go visit Hagrid rather than stay around. Ron did not want to hear his father tell his best friend that she could possibly lose a man she cared very deeply for. "I, um...well, maybe you can make more sense of that. Maybe it's not what I think it is." He pointed towards the book as he led Hermione to his desk.

She looked up at him curiously, then sat down and inspected the book, which seemed to be a very old Spanish spells book. She began reading the section he'd marked.

Paz para el muerto, poder para el vivo

Hermione furrowed her brows. She'd taken Spanish her first year at the university.

"I think this says, peace for the dead, power for the living." She looked further down the page and read more.

Este hechizo uno de los más oscuro de los hechizos. Debe ser usado solamente para asumir los ejércitos de sus enemigos.

"I'm a bit rusty but I think it reads: This spell is the darkest of spells. It is to be used only to take over the armies of your enemies." Hermione looked at Arthur. "Where does this book come from?"

"It was found among Voldemort's personal effects, in his home. When he died the property was seized. Aurors spent days collecting objects and warding the place."

Hermione smiled. "Well, this is wonderful! This is probably the spell he used on Severus. We can reverse it,"

"Keep reading, Hermione," said Arthur sadly.

El alma original morirá, y el alma de usurpación gobernará el cuerpo.

"The original soul will die, and the usurping soul will rule the body," Hermione translated aloud. Her eyes became glassy as they filled with tears. She struggled to read the rest, but the book was old and half the page was faded. The few words she could decipher were just barely legible.

"It says that reversal would cause...death." Hermione felt as though she'd been kicked in the stomach. As she sat back, both she and Arthur remained quiet. What was there to say, when someone you cared about was going to die, and there wasn't anything you could do about it.

"This spell should not be allowed to exist." Hermione took hold of the page from the book and looked toward Arthur, who nodded and turned his back as she silently tore the page. Though he was the Minister of Magic, and should protect all property within the walls of the institution, there were just some things that he couldn't in good conscience allow to remain. For this reason, he turned his back and allowed Hermione to take the page. She folded the page neatly and tucked it into her bra. She needed to show it to Severus. She knew that he was to stay away from her, but she had to see him.

"I need to get back to Hogwarts," said Hermione as she rushed to the Floo.

Arthur stood and walked after her.

"Hermione, maybe it's not the right hex. Maybe..."

"No, Arthur, I have no doubt that this is the hex. Thank you for your help," she said as she grabbed a handful of powder and announced her destination. "Hogwarts, Great Hall."

As she disappeared into the flames Arthur looked after her.

"Good luck," he said softly, then turned and walked to his desk. Arthur was at the Order meeting the night Hermione had been raped, but he and the others had only been told that Voldemort had been inside of Severus all of these years he was in the coma. Arthur didn't know fully what Voldemort had done to Hermione. He didn't know that the Dark Lord was now back at Hogwarts in partial control of Severus' body, with Severus unable to control the changes. Arthur also didn't know she was to stay away from Severus.

At Hogwarts, Hermione stepped out of the flames shakily. She decided first to go to her rooms before she went to look for Severus.

Meanwhile, as Hermione was heading to her rooms, Lucius and Voldemort were in the Potions classroom. There was no Hangover Potion in Severus' medicine cabinet, so they had to look in the small storeroom in the Potions classroom. Voldemort decided to personally inspect the stores, which were now being kept by Hermione, so Lucius paced the room, hands on his cane.

Voldemort was searching for the correct potion when he began to feel dizzy. He leaned against the counter as he fought back the urge to throw up. He mistakenly thought his sick feeling was due to the alcohol, but it was something altogether different. While he knew the hex he'd hit Severus with was meant to be a permanent one, he didn't realize that it was intended for only one soul to inhabit the host body. One of them had to go one of them had to die or vacate he body willingly. During the time Severus was in his coma, both souls were hibernating and not in conflict with one another. But now the constant struggle of both souls wanting to take over was beginning to be a strain on Severus' body. The strain was also making it near impossible for both men to keep anything secret from the other. The walls of secrecy were coming down.

Deep within his body, Severus was desperately trying to push Voldemort aside. He'd heard the entire conversation between Lucius and the Dark Lord. He'd also learned that Voldemort planned on not only taking Ginny as his lover, but he was also contemplating killing Lucius after the blond wizard killed Harry. Since Lucius would not kill Draco's lover, the Dark Lord would soon learn that Severus hadn't been the only spy in his ranks.

Severus felt a surge of anger now rumbling through his body. He then realized that Lucius was in terrible danger. Voldemort knew everything.

~*~*~*~*~*~*

I'm Latin and I speak and read Spanish, but due to my spelling not being up to par I used a translator. Everything is pretty accurate, but I'm not sure about the world for 'spell.'

Sorry for another cliffy, but I should have another chapter up soon. I'm getting close to the end here.

Edited: I'd like to thank Alienor for letting me know the word for spell. I had a feeling what I had wasn't right. Thanks again for pointing out the error. Hopefully its okay now.

A Body Is A Terrible Thing To Waste

Chapter 14 of 18

It all comes to a head.

Thanks once again to those of you who have taken the time to read this story and review it.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thanks as always to June for all of her help and suggestions.

Chapter 14 A Body Is A Terrible Thing To Waste

Ron had spent almost an hour helping Hagrid feed the Hippogriffs, a few of the unicorns, and one caged manticores in the pen. As he was getting ready to leave, Hagrid asked him to take the body of a newly dead gnome to the Potions classroom. The half-giant knew that Hermione used the blood and intestines of gnomes for some healing potions. Not knowing of the battle brewing back at the classroom, Ron made his way to the dungeons.

~*~

Voldemort-as-Severus came out of the Potions storeroom with Severus' wand drawn. Hearing him walking out of the small room, Lucius turned to see a wand pointed straight at him.

Lucius narrowed his eyes.

"You, of all people. You betrayed me, Lucius?" seethed Voldemort.

Lucius snorted. "Well, I see that there's no point in denying it. Yes, I betrayed you."

"I'm looking forward to killing you, Lucius. I wish I could strangle the life out of you, but I have better things to do with my time." Now Voldemort smiled. "Like making your pretty little wife my whore."

Lucius lunged at Voldemort who was fully aware that not only did he have a battle physically, but he had an inner battle as well. Severus was using all of his experience with meditation to mentally cast Voldemort down in his place.

"I blame myself," Lucius said as he grabbed Voldemort by the neck and pushed him against the wall. "So many chances to kill you and never taking any of them."

Voldemort was thankful he'd taken over a body with such strength, as he kneed Lucius in the stomach.

"That's right; you should have killed me when you had the chance, Lucius!" He grabbed Lucius by the back of the head and slammed his head on one of the desks. "Rest assured, I will not let any opportunity to kill you pass."

Lucius saw stars as his head hit the wooden desk. He felt himself grabbed from behind but used his elbow to deliver his own blow.

Voldemort doubled over and kneeled, trying to catch his breath. At that moment, Severus was able to move into control of his own body.

"Lucius," Severus said as he raised his hands. "Get Albus. I can't control him much longer."

Lucius' eyes nearly shot out of their sockets. He quickly turned and began to run towards the door, but before he could make it out he was knocked down. He fell forward heavily as Voldemort-as-Severus stood behind him clutching a cauldron in one hand. Hearing footsteps coming down the hall, the Dark Lord quickly dragged Lucius' unconscious body behind a brewing table.

Voldemort looked around quickly trying to find Severus' wand, which had been knocked out of his hand. Before he could locate it, he heard the latch on the door click and the door opened.

~*~

At that moment, Ginny was making her way towards Hogwarts. After Hermione didn't come back to Malfoy Manor, she Flooed her father to ask if she was still there. Arthur informed her that she'd gone to Hogwarts. Ginny immediately ran outside to the Manor's Apparition point. Being pregnant didn't keep her from Apparating; it was only Floo travel that didn't agree with her present state. As quickly as she could she walked towards the castle and made her way to the dungeons.

~*~

Hermione had gone to Severus's rooms. She knocked at the door.

"Severus," she called. After knocking for several minutes she let herself in. There was a mess of potion bottles in the bathroom. She gathered he'd been looking for something he was out of, and she decided Severus would most likely come to the Potions classroom to see if there was any stock of whatever potion he was missing.

Voldemort-as-Severus spun around as he heard Hermione's voice.

Hermione entered the classroom now and walked slowly towards him but kept her distance, uncertain whether it was Severus or Voldemort in control of Severus' body. So far, so good.

"I...I needed to speak with you about something." She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. "First, I want you to know that I know it wasn't you that...that..." She opened her eyes and looked at Severus, who now stood near the door.

"That raped you?" finished Voldemort. He approached her slowly.

Hermione moved back slightly as he corralled her towards the far end of the classroom. When her back was against the wall, she was trapped. There was an odd feeling in the pit of her stomach.

"Severus?" she asked as her voice cracked and fear now gripped her.

"No, not Severus." Severus' face smiled as his eyes now exuded a faint red glow.

She grabbed her wand and pointed it towards Severus' body.

"I don't suppose you would care to go another round?" taunted Voldemort.

Hermione's hand was shaking.

"Leave him alone, get out of his body!" she yelled.

As Voldemort approached her he once again felt dizzy and dropped to his knees.

Severus heard Hermione's voice. He knew that Voldemort wouldn't think twice about killing her. He hadn't been able to keep the monster from hurting her the first time, but now he was prepared to do anything to keep him away from Hermione. He knew what he had to do. With what felt like the last bit of energy he had left, he once again took control of his body.

"Hermione." His breathing was heavy as he looked up at her through the dark curtain of hair around his face. "You have to kill me, Hermione."

She cried, shaking her head. "No, I can't, Severus I can't kill you, please." Hermione frantically began to pat her chest. Finding the page she'd torn from Voldemort's spells book, she took it out and shook it towards Severus. "I know what the hex was. It's here. We can figure it out together, Severus, please. We could find an answer. You don't have to die."

Severus stood and walked towards her. He grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her.

"Don't you see Hermione, it's the only way. If I'm dead, he has no body to control. I die, he dies with me."

"But..."

"Do it now! Please, Hermione, do this one thing for me. Free me of this curse once and for all." Severus caressed her tear-stained cheek. "Hermione, I've lived almost my entire life serving a man who is more demon than human. I can't live like this anymore. If you love me then you will do this one final act of mercy towards me." He leaned down and kissed her softly on her trembling lips, then backed away from her.

Hermione raised her wand, wondering how she was going to find enough hate inside of her to cast the Killing Curse.

Severus stopped near the door that led to Hermione's office.

She knew she loved him, more than she would ever love another man in her life. In such a short time he had come to mean everything to her. Severus was the one man she knew she could spend the rest of her life with; he was all she wanted and needed. And now she had to kill him because of the dark soul inhabiting his body. Voldemort. How many hundreds of thousands had he killed men, women, children. He'd raped her brutally, and then taunted her. Because of him she now had to kill Severus. Allowing the hate to fill her body she formed the words.

"Severus," she said brokenly.

"I love you, Hermione," whispered Severus.

"Avada Kedavr..."

Suddenly, Severus' body was thrown back against the office door with such force that two of his ribs cracked and his shoulder was dislocated. His body slid down the door, as Hermione dropped her wand and rushed to him. She cried as she held his limp body against her and rocked him.

Just then, Ginny burst into the classroom. She looked at Hermione, crying and holding Severus' limp body. As Ginny took a step towards them, she heard a moan near a long table she remembered using when she was a student. She looked on the ground and noticed someone lying against the wall. Rushing towards the body, she then realized it was her husband.

"Lucius!" Ginny dropped to the ground and lightly touched her husband's face. "Lucius, my beautiful man, what did he do to you, love?" She noticed blood on his hair.

Lucius turned towards Ginny's voice and opened his eyes. He was seeing double as he looked at his wife. Luckily, when he was hit with the cauldron, Voldemort only grazed him slightly enough to knock him out but not enough to do any permanent damage. He thought he heard crying in the distance.

"Ginny, get Albus," he said before he blacked out.

Ginny stood and walked towards Hermione. She placed her hand on her friend's shoulder.

"Hermione, I'm going to get Albus." She quietly exited the classroom and began walking to the Headmaster's office.

"Oh, Severus, what am I going to do without you?" As Hermione brushed the hair from his bruised cheek, her thumb touched the vein in his neck. She felt a pulse. She stopped when she heard a moan escape his lips.

"What the hell?" groaned Severus.

"Severus!" She shook his body and he groaned again but louder this time, as he was clearly in pain. "Severus, you're alive! But...you should be dead."

"I felt him...shift inside of me. As you were saying the curse, something happened. Hermione, I think he's...gone." Severus tried to stand. Hermione helped him get to his feet only to have his knees buckle. Severus fell to the ground again, only he didn't fall hard since Hermione was holding on to him.

"I don't understand, Severus. The hex, it said that you both would die."

"Let me see that paper you were waving about." Severus placed his hand on his rib cage as the pain throbbed.

Hermione picked up the page from the floor and held the paper in front of him as he read.

"It says that reversal would cause death," said Hermione.

Severus looked at the torn page. "No, you read it wrong. Some of the words are faded, but it says, 'Reversal can only come on fear of death.'" He looked at her.

"But I hit you with an Unforgivable," said Hermione.

"You didn't finish saying the curse. Voldemort knew you were going to kill me and my body would die. He did the only thing he could, he fled."

They both looked around the classroom.

Lucius had woken up again and moved around the corner of the table. He held his injured head and looked at the witch and wizard now eyeing him.

"Well, don't look at me. I'm not housing the bastard."

Albus, Poppy and Minerva came rushing into the room, followed by Ginny.

"Am I correct in thinking you are now alone?" asked Albus as he looked at Severus.

The former potions professor nodded as he was helped to his feet by the old wizard.

Poppy and Minerva helped Lucius walk out of the classroom while Albus assisted Severus. As they all headed towards the hospital wing, where they would cast diagnostic spells to verify that Voldemort was not in Lucius or Severus, Ginny and Hermione saw Ron's unconscious body behind an iron grate that was next to one of the dungeon's stone pillars. The Minister of Magic's youngest son still clutched the dead gnome's small body against him.

~*~

As Hermione was readying herself to cast the Killing Curse, Voldemort's mind began to race. All those years of planning, sifting through volumes and volumes of books until he found the obscure curse that allowed him to inhabit Severus' body it would all be for naught. A Mudblood was now going to ruin everything. If Hermione hit Severus' body with the Killing Curse, both Voldemort and Severus would indeed die. Voldemort began to move, he tried to surface, yet he couldn't. Severus was expressing his love to the bitch and his love for her was keeping Voldemort from taking over Severus' body. As Tom heard the words forming in Hermione's mouth he did the only thing his instinct could have him do: he fled.

His soul whirled inside of Severus' body, and then with all his might he willed himself to withdraw. Voldemort went through Severus' body; it was the force of his leaving that threw Severus' body against the wall, not the Killing Curse, as Hermione had thought. He felt his soul move through something cold, then fresh air, and finally...it stopped. Voldemort was inside another body. As luck would have it, he'd found another body. He felt its warmth surround him. He laughed. He'd accomplished much that morning. He managed to get the traitor Severus killed and he was still alive.

Alive in the body of another.

~*~

It took Poppy only a few minutes to verify that neither Severus nor Lucius had any extra company. She mended Severus' ribs and shoulder. Lucius was lucky enough to only have a large bump and a cut on his head; after Poppy closed the cut, he was well enough to go home.

Ginny and Hermione moved Ron into the hospital wing using a Mobilicorpus spell. They floated him to a bed next to Severus. Everyone eyed the young man. Not wanting to contact her parents just yet about her brother's condition, Ginny waited until Poppy examined Ron.

Poppy approached Ron and slowly waved her wand over his body. She sadly looked at the rest of the group.

"I'm afraid that I'm picking up a magical signature just as when I examined Severus."

Ginny gasped and burst into tears. Her brother had been through so much. The blow to his head during the final battle had left him with a horrible affliction, where he'd only had moments of lucidity in the past ten years. But lately, he'd found his life again. The potion Hermione and Severus had developed for him allowed him to have a normal life once more. He was working and was able to perform magic like he used to. All he had to do was drink his potion for breakfast; its effects lasted twenty-four hours. He hadn't experienced any more outbursts with the potion. And now, he was lying in a hospital bed, the host to Voldemort's soul.

Ron began to awaken and immediately tried to sit up. "Blimey, what the bloody hell happened?" he asked as he slowly raised himself to a sitting position. He looked at the somber faces in front of him. Ginny was being held by Lucius as she cried; Hermione was sitting on Severus' bed as he had his arm over her shoulder in a comforting gesture. Albus, Minerva and Poppy all stared at him.

"Ron, how...how do you feel?" asked Albus.

"Like I've been trampled by a herd of dragons, but I suppose other than that I feel all right." Ron was about to ask why everyone was looking at him so, when he felt a movement behind him. He stood and turned to look at the bed. His jaw dropped when he saw what had been moving.

"Merlin's hairy asshole," declared the red headed young man.

Everyone immediately looked to the bed to see what Ron was staring at. Their jaws dropped.

"What the hell are you all staring at?" said the tell-tale voice of Voldemort.

Severus was the first to burst into laughter, followed by Lucius.

"Stop laughing! What are you two fools laughing at?" yelled Voldemort.

Albus stepped forward. "Good lord, Tom, you're a gnome."

~*~*~*~*~*~

I hope you all enjoy Voldemort's new predicament. This story is coming to a close. I was going to post this chapter tomorrow, but I decided to just post it today. I should have another chapter or two ready to post in a few days hopefully.

Thanks for reading.

Not Your Average Gnome

Chapter 15 of 18

Voldemort realizes he's not as scary as he used to be.

Thank you all for taking the time to read this and review.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thanks to June for all of her suggestions and additions she's made to this chapter.

Chapter 15 Not Your Average Gnome

Voldemort blinked quickly several times, wondering if he heard what he thought he heard. He looked down at his leathery looking body and realized he was small, very small. Not only was he small, but he had a long white beard and it seemed he was dressed rather oddly. He briefly thought he looked like a smaller version of Albus Dumbledore.

"Noooooooooooo," he cried as he fell to his knees and began to pound on the mattress with his tiny hands.

Albus looked at the others and indicated he wanted to talk privately with Severus and Lucius. They walked to Poppy's office, while Minerva, Ron, Poppy, Ginny, and Hermione guarded the Dark Gnome.

"I doubt the Ministry will believe that this is Voldemort in a gnome's body," Albus said soberly. "Unless we tell them about Tom's spell, but that would require explaining that Tom first hid in Severus' body for ten years."

"Hermione destroyed the spell. And even if Arthur Weasley argued on my behalf, the Ministry would probably take me into custody for as long as they want, for examination and testing," Severus muttered.

Lucius shook his head. "I don't feel it necessary to get the Ministry involved. In a gnome's body, Voldemort cannot use a wand or magic, so he cannot move into another body. We could cast an Obliviate on him, but it would still be the Dark Lord's soul in that body. We cannot kill him in the gnome's body because gnomes are a protected species, although they are considered pests."

"Gods, we have the pest of all pests now." Severus mused aloud. "He has razor-sharp teeth, he could bite someone. We would have to do something about those,"

Albus shook his head. "We need to discuss this further, but for now, we will keep him in our custody and feed him."

The men walked back into the infirmary. Albus then walked to the bed and sat on the edge. He tentatively reached out and patted Voldemort's new gnome body on the back.

"There, there, Tom it's all right."

Voldemort raised himself and looked at Albus. "All right? All right? What could possibly be all right about my current situation, you old fool." He spat as he slapped Albus' hand away.

Minerva stepped forward and shook her finger at Voldemort.

"There's no need for name-calling."

Voldemort looked up at Minerva and stood with his hands on his hips.

"I'll call anyone anything I wish, you old prune!" He then plopped down and crossed his arms.

He was once one of the most feared wizards in the wizarding world. A man known as the Dark Lord, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, Lord Voldemort. And now, he was a twelve-inch gnome, who looked more like a miniature version of Father Christmas than the serpent-like enemy they once knew. While he wouldn't think so at the time, Lord Voldemort was quite lucky. Most gnomes are known to be only a few inches high. But the gnomes around Hagrid's hut were special. The half-giant fed the little creatures well, and most of them ate plants growing around the hut, which were fertilized with Professor Sprout's special growing compound. He was still quite small though, since even house-elves would now be taller than him.

Voldemort shook his head. What had he become?

Severus and Lucius had been laughing so hard their ribs were hurting. Lucius was wiping his tears from his eyes when Albus motioned that he wanted to talk with him. At one point Severus had to excuse himself to use the bathroom because he nearly pissed all over himself. But now, the two ex-Death Eaters sat quietly watching the small gnome.

"What do we do with him?" asked Ron as gnome Voldemort turned his back to all of them.

"He looks rather harmless," said Poppy.

Ginny and Hermione both scowled at her.

"Harmless? He'll bite your kneecaps off, if you're not careful," added Ron. "I say we keep him in a cage, bring him out every so often and throw him around. That's how we de-gnome the Burrow's garden."

"Maybe he could help the elves in the kitchen?" offered Poppy.

Minerva placed her hand on her cheek. "We could always secure a small section for him in Professor Sprout's garden with a female gnome to watch over him."

Voldemort stood and threw his arms up in the air. "I'm sitting right here!" shouted Voldemort, as they'd all been talking as though he'd gone away. "Stop talking about me as though I can't understand you." He shook his head, as though that would wake him up from his nightmare.

"I refuse to live my life in this," he gestured to his body, "this body! I demand you get me a new body." He stomped his little foot.

"Get off it, tubby. Who in their right mind would want you taking over their body?" said Ron. Unfortunately, Ron had stepped too close to the bed, which allowed Voldemort to launch himself from the bed straight toward Ron's crotch.

"Ahhh, get him off, get him off!" cried Ron.

Albus immediately took hold of the squirming gnome Voldemort and pulled him away from Ron's crotch. He shook the gnome slightly and held him close to his face.

"Tom, now you calm yourself this instant. You have to accept the fact that you now inhabit this body. That's all there is to it. You can either accept that and move on, or you can spend the rest of your life sulking and being miserable."

Voldemort scowled and kicked Albus in the chin.

"That's it. If you can't be nice, then I am forced to put you in a cage until you have learned how to treat others with a bit more respect." Albus turned and walked out of the infirmary with the squirming Voldemort in his arms.

"Blimey, he's a mean little thing, even for a gnome," said Ron

"What are we supposed to call him now?" asked Ginny.

"I don't know, but I for one refuse to call him the Lord Gnome," stated Lucius.

~*~

Albus walked through the halls of the school holding Voldemort. After talking with Severus and Lucius, he'd planned on putting him in a cage in his office, but decided on a better location.

"Where are you taking me?" asked Voldemort warily. He'd only just realized he was no longer in any position to either be rude or demanding. He also feared he might have pushed the older wizard too far. Spending the next hundred or so years in a cage didn't sound very appealing. Perhaps if he was nice to the old fool he might squirm his way out of this. He might even apologize and act repentant, play on the Headmaster's weakness for giving folks a second chance.

"Albus, you didn't take what I did back there personally, now did you?" Voldemort giggled nervously. "You can't hold that against me; it was an honest reaction to my unexpected situation."

Albus continued walking until he was nearing Hagrid's hut.

Voldemort noticed they were no longer in the castle. He looked towards a large wooden structure with what seemed to be a thatch type roof.

"You aren't going to throw me in that barn as though I were some kind of animal, are you?" asked Voldemort in shock.

Albus stopped and looked down at him.

"That is not a barn. That is Hagrid's home," said the old man, with a gleam in his eye. "And it will be your new home until you decide to play nicely."

"No, not Hagrid! Please, Albus, I beg you! Hagrid always smelled of moldy cheese when we were in school. And he collected the most dangerous animals, like that Acromantula." Now Voldemort was really nervous. He also wondered if the half-giant held any ill feelings towards him because of the Aragog incident. It was after all because of him that Hagrid was expelled.

"You will see that there are always consequences for the things you do, Tom. You never really thought about paying for the atrocities you committed. But now you have a chance to atone for your sins. And I think you should start now in the company of Hagrid."

~*~

Back at the infirmary the rest of the group was beginning to dissipate. Minerva went back to writing her lesson plan for the upcoming school year. Poppy started to take stock of which potions she needed to have replaced and replenished. Ron decided he'd had enough of Hogwarts and the rest of the group. He was anxious to get home. One of the many great things that Hermione and Severus' potion enabled him to do was reactivate his social life. Ron had a date tonight with a pretty witch who worked in the Ministry's Spells Department.

Lucius turned to his wife and whispered, "Ginevra, my dear, I believe we should leave those two alone." He motioned towards Severus and Hermione who were now sitting beside each other on the bed Severus had been examined in.

Ginny smiled and nodded, then called to the couple. "Well, we're off, you two. Why don't stop by this Saturday for dinner?" She walked towards the two and looked down at Hermione.

"I don't know, Ginny," said Hermione, as the two women walked towards one of the ward's gothic windows. "...I think I just want to be alone for a while."

Ginny took hold of her hand and squeezed it.

"If you change your mind, you know where we are."

Lucius looked to Severus and nodded towards Hermione. The message to Severus was clear: it was now or never. Lucius knew that if Severus and Hermione didn't discuss what happened when Voldemort raped the young woman with his body, they might never pick up the pieces of the relationship they had been building.

The blond wizard left with his arm wrapped lovingly around his pregnant wife's waist.

Severus walked slowly towards Hermione as she stared out the window. She could see Albus walking towards Hagrid's hut, with the small Voldemort in his hands.

"Hermione?" Severus' voice was unsure. While they had their moment just before Hermione attempted to cast the Killing Curse on him, he was sure that the emotion of the moment was gone. She could very easily turn away from him right at that moment. "I would like to talk to you, if you would spare me a moment."

Hermione turned her head slightly. As she did he saw tears in her eyes.

"I have more than a moment for you, Severus," said Hermione.

Severus managed a faint smile, but he kept his distance.

"I'm sorry, Hermione." Severus spotted Albus outside the window with Voldemort. His eyes immediately darkened. "I'd like to choke that little gnome neck of his right about now."

Hermione allowed herself to laugh at his statement.

"I'll bet that sounded more ominous in your head, Severus." She looked over her shoulder towards the window. "He's not much of a threat to anyone anymore. Somehow, I think this will be his just reward. He's going to have to rely on the kindness of others now. People he's mistreated his entire life. Maybe this is the gods' way of redeeming him, if that's even possible."

"Perhaps you are correct." Severus backed away from her slightly and allowed her to walk past him a short distance. "I wonder...if you would consider coming back to my home. I meant what I said earlier, I do love you."

"Severus, I...I don't know." Hermione wasn't afraid of being alone with Severus. She'd realized and accepted that it wasn't him who had raped her. But she also knew that it would not be easy to become intimate with him again, especially in his home and in his bedroom where it had all occurred.

Realizing the cause of her hesitation, Severus stepped forward and lightly touched her shoulder.

"I know it won't be easy for you, but if you will allow me, I want to help you. I...I haven't been able to set foot in that bedroom since you left." He looked at Hermione's glittering eyes, "Please come back with me, Hermione. You can blast that room into oblivion for all I care. You can do anything you wish."

Hermione smiled. Blasting that bedroom into the sky might just be what she needed to get past the hurdle. While it wouldn't erase the memory of what happened, it would help them start from the beginning.

"All right, Severus. Let's do some redecorating then."

~*~*~*~*~*~

I thought I'd only had a chapter or two left, but I might have a few more. I won't know until I sit down to write a bit more, but it didn't seem right to end it with this chapter.

An Afternoon With He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Gnomed

Chapter 16 of 18

The path to humility and penance begins at Hagrid's hut.

Thank you all so much for your continued support. I'm very happy you are all enjoying this story. I've got a couple of things going on in this chapter. I have to thank Amethystique for the idea she gave me with the Hippogriffs. While it's not exactly what she said, I think this works just as well.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thank you to June for all of her suggestions and help in this chapter.

Chapter 16 An Afternoon With He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Gnomed

Albus walked up the short steps leading to the door of Hagrid's hut and knocked lightly. Voldemort-as-gnome sat on the Headmaster's forearm, scowling with his arms crossed. The door opened and Hagrid happily greeted the Headmaster.

"Professor, what can I do for you?" Hagrid looked at the small gnome in Albus' arms and his eyes went wide with surprise. "Mr. Tinkles! You're alive!"

Voldemort rolled his eyes and slapped his hand on his face in aggravation. The mortification was just too much; Azkaban would be better. He leaned against Albus' breast pocket, which had a large brooch pinned to it, and began beating his head against the sharp metal, hoping to knock himself into an unconscious state.

"No, Hagrid, this isn't Mr. Tinkles." Albus walked in as Hagrid allowed him passage. The half-giant shut the door and looked puzzled.

"But, he looks like Mr. Tinkles. Why, Ron took him into the castle a while ago." Hagrid walked to the Headmaster and bent down to get a better look at the small gnome.

The twelve-inch-high Voldemort looked at the half-giant and stuck his tongue out at him.

Hagrid inhaled sharply, as his Mr. Tinkles would never have been so rude.

Albus invited the Professor of Care of Magical Creatures to sit down, and then proceeded to summarize what had happened to Severus, being careful to leave out details that the gnome shouldn't hear. He told Hagrid of Severus' possession by Voldemort and his subsequent exile from the Potions master's body. Albus only said that the Dark Lord had tried to kill Hermione, with no details. Hagrid clasped his hand to his mouth and looked at Voldemort.

"Do you know about the..."

"Yes, I most certainly do know about the...*thing* Severus was making for you." Voldemort smirked as the bearded half-giant sitting across from him now blushed. During his last few moments in Severus' body he not only learned that Lucius was also a traitor, but he'd also found out just exactly what sort of potions Severus had been making for his friends. Mr. Filch had requested a potion for his horrendous halitosis, while Poppy needed something for the flatulence she couldn't seem to get rid of with anything. And now, Hagrid realized that the gnome sitting on Albus' lap knew that he'd asked Severus for a penis enlarging potion. Not every part of Hagrid was giant-sized.

With eyebrow arched, Voldemort cracked a nasty little smile.

Albus was confused. "Hagrid? What is this... *thing* you two are talking about?"

"Oh, it's just a tiny problem Hagrid has."

"Why, you evil little..." said Hagrid as he leaned towards the gnome.

Voldemort ducked beneath Albus' long sleeve and made his way behind his back.

"Let me have him, Professor!"

Albus raised his hand hoping to keep Hagrid calm. After all, as much as Tom Riddle needed to be taught a lesson, the Headmaster in good conscience couldn't allow a gnome, no matter who it really was, hurt either. Voldemort was a defenseless creature now. He would be taught a lesson, but not with violence. Humility was more what Albus had in mind, along with a healthy dose of penance and suffering. He'd always read about the controversies in the Muggle world about capital punishment. He knew that Voldemort deserved that and more, but knowing Tom like he did, allowing him to live his life in the servitude of others would be a punishment worse than death.

"Well, Hagrid, have him you shall, but I must ask you to not harm him. He is after all a gnome now. But I do have an idea."

~*~

Severus and Hermione Apparated to his home, just as they had done several days before. They walked up the walkway silently. As soon as they entered they were greeted by Dari, Lucius' elf.

"Dari, what are you doing here?" asked Severus.

"Master has asked me to serve you for the evening." Dari smiled and looked at the witch and wizard. The elf had treated Hermione the night she was raped, and though Dari wasn't directly informed of all that happened, she knew everything. She was the head house-elf at Malfoy Manor, and thus she knew the goings-on of the household; also, she'd heard several conversations between her mistress and Hermione. Dari was thrilled when her master asked her to go to his friend's home and help the couple.

"Thank you, Dari, but we can tend to ourselves," said Hermione, smiling. While she knew they wanted to serve, she still felt uncomfortable at times being waited on hand-and-foot by house-elves.

"Oh no, miss, it is my pleasure to help you this evening."

Severus looked at Hermione. "Very well, Dari. You can start dinner, but we will be in need your other services in a short while."

Dari bowed and blinked into the kitchen.

"House-elf magic might be useful after we get through with the upstairs bedroom, don't you think?" said Severus.

Hermione caressed his cheek and smiled softly as she nodded.

They walked up the stairs together. Halfway up, Severus took hold of her hand and squeezed it tightly. Once they reached the top, they walked several more steps and stood in the bedroom doorway. There was a sharp intake of breath from Hermione as she looked at the bed. Severus had been so upset himself, he'd not bothered to remove the bloodied sheets. Dari also noticed the state the bedroom was in when she arrived, but knew that the witch and wizard had to deal with it themselves.

Severus looked at Hermione and saw the tears falling from her cheeks. Before he could reach over towards her and wipe them away, she entered the room with her wand pointed straight ahead.

The blasts were heard clear into the next neighborhood. It sounded like bombs exploding. Hermione cared for nothing except the release of her anger, so Dari ran outside from the kitchen and placed silencing wards around the property. As Hermione set fire to the bed and everything else in the room, Severus stood calmly near the door. From his position he cast a fire repellent spell on Hermione, after he noticed fire now surrounding her. Severus had his own anger at Voldemort for the rape, but he could always "borrow" the creature from Hagrid and kick the Dark Gnome, or better still, there were a few potions he needed to test out and Voldemort was a talking subject. Severus allowed himself a smile as he mentally listed the potions he would start with.

One of the blasts made a huge hole in the bedroom and wind was filling the room. Hermione's hair was blowing wildly all around her head as she continued to cry and destroy.

After almost twenty minutes of destruction she looked towards the door. She saw the dark shadow of Severus standing near the door, one arm extended towards her.

"Severus," she whispered as she walked towards him, not realizing she was walking through the fire with no ill effects, thanks to his protective spell. She took hold of his hand and he pulled her towards him. He wrapped his arms around her trembling body and caressed her hair as she expelled the last of the dark emotions that had been festering inside of her for days.

"He will never hurt you again, Hermione." Severus kissed her on top of her head. They walked out of the room.

The Malfoy house-elf met them at the head of the stairs.

"Dari," Severus began.

"I know what to do, sir." Dari walked past the two and waved her hand. Not only did the fire immediately go out, but the entire room disappeared. Dari moved the guest bedroom into the open spot, and created an empty larger master bedroom and bath in the corner of the home, where the guest room once was. If Hermione wished, she would never have to set foot in that section of the home; if she did, it would be an entirely different room all together. The new bedroom was a blank canvas, for her wizard and her to make their own.

Dari then blinked back to the kitchen and continued working on their dinner. She realized Hermione had needed to lash out and destroy the room where the rape occurred in order to take out her frustrations and anger from the attack. Dari knew that the witch felt cleansed now, and that she would be able to begin where she left off with her dark wizard.

~*~

After Albus left Voldemort with Hagrid, the half-giant and gnome stared at one another for several moments until Hagrid stood and picked up his longtime enemy.

"You're squeezing me too hard, you brute!" squeaked the gnome formerly known as the Dark Lord.

"You're lucky I don't squeeze you harder for embarrassing me like that," said Hagrid. He knew perfectly well that a gnome's body could take a lot of punishment.

"If the baby shoe fits," Voldemort started to say, until Hagrid tightened his grip, "ouch!"

Hagrid walked towards the Hippogriff stalls. He had two at the present. One was a brother to Buckbeak, and the other was a pregnant female.

"Now, Tom, since I've got you here I may as well put you to work." Hagrid walked to a small table next to the pen and picked up a thin rope. He then began to tie it around the gnome's belly.

Voldemort hated having his real name used, but he knew that no one would be calling him Lord Voldemort, or Dark lord. *'Hmm...maybe I can get them to call me Lord Gnome,'* he mused to himself. He then felt the rope tightening around his waist. He looked down at what Hagrid was doing, then placed his hands on his hips and looked up at the half-giant.

"And what may I ask are you doing this for? I can't possibly run anywhere. I'm not a complete idiot; I know I wouldn't survive out there in the Forbidden Forest like this. I'd be eaten within minutes!"

Hagrid smiled and picked him up. He walked into the pen and towards the pregnant Hippogriff.

Gnome Voldemort looked on the ground.

"Ugh, it stinks! There are piles of dung all over the place. You can't possibly expect me to shovel this up." The gnome looked at the half-giant incredulously.

"I wouldn't be concerned with the dung out here. You should be worried about the dung in there." Hagrid then pointed to the Hippogriff's anus.

Voldemort's eyes went wide.

"What's that supposed to me?" the Dark Gnome began to squirm. "And why have you tied this rope around me?"

"Well, I wouldn't want you to get stuck and not be able to pull you out, now would I?" Hagrid had an evil gleam in his eye, something that anyone who knew him would be shocked to see. But Voldemort had pushed the half-giant too far. Hagrid had a score to settle with Tom for Hermione's attack, Moaning Myrtle's death, and for getting him expelled when they were in school, as well as almost spilling the beans to Albus about his shortcomings.

"Now, this pretty girl here is Red Feathers. She's got a bad case of constipation, and since she's expecting I don't want to give her any potions." Hagrid looked at Voldemort and smiled. "That's where you come in, or should I say go in."

Voldemort gasped and began kicking his feet and flailing his arms.

"Nooooo, let me go! I won't go, I won't do it!"

"It's not that hard. All you have to do is crawl in, carefully I might add, and push out any dung she's got near the entrance there. You really only have to get her started. Once she gets going it'll all come out on its own. Mr. Dinkerdoo did this last week and he said the slide out was quite fun."

Hagrid raised Red Feathers' tail and placed gnome Voldemort near the entrance of her anus.

As soon as the gnome got close, he placed his hands on either side of the animal's opening, then his legs.

Hagrid tried to shove him into the hole, but Voldemort wasn't budging.

"Stop that, I can't slide you in if you do that!" said a frustrated Hagrid.

"That's the general idea, you idiot!" yelled gnome Voldemort. "Do you expect me to make it easy for you to shove me up a Hippogriff's a..."

Before he finished his last word, Hagrid managed to catch him off-guard and shoved the squirming gnome up the animal's anal cavity. Hagrid took a broom handle and slowly pushed it against Voldemort so that he could shove him further in. He could hear the muffled cries of the gnome. He wasn't worried; in fact, Hagrid was thinking that the herd of Thestrals might need a good colonic cleansing too.

Inside the Hippogriff's anal cavity Voldemort could barely stand the stench. Not only was it difficult to breathe, but he'd been yelling to Hagrid that the broom handle was going up his own anal cavity and he'd gotten a chunk of shit in his mouth.

"Oh, Hagrid," the Voldemort the gnome said to himself as he crawled slowly into the Hippogriff. "You have them all so fooled, haven't you? Oh yes, you look like this sweet benign giant, but nooooo, you are the spawn of the underworld."

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

There you have it. I should start another chapter soon and hopefully have it up some time next week.

Thanks for reading.

Starting Over

Chapter 17 of 18

Severus and Hermione continue to mend their relationship and Voldegnome ends his day with Hagrid.

Thank you to those of you who have taken the time to review this story so far.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thank you to June for her help and suggestions, especially with the description of the new bedroom.

Chapter 17 Starting Over

After Hermione destroyed the bedroom in which she'd been raped by Voldemort while he was still in Severus' body, she and Severus went to the living room and sat on the couch in front of the fire. Hermione cried for several minutes as Severus held her trembling body.

When she finished crying, they sat in silence until Dari appeared in the hallway and announced that she'd prepared an early supper for them. As they followed her, the house-elf led them past the dining room, causing them to wonder where they were going to eat.

They discovered the clever elf had set a small table outside. The air was cool and the sky was now glowing orange and red as the sun danced on the horizon. Severus guided Hermione to her chair and sat across from her. The witch's eyes were red and swollen from crying. She looked at Severus from across the table and smiled.

"I feel like a huge weight has been lifted from my shoulders," she said quietly. "Thank you, Severus, for allowing me that."

"You could have burned this entire house down if it would have made you feel better," said Severus as he reached across the table and took her hand. "I meant what I said back at Hogwarts, Hermione. I do love you." He raised her hand and gently placed a kiss on her palm.

Hermione felt a slight warmth inside of her when she looked at him, but still she wondered if she would ever again feel joy, happiness, or deep love. Suddenly, she wasn't very hungry. Standing up, she walked towards him. When she was close enough to him, she bent down and tentatively kissed his lips.

Severus remained still, not wanting to scare her away by doing what he really wanted, which was to wrap his arms around her waist and carry her into the house.

Hermione lifted her head and smiled. "I'm not very hungry. Are you?"

He smirked and stood. "Not for food."

Severus took her hand and they walked back into the house.

Dari noticed them and smiled. She cast a warming spell on the food and brought it inside the kitchen. She knew they would come looking for food eventually. It was more important for the couple to put the pieces of their relationship back together.

When Severus and Hermione reached the top of the stairs, they noticed that the door of the bedroom looked different. Severus opened it and noticed it wasn't the same room. When Hermione looked in from the hallway she realized it was the guest room.

"What did Dari do?" she wondered aloud.

Severus turned to her, then looked down the hall and smiled. He took her hand wordlessly and lead her to the new door that he surmised was for the new master bedroom.

When he opened the door the room was empty. It was larger than before, or at least looked to be larger.

"There's nothing here," Hermione said as she entered and looked around the room. When she looked to Severus he already had his wand out.

"Shall we begin then?" he asked.

Hermione took out her own wand and nodded.

Much as she recalled his first year speech about "foolish wand waving," she had to admit the man could do wonders with his wand. Then she giggled to herself.

Severus turned his head and looked at her.

"And what has you giggling like a school-girl?" he asked.

"Well, you seem to be very handy with your wand."

He smirked. "Yes, I am, in more ways than one."

They continued in their shared task. They changed the dimensions of the room as well as its shape. Instead of a simple square room, the door to the now T-shaped room opened to a large rectangular sitting area (the horizontal bar of the T) with a fireplace in the middle. The sleeping area was in a square portion (the vertical bar of the T) that jutted out from the sitting area; this housed a large four-poster bed with a canopy. The walls had two windows, one on either side of the bed connected in the middle. Next to the sleeping area was a round bathroom, equipped with a tub built up against the round wall and a shower next to it. Both the tub and shower had one large window allowing bright light to come through, but high enough to allow privacy. The two-sink vanity followed the wall of the shower and there was a hidden room, which held the toilet. The ceiling was open and allowed views of the beams, just like in old castles.

The colors ranged from sage green to burgundy, to burnt oranges and dark silver. Hermione was pleased. It looked nothing like the old bedroom; there would be no bad memories here. As she stood at the edge of the rug which was part of the sitting area she looked at the fireplace. With her wand she created a small fire. She jumped slightly when she felt two arms wrap around her waist.

"It all looks perfect," said Severus. At first he felt her stiffen, but then she placed her hands on his. He closed his eyes and inhaled the scent of her hair. Severus could smell the light fragrance of patchouli rolling deep within her curls. He loved that she didn't use flowery scents, and he briefly thought brewing a perfume especially for her.

"How lovely you are, Hermione," he breathed.

Hermione leaned her head back against his shoulder and sighed. She turned and looked up into his dark eyes. There was life in them; there was warmth and compassion.

"How could I have ever thought that it was you at that moment?" she whispered as she caressed his cheek with her hand. She then kissed him eagerly, wanting to feel his lips against hers, feeling the need to now incinerate the memory of that night when she thought Severus raped her.

Hermione knew that Severus had been waiting for her to initiate what would happen next. He wasn't completely sure how he should proceed with their relationship or if she would want to be intimate with him once again, but he hoped that what they had done since returning to Spinner's End helped her expel some of the demons inside of her.

Knowing the wizard was allowing her to set the pace she let go of him and walked past him, brushing her shoulder against his slightly, but never taking her eyes off of his. She turned and walked backwards until she felt the mattress touching the back of her knees. Smiling, she began to unbutton her blouse slowly. Severus mirrored her movements and began to unbutton his own shirt. Hermione kicked off her shoes, he kicked off her shoes. She untied her skirt, he unbuttoned his slacks. Only when they both stood in front of one another in their undergarments, did Severus approach her.

"Stay with me here," he said quietly as he delicately cupped her face with his hands.

Hermione kissed his soft lips and eased herself onto the bed, taking him with her.

"I will stay wherever you want me." She laid herself down and looked up at him. "I do love you, Severus."

Severus lowered himself on top of her as she lifted one leg and pulled him closer to her. He opened the front clasp of her bra and licked her nipple as he caressed her other breast with his hand. Hermione arched her back and pulled his head closer to her.

As Severus sucked moved from one nipple to the other he allowed his hand to travel down her stomach and rested it on her mound. His thumb began to form circles around her nub as his fingers made their way past her now sensitive lips. Feeling her wetness increasing around his fingers, Severus lifted his head from her breast and looked at Hermione. Her head was flung back and a look of pleasure was etched on her face.

"I need to be inside of you, Hermione," he groaned, not realizing he'd said the words out loud.

Hermione opened her eyes and lifted her head. Her hands traveled down his back and felt his boxers. She pushed them down and gently took hold of his erection.

Severus gasped, and settled himself firmly between her legs. Allowing Hermione to place him at her entrance, he then thrust himself into her. For a moment she stiffened. Thinking he'd hurt her yet again, he held still. It was only when she wrapped her legs around his waist and smiled up at him that he allowed himself to move and breathe once more.

They moved together, finding a rhythm they were both able to enjoy. Not too fast and not too slow, as they both wanted to enjoy the feel of each other's body again.

"I thought I'd lost you, Severus," said Hermione breathlessly as she now thought back on what had happened in the Potions classroom. Had Voldemort not left Severus' body when he did, she would have finished saying words and performed the Killing Curse to its full potential.

"But you didn't, and I am here with you, Hermione." Severus continued his slow thrusts, which very quickly became more and more hurried.

Hermione could feel her impending orgasm and began working her inner muscles to stimulate Severus.

"Yes," groaned Severus as he began to move faster and faster. He positioned his pelvis so that he rubbed against her clit.

She dug her nails into his back, her body now responding more and more to his movements.

"Oh, Severus, oh my God, please." Hermione's breathing began to increase; she looked into Severus' eyes, wanting to feel their connection in more than just a physical way.

"Please what?" Severus held her gaze. "What, Hermione?"

"Tell me you love me. I need to hear it, please."

"I do love you," said Severus as they both began to reach their climax together. "I love you, I love you," he chanted as he felt her inner muscles milking him. Severus buried his head in her neck, while still professing his love to her. Hermione heard his words in her mind over and over again, like a distant song carried by the wind.

They lay together for several moments, until Severus turned them both so that they were on their side facing each other. He kissed her tenderly then held her firmly against him while he rubbed her back. Hermione seemed to purr when he did so, which made him chuckle.

"What?" she asked.

"You're like a little kitten, purring away."

"Hmm..." Hermione ran her fingers across the scratches she had just put on his back. "You might not be so kind with your words when you see these scratches on your back."

He threw his head back and laughed loudly now. "Purring AND scratching? I wonder if I could get you to lick milk off of me." He wiggled his eyebrows, as she swatted him on the shoulder and laughed.

"Oh, you pig," she said playfully.

They lounged in bed for another hour, Severus getting Hermione to agree to move into not only his home but his rooms back at Hogwarts. It was mutually decided that they would live together before they moved forward further with their relationship, both wanting to make sure they could live with each other before making things permanent.

After hearing Hermione's stomach protest for a few moments, Severus put on his robe and went downstairs. He asked Dari to set up a small table in front of the fireplace in the master bedroom for their late supper. Once she did so, Severus thanked her and gave her leave, and she went back to Malfoy Manor.

~*~*~

Lucius was in the kitchen getting Ginny some warm milk when Dari popped in behind him.

"Master, I have returned."

Lucius turned and smiled. "Well, how did everything go?" he asked hopefully.

Dari jumped up and down in excitement. "Master, you should have seen their faces. I think they were very happy. The mistress was sad at first. She destroyed one of the rooms, sir."

Lucius' eyes went wide. He knew Hermione had a temper, but he didn't realize it was that bad.

"But I fixed things. I gave them a new room to make their own. Very different, not at all like the old room. They worked on it together. I think they will be happy. And sir, they used the new bed!"

"Splendid," said Lucius as he walked out of the kitchen. He knew Ginny would be thrilled to know that Hermione and Severus had made amends.

~*~*~

Back at Hogwarts, Hagrid was in his small hut, dipping gnome-Voldemort into a bucket of warm water and scrubbing him from head-to-toe.

"Stop scrubbing so hard!" yelled the gnome.

"Quite complaining, I've just about got the dung out of your beard."

After his trek into the bowels of Red Feathers the Hippogriff, Hagrid had him extract Thestral semen from two of the males in the herd that he kept near the edge of the Forbidden Forest.

"You aren't serious?" Voldemort had complained as he stared at the Thestral penis in front of him, "You can't tell me that this can't be done magically."

"Oh no, magic would take some of the potency," Hagrid said simply. "We sell the semen to the Apothecary in Hogsmeade. They make facial cream out of it."

Once the gnome was clean enough, Hagrid notified Albus, who came back to Hagrid's hut to collect the gnome. While they walked back to the castle, Albus informed Voldemort that he would be assisting Mr. Filch with some chores the next day.

"Anything has to be better than working with that crazy bastard," mumbled Voldemort.

"Come now, Hagrid couldn't have been so difficult to work with."

"It was disgusting. First he shoved me up that pregnant Hippogriff's anus, and then he had me wanking off the Thestrals so he could sell their semen to the Apothecary!"

"Whatever for?" asked Albus, now curious.

Voldemort looked at Albus as though he was the stupidest wizard on earth. "As an ingredient for facial cream of course."

"Tom, there is no such ingredient in any facial cream made," laughed Albus, not being able to control himself.

"Nooooooooooooo!"

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

I hope you enjoyed this chapter. I'm winding things down here. The next chapter will most likely be the epilogue.

Epilogue - The Future Awaits

Chapter 18 of 18

The beginning of a new life.

I've come to the end of this tale. I hope you have all enjoyed it and I'd like to thank those of you who took the time to read this and give me some wonderful reviews.

All canon characters belong to JKR.

Thanks as always to my wonderful beta June. I appreciate all of your help.

Chapter 18 Epilogue - The Future Awaits

Three weeks passed and Severus and Hermione's relationship grew stronger by the day. After their third week living together, Lucius woke them up at Hogwarts in the middle of the night via the Floo. Ginny had gone into labor and there had been no time to transport her to St. Mungo's.

Severus and Hermione made their way to Malfoy Manor, arriving in time to hear two new additions to the Malfoy household come into the world. In attendance were Albus and Minerva as well as Arthur and Molly. Poppy had been called immediately when Ginny's water broke. Harry and Draco were on the couch playing with little Godric, while Ron was having his fill of biscuits. Ron was the only one of Ginny's brother's at the Manor, since Arthur didn't want to drive Lucius completely insane with having to deal not only with Bill and Charlie and their own children. It would have been even worse if the blond wizard had Fred and George wandering the house unattended.

Lucius was ecstatic to learn that his wife had given birth to not only a little girl, but also to Draco's baby brother.

Poppy led Lucius into the bedroom and gave her three patients a final check, then went back to Hogwarts to continue her preparations for the new school year.

Lucius watched Ginny lay on the bed looking at her two new babies. He'd never had the opportunity to see Draco when he was newly born. Lucius had been away on family business then, and quite frankly at that time in his life he was still young and didn't care much for fatherhood. It was only when Draco grew older that he took a more active role in his son's life. But now, here he was, a father once again. This time he wanted to be part of his children's lives from the start. He sat down on the bed next to Ginny, who gave him a tired smile.

"Look at them, Lucius; they look just like us," said Ginny, as Lucius moved the blankets from the first bundle in Ginny's arms.

The first thing he saw was a small head with fine red hair. He smiled; this had to be his daughter. Knowing his little girl would look like her mother brought him great joy, as he thought Ginny was the most beautiful woman in the world.

"Ginny, she's beautiful." He kissed the baby's tiny forehead and heard the whisper of a mewl from his new daughter. He then looked at the other bundle in Ginny's arm. He knew this would be his son, and as he peeled away the blanket he saw a full head of blond hair. His son's eyes were open and he could see the dark grey color that would eventually turn into the ice blue eyes that were a trait of the Malfoy men.

"He's going to look just like you, Lucius," said Ginny as she beamed with pride.

They stayed in their room for almost an hour, wanting to be alone with their babies, when Lucius decided to tell their friends and family that they were welcome to come and see the new additions. Ron, Harry and Draco practically sprinted up the stairs, with baby Godric in tow. Arthur and Molly followed, with Albus and Minerva close behind.

Severus and Hermione walked up the stairs slowly and silently. They were in their third week of living together and found they got along very well. It was easy for them to work together silently, as well as just be in the same room with no need of one word passing between them. It was just as nice having another person to talk to about their day or a particular idea either of them had, and while they never discussed marriage it was always on both their minds.

They reached the room and looked on as Ron held his niece, while Molly held her grandson.

"Have you decided on names?" asked Albus.

"Yes, we decided on Lavinia and Gerard," said Lucius rather proudly.

Severus watched as Molly handed Hermione little Gerard. He imagined her holding their own child, and wondered if she was thinking about the same thing.

"Oh, Hermione, why you're a natural holding a baby," said Molly, hoping that her not-so-subtle hint was heard by Severus.

Hermione knew that Severus heard Molly, how could he not Molly's voice traveled. Not wanting to meet his eyes, Hermione returned the baby to Ginny's arms and walked to Lucius who was now holding his daughter again.

"She's lovely, Lucius; they both are. Congratulations to both of you."

Lucius smiled. "Thank you, Hermione." He made sure they were not being watched, then leaned close to her and whispered in her ear, "Ginny and I hope you and Severus are in our shoes very soon." He winked at her and walked to the small bassinet next to the bed, where he placed Lavinia next to her brother.

It had been a difficult night, though. Ginny and Lucius were tired and wanted nothing more than to crawl into bed and try to get some sleep. They knew they would need all they could get in the coming weeks. While Dari and the other elves would be helpful in the care of the babies, the couple wanted as much hands-on time as they could get. They bid goodnight to all and invited everyone to stop by the coming weekend to visit.

"I feel like some air," said Severus as he looked at Hermione. "Let's Apparate home and walk for a bit."

Hermione became nervous. She wondered if seeing their friends with their newly born babies might have been too much for him. Knowing that things between them might soon change, she readied herself for the inevitable.

They Apparated back to the gates of Hogwarts and silently walked the lawn to the castle.

"The babies are really adorable, aren't they?" asked Hermione.

Severus nodded.

"I can't believe how much they both look like Ginny and Lucius," said Hermione, now growing nervous. He looked pensive, almost troubled. She stopped abruptly, as he kept walking.

After several steps Severus realized she was not at his side. He turned and saw her standing behind him, wringing her hands.

"Severus, what's wrong? You've hardly said two words since we got to the Malfoys' home."

"I'm sorry, it's just..."

Hermione approached him. "Just what?"

"Hermione, you know that Lucius and I, in our time well, we were ruthless in our service to Voldemort. I have seen and caused many a death." He looked up at the sky and noticed the half-moon peeking from the clouds. "Tonight, I saw my friend who's had the blood of so many on his hands, holding a new life, and I wondered...I wondered if I would ever know that happiness."

He looked down at Hermione now.

"And what happiness is that?" Hermione placed her hand on his arm.

"The happiness of holding my own child in my arms." He shook his head. "I never thought having a child would be something that I wanted. But when I saw you holding their son, I...I wanted it to be our child."

He looked away from her and continued walking, afraid he'd said too much, given away too much. Knowing he'd probably just ruined everything by pressuring her he walked faster. He'd noticed her blushing when Molly told her she looked natural carrying a baby. No doubt she'd been embarrassed because she had no interest in having his children.

'She would never saddle herself to an ex-Death Eater and her former professor forever, he thought. He'd almost reached the castle when he was grabbed by the arm and jerked back to reality.

"Severus," Hermione said as she took his face in her hands. "I want nothing more than to hold our child in my arms." She wrapped her arms around his waist and held him close to her.

Severus wound his own arms around her and entwined his fingers in her lush curls.

"Classes begin in two weeks." She arched her body into his. "Until then, it seems that we have a new project to occupy our time with."

Severus pushed away from her slightly. "Indeed we do, but there is one thing I insist you do before classes officially begin."

Hermione looked at him questioningly. "What?"

"Marry me."

~*~*~*~*~

That weekend Lucius invited the usual suspects to the estate for a celebratory dinner. Severus took the opportunity to present Hermione with a beautiful wedding ring. Arthur jokingly made the suggestion that they just get married right then and there. Much to everyone's surprise they took him up on his offer.

Hermione simply explained that it didn't make any sense to wait, seeing as most of the people who they would invite were already there. Even Remus and Tonks made an appearance late that evening.

During a break in the festivities, Albus called Severus and Lucius to one side.

"We need to discuss what to do with Tom. With classes beginning soon, I want to be certain his access to the students is nil," said Albus as he looked over his spectacles at the two younger wizards.

"Why don't we meet at your office this coming Saturday?" said Lucius. "Ginny will be taking the children to St. Mungo's for their first check-up and Molly said she would go along with her."

They agreed on a time to meet, then continued on with the celebration.

That Saturday morning Severus slipped out of bed early for his meeting with Albus and Lucius. As he walked out of the bathroom, he noticed Hermione had shifted to his side of the bed and was hugging his pillow. He smiled and walked over to her, kissing her lightly on her cheek so that he wouldn't wake her. After he left her a short note, he walked up to Albus' office.

Lucius had already arrived and was pouring himself a cup of tea.

"Ah, there is Severus," said Albus. "Have some tea, Severus, we won't be long."

"I would think he wants to get back to his wife," Lucius said, with a lascivious smile on his face.

Severus rolled his eyes and shook his head. He thought it was amusing that Albus and Lucius would think that he and Hermione spent all of their free time in bed. He chuckled to himself as he realized they weren't too far off.

"Now, classes begin a week from this coming Monday, and the children will be arriving Sunday evening. Tom cannot come into contact with them, at least not without someone watching him at all times. I've decided that it's best he be magically bound to the grounds." Albus looked at the two younger wizards across from him.

Severus and Lucius looked at each other, not totally convinced that binding Voldemort to the grounds was such a good idea.

"While I agree that it is best to keep him away from the rest of the wizarding population, do you think it's wise to have him bound to the castle which is always full of young impressionable minds?" asked Severus.

"I wonder about that myself, Albus. I know my twins are a long way from attending Hogwarts, but knowing that he will be here makes me a bit uncomfortable," added Lucius.

Albus nodded. "I understand your trepidation, but this is the only place where he can be watched constantly, without revealing who he is. I've had him working with Hagrid, and Mr. Filch put him through the paces as well."

Albus related the story about Voldemort's day with Mr. Filch. It seemed that the castle's caretaker thought it would be a good idea to have the gnome help him clean the owlery. Voldemort thought it would be easier than being shoved up a hippogriff's ass, however it turned out not to be the case. It seemed that owls thought gnomes were quite a tasty treat, so Voldemort spent almost two hours trying to keep from being pecked to death. Then, as if that wasn't bad enough, the caretaker decided it would be a good idea for the gnome to give Mrs. Norris a bath.

Severus and Lucius laughed. Albus pointed their attention towards a small cage just off to the corner. For the first time this morning since they entered the Headmaster's office, they noticed the gnome once known as Voldemort.

He sat sulking on a small bed in the cage. His hair was a matted mess, and his beard scraggly and unkempt. He had several scratches on his face and upper body. He was a complete mess.

"I have the cage charmed. All he sees is an image of an empty office. He doesn't know we are here," said Albus.

Lucius looked at Voldemort. "I almost feel sorry for him."

Severus scowled at him.

Lucius raised his brows and shrugged his shoulders. "I said almost."

"I am assuming then that he will be accompanied by someone at all times when he is outside of this cage?" asked Severus.

Albus nodded. "Yes, I have spoken to Hagrid, and he has agreed to take on the task of watching him during the school year."

The three agreed that for now, Albus' plan was the best one, and decided to meet once a month to make sure the gnome was of no danger to the children or staff. They briefly spoke about obviating the gnome, but felt it would be useless, as there would still be a chance of him some day remembering even a minute detail of his former life. And even if Tom Riddle had no memories of his deeds, he still had his evil nature.

The school year began and things ran on a routine once again no murders, no mysteries, nothing extraordinary. It was like this for two years.

After their second wedding anniversary, Hermione found out she was pregnant. Severus was thrilled to know that he would be a father.

Hermione's pregnancy was difficult for the first few months. She suffered from very bad morning sickness and they feared that she had developed gestational diabetes. After a few days of thinking the worst Poppy gave her the news that she was perfectly healthy. Three weeks before the end of the school year Hermione gave Severus a son. The day Hermione gave birth had been so hectic, that Hagrid didn't realize he'd left Voldemort's cage unlocked.

That evening, gnome-Voldemort sneaked into the castle and made his way to the DADA classroom, where he immediately spotted a large anaconda snake in a display case. Severus, who was planning on giving a lecture to his class on the uses some dark wizards have for large snakes, had the snake on the table at the front of the class. When Voldemort saw this, he jumped up and down.

"Nagini! I thought you were dead!"

In his demented mind the result of two years of cleaning up after Hippogriffs, Thestrals, and other creatures the former Dark Lord thought that his old familiar was in the display case. He quickly began to push one of the chairs towards the table and made his way up and onto the table. He managed to crawl into a small hole on the top of the case.

It was several hours later, when Severus returned from the hospital wing after visiting with his wife and his new son, that he saw what had happened.

Severus had stopped by to check on the snake when he noticed a huge lump in the middle of its body. As he walked closer towards the display case he noticed the chair next to the table. He then saw two small boots next to the snake's head.

He immediately contacted Albus, who practically flew down to the classroom. They both stood next to the display case, watching the lump that was once Voldemort travel down the snake's body.

Severus looked at Albus and smirked. "A rather fitting end, don't you think?"

Albus patted him on the back. "Yes, I most certainly do."

And so the years passed quietly and with many happy events. Severus and Hermione gave their son, Balthazar, a little sister they named Genevieve. The children had their mother's love of knowledge and their father's snarky personality. Both children were sorted into Slytherin.

Lucius and Ginny's children were so much like their parents that they were often seen as miniatures of their parents. Little Gerard looked like his father, but had his mother's personality; he would join his friend Godric Potter in Gryffindor house. The Sorting Hat barely was on top of Lavinia Malfoy's head when it shouted Slytherin.

Ron married a young witch he'd met in America. He'd been traveling to the States to promote the improved potion Severus and Hermione had developed for him. He no longer had to take a daily potion for his condition. The potion came in either monthly supplies, or the more expensive yearly dose. Either way, the convenience of the two new doses made it possible for many wizards and witches to live normal lives without worrying about the embarrassment of being out in public and having something like their pubic hairs need a trim.

After Voldemort's death Hagrid was slightly bereft. He'd grown fond of torturing the little gnome with embarrassing tasks, but he quickly got over the loss.

Severus Snape often wondered what his life would have been like, had he not been under the spell that Voldemort placed him under. While he'd missed out on ten years of his life, he knew that it was the best thing that ever happened to him.

His original plan was to leave Hogwarts and buy a small home in some faraway country. He'd had enough of the wizarding world as it had been during those days. He would never have seen the grown-up Hermione and fallen in love with her. His children would have never existed. All of the joy he had now was the product of a curse cast upon him by a crazed wizard. Now, he looked forward to his future with his family and friends. Whatever the future held now, he would be there to enjoy every single bit of it.

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I briefly thought of having Voldegnome live the rest of his days at Hogwarts, but that would have been too easy for him.

I hope you enjoyed this last chapter.