

# Always

*by themistresssnape*

Sequel to "I'll Be There For You." Suggested that you read that one first! Rated for later chapters.

## Keeping An Eye on Crookshanks

Chapter 1 of 9

Sequel to "I'll Be There For You." Suggested that you read that one first! Rated for later chapters.

*Although I had planned on leaving! I'll Be There For You as a one-shot, I was efficiently coerced into continuing with a sequel. So, with the usual disclaimer in place, this one's for you inna chy! I hope you enjoy!*

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## CHAPTER 1: Keeping An Eye on Crookshanks

He jerked his head toward the sound of crashing books and her screams. His legs began running before he could comprehend their movement. He threw the kitchen door open so hard that it slammed against the wall and was almost knocked off its hinges. A hissing orange ball of fur scurried from the huddled form on the floor, throwing a rather angry hiss in his direction as he went.

"Damn kneazle," he swore as he fell onto his knees beside the huddled form on the floor. Her short, brown curls were tousled from her fall, and bruises were already forming on her cheek and upper arm. He pulled the young woman up from the floor and guided her to an armchair nearby while he knelt in front of her.

The young woman's hand stretched out toward him and traced over his face. She felt his brow and the harsh bridge of his nose. She ran her fingertips over his eyelids and over the soft curve of his lips. He kissed the tips of her fingers gently, as he always did when she learned his face.

"Are you hurt anywhere?" he asked when she removed her hand. She touched her fingers lightly to the growing bruises on her cheek and her arm. "Yes, there are bruises there. Anywhere else?"

She touched her side and her ankle, her listless cinnamon eyes staring off into the distance over his head. His hands were warm as he slipped off her sandal and checked her ankle. It would be swollen in the morning.

"Will you allow me to look at your side, just to make sure you haven't broken any ribs or anything?" She nodded, and his warm hands lifted the hem of her blouse. Her pale skin was tinged purple and blue. She would have another bruise there as well.

He righted her clothing and took her hands in his own. "You are going to be rather sore in the morning, Hermione. That damned kneazle..."

"Crookshanks," she interjected.

He huffed and rolled his eyes, even though she couldn't see. "Yes, Crookshanks. He has tripped you up three times this week. I still think you should consider getting rid of the damn thing. Give it to Potter or Weaslev. I'm sure they would take care of it for you."

Her hand came up to cup his cheek. She had a habit of doing this when she wanted to make sure he was still near. After he had acknowledged his presence, she had become more and more comfortable with him being around. Sometimes she had a difficult time pinpointing where he was if he had been in the room for a long period of time.

"I couldn't do that. I have had Crookshanks since I was nearly fourteen. He is going to die soon enough, and I don't want to give him up so soon. Please do not suggest it again." Her face was set in a firm expression, and he knew the discussion was closed for the time being.

"As you wish, Hermione. Now, let's see what we can do with you today. Are Potter and Weasley coming with lunch as usual?" He pulled himself up from his kneeling position on the floor with a minimum of groans and settled onto the end of the coffee table. She nodded. "I suppose I will begin work on your books while they are here. Things did not go very well the last time we three were together."

"You can take them with you. I can't use them anymore," she whispered, her voice cracking as tears slipped out of her vacant eyes.

The calloused pads of his thumbs wiped away the tears as he pressed his forehead against hers to calm her. "You cannot use them as they are, Hermione. But there is a way for you to read again. I am going to teach you braille, and I am going to transfigure all of your books so that they are in braille."

She smiled and pulled away to take his hands in her own again. "One day I want you to tell me why you have watched over me all these years."

He grimaced and kicked at the ginger fur ball that streaked by his feet. "We must do something with that... uh... Crookshanks. What would happen if you tripped over him and hit your head if I am not here? Seven years would be for naught, that's what."

Her face went serious for a moment, and her vacant eyes seemed to fix on him for a split second. "Then must you leave?"

"It is highly inappropriate for me to stay here at night, Hermione. I would not want to put you in any position that would make you feel uncomfortable." He sighed and let his chin drop to his chest. *Only if you want me to*, he thought.

She asked again. "Must you leave?"

He was caught off guard at her repeated question and stared up at her, wishing he could find some emotion in her eyes. He hesitated and then let his thoughts come out. "Only if you want me to."

"I want you to stay here. I feel safer when I know you are here." She brought his hands to her lips and kissed them both gently. "You can keep an eye on Crookshanks for me."

There was a knock at the door that signaled the lunchtime arrival of Messrs. Potter and Weasley. He stood and helped her up before smoothing her hair and placing a soft kiss on her forehead. "I am going to let those two in, and then I am going to set to getting your books in order."

Hermione wrapped her arms around his waist and gave him a warm hug. "Thank you, Severus."

"As you wish, Hermione."

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The Mistress's Notes: Please review! House points to whoever can tell me where "as you wish" comes from!

## It's The Little Things That Matter

*Chapter 2 of 9*

A change in Hermione's routine and a surprising slip for Severus.

*Thanks so much to everyone who reviewed! With the usual disclaimer in place, I hope whitesilence and June\_W enjoy this chapter, as there is a little piece in here for each of them. And inna\_chy, I hope you get everything you want out of this one! ~The Mistress*

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### CHAPTER 2: It's The Little Things That Matter

Severus had no idea how the second bedroom of her flat had come to be painted in the brightest hue of yellow he had ever seen. The sight of it made him sick. It was not because he hated any shade other than black, for he loved the soft chestnut brown of her hair and the pale cinnamon hue of her blank eyes. The room was just too damn bright! A quick flick of his wand solved the matter, changing the theme of the room from damnable bright yellow to a more subdued forest green.

He had arranged the things he felt necessary to have at hand in the room the day after Hermione had asked him to stay. The rest was stored at his family home near Birmingham, those possessions just a Floo call away. He slept with the bedroom door open, in case Hermione should need him sometime in the night. They had been this way for a week now, and Severus was beginning to enjoy the domesticity of it all.

Hermione still woke up at seven, but there was no breakfast waiting for her when she arrived in the kitchen after her shower. She had asked him to wait and to let her help him cook. Their breakfasts were simple, usually consisting of toast, eggs, and tea, but it was enough for him that she wanted to try. She helped him clean up before he would start with her lessons. He had made good on his promise and had spent three whole days transfiguring her books to be written in Braille. They spent several hours each morning on the sofa, a beginner's book of the Braille alphabet open on the coffee table before them. Severus was a patient teacher, allowing her to take her time when learning the feel of the letters with her fingertips, but he also encouraged her to challenge herself.

He usually stopped their lessons at eleven o'clock and praised Hermione at her hard work. "You are doing wonderful," he would say, kissing her affectionately on the forehead. "It will take time, but you will be devouring those books again, Hermione." Severus would allow her to recline against him, his arm around her and the weight of his palm on her belly, as he read to her. It was a worn volume, its covers soft and frayed around the edges. It looked as if she had owned it for a very long time and read it many times before the curse.

Severus cleared his throat and propped his feet up on the coffee table. Hermione sighed and snuggled closer to him. "*The Princess Bride* by William Goldman," he began, turning the worn pages with care. He would read to her for an hour before Potter and Weasley would arrive at noon with lunch. They did not like that fact that he was the

one who looked after her, but they refused to do anything to upset Hermione. Even though she had changed perceptibly since Snape let his presence slip, she was still fragile in many respects. They were civil, although Harry had to stop Ron from hexing the older man on a few occasions. Harry would hand him a boxed lunch when Severus opened the door to them and then watch him disappear into the kitchen to eat alone. It was as if Snape realized the two boys needed their time alone with Hermione.

The boys would leave around two, and Severus would emerge from the kitchen to find Hermione. She seemed to always find her way to the window that opened out over the street. After three days of watching her do this consistently, Severus went over to join her.

"How long has it been, Severus?" she asked that fourth day. "How long has it been since I've been out there?"

He brushed one of her short curls behind her ear and caught her hand in his own. "Far too long, love."

Later on, he couldn't have said when the decision was made, but after that day, he took her on a walk every afternoon after lunch. They would walk down the street a few blocks from her flat through the market district. Hermione's head would turn this way and that so fast that Severus thought she would get whiplash as she took in the new smells and sensations. Each day they would go a little further, and they began to turn their walks into daily trips to the market for groceries.

Hermione would nap on the sofa while Severus made dinner. He liked being able to watch her sleep through the open kitchen door as he cooked. Little by little, day-by-day, more of the strong, passionate young woman he had once known was reappearing. Severus would wake her for dinner and let her help him clean up afterwards. He would sit with her by the open window and listen to the wireless with her as she started to drift off to sleep for the night. Sometimes he could wake her enough to guide her to her bedroom. Sometimes he would carry her to bed and give her a gentle kiss before retreating to his own room.

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

"It's beautiful out tonight, Hermione," Severus whispered quietly. They sat at the open window together, Hermione reclining against him with her head against his shoulder and his arms wrapped around her. He would describe the night sky to her, telling her all the constellations he could see and the way the moon was shining. She would listen, letting the warmth of his velvet voice wrap her in comfort. She felt safe with him.

*Tinkle... tinkle... tinkle.* Hermione's brows knitted together at the sound that was coming closer. She disentangled herself from Severus and began feeling toward the sound that was circling her ankles. Warm, soft fur tickled her skin as she hefted Crookshanks into her arms.

"What's this?" Hermione asked as she felt a soft ribbon around the kneazle's neck.

Severus smiled and pulled her back to him as the animal purred happily in her lap. "It is a bell, Hermione. If you won't get rid of the damned thing, at least you can be warned as to where it is."

Her head turned just as he bent to kiss the top of her head. His lips pressed against hers, feeling their softness and tasting their sweetness amid his whirling thoughts of surprise. He pulled away abruptly and kissed her temple before wrapping his arms around her once more.

"Where did you learn to read Braille, Severus?" she asked quietly. It was as if she was oblivious to the fact she had just been kissed by Severus Snape.

"From my mother, Eleanor. An infection she contracted when she was a young woman caused her to go blind. She taught my brother and myself to read Braille as we grew up." He spoke with a tone of finality, as if to say that the subject was closed.

Hermione smiled and rested her hand atop his own. "Thank you for telling me, Severus."

He kissed the top of her head and felt her snuggle against his warmth. "As you wish, Hermione."

She sighed and stretched her legs as Crookshanks jumped down. "As you wish, Severus."

## Sweet Dreams Are Made of Thee

*Chapter 3 of 9*

A rainy day outside and for Hermione, too.

*I am so terribly sorry that it has taken me so long to update! I hope you will all forgive me, especially inna\_chy, and that this is worth the wait. I must apologize to anyone who is offended by an OOC Snape, because he is very much so here. Enjoy. Please review!*

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### CHAPTER 3: Sweet Dreams Are Made of Thee

She looked so peaceful when she slept. There was a soft blush on the cheeks that were partially hidden by her curls. Those soft curls now tickled at the top of her shoulders, enough to remind Severus of the way she used to look. Four months ago, he never would have thought he would give in to the urge to twist the tendrils that played at the edges of her face around his fingers. And yet, he could not deny himself the indulgence. They felt like cool silk on his skin as he sat cross-legged on the floor beside the sofa. He could feel her warm breath on his face as she slept, one hand beneath her cheek and the other draped over her hip. This was his favorite time of day, when he could sit and watch her, a myriad of thoughts and feelings playing over her features as dreams swept through her mind.

"My Hermione," he whispered as he pushed a curl gently from her brow. Severus let his hand drop to the sofa near her head, his thumb lightly stroking through her soft curls. Streams of watery afternoon sun trickled through the window that was still streaked with rain. Even in the half-light, she looked gorgeous to him. He leaned forward and pressed a gentle kiss to her lips. "My beautiful Hermione."

She stirred and her blank honey eyes fluttered open as he pulled away, startled at nearly being caught. Hermione smiled lazily as she reached out toward him. The tips of her fingers flitted across his brow, easing the care worn lines that years of scowling had etched on his features. She traced the bridge of his nose and his high cheekbones, the strong line of his jaw and the soft curve of his lips.

He smiled against her fingers and kissed them before she moved to cup his cheek. "Did you sleep well, Hermione?" Severus said, nuzzling into her soft, warm palm.

She smiled again and sat up on the edge of the sofa. "Hmm mmm," she mumbled softly. "I think our walk exhausted me today. Has it stopped raining?"

Severus glanced over her head to the window. "Yes, but it looks miserable out there. I suppose I'll have to make dinner after all."

"We can always go to that little café tomorrow, Severus. I had a few delivery brochures in the kitchen somewhere," Hermione said, standing up and stretching luxuriously. "I suppose you haven't noticed them anywhere? Harry gets them when he picks up lunch, but I don't know why he leaves them. It's not as if I'm ever going to use them..."

Hermione sniffled and tried desperately to push back the tide of tears threatening to come out. She closed her eyes tightly and bit painfully into her bottom lip, hard enough to draw blood. It was no use, the tears had been held back far too long. The overpowering stress of hiding the fear and helplessness from Harry and Ron, of trying to be strong and brave in front of Severus. The tears came hot and shameful as Hermione buried her face in her hands. Her shoulders shook, and her breath came in shallow gasps as the salty drops blazed paths down her cheeks.

Something completely foreign and distressing pooled in his chest as Severus saw her resolve shudder and collapse. His heart skipped and nearly stilled at the tears streaming from her once bright eyes. Severus scrambled to his feet as the disconcerting urge to comfort her coursed through his veins. He gathered her close, wrapping his arms firmly around her. Hermione leaned into him, her face still buried in her palms and the backs of her hands pressed into his chest. She shook and sobbed in his arms as he rested his chin against the top of her head.

"I shall speak to Mister Potter about that. You needn't let it bother you, Hermione." Severus embraced her tighter and stroked her chestnut curls soothingly. "There's nothing wrong with crying if you feel the need. No one will think less of you for it. I certainly don't."

She sniffled and turned a tear stained face up toward his. As much as she had grown accustomed to seeing nothing but darkness, Hermione had never wished harder that she could see again. She longed to be able to look into those ebony eyes she had known for so long. She wondered if their harshness had softened over the years. "You don't?"

Severus smiled and kissed her forehead affectionately. "No, love, I don't. I think you have been through more than someone your age should have to endure. And you've come through spectacularly without losing yourself along the way."

Hermione sighed and clasped him around the middle, resting her cheek against his chest. The fabric of his shirt was soft and soothing against her skin. She smiled slightly at the thought of him in something other than his usual black robes. "I feel sometimes as if I have," she muttered softly.

He wrapped his arms tighter around her again. "The person you are is still here, Hermione. I can see her when I watch you going through your Braille books, desperate to learn. She's there when you're talking to Potter and Weasley. The Hermione Granger I knew has never left you. She has just changed and grown with what life has given her." Severus drew a deep breath and debated whether or not to give voice to the words echoing through his mind. "And I still think she is beautiful," he whispered.

The arms wrapped around his middle tightened perceptibly. "Severus..." she began, but the sound faded into quiet nothingness.

The soft sound of falling rain pelted gently against the window as the late afternoon shower revived. They stood in the soothing silence for a few moments, Severus listening to the sound of the rain and Hermione listening to the gentle beating of his heart. Suddenly he removed his arms from around her and took her by the shoulders, pushing her back from him. "Come with me," he said, grasping her hand in his own. Severus quickly set wards on her flat and Disapparated them outside.

It was mid summer, and the air was warm and heavy with the rain that fell in sheets like silk. It pattered against the ground and pinged off wastebaskets and railings. It washed over the two of them, standing in the middle of the empty street holding hands and turning their faces up to the sky like children. Their clothing clung to their skin, their hair plastered to their heads, their faces stinging with the falling droplets. Severus looked down at her as she stretched up on the tips of her toes and reaching her hand upward as if she were trying to grasp a handful of the bursting clouds. He smiled as she pulled her other hand from his grasp and began turning in slow circles, her arms up above her head and reaching toward heaven.

The sun peaked out from behind a retreating cloud and illuminated the sight before him. Hermione positively glowed as the light reflected off the water clinging to her skin and hair. His breath caught in his throat as he watched her, a smile stretching over her beautiful face and brightening her blank eyes. Her eyes crackled with excitement and pure joy as she reached out for him. His wet hand clasped her own and pulled her to him. Their soaked bodies stuck together as he cupped her face in his hands and pressed gentle kisses to her forehead and cheeks. He felt his heart stop when he finally kissed her lips, and his knees went weak when it finally started up again.

Hermione melted into him as he washed away her self-doubt with a soul-consuming kiss. One of his hands cradled the back of her head as the other snaked around her waist to pull her close, as much to anchor himself to reality as to give her reassurance. She was crying again as he ended their kiss, her tears of relief and joy mingling with the raindrops still streaming down on both of them. She smiled broadly and stood on the tips of her toes to kiss him lightly on the end of his nose. "I think you're beautiful, too, Severus."

For a moment, Severus felt his chest constrict tightly, the air forced out of his lungs, the beat of his heart held still. "As you wish, Hermione."

She giggled aloud and wrapped her arms around his neck. "I love you, too."

The restraint around his chest released, his lungs filled with air, and his heart began beating so rapidly it hurt. *So this is love...* he thought, gathering her up into his arms so that her feet were dangling off the ground and twirled her in slow circles, the rain washing new life over them.

## What I Meant To Say

*Chapter 4 of 9*

A few tender moments-and a confession or two--stolen over a good book. And a brief Hermione tirade.

*Apart from the general disclaimer...and the ultimate dedication to inna\_chy, without whom this story would never have appeared...I must warn that Severus is severely OOC in this chapter. If an OOC Snape offends you, then I suggest you take a look at "Like Sands Through The Hourglass" by Southern\_Witch for a more in character Snape, otherwise enjoy! Oh, and don't forget to review... you know you want to!*

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### CHAPTER 4: What I Meant To Say

Hermione smiled as she felt his fingers whisper through her hair. The steady beat of his heart melded with her own as she lay against his chest. It was comforting lying

with him on the sofa, his fingers toying with her hair, his heart thumping gently, and his silken voice reverberating in her ears. Severus had his arms around her, one resting on her head while the other rubbed gentle designs on her back as a book floated above them.

A soft, throaty hum vibrated against his chest as she wriggled, pressing her body from breasts to toes against him. "Everything okay there, love?" he murmured, slouching his neck to see into her face. She hummed again in response and wrapped the arm across his stomach a little tighter.

"I finished *Sleeping Beauty* today," she whispered, an almost sleepy note in her voice. Her warm breath washed over him, feeling as if it were searing his skin through the cotton shirt he wore.

Severus looked puzzled as Hermione snuggled closer. Her warmth permeated every bit of his being and made his blood pound in his ears. "I didn't know you were reading that. When have you found time?"

"I've been getting up early to read and study. The last few days I haven't been sleeping much anyway. It's getting easier though. I finished it in a week. Remember how long it took me to read *Cinderella*?" She sighed and stroked her palm across his chest.

He rolled his eyes at her and removed the book from its place floating in front of them. "You should get more sleep, love. Take time during the day to read. There's nothing here that I can't manage on my own for a while." His breath hitched as she continued to stroke her palm over the planes of his chest and down the ticklish expanse of his ribs. Severus kissed the top of her head and grasped her hand in his own to still her motions. "Why aren't you sleeping? Is there something the matter?"

Hermione was quiet for a long moment; the only sound the soft tinkling of Crookshanks's bell. She breathed deeply, taking in the herb and sandalwood scent of him. "The same reason I can't read during the day. I miss you."

Severus' breath choked in his throat as if he'd been hit. He looked at the young woman draped over him, her soft, warm curves pressed gleefully against the planes and angles of his form. Her clean scent wrapped around him, the jasmine and rainwater smell that clung to her skin and ignited his senses. "Hermione, love..."

"It's just that I like this, being near you. Knowing exactly where you are because I can feel the warmth radiating off you. Everything here has your smell, you know. Not that dusty, dank, depressing odor it had for so many years. I can even smell you in my room, but it's cold and just not the same. I'd rather be out here with you; besides, I take a nap every day. I get enough sleep then." Hermione stopped and listened to the frantic beat of his heart beneath her cheek. His chest rose with shallow, labored breaths. "Severus?"

His mind seemed to be on overload. Her words worked their way through his brain, moving far too fast for any sense to be made of them. She couldn't have *said* what he thought she'd said, let alone *imply* what he hoped she *meant* to imply. It was the smell of her in his nostrils, the feel of those soft curves that practically screamed *woman* that were crushed against him, the sound of her slightly drowsy voice in his ears that distracted him. They gave him hope, broke his heart, and undid him at once. Her face turned up to him, her fingers breaking free of his hand to seek out the contours of his face to see if his thoughts could be read on the curve of those lips and the knitting of that brow. He was frowning, that he knew, but he could not make his muscles contort into a smile no matter how he tried.

Hermione struggled against him and sat up, moving to the far end of the sofa. She wrung her hands in her lap, her cinnamon and honey eyes prickling with tears, the color drained from her cheeks. She drew a shaking, unsteady breath and bowed her head, her curls hiding her face from view. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that. You have given up so much to stay here with me, and I'm still asking for more. Please forgive me, Severus; it won't happen again." Her voice grew quiet, her words from days before ringing in her ears with the splattering of raindrops... *I love you, too*. Perhaps she was the only one who loved, and least *in that way*.

Severus sat up and scooted to sit next to her. Their thighs touched as he reached out to lace his fingers through hers. He brought their entwined fingers to his mouth and kissed her warm flesh gently. "You have rendered me speechless, Hermione. It has been a very long time since anyone has wanted my company enough to miss me. You must understand that I am not a patient man."

"No," she interrupted with a slight smile, "you're a stubborn man. You *are* a gentle man, Severus. You are gentle with me. The way you like to read to me, or when you watch me when you think I'm sleeping... Oh, don't snort at me, Severus Snape! I may be blind but I still know when I'm being watched. You are a different man than the one you were years ago. You don't have the cares you had then." She squeezed his hand lightly in reassurance and tilted her head onto his shoulder. He marveled at how easily her confidence was restored in him, how she could be on the verge of tears one moment and sighing contentedly in the next after a touch of his hand or the sound of his voice.

"No, I have new ones," he muttered, letting his hand rest atop her own. "I am not good enough for the woman I love, and she could never have meant it when she said her bed was cold at night without me." His thumb stroked the fleshy part of her hand sending little shivers down her spine.

Hermione held her breath, wondering if she had heard him correctly. Severus sighed and murmured, "You smell like rainwater. You'll always smell like rainwater to me." His tone was so wistful that Hermione felt her heart swell and nearly burst inside her chest. God help her but she loved this man, this man who had given her back her soul.

"I do love you, Severus," she whispered softly. She pulled their entwined hands onto her lap and covered them with her other hand. Severus smiled slightly at how her two small hands could barely contain one of his. His ears pricked at her words. "There'll be no more talk of you not being good enough. You are the most kind, gentle, loving man I have ever known. If anyone here is unworthy, it's me."

Severus stood with a swiftness that would have made his teaching robes billow if he had been wearing them. He pulled her up from the sofa and into his arms, crushing her soft curves against his chest. She wrapped her arms around his middle and turned her face upwards as his lips came crashing upon hers. He kissed her gently, but with a fierceness that told her in no uncertain terms that he didn't find her unworthy. His hands came up to cup her face as his tongue traced the seam of her lips, begging entrance. Severus felt as if he could die at that moment, the rich and intoxicating taste that was Hermione Granger dancing on his tongue and the smell of rain surrounding him.

He pressed gentle kisses to the corners of her lips, her cheeks, her eyes, her nose, and her forehead before embracing her tightly again and resting his forehead against hers. "You are not unworthy, Hermione. No, love, you are the goddess of my idolatry, the object of my worship, and the whole of my devoted obsession." With that, Severus knelt in front of her and kissed the tops of her feet and the hem of her summer skirt. He straightened up on his knees and pressed warm kisses to the curve of her belly as his hands stroked the swell of her hips.

Sighing, Hermione closed her eyes and rested her hand on the back of his head as he kissed her stomach. Warmth radiated through her, beginning where his lips and hands were spreading outward in undulating waves. At that moment, that point in space where the entire outside world ceased to exist, Hermione did feel worshiped. More than that, she felt loved.

The bell rang, snapping Hermione out of her daydreams at the mercy of Severus' hands. Her eyes popped open to stare at nothingness as a hot blush crept over her cheeks. Severus groaned inwardly as he got to his feet and regarded the time. It was noon; Potter and Weasley had arrived with lunch. He kissed her on the forehead once again and departed to answer the door.

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"*What?*" Hermione shouted a few minutes later. Severus was at the table in the kitchen eating the lunch Potter and Weasley had given him when he heard her. He nearly jumped out of his seat before he was able to calm himself. He smirked as he heard Weasley stammering.

"But we didn't ask him to, 'Mi-one," Ron whined. "He goes in there by himself!"

"Probably to keep from being hexed by you!" She was practically screaming at them now. "Harry, how could you let him do that? Get him in here now! Severus!"

A tousled head of black hair peeked around the doorframe followed by a rather fearful face belonging to the Boy Who Lived. "Um, Hermione wants you to come in the sitting room, Professor."

Severus smirked at the fear painted on Harry's face as he wiped off his hands and stood. He followed the younger man into the sitting room and beheld the most enticing sight. Hermione stood, fists on her hips in front of Ron's chair, her blank eyes glaring, and her face twisted in anger. The poor boy's want lay useless in his lap.

"Hermione," Severus said calmly. "What did you need, love?"

Almost instantly, her face softened, and she turned toward the sound of his voice. "Severus, how long have you been hiding in the kitchen when Harry and Ron are here?"

"Since the day I came here to watch over you," he replied calmly. Her face twisted into a frown of confusion. He grinned slightly and answered the question already forming on her lips. "I thought it best that you have your time alone with Messrs Potter and Weasley. At first I did not want to alert you...albeit inadvertently through Potter or Weasley...to my presence. Recently, I thought it best for you to enjoy a bit of life apart from my presence. You must carry on with the parts of your life that do not apply to me if you are to regain your confidence. I also refuse to interfere with the bond you have with them as you have known them far longer...and better...than myself."

The confusion fell from Hermione's face as she walked over to him and wrapped her arms around his middle. "You insufferable, wonderful man!" she cried as she pressed her cheek against his chest. "You are not to do that again. You'll have lunch in here...with all of us...and none of you are going to complain about it! If you boys can't get along, I'll have to lock you in a room and take away your wands until you play nicely."

Severus found it very difficult to keep himself from grinning as he wrapped his arms around her and kissed the top of her head. "It appears the old Hermione is finally reappearing."

She giggled, oblivious to the shocked looks Ron and Harry were giving them. "She will be as soon as you find my wand."

"As you wish, love," he whispered, kissing her soundly.

## When The Rain Falls

### Chapter 5 of 9

A late night rain storm keeps Hermione awake and leads to some steamy consequences. Please beware of lemons.

*Usual disclaimer goes here, as well as another warning that Severus is very OOC here. I hope you enjoy whatever lemony freshness this installment may bring. As usual, Always is dedicated to inna\_chy. Also a special thanks to Southern\_Witch for all of her encouragement and wonderful comments! Please don't forget to review!*

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#### CHAPTER 5: When The Rain Falls

Severus watched the summer rain falling against the window of his bedroom as the moonlight whispered through the curtains. He had always liked the sound of rain as a child; it was a comforting thing that brought to mind everything happy that had happened in his life. The scent of it was a different story. The clean, refreshing smell wafted through the slightly open window and wrapped around his senses, reminding him of the girl asleep in the next room. He had been living with her for four months now, and what he had said to her that afternoon was true. He worshiped her with every breath in his body and every beat of his heart.

He drew his knee up toward his chest and rested his chin on it as the rain let up. He could hear the wireless playing softly from Hermione's room over the quieting storm and smiled. She was beautiful when she slept, almost as beautiful as when she smiled, or when she laughed, or when she lay against him as he read to her. He saw her in his dreams, the way she used to be as well as the woman she had become. Groaning, Severus closed his eyes and let his mind drift away with the pattering rain.

The door of his bedroom creaked open, drawing him back to reality. He looked up to find Hermione leaning against the doorframe, her curls tousled with sleep. Smiling, Severus pushed his hair away from his face and stretched his legs out. "What are you doing up, love?"

Hermione smiled lazily at the sound of his voice and rested her head against the doorframe. "The rain woke me up. What about you?"

"I have yet to go to sleep," he replied, watching her carefully as she started to feel her way into his room. He climbed off of his bed and took her hand, leading her into the room. "I don't sleep much as it is."

Severus found it hard to hold back the grin that broke over his face as Hermione sank onto his bed and curled up comfortably. He walked around to the other side of the four-poster and stretched out beside her. Feeling the mattress dip with his weight, Hermione rolled over toward him and smiled as he pulled her into his arms. She could smell the rain falling outside the open window and thought of the day they had stood in the storm together.

"Do you mind if I stay for a while, Severus?" she asked quietly, pillowing her head on his shoulder.

He pulled her a bit closer and stroked her back with his palm. "If you'd like," he replied wrapping her in his arms and pulling her close. He watched the rain running down the window as Hermione's fingers traced little designs on his shirt and felt sleep tugging at the edges of his consciousness.

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

Severus jerked awake when he felt something remarkably soft wriggling against the burgeoning erection straining in his pants. His black eyes snapped open, his senses suddenly reeling with the scent of rainwater and jasmine and the feel of intoxicatingly soft curves against him. His mind ran in overdrive as he pieced together where he was and what had happened. The last thing Severus could remember was Hermione asking to stay. Now he found himself spooned against her, his rapidly hardening cock pressed against her arse.

He groaned and tried to pull himself away from her. He didn't think his pride could withstand Hermione's mortification at waking up to a severely aroused Severus Snape. Problem was, even though he tried to pry himself free of her, Hermione apparently refused to allow him to do so. She clasped on to his arms as they were wrapped around her and slipping her right leg between his to hook her foot behind his calf.

"Severus," she moaned softly, sounding as if she were dreaming. A frown etched across her face as he tried to pull away again. "Don't go, please." He stilled for a moment, unsure if he had heard her correctly, before relaxing against her and pulling her tighter against him.

Unable to resist the temptation presented to him, Severus nudged her curls aside and pressed gentle kisses to the back of her neck. Hermione sighed and stroked the hand that was splayed over her lower belly as the other slipped the thin strap of her nightgown off of her shoulder. His lips traced across her skin, caressing her flesh reverently with tender kisses. The most beautiful, soft sighs escaped her as Severus flexed his fingers against the wonderfully feminine swell of her belly as his other slipped over her ribs and teased the deliciously ripe underside of her breast.

Hermione moaned, low and long, sounding much like the purring of a very satisfied cat. His cock swelled even more at the sounds dripping from her lips. He nipped lightly at her warm flesh as he slid his thumb gently over her breast, her nipple peaking almost immediately. He cupped his hand around her full breast, testing its weight in his palm and basking in the hitch of her breath and the throaty moan that followed. Severus smiled against her skin and kissed his way to her ear. His hot breath tickled over her as he whispered, "Would you like me to stop?"

Hermione swallowed hard and tried to speak despite her panting breath. "No," she whispered, arching into him and pressing her breast further into his hand. "Please..."

Severus smirked, grasped a handful of her nightgown with the hand caressing her belly, and proceeded to pull it up over her thighs. "Please what, Hermione?" he asked, his voice deep and as rich as the finest chocolate. It worshiped her as it flowed over her tingling skin, sending a rush of feeling to the core of her.

The feel of his fingers flexing against her flesh as he pulled her nightgown higher robbed her of coherent thought. She was panting unashamedly now, one hand over each of his, guiding his movements. "Don't stop... *fucking hell!* Talk to me, Severus."

"About what?" he murmured. His fingers itched to delve into her folds, to feel the velvet of her slick opening clamp around him as he teased her up into a shattering orgasm.

"Anything," she moaned, writhing in his arms. Tears trickled from the corners of her eyes at the pain that tightened her chest. She wanted to see him, to look in his eyes and see love, to see the way his fingers played over her body and how his raven hair stood out against her pale skin. She knew at that moment that she would give anything to be able to see his face again.

If Severus was surprised by her request, he didn't show it. He chuckled softly and kissed the skin behind her ear. "As you wish," he whispered throatily as he pulled away. Hermione whimpered at the loss of his warm touch and reached out, searching for him. "I'm here, love. Right here, you see," he murmured, rolling her gently onto her back. He let his hands roam down her arms and across her belly. "Do you like the feel of my hands on your skin, Hermione?"

"Mmm," she purred, reaching out to him. Severus leaned into her touch and allowed her to pull him down atop her. He braced himself on his forearms on each side of her head as she pulled him into a languid, lazy kiss. He stroked her hair as their tongues danced together, her fingers tracing over the thin cloth covering the sinewy muscles of his back.

Severus broke the kiss and returned to his position kneeling beside her. "My beautiful Hermione," he whispered, looking down on her with a mixture of love and rampaging lust. She made such a beautiful picture, splayed out on his bed looking deliciously wanton. He slipped his hands beneath her and pulled her into a sitting position. Severus guided her nightgown over her head and tossed it over his shoulder before capturing her lips with his once more. He eased her back onto the bed and stroked every inch of flesh he could reach.

When they finally parted for breath, Severus greedily took in the sight of her milky skin, her full breasts with their peaked nipples, and her shapely legs as he unbuttoned his shirt and tossed it aside. "My lovely, beautiful Hermione. Do you know how beautiful I think you are? How much I love you, my wonderful, dearest girl?"

He leaned over to kiss the pulse point at the base of her throat before tracing his tongue down through the valley between her breasts. She hummed in delight and her fingers laced through his hair as it tickled over her skin. He took one nipple between his lips, flicking his tongue over the turgid peak and feeling his pride balloon at the beautiful music he was eliciting from her. One hand slipped down her belly to trace the elastic of her knickers as he moved his attention to her other breast. Her hips writhed beneath his firm hand, lifting up from the mattress in search of more contact.

Severus planted soft kisses down her belly, nipping slightly at the flesh around her navel, inhaling her scent as he went. His hands stroked over the cloth of her knickers at her hips in silent question. "Do you want me to continue, love?" He pleaded to any deity that was listening that she did. He wasn't sure if he had the willpower to stop now.

Lifting her hips, Hermione smiled softly. "Yes," she whispered, the longing to see him warring with the lust fogging her brain. She sighed and shuddered as she felt his comforting hands slide her knickers down her legs. Her sigh turned into a breathy moan as he worshiped her legs with his lips, grazing her flesh with gentle, lingering kisses from her ankles to her hips. He carefully avoided the place where he most wanted to be, teasing her just a bit more before he gave in to them both.

She shifted her legs open wider and bit down on her lower lip as she felt his warm breath mingle with the heat radiating from her core. He smirked as his fingers traced over her swollen lips before teasing her open. Severus flicked his tongue teasingly against her, drawing her taste into his mouth. Hermione bucked against him so that he had to wrap his arms around her thighs to hold her still. He tortured her with his tongue, slipping into her opening and then lapping up to her clit before sucking and lavaging it with fervor. Severus closed his eyes and let her panting, incoherent mumbling wash over him and urge him on. Her legs tensed as her hips arched from the bed as much as they could, a barely intelligible chant of *oh, god, oh, god, oh, god* filling the room as she spiraled upwards on the tension pooling where Severus' lips touched her. It coiled tightly in the pit of her stomach, where it settled for a split second that stretched into an eternity, before it exploded in a rush of warmth and sensation that spread over her.

His cock straining toward her painfully, Severus slid from the bed, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand. He dropped his pants and boxers to the floor as he watched her reveling in post-orgasmic bliss, a pleased smile on her lips, her honey and cinnamon eyes closed, and her fingers flexing lightly over her belly. He groaned as he crawled back onto the bed and settled between her splayed thighs. He could still feel the heat radiating from her and the wetness that had gushed from her opening to soak the bed sheets beneath her. Bracing himself on his forearms, Severus drew her into a needy, fevered kiss as he flexed his hips against hers. He swallowed her groan and reached between them to position himself at her entrance, her juices coating his cock. Fleeting, he wished that she wasn't blind, that he could look into her eyes and see the emotions raging in their depths.

"Holy fucking hell," he groaned as he pushed forward, sinking into her until he was buried to the hilt. He held himself still for a long moment, feeling the velvet softness of her walls encasing him, the warmth of her breath on his face, the comfort of her curves beneath him. She hooked her legs over his hips in silent pleading.

She hissed as he pulled out of her slowly before slamming back into her. He repeated the motion until she lifting her hips up to meet his thrust, drawing him in deeper and allowing him to hit that sinfully sweet spot within her. They quickly set a rhythm until all that could be heard was the panting of their breath, the slap of skin on skin, and the rhythmic squeaking of the mattress. Hermione pulled him down into a searing kiss and moaned into his mouth as the angle caused him to hit her swollen clit with his pelvis each time he thrust.

He felt her orgasm build and knew his own wasn't far behind. His thrusts became deeper, all rhythm lost as they both raced toward completion. Hermione pulled away from his kiss, her body arching against his, her head thrown back against the pillows as her muscles fluttered and clamped down on his swollen cock. She cried out his name as he thrust through her orgasm, his bollocks tightening. He kissed her throat and sucked gently at the crook of her neck as he came inside her.

Collapsing atop her, Severus kissed her lazily as their breathing slowed. "My Hermione," he whispered, stroking her hair. He rolled off of her and, pulling the covers out from underneath them, drew her against him.

"Severus," she whispered, curling up at his side. At his grunted response, she smiled and said, "You won't leave me, will you, Severus?"

His chest tightened momentarily as he kissed the top of her head sweetly. "Never, my love. I think I'd die if I did."

With that, they drifted off into a peaceful sleep as the rain began to fall.

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**Notes From The Mistress:** I'm sorry to anyone who is a bit tired of the rain; I just can't seem to get away from it. Apparently London is having some rough weather lately.

At least things are looking up! Cheers!

# The Grass is Always Greener...

Chapter 6 of 9

I think a little time away is in order...

*They aren't mine; I'm just playing with them! As always, this one's dedicated to inna\_chy, without whom Always would never have been born. Read, enjoy, and review!*

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## CHAPTER 6: The Grass is Always Greener...

*Messrs. Potter and Weasley,*

*I regretfully inform you that Miss Granger and myself will not need your presence at lunch today or for the remainder of the week. I shall be escorting Miss Granger to the country for some much needed time away from London. If you need to contact either of us in case of emergency, you may send an owl. It will not be difficult for one to find us.*

*Respectfully,*

*S. Snape*

Severus rolled the parchment tightly, sealed it, and fastened it securely to the outstretched leg of the owl on the window ledge. He stroked the owl's feathers and looked directly into its eyes. "Take this to Potter's flat in Diagon Alley, Titan. I'm sure both of the dunderheads will be there," he said, holding his arm out of the window and watching the owl fly off into the distance.

Latching the window and warding it securely, Severus turned and surveyed the rest of the sitting room. The other windows in the room were shut, locked, and warded. He needed to check the one above the sink in the kitchen and make sure that all the perishable items in the refrigerator had been packed for the journey to the country. The windows in Hermione's room needed to be warded, as did the one in his own room, but Severus could wait until they were ready to leave to do those. Hermione was having a bit of a lie in back in his room. They had packed her things the night before, leaving a suitcase and her traveling clothes lying on her bed. Severus' own suitcase was next to hers.

Severus checked the kitchen, pouring what little milk was left into two glasses for himself and Hermione, and went to wake her. It was nearing ten o'clock, and he wanted to make sure she had something to eat before they Apparated to the country. He paused at the door of his bedroom and, leaning against the doorframe, smiled at the vision in front of him. Hermione lay curled beneath the blankets, her short curls pulled over her shoulder, in his white dress shirt. She was smiling softly, one hand resting beneath her cheek and the other clutching the sheet to her chest. One shapely leg peeked out from the edge of the blanket.

Smiling, he walked into his room and slipped beneath the blankets on his side of the bed, toeing off his shoes as he did. Hermione stirred slightly as the bed shifted and rolled onto her back. Severus propped himself up on his elbow and watched her as she slept, her smile melting his heart. He brushed a curl behind her ear and let his fingertips feather over her face softly.

"Mmm," she hummed, waking and turning her face into his touch. She held his hand against her face. "You're spoiling me, Severus."

"How on earth am I doing that, love?" he asked, his voice dipping low and trailing over her like silk. He peppered her face with kisses, his warm breath making her shiver. His fingers linked with hers as he pulled her over to him and held her soft curves against him.

Hermione sought his lips with hers as her heart swelled with the simple gesture of holding hands with him. Their entwined hands rested between them as Severus held her tightly with the arm wrapped beneath her. She could feel the beat of his heart as easily as she could her own, the soft *thump thump* beneath her cheek and soothing her completely. When Severus pulled away to press gentle kisses to the tip of her nose and her forehead, Hermione snuggled against him, letting her head rest in the crook of his neck.

"Waking up to this every morning and having you with me every day," she murmured, smiling against his warm skin. "You've done so much for me, Severus. You've sacrificed... goodness! Do you realize you have been living here with me for six months?"

Severus smirked and chuckled warmly. "Yes, and the last two months have been very *satisfying*," he replied, stroking her back languidly.

Blushing terribly, Hermione was suddenly aware of the fact that their hips were pressed together firmly. She mumbled something against his shoulder and tried to burrow deeper into the warmth radiating from him.

"What was that, Hermione? I didn't quite catch that last bit." He was still smirking when she pulled back a bit in order to answer him clearly.

"Yes," she said, her voice dropping low as she traced kisses over his jaw. "They most certainly have."

He allowed them a few moments of impassioned snogging before groaning and pulling away from her. "As much as I am enjoying this, love, if we do not get up now, we will not be arriving in the country until tomorrow afternoon." He kissed her sweetly on the tip of her nose. "Now, I'll conjure up a quick breakfast for you before I finish locking and warding the windows." He climbed out of the bed and held out his hand to lead her to the kitchen. "I have owled Potter and Weasley to let them know where we will be, although I have requested that they not contact us unless it is an emergency."

Severus pulled out a chair for her at the kitchen table and guided her down into it. He waved his wand over the table and a plate of bacon, eggs, and toast appeared. He placed the cold glass of milk beside her plate and summoned a fork from the cabinet. "Here you are, love," he murmured, bending so that his mouth was next to her ear. He smirked at the shiver that traveled down her spine. "I'm going to finish warding the windows, and then we'll be on our way."

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

The clean, crisp smell of late summer in the country washed over Hermione as she regained her bearings, leaning against Severus' side after the Side-Along Apparation.





Minerva's receiving room into a makeshift lab and had spent several hours there in the last two days. She smiled to herself as she heard bottles clanking together and the frustrated groan that signaled his latest experiment had failed. Crookshanks trotted by, his bell softly tinkling as he crossed the front room and disappeared further into the house.

"Everything okay in there, love?" she called, smiling when she heard glass shattering against the wall and a door slamming angrily. His footsteps were heavy as he stalked down the hall toward the front room.

The vision that met his eyes when he came through the doorway was enough to knock the breath out of him. The sun flowed through the window, illuminating her so that she looked as if she were glowing from within. Her eyes were fixed on a point on the wall above his head and a smile was stretched over her lips. She looked so content and so beautiful that he felt all of his frustration of failed experiments drain out of him. He crossed the room and pulled a low stool over to the window next to her.

"Useless, Hermione," he sighed, leaning over to rest his head in her lap. Her soft fingers combed through his hair, soothing him almost to sleep. With each failed attempt at a potion to restore her sight he would find himself practically bowing at her feet with shame and humiliation that he could not keep his promise. And yet, it was as if she didn't care that he had failed again. She accepted him with love and open arms, her warmth ready to banish his frustration and her unconditional affection for him proof that he was all she needed. "I am nearly at a loss. I have no idea where to go from here."

She bent forward and kissed his hair softly. "Then let it go for today, Severus. You can only do so much. Perhaps we could go out for a while, it's nice today." She smiled and melted his heart.

He could tell she missed their daily walks in the city, even though they had only been in the country for two days. He realized he had been so consumed with finding a cure for the curse that blinded her that he ignored her while he was experimenting. It was a nice day out, for now at least. There were dark, heavy thunderclouds on the horizon. They would get a storm before night fell.

"Maybe we can go out tomorrow, Hermione. It actually looks as if it could rain soon." His chest constricted painfully at the downcast look on her face. He sat up straight and took both of her hands in his. Severus looked around the room for a moment until his eyes settled on the Muggle radio in the corner. He smiled and reached up to stroke her hair. "Dance with me, dearest."

Hermione's face brightened with a wide smile as Severus waved his hand and music filled the room. He stood and offered his hand to her with a bow she could not see. He kissed her knuckles softly as she blushed and joined him. Severus guided her to the middle of the front room, the furniture flying back against the walls at the flick of his wrist, and bowed to her again. He took her left hand in his right and gathered her close with his left arm around her waist.

The music from a Muggle station wafted around them, wrapping them together as if to bind them against the world of hurts and misunderstanding that lay outside the door of the little cottage. Hermione leaned against him, her head resting on his shoulder as the comforting smell of him filled her senses. He held their entwined hands over his heart as they danced, his voice unconsciously joining in with the radio. Warmth spread through him when he heard her sigh and felt her curl her fingers in the fabric of his shirt.

"Hermione," he whispered as the song faded into the next. "I hope to never disappoint you, no matter how long our time together may be."

She knew what he meant. He was terrified of failing to cure her, of not being able to keep his promise to her. For a man who was so guarding of his honor and pride, failing her would be devastating. She could feel his hopelessness and frustration every time she held him after a misdirected experiment. She held him tighter and turned her hand until she could lace her fingers with his.

"I'll stay as long as you'll have me, Severus," she murmured, not quite willing to leave the warmth of being burrowed in his arms. "And I don't care if you beg on the streets or go back to teaching or end up Minister of Magic. Nothing you do could ever disappoint me. You've given up seven years of your life for me. You quit your job at Hogwarts and left your home to take care of me. I could never ask any more of you than what you've already given me."

He kissed her softly then, a jolt of certainty running through him as he held her close. He could not see his life without her now, not after seven years of watching over her as she slept and months of holding her against him at night. She sighed as he pressed light kisses over her brow and snuggled further into his warmth. There was nothing that could stop her from loving him, even if he didn't find the cure for her blindness. If being without sight for the rest of her life was the price she had to pay for having him at her side, she would pay it in abundance.

"I do love you, Severus. You know that don't you?" She was suddenly afraid that he wanted to leave, not only the country but her as well. If he had decided it was a lost cause...

Severus felt her body go rigid in his arms. He kissed her forehead and her hair again and squeezed her hand in reassurance. "I could never forget that, love," he murmured. "You are the first thing I think of when I wake up and the last thing I think of when I go to bed. And most often, you are the last thing I see and feel as well." The arm holding her to his chest slipped down her back in a soft caress, over the curve of her arse to rest on the soft swell of her hip.

"Don't ever think I do not care for you, Hermione. There is nothing in this world that means more to me than you." Severus left her with no doubts with a tender kiss. "I. Love. You. No matter what. Always remember that."

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

Hermione was asleep, and Severus was on a bit of an experimental spree in the lab. He had awoken in the middle of the night with a stroke of inspiration and couldn't get back to sleep because he was afraid he would forget about it. So there he was at three in the morning, standing over a cauldron with his teaching robes thrown over his lounge pants and his hair pulled back with Hermione's elastic. His notebook lay open on the table next to his cauldron, a Dicto Quill poised above the parchment and taking notes when he spoke.

The cauldron hissed violently, and, for a moment, Severus thought it was going to explode. "Potential for combustion with the assimilation of the *Daucus carota* into the synthetic organic base. Must be added cautiously, no more than one to two grams at a time. Once the *Daucus carota* is fully absorbed into the base, let sit on low flame for," he checked the clock on the wall, "one hour."

He summoned a stool and perched beside the table, reading over the notes he had been making. The potion seemed stable, at least until the addition of the last ingredient. It was so obvious that it pained him that he didn't think of it before. Who knew, if the Fates were kind, Hermione might be seeing his face this evening for the first time in seven and a half years.

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**Notes from The Mistress:** Please don't chase me down because I'm a tease!!! I beg of you, be merciful with the torch-wielding mob!!! Somehow this one feels as if it's winding down, although I'm not sure how much longer it will go on. Suggestions and criticisms are welcomed, as I write for you guys and am always striving to become a better writer. See you on the next one!

# Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder

## Chapter 8 of 9

The results of Severus' experimentation at Minerva's country house.

*I'm just playing with them, they don't belong to me. Much thanks to Inna\_chy, who requested this sequel. This may be the last chapter, let me know what you think!*

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### CHAPTER 8: Beauty Is In The Eye Of The Beholder

He was nervous, she could sense it the second he walked into the sitting room. She was reclining on the sofa, just having woken up from a light nap. Even though Severus had made a gallant attempt to spend more time with her as their days wore on in the country, Hermione spent most of her time feeling desperately bored. The spell Severus used to transform her books at home into Braille had been a complicated one that took up quite a bit of time and energy. And, of course, it called for a large amount of confidence and prowess with a wand, the likes of which Hermione had not yet regained. Having been more than sufficiently occupied in his makeshift lab, Severus had been unable to transform any books for her to read here. She had already finished the ones they had brought from London.

Her senses turned back to him. He was standing at the door, and she could hear the scuffing of his boots against the floor as he shifted his weight from one foot to the other. He cleared his throat and drew deep, painful breaths several times before he tread nervously over to the sofa where she lay. Hermione sat up, pulling her knees up to her chest and wrapping her arms around them. She rested her chin on her knee, her persistently longer curls spilling over her face. She smiled at him, hoping it was reassuring.

"Love, I think I may have found something," he whispered, his voice shaking almost imperceptibly as he sank onto the sofa at her feet. "I wish to try the serum I have brewed, but I want to make sure that you do not have your hopes up too high. This might not work, Hermione. Perhaps nothing I brew will work at all. I do not want to hurt you in any way, and so I thought it my duty to tell you this. The choice is yours. We could try the serum and hope it works. If it does not, I could try to brew something in the hopes I may discover something else. Or, we could simply let the situation be. I will do nothing you do not want to do."

Hermione drew a ragged breath, feeling the tears stinging her eyes. She reached out to him, sighing when his hand closed over hers and drew it to his lips. His warm breath against her fingertips was reassuring. He seemed so desperate to help her see again that he was willing to sacrifice himself in the process. Her mind raced as she tried to decide what to do, all the while his fingers were stroking her hand and his lips murmuring soft nothings into her palm.

Smiling, she took her hand from his grasp and lay back against the sofa, piling her hair atop her head as she went. "Let's try this one, Severus. I trust you. Just tell me what to do."

He sighed as the weight on his chest lifted. She trusted him with this most important project. The thought of it meant more to him than anything ever before. He leaned over her and pressed a gentle kiss to her forehead. Drawing his wand, Severus conjured a warm cloth to put over her eyes once the serum had been applied. "Lay flat on your back, Hermione, and open your eyes as wide as you can. I am going to put the serum in with a dropper and cover your eyes with a warm towel. You must hold your eyes open as long as you can, it may take several minutes for the serum to work."

Nodding at him slightly, Hermione slid onto the sofa until she was on her back, her curls splaying out behind her. She opened her eyes and struggled to draw even, calming breaths as she sensed his movements. She flinched slightly as she felt his fingertips holding her eyes wide. It seemed as if it took forever for the first drop to hit her eye, and, when it did, the droplet was as cold as ice. Four more drops followed before Severus moved to the other eye.

As he covered her eyes with the warm cloth and took her hand in his own to wait, Hermione felt the drops growing warm in her eyes. For a moment, they felt numb and then, suddenly, sparked to life with feeling. It felt as if someone were pricking her eyes with needles and running water over them at the same time. She cried out and clutched at Severus' hands as the feeling grew stronger. Tears trickled down her cheeks and into her hair as minutes dragged on, the feeling in her eyes dulling to a painful throb.

Severus felt terrible as he saw the pain wash over her face. He felt every stab of discomfort as she felt them, his heart breaking as she clutched his hands with all her might. "Hermione, love, I'm so terribly sorry. Please forgive me for causing you this pain." He pushed her hair back from her brow and kissed her softly. "Please forgive me, love. Please..."

Hermione's breath came in ragged gasps as she focused all her might on fighting the pain that still throbbed in her eyes. She latched on to his words, letting Severus' voice wash over her and take over every synapse of her brain. "There's nothing to forgive, Severus," she gasped through clenched teeth.

Gently, Severus pulled her into his lap, cradling her head in the crook of his arm. The soft thump of his heartbeat in her ear was soothing, comforting enough to lull her close to sleep. She closed her eyes and snuggled into his arms, the awareness of the pain in her eyes fading.

They sat that way for a long while until Hermione was breathing softly, dancing on the edges of sleep. Severus smiled sadly down at her, his heart torn at the pain he had caused her. He gently removed the cloth from over her eyes. He gasped at the blood red circles around her eyes and the thin layer of clear crystals coating her eyelashes.

"Stay still, love," he whispered, taking the cloth and gently trying to remove the crystals as gently as possible. He cursed softly when Hermione winced. "Forgive me, Hermione, I am not trying to hurt you. I promise."

Taking several, deep, shuddering breaths, Hermione tried hard to ignore the tenderness around her eyes as Severus wiped them clean. She stilled his ministrations as she took his hands in her own again. "I love you, Severus," she whispered, kissing his hand gently.

For a moment, she lost all thought as cool tears slipped down her cheeks. Severus brushed them away with the tips of his fingers as Hermione opened her eyes slowly. Her heart pounded as she blinked rapidly, trying to clear the faint numbness left from the serum.

"Oh, shite," she muttered, sitting straight up and turning toward him. Her hands reached out for him, stroking his hair, tracing the bridge of his nose. Tears streamed down her face. "Finally!"

Hermione lunged forward and wrapped her arms tight around him, pressing kisses along his jaw and across his cheeks. "You look the same as you did when I was in school!" she cried out, sobbing against his shoulder.

His voice caught in his throat as he tried to process what she was saying. Her hands seemed to be everywhere at once, tracing the contours of his face and testing the oily mess that was his hair. She continued to cry with joy as her words began to penetrate his brain. Coherent thoughts chased after one another as memories of her screams

of pain resurfaced.

Severus held her close as he finally realized what he had wanted for nearly a year. Hermione was looking directly at him, and she was smiling. After almost eight years of living in the dark, she could finally see. And all she could see was him.

**Notes from The Mistress:** I'm terribly sorry for the long delay. I have been having health problems for the past month or so, and haven't had the energy to do much else besides sleep and eat. I have also taken on a heavy load at University, as well as a new job, and other responsibilities with my church. Not to mention the wedding plans, well, life just hasn't given me time to do what I love best. Let me know what you think because I'm toying with the idea of ending the story here. It's up to you!

# Epilogue: Who Needs the World?

Chapter 9 of 9

The final chapter, and how it all ended.

## EPILOGUE: Who Needs The World?

Severus brought her red roses every morning and watched with delight as she studied them and took in their fragrance. It seemed as if Hermione cried every morning as she walked through the fields around Minerva's country house, watching the trees and grass sway in the autumn breeze. She came back afterwards with flowers woven through the curls that were now trailing over her shoulders. Her smile was radiant each time she saw him, and she continually touched his face and hair.

"Come here, and let me see your eyes, love," he said softly as they sat in the sitting room watching the rain falling outside. Hermione sighed and smiled as she moved closer and opened her honey-brown eyes wide. Studying them with a serious look, he touched her hair comfortingly. She had gotten used to this nightly ritual.

Severus smiled softly and kissed her forehead after he finished examining her. "They have healed completely. It's almost as if you never received that curse."

Hermione stared out the window for a long while, tracing designs on the back of his hand. The rain pelted against the window as the wind blew the branches of the tree against the side of the house. It was their last night in the country before returning to London. Hearing the rain-and seeing it after all these years-made sense to her. After all, Severus had opened her soul so many times as the rain poured down around them.

"I love you so very much," she murmured, leaning her head on his shoulder. "May I ask you something, Severus?"

He kissed her hair and nodded. "Of course you can. I will never keep anything from you, my Hermione." He held her hand tightly and felt his heart begin to pound in his chest.

She smiled and slipped her wand from her sleeve. Concentrating, Hermione pointed it at the table in front of them and conjured a red rose with a black ribbon tied around the stem. She took the rose in her hand and held it out to him. She looked very young and shy as she waited for him to take the flower from her. A sweet blush rose over her cheeks as her mind whirled, trying to get her thoughts together.

"It's been almost eight years since you came to London to protect me. You gave up teaching to care for me. You spent countless hours creating a potion to help me get my sight back. For Merlin's sake, you put up with Harry and Ron every day for me. No one has ever done so much for me or cared for me as you have, Severus. You gave me my life back, and I can't thank you enough for it." She sighed and glanced back at the rain as if she were seeking the strength to continue. She took a deep breath and plunged on. "Marry me, Severus?"

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

They were married outside Glasgow in late November with all their family and friends around them. Harry was surprised that Severus approached him with the request that he be the Best Man. Ron... poor, pitiful Ron... sat between his mother and Minerva on the front row, sulking with all his heart. He'd given up any hope of having Hermione as his own when he found out about the curse, but he couldn't understand why she would have fallen in love with Snape.

"Why won't you be part of the ceremony, Ronald?" Hermione had asked the day she announced her engagement to them. "It would mean so much to me if you celebrated with us."

"Because you're marrying Snape, that's why. Sorry, 'Mione, but I won't have any part of it." His eyes clouded over with anger and jealousy as he pushed Crookshanks out of a chair and sat down. "I think you're bleeding mad, really, but I'm not allowed to say anything because Harry'll write my mum!"

"Shut it, Ron. You're being a wanker," Harry replied, picking up the displaced animal and soothing it with a scratch behind the ears.

"Bugger you, you little traitor!"

Of course, Severus had found the lack of a Weasley in the wedding party as one less headache to deal with. Hermione was hurt, but refused to let Ron and his stupid pride ruin the beautiful wedding that Severus had promised her. There were roses everywhere, each with their own black ribbon tied to the stem. Hermione carried a bouquet of roses and tulips.

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

I stared at the photo as my mother finished her story. The couple in the photo were holding hands and smiling as they waved up at me. The woman had long curls that trailed down her back beneath the lace veil she wore. Her wedding gown flowed around her, barely covering her swollen belly and spilled out in a wide arch on the floor. The man beside her was tall and good-looking. His eyes were focused on the woman next to him, and his black hair glittered in the light of the sun.

"Would you like to keep that, Beata?" my mother asked, brushing her black hair away from her face.

Nodding, I looked back at the man in the photograph. Mother had his eyes and his hair, but she had the warm smile of the woman beside him. The longer I stared at the man waving up at me, the more I began to relive memories of when I was a little girl. I could see him as clearly as if he were standing in front of me.

His black hair was shorter than it was in the picture and peppered with gray. He had smile lines around his eyes and a deep laugh that rumbled through his chest. Each time I saw him, he swept me into his arms, kissed my forehead, and straightened the ribbon in my hair. He never failed to bring a new book for me, many of them with *her* name written in neat, cramped writing on the inside.

"They are rightfully yours, my Beata," he would say as he pulled me onto his lap like he always did when he told me about *her*. "She would want you to have them. You are so much like her, my lovely girl."

Mother left us alone when he came to visit. She always said that I reminded him of *her*, and that was why he loved me so much. He loved to wrap my curls around his fingers. He said I looked just like *her* and that she would have been proud of how smart I was. I can still remember when my mother took me to see him after I got my Hogwarts letter. He was so proud, even though he always told me that I would go to Hogwarts and be the best witch of my age.

He gave me roses every time he visited, too. There was always a black ribbon tied around the stem. "She gave one to me many years ago, Beata. Now I give them back to her because she lives in you now. You have much to live up to, but you are a very smart and talented girl. Whenever you feel lonely, these roses will remind you that we love you very much."

Mother says that I met her when I was very little, but I don't remember much about her. The pictures I have and the books he brings me are all that I have of hers. She died when I was three, and Mother said it broke his heart. She went to visit her Muggle parents, but she had a terrible car crash. She died instantly. He never got to say goodbye.

"Beata?" It was my mother's voice. She was standing in the doorway, smiling softly at me. "You have a visitor." She stood aside and touched his arm as he passed. "She's been waiting for you, Dad."

He smiled and pulled me into a warm hug. He kissed the top of my hair and arranged *her* veil softly. "You look just like her, my beautiful Beata. She would have wanted to be here for this day."

I wrapped my arms around him and held on tightly as the tears stung my eyes. "Thank you for everything, Grandpa," I sniffed. I stood on my tiptoes and kissed his cheek softly before he led me to the doors of the church.

I'm sure you have figured it out by now. Severus Snape and Hermione Granger were my grandparents. My mother is Eileen Elizabeth Granger-Snape, their only child. She grew up loved and happy, playing with the many Weasley and Potter children. She married Nicolae Leroux when she was twenty-five and spent six wonderful years with him before he died in a flying accident. I was born a month after my father died, on Severus and Hermione's thirtieth wedding anniversary. As her gift, my mother handed me to my grandparents and asked them to give me a beautiful name. The name they gave me was this: Beata Noel Granger-Snape Leroux. My life, however, is another story.

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**Notes from The Mistress:** Here's a bit of a Thanksgiving surprise for you all. I was allowed to come home to spend the holiday with my family, but I will be returning to the hospital tomorrow afternoon. I'm doing much better now, and hope to be home for good before mid-December. Thank you all for your thoughts and prayers, Gerard has faithfully brought your emails to me. He is so thankful for my readers and your support. Writing this chapter is about the only thing that has kept me from getting depressed during the last few weeks. Thank you so much, and I love you all so much! I hope you enjoyed this chapter, it's something I'm really proud of.