

Discoveries

by snapeophile

Newly-trained Psychiatrist Hermione Granger-Bradbury takes on a very difficult patient. Can she and Severus resolve their issues? Response to the Analyze This! Challenge on WIKTT.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This is a response to the Analyze This! Challenge on WIKTT. I began writing in strict drabble form but text revisions went over the 100-word limit in some cases. I bow to my beta, JaneAverage, whose sharp eyes and insightful suggestions improved this fic immeasurably. I also thank JenKM1216 for letting me borrow a great phrase, "Gryffindors. So easy."

They told her it would never work. No one from the Wizarding world would utilize her services, and her Muggle medical school education and training would be wasted.

Yet six months later, her appointment book was full. And here was another owl; yet another request for a course of psychiatric treatment with Dr. Granger-Bradbury. Dr. Bradbury, as she was professionally known.

St. Mungo's had given her a large office suite, but she preferred to meet clients at a nondescript, innocuously decorated Muggle flat. Clean, but without the negative associations psychiatric patients may have with hospitals.

The owl held out its leg. Hermione smiled. The parchment was from Minerva.

Dearest Hermione,

Congratulations on your practice. Of course, the brightest witch of her age is a rousing success! One expects no less from a Gryffindor.

Hermione, I beg you to take one more patient. This one will be a tough nut to crack. Like many of us, he bears deep scars, physical and mental, from the War. Also, he's skeptical, to say the least, about the science of Muggle psychiatry. I know you can break down his defenses and help him. We will be forever in your debt, my dear.

Love, Minerva

P.S. Could I send him Saturday at 1:00?

"It's hard to believe that woman's a Gryffindor. She's downright Slytherin when she wants something," Hermione mumbled to herself as she replied in the affirmative. She had scheduled Saturday afternoon free, but would see Minerva's friend.

"Who is it? That's odd, she never said-"

Severus Snape glared in disgust at the Muggle flat Minerva had directed him to. Not quite shabby, but definitely not posh, it hovered uncomfortably somewhere between. He sighed and pressed the buzzer for #4. "Dr. Bradbury" was the name given. Minerva hadn't even told him the doctor's name when she manipulated him into taking the appointment.

The hackles on Snape's neck rose as the doctor's intercom-distorted voice responded. Something was oddly, unsettlingly familiar about that voice. Snape held his wand at the ready, just in case. As an ex-Death Eater and the Officially-Exonerated-Yet-Roundly-Detested-Murderer-of-Dumbledore, he had not let down his guard. Not since his first day of spying, several decades ago. This was one of the main reasons Minerva insisted he come today:

"Severus, you're strung as tight as a centaur's bow string. And your reactions have the potential to be equally dangerous. I cannot have you around the students in such a state . . ."

Universal time came to a screeching halt as Hermione "Little Miss Know-It-All" Granger and Severus "Greasy Git of the Dungeons" Snape, stared unbelievably at each other in the doorway.

"Miss Granger! What is the meaning of this? Is this some kind of sick joke?" Snape snarled, forcing himself to uncoil his hand from his wand. The hand was strangely resistant, as if it had a mind of its own.

"I was wondering the same thing, Professor. I'm expecting a patient at 1:00."

"Patient? You're the bloody doctor?"

"Well, I'm certainly not the chambermaid. I am a board-certified Doctor of Psychiatry."

"What in hell are you doing in a squalid Muggle flat? Why don't you see patients at St. Mungo's, where the authentic, skilled Magical Healers work?"

"I assure you, *Professor*, that I am every bit as real as the Healers at the hospital. I happen to have more post-graduate training in my field than they do. Now, if you would excuse me, I am expecting a patient at any moment and would not want him disturbed by your . . . charming . . . presence."

"Ah, but Miss Granger, you are awaiting my charming presence."

"It's Dr. Bradbury, and what in the hell are you on about?"

"Minerva sent me. Your 1:00 appointment. You are going to ask a few inane questions, relate my *issues* to hatred of my father and Oedipal lust for my mother; then, without the benefit of magic, transform me into a cuddly, loving, gentle Potions master so I can return to coddle the nearly retarded students at our alma mater."

"Oh, sweet Merlin, help me now!"

"No one can help you, Miss Granger. Now may I please come in? I don't want to waste another minute of my session with you," Snape said, grinning evilly whilst mumbling, "This should be quite illuminating."

Hermione let a bemused Snape into the flat. He rotated his head in an owl-like manner as he took in the surroundings.

"Nice enough, I suppose. Predominantly taupe, a soothing color for mental patients like myself."

"Should you be a mental patient, Professor?"

"It's your job to tell me that. Minerva obviously thinks so, or I would be happily sorting potions ingredients in my storeroom now instead of exchanging inanities with you."

"Please sit, Professor."

"No fainting couch, Miss Granger?"

"No, that's an old psychotherapy cliché. And it's Dr. Bradbury."

"Miss Granger, has someone had the misfortune to marry you?"

"No."

"Then where does the Bradbury name come from?"

"It's my mother's maiden name. Actually, I'm Hermione Granger-Bradbury now. A defensive action after all the war-hero stuff."

"Ah, yes, the adulation of yourself and your two martyred best friends. Headlines in the Prophet, Orders of Merlin, grateful families offering you scholarships and their pureblood sons in marriage. I missed all that, as I was enjoying a lovely stay in Azkaban awaiting my trial."

"Do you think it's my fault your trial took so long?"

"No, Miss Granger, I don't. My Death Eater 'status' had already secured the enmity of the Wizengamot."

"Oh, do continue, Professor."

"What are you doing? What is that?"

"It's a parchment, clipboard and quill."

"I realize that, silly girl, but why can I not read your scribbles?"

"Do you like it? It's my own invention, and I'm thinking of having it patented. This quill is keyed to respond only to me. When I finish writing a thought, I tap the parchment once, and the writing disappears from all eyes but mine. Privacy is of the utmost importance in my line of work."

"And this *privacy* includes hiding information from the patient himself?"

"Especially from the patient."

"This simply will not do."

Hermione laughed. "What do you mean, Professor? Did you think I would take you on as a patient? You're insolent to the point of refusing to use my title and correct name, and you have blighted the memory of my two best friends. You are right, 'it simply won't do.'"

"But you agreed as a favor to Minerva, your friend, former teacher and one-woman cheering section."

"See? You can't even make a statement without imbedding an insult or criticism. Your latent hostility towards me would make it impossible for us to create the necessary patient/physician bond. Therapy would be impossible."

"I was under the impression, Dr. Bradbury, that my hostility is anything but latent. I am also certain that you promised Minerva to help me, and she promised me help."

"So you expect me to take you on despite my incredibly negative feelings to the contrary?"

"Yes, and you will work assiduously to help me."

"Just as you taught Harry Occlumency when he needed it? The one skill which, if mastered, most likely would have kept him alive in the final battle?"

"Touché, Dr. Bradbury. Perhaps that could be the starting point for our next session? Our hour is up."

"You infuriating man."

"Is that a Muggle technique...bully the patient? It's really quite crass, if you ask me."

"Get out."

"Same time next week, then?"

"Get out."

"I'll take that as a 'Yes.'"

"Take it any way you like, you frustrating bastard, as long as you leave and never return."

"Language, Dr. Bradbury, language. Even an ex-Death Eater such as myself prefers decorum and restraint in polite conversation. I'll owl Minerva and tell her we're on for next Saturday. She'll be thrilled."

"You'll do no such thing, Snape, and don't dare darken my doorstep next Saturday."

"Hermione, I need you . . ."

"What in the hell did you say?"

"Hermione, I need you. You may be the only person in the world who can understand me. You believed in me when other Order members didn't. You have insight into the difficulties I faced as double-agent to Voldemort, the most skilled Legilimens ever. You are undoubtedly one of the few persons who can tolerate my company. I'm confident you can overcome any anger you feel. I need you to listen."

"Oh . . . my . . . well . . . in that case, I could try. Just a few sessions, to see how things go."

"Thank you." Mumbling to himself: "Gryffindors. So easy."

Hermione closed the door of the flat a bit too hard, as Snape left. Turning, she leaned against the cold steel of the door, trying to compose herself. One thought was paramount in her mind: "Minerva!"

She strode over to an undecorated brickwork hearth. She pelted Floo powder into the fireplace. "Headmistress Minerva McGonagall!" she requested, fiercely.

"Hermione! What a lovely surprise," McGonagall said innocently.

"Minerva! How could you?" Hermione indignantly huffed.

"My dear, how could I not? Severus needs assistance right now; the kind only you can give him. Besides, you and I are just about the only people who could stand him for an hour at a time. He's really quite a fascinating person, if you can get him to open up to you. Will you try, dear?"

Hermione sighed heavily. "For you, Minerva, yes."

Chuckling, flashing Hermione a knowing look as she exited the Floo, Minerva replied, "No, dear. For yourself."

That evening at dinner, Minerva maneuvered the seating at the head table so that the only empty space available for Snape was next to her.

"So, Severus, how did you find Dr. Bradbury?"

"Very well. I have an appointment next Saturday."

"You *do*?" Minerva asked with feigned surprise.

"Yes, Minerva, I do. Dr. Bradbury is a very skilled psychiatrist. She and I made a doctor/patient bond in our visit. I think therapy will be helpful."

"You *do*?"

"Minerva, are you going daft? You're repeating yourself again."

"It's just . . . I . . ."

"You thought we wouldn't work together? That the shock of our mutual *ambush* would be too much to overcome? Certainly not. We are both adults and she is a physician. She sees me as a challenge."

"Oh . . . good."

To himself: "Gryffindors. So easy."

The following Saturday found Hermione steeling herself for her therapy session with Snape.

"I will *not* let him control the conversation or the tempo of the session. I will take copious notes and keep a log book of his treatment. If I see *any* signs of insincerity, I will cease to see him."

"Hello, Dr. Bradbury. I trust you had a good week?"

"Yes, thank you, and you, Professor Snape?"

"Severus, please. I am no longer your Potions professor. And I do believe you outrank me now in scholarship."

Hermione blushed at the deference. "Sit down anywhere you would like."

Psychoanalysis of Severus Snape...first session, May 14, 2006

Doctor's Notes: Patient surprisingly amiable today. Wanted to start from the present, not childhood. Dissuaded him.

"Severus, it's important we discuss your childhood."

"But I really don't see the relevance . . ."

"Of course you don't, consciously. But in the subconscious mind, past events can greatly influence present behaviors and feelings."

"Oh, I have plenty of feelings about my childhood."

"Yes?"

"Well, as Potter undoubtedly told you from his trip into my Pensieve, my father liked rum more than me and my mother."

"Yes, go on."

"No, that's it. There's no use dwelling on the past."

"Did you hate your father?"

"Of course."

"Did he anger you?"

"Dr. Bradbury, now you're sounding daft like Minerva, repeating herself. I didn't like what my father did, end of discussion."

"Did he love you?"

"Of course he did, I think."

"You think?"

"Still a pest with the questions, Miss Grang...I mean, Dr. Bradbury. You always were, you know."

"This isn't about me, Severus. Focus."

"Oh, I'm focused all right."

"On what?"

"On your lovely arse."

"Severus! Stop that! That's demeaning to me."

"Is appreciation demeaning nowadays?"

"Yes, if you insist on objectifying me."

"Then I can't compliment your breasts, either?"

"This session is over. Come back when you wish to do psychotherapy."

"Dr. Bradbury, I'm merely expressing my repressed sexual feelings so we can discuss them. You're *reblushing*?"

"No! It's just..."

"You are uncomfortable dealing with my sexuality?"

"Absolutely not! I have excellent training in this area!"

"Oh, do tell..."

"Not *that* kind of training, Severus. Wait a minute, how did I become the topic of conversation? This is *your* therapy session...."

"I think we came round to you, Doctor, because you needed to get something off your chest, subconsciously, perhaps?"

"No."

"You never fantasized about any of your professors?"

"Oh, dear God, this is not going as I had planned."

"Yes, well, what's that about 'the best laid plans'...wait...what are you frantically scribbling *now*? Get rid of that infernal contraption!"

"Absolutely not. I have to record notes of our conversation so I can review and formulate treatment...."

"So you are going to treat me?"

"Yes, of course, Severus. Every time I meet with you I discover again just how badly you need treatment. Take today, for instance. Trying to upset me with feigned sexual interest. You really are quite passive-aggressive."

"Are you so sure my interest is feigned, Doctor?"

"Of course it is. You never could stand me, and I doubt sincerely you have taken a sudden interest in my person."

"We are both very different people, now, Hermione. Changed in so many ways."

"How do you mean?" Hermione asked, while scribbling away furiously.

"Well, is it so impossible that I would want companionship? Sexual comfort? Friendship? Possibly even a relationship, with you?"

"Yes. It is impossible. You are trying to manipulate me and the session to your own nasty ends."

"Maybe yes, maybe no. I'll leave you to contemplate that this week. Our hour is up. Thank you."

"Oooh! You are the most frustrating..."

"Ah, that word again. 'Frustrating.' You've used it during each session we've had. Why?"

"I will *not* answer your questions, Severus. You will answer mine!"

"I believe I have touched a nerve. Unfortunately, I must go."

"That man! That horrible, frustrating man! I can't believe how he gets to me! And, oh, God, I just said 'frustrating' again . . . maybe he's right? I always did admire him for his mind. Now do I lust after his body? This is terrible! Hermione get a hold on yourself, girl! *You* are the doctor! Act like it!"

Psychoanalysis of Severus Snape...second session, May 21, 2006

"Severus."

"Dr. Bradbury. I was pleased to receive your owl and a chance to redeem myself."

"Of course."

"You're scribbling again. You know how I feel about that infernal instrument."

"Yes."

"That's it? 'Yes'?"

"Mm-hmm. So, Severus, what is troubling you today?"

"My loneliness. I'm positive you can help me in that regard."

"Absolutely. To do so, let's discuss your parents' relationship. Describe their marriage using just one word..."

"Are you mad? Why would I do that?"

"As a jumping-off point for today's session. Your word is . . . ?"

"Fucked up."

"That's a very strong feeling. Elaborate."

"We've been over this. Didn't that contraption of yours capture my every word? My father liked rum more than my mother and me. Full stop."

"How did he treat her when they interacted?"

"He was scornful and disrespectful and very manipulative. A true Slytherin."

"I think we've just had a breakthrough, Severus. Let's reflect on how you've spoken to me so far . . ."

"But that's totally different."

"How so?"

"Because he was addled with drink. I'm not. He was a mindless fool. I am not. He didn't love her. I..."

"Yes?"

"...need to go, Dr. Bradbury. I am meeting a colleague in the Leaky Cauldron."

"Severus, don't avoid the issue. Why do you think your father treated your mother that way?"

"She loved him too much."

"So his relational style was a defense?"

"Perhaps. Now, I really must go."

"Good day, Severus."

Hermione wrote quickly, reviewing the session in her mind. "Well, I was right about defense mechanisms. But what was he going to say when he stopped himself? Did he mean . . . was he going to say . . . oh, I hope...gods, that is so unprofessional. Even thinking about a patient that way flies in the face of medical ethics."

"But what if it's true?"

Hermione met Ginny Weasley later that evening in Hogsmeade for a drink.

"So, Dr. Bradbury, been curing the world, this week?"

"Oh, no, not the whole world. Just a few patients at a time."

"So, what're they like?"

"Ginny! You know I can't tell you anything due to doctor/patient confidentiality."

"Don't be thick, Hermione. You can tell me about them and not use any names."

"Well . . . all right. There's one woman who collected all the sharp metal instruments in her house and buried them in dustbins."

"Why the hell would anyone do that?"

"Poor dear's schizophrenic and afraid aliens were controlling her through metal objects."

"Oh. I was expecting a laugh, Hermione, but that's not funny. That's bloody sad."

"Yes, but with medication and therapy, I'll help her."

"Good. Anyone else not so heart-wrenching?"

"Well, there is this older man . . ."

"Is he good-looking?"

"Yes, but I don't think..."

"Right. Continue. What's his deal?"

"He's had a hard life. Made some poor choices, but the deck was stacked against him. We've only had two sessions, so I'm not certain, but I think he's a decent man underneath his defenses."

"Well, if anyone can ferret that out, it's you, Hermione. Oy! Look what just crawled in...Snape! Can you believe it? Duck down so he doesn't see you."

"Ginny! Why are you acting so strangely? So what if he sees us?"

"Hermione, do you really want to chat up Dumbledore's murderer?"

"Ginny! He's exonerated..."

"...but never forgiven. Miss Weasley, Dr. Bradbury, good evening."

"Good evening, Severus."

"Hello, Professor Snape."

"Enjoying your evening, ladies?"

"Yes."

"Yes."

"Good. I'll take your leave, then, I wouldn't want to ruin it." Snape turned, catching Hermione's gaze in his. A connection was made.

Hermione shuddered, realizing, against her better judgment, that she wanted to follow him.

"He's a right nasty piece of work. Pretending to be all courtly and mannered. Hermione, what's wrong?"

"No...nothing."

"Don't let that greasy old git ruin our evening. He came in alone, and he's sure to leave alone. But you, on the other hand . . . there's a cute wizard at the bar who's eyeing you. Watch, I'll leave and he'll come round . . ."

Hermione engaged in a half-hearted conversation with said handsome wizard and got rid of him as soon as possible.

Psychoanalysis of Severus Snape...third session, May 28, 2006

"Did you and Miss Weasley have a lovely evening, Dr. Bradbury?"

"Yes, Severus, we did. And why did you not sit down with us?"

"Because it was apparent Miss Weasley would become physically ill if I had."

"Severus! That's not..."

"...true, Dr. Bradbury? Absolutely it is. I'm resigned to my fate as the most hated man in the Wizarding world."

"But, that's not true! Many people recognize the incredible heroism you displayed all those years you were a double agent, your life hanging in the balance with every summons."

"For generations I will be the 'Murderer of Dumbledore.' No one willingly associates with me. I am a lonely man doomed to a solitary life against his wishes."

Hermione froze; her magical quill suspended in mid-air, forgotten.

"I think we've made a breakthrough, Severus. I'm hearing you don't feel worthy of a relationship."

"Come off it. I expected more insight from you, Hermione. You've dredged up the oldest Snape gossip cliché. I feel worthy enough, dammit. I just haven't found anyone yet who is woman enough to accept me as I am: flawed, yes, but a man in his prime."

"Now you come off it, Severus. You're hiding behind your 'quest' for the perfect woman as a defense. I see it *all* the time."

"I really must leave, Dr. Bradbury. I'm through dealing with incompetents masquerading as specialists. Owl your bill to me."

"Sit down, Severus! Sometimes the truth is uncomfortable."

"Uncomfortable? Try insulting and demeaning."

"This is a breakthrough," Hermione insisted. "When was your last true relationship with a woman?"

"That is none of your business!" Severus roared.

"So it's been a while. Why is that?"

"You insufferable, know-it-all chit..."

"Think on it, Severus. Time is up. See you Saturday."

"Insufferable know-it-all! Bushy-haired...well, all right, her hair is better... buck-toothed . . . oh, damn it, man, admit it. You've gone around the bend for Hermione Granger, of all the available women in the world!" Snape ranted as he walked to the Apparition point.

Psychoanalysis of Severus Snape...fourth session, June 4, 2006

"Severus, let's continue our last session. You don't mind my parchment and quill, do you?"

"You know I do. Not that my opinion matters."

"True. We were discussing your inability to form lasting relationships with women. Describe your most significant relationship."

"Does patronizing the same whore count?"

Hermione choked. "No, Severus."

"Right. Lusting after a hated associate's pureblood, Patrician wife?"

"Did you two share a bond?"

"Yes. But not the kind you mean."

"Oh! I apologize for my blunder. I hadn't yet meant to discuss Albus' death."

"Ah, something to look forward to."

"Refocus, Severus."

"Certainly. I know...unrequited love for the soon-to-be wife of a hated schoolboy enemy?"

"Nothing deeper, Severus?"

"No. I've been busy, you see. I found double-agent status to be a detriment when trying to establish trust with a woman. Hence, the whores. So, I believe that brings us round to my Mum again?"

"Severus, stop with the Oedipal references. We both know your life has been . . . complicated . . . and that would naturally preclude any serious attachments. But now, with Voldemort dead . . ."

"What's the problem, then, Dr. Bradbury?"

"Yes."

"I refer that question to you. You, too, are alone in this post-war era. Your life has been much less 'complicated' than mine, and while I do wish you condolences on your losses, *what's the problem?*"

"This is your therapy session, not mine, Severus."

"How can you expect to help me, when you are experiencing identical difficulties?"

"Our 'difficulties' are *not* identical, Severus!" Hermione replied, furiously. "I have been busy with my schooling. Plus, the years immediately post-war were difficult because of my status. Well-meaning strangers hounded me all hours of the day and night. I had to leave England for a while, it was so bad. And then there's Harry and Ron . . . you know Ron and I were together during what should have been our seventh year?" she finished, softly.

"Yes, I do remember, Hermione. And that has been your most recent significant relationship?"

"Yes," Hermione whispered.

"We are not so unlike, you know."

"What the hell? How...?"

"We are both scholarly loners, our lives greatly affected by the War. We were hounded by people, though for very different reasons; we are searching for our equal in another," Severus said, quietly.

"No, we are not alike. I was never even tempted to become a Death Eater," Hermione spat.

Severus sat, stunned. How *dare* she throw that in his face? This was it, the unavoidable truth of his life. His life-altering, life-ruining, mistake. And not merely his own life ruined, of course.

"I...I'm so sorry," Hermione stammered, tears in her eyes. "That was unforgivable."

"'Unforgivable.' A fascinating choice of word," Snape began. "Many of my choices in life, Hermione, fall into that category. But is 'unforgivable' the same as 'irredeemable'? Am I never to partake in the sweetness of life?" Snape spat bitterly, slumping in his chair. He held his head in his hands, glossy black hair curtaining his face.

Hermione sat stunned, her role as physician forgotten. Snape was in pain, true physical and emotional pain. The woman in her, and the Gryffindor in her, reached out to console him. She crossed the doctor/patient divide and grasped his trembling hand.

Snape brought Hermione's hand to his cheek, moving it to his lips as he passed a feathery kiss across her palm.

This motion brought Hermione to her senses. She immediately sat up and retracted her hand.

"Oh, my goodness, Professor Snape, please, please, forgive me. I have acted in an incredibly unprofessional manner. I can no longer be your physician. I will need to refer you to a colleague of mine, a witch who is also..."

"I do not care about therapy, Hermione. I care about you."

"What?"

"You heard me, Hermione. Don't make me repeat myself. That is one of Minerva's most annoying faults. What I need right now is your friendship, companionship, and hopefully someday, love."

"When . . . ?"

"Now."

"No, I mean, when did you . . . you know?"

"Minerva's gossip has kept me, 'abreast', shall we say, about your life." Snape smirked, to himself.

"And her information was enough ...?"

"And, I've seen you, from afar, at a few Hogwarts events. You've become quite an attractive woman, you know, Hermione."

"But...you never liked me as a student. Can you blame me for being skeptical that you're suddenly interested?"

"No, I suppose not. Do you intend to psychoanalyze every word I say? Perhaps this isn't such a good idea after all ..."

"Stop attempting to change the subject, Severus. I'm not going to let you slither out of this quite so easily. In earlier sessions you were less than sincere, so I need to be sure of your intentions."

"Less than sincere? When? I sincerely was admiring your arse and breasts and intellect. I sincerely was interested in you, or I would have fled a long time ago and not returned. I may have used our sessions to gather information, but that was necessary."

"Oho! So you were manipulating our sessions?"

"And you weren't?"

"No! I'm a professional. And a Gryffindor."

"And I am a Slytherin who is tiring of this incessant chatter. You need to make a decision about me. May I begin to court you, Hermione?"

Hermione smiled and slowly replied, "You realize you'll need a new psychiatrist, don't you?"

"Happily, yes. Do you know any who are attractive, intelligent, brave, Gryffindor, with excellent verbal sparring abilities?"

"Only one," Hermione laughed.

"Then I'll take her."

"Severus, how is your therapy progressing?"

"Not well, Minerva."

"But why? Did you offend Dr. Bradbury?"

"No, in fact, just the opposite. But we've had to suspend our sessions; it is unethical and highly inappropriate for a doctor to date her patient."

"Date?"

"Yes, Minerva, date."

"Oh, thank goodness. I wondered when you two would notice the other's existence."

"What?"

"Severus, I couldn't allow two of my favorite people to continue on in lonely misery, not when they have so much in common and seemingly are so well-suited to one another."

"You mean...you set this whole thing up?"

"Absolutely."

"How dare you!" Snape thundered.

"Now, now, Severus, that's just the kind of reaction I'm hoping some companionship will quell. You've always been quite interested when I speak of Dr. Bradbury. And she in return has followed your progress eagerly. I just thought . . ."

"That you'd meddle in our private affairs?"

"Yes. Does the fact that I had a hand in it change how you feel about Hermione?"

"Well, no . . ."

"Then stop acting like a child, Severus. Go and enjoy your life."

To herself: "Slytherins. So easy."

Severus Floo'd to Hermione's flat.

"Did you know, Hermione, that we were manipulated by that old witch?"

"No; do you really mind?"

"Yes, I do. Since Voldemort is gone, I am no longer anyone's puppet. Minerva's least of all."

"Methinks he doth protest too much. If you're truly upset, I'll get my parchment and quill . . ."

"No! Keep that damned quill of yours under lock and key, Dr. Bradbury. You know how much I hated that."

"But I'm thinking we could repurpose it . . ."

"A *quill*?"

"The *feather*, Severus!"

"I've missed out on many things, Hermione."

"I'll teach you."