

It's Just a Technicality, After All?

by *blackaces924*

Hermione returns to England to attend a naming ceremony and bumps into her estranged husband.

Homecoming

Chapter 1 of 9

Hermione returns to England to attend a naming ceremony and bumps into her estranged husband.

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Author's note: This is written as part of the HGSS exchange at LJ community [sshg_exchange](#).

It's Just a Technicality, After All...

A warm breeze swept past her as she stepped between the doors of the aircraft to the "tube" leading her to airport's main building. Heathrow International Airport was just buzzing with liveliness at this time of the year since Muggle schools would start in a week's time. People were rushing to pass through customs and collect their luggage; others were waiting in line to board their flight to various destinations.

Hermione made the decision to travel the Muggle way instead of taking a Portkey or Apparating. She hadn't brought much with her, for she didn't plan to stay long in England anyway, so there wasn't much of a need to magically shrink her belongings. She flagged a taxi at the Arrivals level of the airport and went to check-in at the Inter-Continental Hotel situated at the heart of Central London. She had planned to catch a bus or the London underground to Leaky Cauldron the next day.

Even with autumn approaching, there was still a rather humid atmosphere draped around London. She gritted her teeth at the heat. If there was one thing Hermione hates, it was the excessive heat of summer. Summer was her least favourite season. Autumn, in her opinion, was the best, followed by winter. The cool breeze along with the added warmth from the sun is like a soothing balm to her. Tree leaves turning from green to a kaleidoscope of red, orange and yellow; she had always preferred their reddish-orange colour than green, some gathering at the foot of the tree, others hanging by what seemed like an invisible thread so fragile that a breeze can sweep it away at any moment. It gave her a feeling of warmth, much like lying on a plush rug in front of the fireplace in winter and enjoying a cup of hot chocolate with marshmallows.

It has been several years since she'd been home. She had decided to travel to different countries to further her study on Charms and Potions. Whether that was the main reason she'd left England was another matter.

In the years that she was not in England, she went to France, Italy, Greece, Spain and even spent a week in Bulgaria visiting Victor Krum, whom Hermione adamantly claimed was only a friend, as well as Romania where she learnt quite a lot about dragons, especially the Hungarian Horntail from Charlie Weasley. She spent most of her time abroad in France, though, working herself near-death to complete a double Charms and Potions Mastery. When she finally allowed herself to relax, it was under the order of her Mastery supervisor, at wand point, mind.

However, out of all those countries, it was Greece that she felt especially drawn to. Perhaps it was because of her emotional attachment to it.

The memories she had linked and associated with the country the Santorini Islands in particular. Memories of when she'd allowed herself to love, wholly and freely.

She had tried to convince herself that there was only one reason why she came back to England, and that was to attend the naming ceremony of Luna's first child. No matter how many times Luna, in her letters, pleaded for Hermione to stay longer, she had resolved to stay for one week and nothing more. She could not afford to bump into one person in particular well, her heart couldn't.

She caught a bus near the hotel to Charing Cross road and was almost preparing to enter the Leaky Cauldron when she caught sight of a newly opened bookstore a bookstore nearly the size of central business district shopping mall. The bookstore, named "Chapters", boasted of five levels, each level filled with countless bookshelves complete with comfy sofas and mahogany coffee tables. Every level had its own coffee shop and children's section for the convenience of its customers. Hermione looked at the books from the entrance of the bookstore with an awe that rivalled the first time she'd entered Hogwarts' Great Hall as a scrawny eleven-year-old girl. Her first thought was, *There's so many books!*

Realizing that she had only about two hours till her afternoon tea appointment with Luna, she headed for the section that showcased child-rearing books *Too bad they don't have a magical section*, Hermione mused as she browsed rows upon rows of books.

Having gotten the chance to know Luna "Loony" Lovegood better through the DA and particularly through their work for the Order of Phoenix during the height of the war against Voldemort, Hermione had found that the Ravenclaw had the same love for books. It was like having a kindred spirit, someone who could understand what she was talking about and had the same enthusiasm for learning. Although Luna often gave the impression that she was in-her-own-little-world dreamy and well, *loony*, she was actually very intelligent and insightful. In the many encounters with Death Eaters leading up to the final battle, the members of the Order of Phoenix had come to realize that Luna Lovegood was a force to be reckoned with the way she fired off curses after curses. She'd looked more like a livid eagle digging its razor sharp talons into one's skin, its beak nipping at anywhere and everywhere someone definitely not wanted as an enemy.

Perhaps it could be attributed to Luna's uniqueness in everything that her choice of a husband didn't cause *much* of an uproar. Although, Hermione often did wonder what her friend saw in the "ferret" that made her go positively dreamy at the sight of him or just by mentioning his name.

Malfoy apparently went to Professor Dumbledore in his sixth year at Hogwarts when it became clear to him that his father, who'd prided on himself as being the most loyal servant of the Dark Lord, wanted him to take the Dark Mark earlier than the average new recruits. Brought up in a family of Death Eaters, Draco had initially believed all the things that Voldemort promoted, as his father hadn't wasted any time in instilling the notion of blood purity into his young, naïve son. He also hadn't known about Voldemort's heritage until the year in which the DA was formed. It was in that year that he'd received an anonymous note a word puzzle, actually. When he'd finally figured it out, the note had shown in blood red letters, "Riddle ≠ Pure". The note had then proceeded to burst into flames and was reduced into nothing but ashes in a matter of seconds.

It had always annoyed him to no end that Granger had always been ahead of him when it came to topping the class, with the exception of flying, of course. It had been rather like a light bulb had suddenly turned on when it'd hit him that Granger was the living contradiction to Voldemort's rant about purebloods being superior to half-bloods and Mudbloods. This realization was somewhat belated, he had thought with uncharacteristic self-disgust.

However, the absolute last straw had been when a distant pureblood cousin was tortured and then killed for failing a mission. Draco had come to the conclusion that it wasn't about blood purity anymore, perhaps it had never been, and that it all came down to Voldemort's hunger for power and the desire to terminate anything that had the power to eventually become a threat to him.

When he'd run to Dumbledore for help to save himself from going down the same road as his father, Headmaster Dumbledore, as the head of the Order of Phoenix, asked him to be the additional spy when it became evident from Snape's reports that someone from the Order was giving out confidential information.

In the final battle, Draco had ended up back-to-back with Luna Lovegood, fighting off loyal Death Eaters. It had been a surprise that their movements complimented each other so well, and within moments the Death Eaters that originally had them surrounded were falling like dominoes. They had made a formidable team that day.

Hermione, in her search, came across a book written for new mothers Parenting: A New Addition to the Family and decided that it would be a wonderful gift for Luna and Draco. Turning to the next bookshelf, she blushed when she realized that the child-rearing section had ended and that the next section started sex and relationships.

Later, she'd berate herself for her insatiable curiosity, but at that moment, she was amazed at the amount of books that could ever be written on the subject of sex and relationships. Her eyes almost absorbed every title she glanced at, her mental commentary going at a hundred miles per minute, exclaiming things such as, "Oh, there's more than one way to have sex?", "Love vs. lust?" and "Toys?!"

She blushed scarlet as her eyes landed on a book called Pleasing Your Partner. She tentatively reached out to take it off the shelf, but feeling somewhat guilty at reading "naughty" books, she quickly skimmed the back of the book and was preparing to put said book back on the shelf when someone bumped into her, causing her to lose her balance and land on her bum in a most unladylike manner. In her rather unpleasant acquaintance with the carpeted floor, the books she'd been holding also fell to the floor.

Apologies at the tip of her tongue, as she stood up, became indefinable squeaks when her eyes registered the tall, dark man standing in front of her, his black eyes almost boring holes into her with their intensity.

He was the man that she'd do anything to avoid in her return.

"Professor," she managed to begin.

"Severus," he interrupted.

It was in her initial shock at seeing Severus Snape that she had forgotten about the books that she was holding, particularly the one that she'd been in the process of putting back. Her belated panic was rather hard to hide as her mind frantically tried to think of something to say that would keep him from seeing her books and at least something that would divert his attention until she could pick up the two books and hide one under the other.

However, in that moment, Snape held up the exact book that she was trying to prevent him from seeing, right in her face.

Merlin, her mortification was complete.

Escape

Sometimes you just have to stand your ground no matter how enticing a Slytherin's persuasion might be.

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Hugs to Southern_Witch_69 for being an amazing beta!

Chapter 2: Escape

"Professor..."

"Severus," he prompted again.

At this point in time, though, she couldn't bring herself to say his given name.

"I...I..." she stuttered.

He raised an eyebrow at her, the corner of his upper lip curled up slightly in amusement.

The book was still held glaringly obvious in his hand.

Giving up on saying anything coherently, she took the opportunity to snatch the book from his hand and turned to stash the book hazardly back into the bookshelf in her attempt to keep him from seeing the cover of the book – or at least the title.

But it seemed that he'd done so anyway.

When she turned back from the bookshelf, Hermione found herself almost chest to chest with Severus Snape. *He's so close*, her muddled brain managed to process – in fact, so close that she was able to smell him, a masculine scent of herbs and sandalwood. She couldn't stop herself from closing her eyes when she saw him leaning down towards her, her eyes drowning in the deep black pools, despite her brain frantically telling her to run and not stand there like a frozen icicle.

He did not kiss her though.

Just as she was going to open her eyes in disappointment, something that she'd forever deny, his breath was hot on her ear, and his lips brushed her neck, sending shivers down her spine.

"Come back to me," he said in his low, silky voice.

So intent was she on the feeling of being so close to him and having his warm breath on the space between her neck and ear that she didn't even register what he was saying. She made a noncommittal noise.

"Come back to me, Hermione," he repeated. This time his arms snaked around her waist to pull her flush against him.

At that moment, reality came crashing down on Hermione.

Her eyes snapped open, and she had to mentally steer her courage and resolve against such an offer. *No*, she said to herself, *I didn't come back for this*.

"No," she said.

"No?" The raised eyebrow was there again.

"No, Severus," she ground out, shaking her head as well to convince him.

He changed his tactics and inquired, "So what were you doing with a book such as *Pleasing Your Partner*, hm?"

When she didn't answer, he had a fierce scowl, and all of a sudden, she found herself backed into one of the huge bookshelves, her upper arms in his vice grip.

"Who. Is. He?" he growled.

"I don't know what you are talking about," she replied, mindful of the fact that his face was mere inches from hers.

If it was possible, his grip on her arms tightened further. His voice dropped even lower in his apparent anger. "Who is this idiot that you are seeing? Planning on rehearsing every advice written in that damn book with him, hm?"

Inwardly embarrassed at the actual lack of social life during her years abroad, but mostly hurt and angered by his insinuations, she bit out, "It's none of your damn business!"

"Of course it is *my* business! *You are my wife!*"

"Mind your own business!" she yelled, realizing somewhat belatedly that she should not have said that.

"*You are my business, so I'm minding you!*" he lazily drawled.

Hermione was frustrated to no end. The man was utterly too arrogant. "I seem to recall that when we married we agreed that the other party was free to see whomever they chose so long as they don't bring whoever it was back home. So you have no grounds for interrogating me like some prisoner!"

"So we agreed, but that doesn't change the fact that you are my wife. You're mine!" he said with a possessive growl.

"No, Severus," she disagreed sadly, desperately and successfully hiding her sorrow, "our marriage is just words on a piece of paper – a technicality. I am no more your wife than you are my husband."

The second he slightly slackened his grip on her arms, she pushed him with all her strength, fleeing like the Devil was on her heels and totally forgetting about the parenting book that she was going to give to Luna and Draco.

"This is *not* over!" he yelled after her.

The Malfoy Baby

Chapter 3 of 9

Malfoy Manor is obviously *not* the recommended hideout when you have something like *Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions*.

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Hugs to Southern_Witch_69 for being an awesome beta!

Chapter 3: The Malfoy Baby

She ran and ran until she finally reached the Leaky Cauldron, afraid that he might have followed her. She didn't stop at the Leaky Cauldron though; she headed straight for Diagon Alley and dashed into Madam Malkin's shop, knowing that it would be the last place Severus Snape would find her in if he had indeed followed her.

Breathing a sigh of relief when it was obvious that he wasn't after her, Hermione took in her surroundings. There were many robes of different size, colour and material. A few of them were hung on the plastic models, placed on the shop display window, and turning magically in a manner like a real model would on a catwalk.

In one corner, a piece of silk was being stitched together by magic. It would make a great dress someday, Hermione thought. Just as she was admiring the silk fabric, Madam Malkin came out of her office.

"Hello, dear," she said, "anything I can help you with?"

"Hello, Madam Malkin," Hermione returned politely as she turned around.

"Oh, Hermione, you're back!" The old lady enveloped her in a hug.

"My, you have grown even more beautiful!" Hermione blushed, but she instantly sobered when Madam Malkin said, "Now, where's that husband of yours? He should be lavishing you with diamonds, pearls, gowns and gifts; you certainly deserve it, dear."

Oh, he had sent her gifts, lots and lots of them, she had wanted to say, but somehow her mouth wouldn't comply. She didn't know what to do with them. It would seem rude to send them back to him, but she also didn't feel comfortable wearing them. She thought it felt like she was some sort of trophy wife with the amount of expensive jewellery he'd sent her. *Even if you wouldn't admit it, you've been reading too many Harlequin romances in your free time* she chided herself.

She gave a small smile and changed the subject. "Madam Malkin, do you happen to have any shawls for sale?"

"Oh, yes, dear, come over here." She waved Hermione over to the middle of the shop. There upon the wall were several racks, which held many shawls of various styles and materials. Although Hermione was not one who usually fawned over beautiful clothes and makeup, she nevertheless believed in making oneself presentable. But the shawls in Madam Malkin's shop really did catch her eye. Along the rack was a royal blue shawl it was made of silk and was rather translucent, but it was quite shimmery, like stars sparkling in the dark sky.

It would go perfectly with the dress for the ball Hermione mused.

The Malfoys would be holding a ball after the naming ceremony, and typical of a Malfoy, Draco had announced with a smug smirk that no expenses would be spared for celebrating the new addition to his family.

Having then paid for the shimmery royal blue shawl, Hermione looked at her watch and almost yelped aloud when she realized that she only had two minutes till her meeting with Luna.

Stepping back out into Diagon Alley, she Disapparated with a pop and reappeared on a path in Wiltshire.

Up ahead was Malfoy Manor in all its glory the mansion was enormous to say the least, but its previous generations of occupants always gave it a dark, foreboding aura.

Draco had not returned to the manor until after his wedding to Luna, but once they returned, they set to rid the manor of all its anti-Muggle charms, jinxes and everything that contained Dark magic. Drapes and curtains were pulled open to let the morning and afternoon light in, making the manor look and feel more like a home rather than a previous torture chamber for unfortunate Muggles or for those who had incurred the displeasure of either Lucius Malfoy or Voldemort himself. The only things that were undisposed of and could be called Dark were the books on Dark magic, and much to everyone's surprise, it was Luna who said they should keep them (locked under multiple, complex protection and warding charms, of course). Luna reasoned that they should keep it for future reference in creating antidotes and counter-curses just in case another Dark Lord would rise.

Just as she was about to knock on the front door, it opened to reveal not a house-elf, but the master of the house himself. He opened the door with a flourish, and with a mock bow, he drawled, "Welcome to my humble abode, Your Majesty."

Hermione rolled her eyes and batted Draco on the arm not so gently. "'Your Majesty,' my arse!" Hermione huffed.

She joked, "Did you finally have enough of your house-elves and dispose of them, Draco?" Hermione raised her brow and smirked. "Never thought I'd ever see the day of you opening your own front door. Now, where's your darling wife?"

"In the sitting room with the baby," he replied.

Hermione had often wondered why it was that a bundle of squirming, screaming infant could reduce women (and to Hermione's horror, some men as well) into a bunch of mushy, gushing and cooing-unintelligibly messes.

She found her answer when she stepped into the sitting room and saw the baby held in Luna's arms. "Hey, Luna," she greeted.

The baby girl was fast asleep in her mother's arms, content in her mother's embrace; she shifted to snuggle up to her mother's bosom. The baby had the longest blonde eyelashes, and her head was covered lightly with soft, blonde hair. Her tiny hands were curled into fists, moving slightly as she turned her body in her sleep.

Hermione marvelled at the sight. Such a tiny creature. An angel. She really wanted to reach out and touch the tiny hands, feel the soft baby skin. She placed her index finger on the baby girl's palm and almost gasped out loud when the tiny fingers curled around her finger. She looked up to find a pair of big, round, bright grey eyes watching her with an air of curiosity, almost as if the baby was studying her.

Hermione heard cooing sounds, and she blushed profusely when she realised that it was she who was making the sounds. Luna just looked on, amused.

"She's so beautiful," Hermione whispered.

"Yes, she is," Luna replied and asked nonplussed, "So when are you going to have one yourself?"

Hermione sighed wistfully as she looked at the now awake baby girl. "When I find someone who loves me as much as Draco loves you, Luna."

A voice in the doorway drawled, "And here I thought you are a married woman, Lady Snape."

Luna gave Draco a you-shouldn't-have-said-that-so-now-you're-in-big-trouble look and said, "Lord Malfoy, if you will please excuse us ladies, as we have some delicate matters to discuss."

"As you wish, my lady," Draco replied graciously and gave a mock bow before leaving the room. Luna rolled her eyes.

Hermione giggled. "Have I been sucked into some alternate universe? This is like some Regency movie!"

Luna's butterbeer earrings jiggled as she laughed with Hermione, and the baby in her arms looked curiously at the two adults before she too gave a chortle and proceeded to move her hands together as if to clap.

"Seriously, you are only staying for a week?" Luna asked.

Hermione nodded. "Yes, one week at the most."

"You should come and stay with us. We have so many rooms here. Why on earth did you insist in staying at Muggle London?"

"I really don't want to impose on you and Draco. What with the baby, you two must be running yourselves to the ground. Plus, I don't want to intrude on your family time," Hermione said, smiling.

"Well, I can definitely tell you the advantages of you staying here. One, you don't have to travel so much just to get here. Two, we can find time to have girl talk," Luna said with a grin, "and last but not least, you can be our temporary nanny!"

Hermione smirked. "You mean so you can have some private time with Draco, hm?"

Just then, the fire in the sitting room's fireplace turned green. Hermione turned to see who was Flooing and found herself face-to-face with the tall, imposing form of Severus Snape yet again.

"Good afternoon, ladies. Mrs. Malfoy, may I inquire as to the whereabouts of your husband? There is an important matter which requires his assistance."

"Oh, good afternoon, Severus. I'll go get Draco for you," Luna greeted. She then turned to Hermione and said, "Can you hold her for me please? I'll be right back."

Although the sitting room of Malfoy Manor was as spacious as they came, Hermione felt her cheeks heat up at the notion of being alone in a room with Severus Snape. Holding the baby securely in her arms, she walked to one of the French windows, turning her back to him, and looked out onto the grounds, trying to find anything that could keep her attention away from the man.

And for the second time of the day, she failed to notice that he had come to stand behind her until she felt his hot breath on her neck. He began to place kisses on her neck. Startled, it was pure luck that she didn't drop the baby in her shock.

The baby girl waved her little arms instead, her eyes crinkling at the corners and her mouth opening to emit a happy laugh. Moving slowly and speaking in a low voice so as to not upset the baby, she hissed, "What are you doing here?!"

He didn't stop kissing her neck though; rather, he trailed his mouth up to her ear and murmured huskily, "Aren't you glad to see me, Mrs. Snape?"

Her frustration showed on her face when she realised that she didn't have any hands to push him away with. But deep down, she couldn't help but feel the tingles that kept racing down her spine, making her toes curl.

She grimaced.

Merlin, help us all.

Typical Paternal Behaviour

Chapter 4 of 9

What to do when Draco acts like a ninny...

Chapter 4: Typical Paternal Behaviour

Before Hermione could reply with a resounding 'no,' a discreet cough came from the doorway.

They both turned in slow motion – Hermione, in particular, almost jumped apart from Snape with dawning dread and horror.

"Well, that was quite some homecoming welcome," Luna mused.

Hermione felt herself blushing to the roots of her hair.

Draco, however, gave a strangled moan. Covering his eyes in a dramatic show, he whined, "My eyes! Oh, my innocent eyes!" It was a pity that the rest of the adults in the room did nothing but roll their eyes at him.

As if only realising then that his daughter was still in Hermione's arms, Draco rushed to snatch his precious daughter from Hermione with his arms flailing in the air like a wild hen and acting like a total ninny. Groaning in despair, he said, "Get a room, you two! For God's sake, leave the X-rated stuff behind closed doors!"

Snape gave a disdainful sneer. "It was hardly X-rated."

"Ah, but you were thinking about it, weren't you?" Draco's reply was smug, knowing that he had hit the nail on the head.

Cooing to his daughter, he said, "My poor darling, Daddy will get rid of these *guests* in no time." Giving Snape and Hermione a mock glare, he said imperiously, "If I had my way, my daughter won't be seeing *anything* even remotely close to X-rated. Ever."

Laughter burst from both Hermione and Snape while Luna whacked Draco none too lightly on the arm, saying, "That's *only* if you had your way, dear."

Her sentiment was echoed by the cheerful gurgles from the bundle in his arms.

After what would be considered as Draco's version of Professor McGonagall's indignant sniff, in Hermione's opinion, Draco said, "Now, what is the matter that requires my assistance, Uncle Sev?"

Snape immediately bristled. "How many times have I told you..."

"Not to call you 'Uncle Sev'?" Draco finished with a smirk. "Well, we are related – cousins, albeit quite distantly – besides you *are* my godfather, aren't you?"

"'Severus' will do," Snape replied.

Draco handed the baby to Luna and walked towards the door, saying, "Well, do come to my study if we are to discuss important matters. I'm sure the ladies will be too preoccupied to notice us..." and just before he disappeared through the now open door, he added with a rather cheeky grin, "Uncle Sev."

After enjoying a cup of tea with a tray of sandwiches prepared by Twigg, the paid house-elf, Hermione said with a smile, "Thanks for having me over for tea, Luna. It's great to see you again. Do come and visit me sometime. Bring the baby too; you can leave Draco here if he couldn't be bothered to come."

"Of course! If Draco doesn't come, I will bring Twigg, and then we can go clubbing ourselves," Luna said with much enthusiasm.

Wagging her index finger, Hermione said with a mock serious tone, "Luna Malfoy, you should be ashamed of yourself! A wife and a mother now, and all you are interested in is clubbing?!"

They both proceeded to burst into gales of laughter.

"Anyway, I better go now. It's getting late, and I plan to visit Professor McGonagall tomorrow at Hogwarts. The ceremony is going to be held here at ten in the morning, yes?"

Luna nodded in affirmation. Placing her hand on Hermione's arm, she said, "Hermione, Draco and I would like you to be the baby's godmother."

Stunned, Hermione could only do nothing but the impression of an open-mouthed goldfish. "A-are you sure? I mean what about..."

"Yes, we are sure." Luna smiled.

"Well, then I'm honoured," Hermione accepted. "So, what are you going to call her?"

Luna gave a cheeky grin. "Everyone will know on Friday. Godmother or not."

"*Tease.*"

What Luna didn't offer was the identity of the prospective godfather.

Odd Behaviour

Chapter 5 of 9

When Snape's odd behaviour is not really odd at all...

Chapter 5: Odd Behaviour

The next day Hermione spent the morning with her former Head of House, Professor McGonagall, having morning tea and catching up with each other. The professor had become Headmistress a few years ago when the great Albus Dumbledore had decided to retire.

Though one of the greatest, most powerful wizards in magical history, the Final Battle took a lot out of Albus Dumbledore. Now in retirement he could do whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted – not that he couldn't during his tenure as Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. It's just that now he was able to travel and enjoy things like wearing Hawaiian t-shirts, photography, discovering Muggle sweets (by the way, he had also put in an order of lemon sherbet to be owl-delivered monthly to wherever he might be – one of the perks of having a lifetime membership at Honeydukes).

Hermione found the former and the current Headmasters of Hogwarts talking in front of the unmoving gargoyle when she arrived.

"Professors," she greeted. Although at McGonagall's rather stern frown, she changed it to, "Minerva. Albus."

"Hello, Hermione," they returned.

Since the school term had yet to start, Minerva McGonagall was in casual attire, which gave her a rather more youthful look. She was delighted that her favourite student the Gryffindor Know-It-All of Class '98 Hermione Granger – in her private opinion of course, was back for a visit.

Morning tea was a lively affair, and before Hermione left, she was assured that she would see them both again at the Malfoy naming celebration the following day.

Arriving back at her room at the Intercontinental Hotel a little before lunch, she pulled out a small quilt that she had knitted for Luna and Draco's baby girl. On it was the four mascots of the four Houses of Hogwarts. The only remaining thing to be added was the girl's name. *Hmm... that will have to wait until Friday afternoon*, Hermione mused. She planned to come back to the hotel after the naming ceremony to finish the quilt before bringing it to the ball on that night.

Thinking about the baby girl brought her thoughts back to the day before both at the bookstore and at Malfoy Manor her muddled thoughts all centring on one Severus Snape.

Snape's odd behaviour became the main theme of her thoughts for the rest of the afternoon. Well, to be correct, it couldn't exactly be classified as 'odd behaviour' as such with regards to the general population... or at least those people in trashy romance novels; however, Snape was behaving oddly with regards to himself someone she had known since her first year at Hogwarts.

She had been in love with him, whether she was still in love with him was not something that she wanted to contemplate at this time. ~~He~~ He had not been in love with her, of that she was sure. Back when they'd first married, he had made sure that she was clear of that fact that he might care for her as a *friend* and fellow Order member, but he was not in love with her and would never be in love with her.

So why was he behaving like that?

Sleep did not come easily for Hermione that night.

The next day was the sole reason for Hermione's brief return to England. The morning light shown brightly outside as Hermione pulled the heavy, yet luxurious, curtains aside. The sky was bright blue with hardly any clouds scattered across it. She was glad that today of all days had such fine weather.

By the time Hermione arrived at Malfoy Manor, a large number of guests had already arrived. The ceremony was to be held at the back garden in a glass gazebo which had been magically enlarged for the occasion. Since it was a formal occasion, Hermione wore a maroon robe over her business shirt and pants with her hair up in a sophisticated twist. Making her way to the back of the house, she greeted some Aurors and former Hogwarts classmates. The Weasley clan had yet to arrive, but she spotted Remus and Tonks talking to Shackbolt in the kitchen. It was a pity that Harry and Ginny were away on their postponed honeymoon (the arrival of baby Annie muddled up their plans), and Ron, unfortunately, was killed by a Death Eater during the Final Battle.

Albus Dumbledore officiated over the naming ceremony, and the baby girl was placed in a small cradle at the front with both parents standing proudly and lovingly on each side. When it was time to name the baby's godparents, Hermione found her own name being called as the godmother of Isabella Grace Malfoy. Almost in a trance, she slowly stood and walked over to stand next to Luna, still quite unbelieving that she had become the godparent of a child. It was a miracle that she didn't faint and fall onto the floor in a dead thump when the name of the baby's godfather was announced.

Severus Snape.

He came to stand beside Draco as Dumbledore proceeded into the last part of the ceremony. She had turned her head slightly to look at him but found that he was already looking at her intently. Gasping inwardly, she quickly turned her attention back to the baby.

Somehow she got through the rest of the ceremony, but she had felt his eyes on her the whole time. It was rather unsettling. His gaze was so intense she could almost feel him burning into her. If she was a piece of leaf and he was a ray of light shining through a magnifying glass, she was sure that she would have had a big, black hole on her.

Once a light buffet lunch of sandwiches and other delicacies was announced, she made a beeline for Luna and Draco. They made her promise to come to the ball that night. Excusing herself, she reassured them of her presence at the later hour saying that she just needed to go back to the hotel to finish her gift for Baby Isabella.

Hoping to avoid Snape, she tried to be as inconspicuous as possible. But alas, he saw her as she was leaving via the front door. Once he saw her, he made to follow her, his strides long and quick. She knew that he would catch up with her in no time. With a sudden rush of adrenaline, she raced to the Apparition point. Grumbling under her breath, she muttered, "Damn you, Malfoy. Stupid Anti-Apparition wards!"

She Apparated into a female lavatory in one of London's tube stations. *Ha! See how you get out of this*, she thought smugly. It would be idiotic to Apparate to her hotel, as it would literally lead him to her 'nest'. Going aboveground, she caught a taxi back to the hotel and then proceeded to pack her belongings with several flicks of her wand.

She had to check out of that hotel. It was stupid of her to register under her real name. Even if he couldn't follow her just then, she was sure that the Malfoys would have had mentioned where she was staying, and it would be only a matter of time before he found her. Alone.

Although she had no idea whatsoever how he planned to explain to the Malfoys why he himself didn't even know where his wife was staying and moreover why she was not staying with him in the first place.

She turned herself into a blonde with long, straight hair wearing the most hideous pair of glasses Transfigured from a hotel-supplied notepad. She felt rather guilty though at changing her credit card details, but knew that it was necessary, as she couldn't think of any better way, what with her head being so muddled with frantic thoughts at the time.

Hermione arrived at the Hilton Hotel only to be told that the only room available was the honeymoon suite. Running out of time to finish the quilt and prepare for the ball, she decided to take the room, all the while grumbling under her breath about the downside of being a British citizen the need to be polite being at the top of the list.

Once she was satisfied with the finished quilt, she stripped and dived into the enormous Jacuzzi, washing her hair and soaking in a mixture of peach-flavoured bathing salts. She changed into a strapless, royal blue ball gown and wrapped the shimmering royal blue shawl which she bought from Madam Malkin around her bare shoulders. With a few flicks of her wand, her hair changed back to its original brown and twisted itself up, leaving only a few ringlets of curls framing her face and her long, delicate neck column bare. A light layer of lip gloss and she was done.

It seemed that the party was already in full swing by the time she got there. As she neared the ballroom, she found Severus Snape waiting outside the door.

For her.

An Act of Love

Chapter 6 of 9

Just how true are his feelings for her...?

Chapter 6: An Act of Love

She had thought of either pretending to not notice him and walk right by him or walk up to him where he would, she daydreamed, hold out his arm for her and they would walk into the ballroom like a real couple.

By the time she had decided on the former as the safer route, he had seen her and strode towards her in quick, long strides. Before she even had time to utter a greeting, he had her upper arm in his grip. His head bent and his mouth was close to her ear; to anyone who could be observing (but there was actually no one) it would seem like an intimate gesture, and Hermione knew that no one would have known that he was actually hissing into her ear, "Get your act together!"

Perhaps that was the most painful thing of all. Knowing that the man she used to love (and probably still loved) was making himself pretend to be in love with her in front of friends and society just because they were married when he had actually adamantly said that he would never love her.

Hermione felt a sudden sharp pain in her chest. It went unnoticed by Snape. Maybe she should be thankful that he wasn't behaving oddly. *This* Snape was the Snape she knew. The Snape of two days ago was most likely Pretend!Snape. She could see why he might have kissed her at Malfoy's house – to keep up the façade that all was well with their marriage. However, it did not explain his behaviour at the bookstore. Oh, well, she mentally shrugged; perhaps there was someone she didn't see at the time.

They entered the ballroom together, her hand on the crook of his arm. He nodded to a few acquaintances; his face was impassive as usual. She managed to paste a smile on her face, though she knew that underneath her emotions were less than joyous. Hermione knew that she owed to it her friends to not cause any commotion – for Merlin's sake, it was the celebration of the birth of their first born. She should be happy for their sake if not for her own.

Dinner was an extravagant affair, a total of eight courses interspersed with toasts and gifts for the baby (who spent most of the night in peaceful slumber in her mother's arms, earning lots of ohh-ing and ahh-ing from many female attendees). To Hermione's dismay, the table arrangements did not allow her to sit beside Luna and Snape beside Draco. The two of them were unfortunately placed together. For Hermione, it was agony. She could not think of anything to say to him. She also knew that he hated small talk. He did not make any attempts at conversation with her, choosing to speak instead with Dumbledore who sat on his other side. It wasn't even this bad when they worked together for the Order. In the end, she concentrated on the delicious food and conversed with Luna, hoping no one noticed that the Snapes had not spoken to each other throughout the whole evening.

Baby Isabella did have her share of the cake – a three-tiered mud cake concoction courtesy of the house-elves who had outdone themselves tremendously with the dinner and the dessert – except almost half of it either went to her face or her bib.

Some would say that the highlight of the evening was the dance. Young ladies were given dance cards, and young men were urged by their hosts to sign their names on the cards. Hermione fought the urge to laugh out loud when she saw Luna and Draco already practising their parental skills on Millicent Bulstrode – reminding her that she should dance with every single man in the room but to remember to not to dance with the same man more than twice, and the man that she danced twice with should be someone special. It was funny. Once again, Hermione felt as if she had landed into Regency times with her Time-turner.

She flitted across the ballroom and breathed a sigh of relief when her dance card was full. Not one single space left for Severus Snape. Being in such close contact with him in a dance would wreak havoc on her already tangled emotions.

The first dance was reserved for the host and hostess of the ball. Hermione joined in enthusiastically with the applauses going around the room when the dance ended. Draco and Luna make a lovely couple on the dance floor, she thought smiling. However, the smile slipped off her face when host announced that the second dance was reserved for the newly appointed godparents and would the godfather and godmother of Isabella Grace Malfoy step onto the dance floor?

She could hardly give the excuse that she could not dance as her dance card was filled to the brim, so Hermione reluctantly stood up and met Snape at the middle of the dance floor. She had expected the music to be a light, lively tune – similar to the one Draco and Luna had danced to, but it turned out to be a slow song, and all she could do was groan inwardly. Everyone who was not enjoying the ever-flowing champagne or in conversation with other people watched them.

He pulled her flush against his body, his hand tightening around her waist. His chest was hard and muscled despite the robes that he usually wore to conceal them. Her whole body tingled, and she fought the blush that was trying to creep into her cheek, wishing that the song would end soon. She turned her face so that her head lay on his shoulder. Much as he was staring at her rather intently, she could not afford to look into his eyes. She had not been practising her Occlumency skills as of late, and it would be detrimental for her should he look into her mind. She had already been a fool to fall in love with him in the first place. It would not do to let him know that she still pined for him like a lovesick puppy – he would just sneer at her feelings and ruthlessly squash them like one would squash a cockroach.

Much as she wanted to avoid him during this visit, she knew that it was inevitable that she would see him and that she would need to talk to him about the signing of another document. It would be their fifth wedding anniversary come New Year's Eve. They had not spent their anniversary together since the first anniversary. Perhaps this year would be the last as well.

A Dance of Passion

Chapter 7 of 9

In which Hermione reminisces her honeymoon...

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My wonderful beta: Southern_Witch_69

Chapter 7: A Dance of Passion

Hermione gave an almost audible sigh of relief when the song started to come to an end. She lifted her head from his shoulder and proceeded to withdraw herself from his embrace. She curtsied and started to thank him for the dance before turning away when he grasped her arm in a vice grip again, saying silkily, "Not so fast, darling."

It was apparent that Snape had different ideas, for he clicked his fingers and the orchestra started to play music fit for a tango – the exact same music from the movie "The Mask of Zorro," which Hermione loved watching over and over again.

She gasped in shock when she found that her ball gown had been Transfigured into a little, hot red and black number. She opened her mouth to ask, "Why –" but he cut her off by yanking her back towards him and started to dance with the rhythm. She placed her palm upright, adjacent to his as they turned in circles, having memorized the moves from the countless times that she'd watched the movie, moving almost as if on autopilot, for her mind was elsewhere.

He had caught her watching the movie again when they had travelled to Spain during their first anniversary. Circumstances had not allowed them time to spend their honeymoon as most couples would spend their honeymoon, so their first anniversary had also been their honeymoon. She had been so enraptured with the movie that she'd failed to notice him leaning against the doorway, watching her try to imitate the dance.

He had offered to teach her the dance on their last night in Spain, and the lessons continued when they arrived at their next stop - Greece. During the day, he would take her around the Santorini Islands to explore tourist places and enjoy the scenery. She had fallen in love right away with the bright blue sea and the pristine white buildings with swimming pools as sparkingly blue as the sea. At night they would dine on exotic dishes in his luxurious home facing the sea, so delicious they had Hermione licking her lips and pouting unconsciously for more. She had no idea that Snape was fighting the overwhelming desire to make her his dessert.

And so it was at night when they continued the dance lessons. Every night he would Transfigure a different dress for her, each made her figure no less alluring than the last. Though theirs was a marriage of convenience, she could not help falling for him hard and fast as their dances of passion continued. Sure, she almost went starry-eyed in her first year at Hogwarts just by thinking of the amount of knowledge he could impart to her and her respect for him when she'd found out that he was Dumbledore's spy in Voldemort's camp, but this was nothing compared to the crush that she'd felt for him during her fifth and sixth year when she'd worked with him on Order business.

So engrossed was Hermione in her reverie that she was oblivious to Snape's rather intent stare into her eyes even as they continued their dance. She was roused from her descent into the past when she felt Snape's lips trailing the base of her throat during the final dip.

She couldn't help blushing scarlet when roaring applause, wolf-whistles and catcalls came from around the ballroom. As she curtsied and pulled her hands from his, Hermione caught the satisfied, smug look on Snape's face. Not wishing to know what had brought on that look, she rushed as gracefully as possible to the ladies' room.

Out of Snape's embrace, it was as if she literally landed back from cloud nine just like her honeymoon/first anniversary had. For when they'd returned to England from Greece, Snape had reverted to his impassive demeanour, making it clear that they were married in name only. It had been with a broken heart that Hermione had suggested the idea that they could take lovers if they wanted to on the condition that such lovers would never be taken back to their marriage bed. She gave him this option because she loved him too much to bind him to a loveless marriage, for it was *he* who married her to save her.

He had made no attempt to change her mind.

In the Times of Yore

Chapter 8 of 9

The long-awaited story of Severus and Hermione's past.

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A round of applause to Southern_Witch for being such an awesome beta :)

Chapter 8: In the Times of Yore

Perhaps it would be wise to start from the beginning...

Harry Potter's sixth year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry became an important year of discovery and change for Draco Malfoy. During the start of his fifth year summer holiday, Draco's father announced with unmistakable pride that his son would be the youngest most loyal servant of the Dark Lord the following Christmas. It was also that summer which Draco accidentally happened upon the abject, endless torture of a pureblood distant cousin by Lucius Malfoy and Voldemort who had failed one of the Dark Lord's missions. It was rather fortunate that he did not forget the flame-bursting anonymous note he had received at the end of his fifth year.

He knew then that he had been trapped into a dead end.

For to join them, it would be fatal – his soul would be ripped to shreds the moment the Dark Mark burned into his left arm; but to fight them, he knew his father would not hesitate whatsoever in torturing and killing his treacherous son.

And so he ran to Dumbledore for help. The only wizard that Voldemort feared.

Eventually, he still had the Dark Mark burned into his left arm, but he knew that the excruciating pain had been a small sacrifice compared to the loss of his soul for he went to Voldemort's camp as Dumbledore spy.

Young Malfoy's spy status caused quite an uproar in the Order of the Phoenix, though with time, the others came to realize that the real Draco Malfoy was nothing like his father. After much whining and sulking on the boys' side, the Golden Trio and Ginny with growing respect formed a truce with Draco.

During the two years of vigorous preparation, Malfoy often practiced with Harry, Ron, Ginny and Luna while Hermione worked with Professor Snape on developing draughts to weaken Voldemort. She still had her combat training though, with Professor Snape.

Ron had been an invaluable strategist during the War and it was to his credit that casualties from Death Eaters attacks and the Final Battle were mostly on the Dark side. Hermione had mourned him when he had been killed by a vengeful Death Eater during the Final Battle as one would mourn one's best friend though she knew that he had loved her as more than a friend. She had already given her heart to another.

Perhaps it could be credited to one's survival instincts, especially a Slytherin's, that Lucius Malfoy, to save his own skin, fired off a Stinging hex at an unsuspecting Voldemort which gave Hermione an opportunity to launch the weakening draught she and the Professor brewed, and Harry to finish Voldemort off with a loud and powerful Avada Kedavra.

Many celebrations were held after Voldemort's much awaited demise. However, there was one thing that doused the merriment of the Order of Phoenix's celebrations at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place. It seemed that Lucius Malfoy has once again wheedled his way into the Ministry and received a pardon for his crimes.

During the several occasions that Hermione was at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place, she rarely happened upon the Professor and the few times she did, he did not even speak to her except for a curt nod. With a despondent heart, Hermione urged herself to forget him.

However, it was not to be so.

One evening after her graduation from Hogwarts (Dumbledore had announced that everyone was to be exempted from final exams for the year due to the Final Battle), Hermione received an owl from Professor McGonagall urging her to come to Hogwarts at once.

She arrived at the Headmaster's office to see the object of her affections pacing back and forth on the thick carpet. Not long afterwards, both the Headmaster and Professor McGonagall emerged from another door. It was with shock that Hermione noticed how frail the Headmaster had seemed.

"Severus, Hermione, have a seat," said Professor Dumbledore.

"I have decided to retire," he continued after a few slight coughs, "and Minerva will take my place as Headmistress."

Seeing the shock on Hermione's face and Severus' widened eyes (for Severus Snape does not gape like a fish when in shock), Minerva explained, "The Final Battle had taken a lot out of Albus when he lent Harry his magical energy. I suspect that might be why it will take longer for him to recover from a cold. I called you two here because I wanted your help in finding a draught to help Albus regain or at least maintain his magical energy, I'm afraid the cursed Slytherin's ring is doing its best to drain it away," Minerva paused before continuing with a slight smile, "And I do want to offer you the position of Deputy Headmaster, Severus."

And so it was decided that Potions Professor Severus Snape would become Deputy Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry the year following Harry Potter's seventh year of magical education.

Hermione on the other hand, found herself in a catch-22 situation. She wanted to work with him yet she couldn't bear to see him knowing that he did not feel the same way. Working close quarters with an unsociable and rather grumpy old snake really did nothing to quash her affections for her fellow Order member.

She did not notice the way he did look at her when he was sure she was not looking. So when the opportunity to go to France came, she jumped at it.

Hoping the phrase "absence makes the heart grows fonder" would not apply to her.

Blue Moon

Chapter 9 of 9

Correspondence between Hermione and Snape and the appearance of the Blue Moon rose.

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A round of applause to Southern_Witch for being such an awesome beta :)

Chapter 9: Blue Moon

A Portkey later and she arrived at the rather spacious flat that the Headmistress had arranged for her. It had two bedrooms and a study with a large cupboard which could be converted into a potions laboratory.

For the next three months, Hermione worked tirelessly in her research for a cure for Dumbledore's condition, looking for any ingredients which could be added to the potion that Snape is working towards brewing. She corresponded frequently with McGonagall, keeping up to date with Dumbledore's health and other matters – her excitement for former Head of House's first year as Headmistress and McGonagall's concern for her favourite student's health.

Correspondence between Snape and her had been few and brief.

Professor,

Here are the notes I have on the "Blue Moon" rose. It should be able to stabilize the present mixture. Please do let me know if it works.

HG

She had wanted to write more but did not know what to say to him that he would not consider as utter rubbish.

Miss Granger,

It did not work. Perhaps you should concentrate on the main points rather than giving me a whole volume on the uses of roses. The Blue Moon interacts poorly with the bezoar.

SS

Hurt by his condescending tone, she decided to brew his part of the potion herself before adding the grounded rose petals and leaves (instead of the original chopped petals and leaves). Ha! She would show him that she could be as good as he!

At night, she became a songbird. An old friend from her Muggle school days had opened an upscale restaurant/bar at the heart of Paris. And so, she would pour out her joy and sorrow through the songs she sang. The restaurant/bar became even more popular afterwards and Hermione's close friend Estelle had been overwhelmed by the increasing number of rich and famous frequenting the restaurant.

Estelle knew about Hermione and magic, but she also knew that her dear friend has a cloud of sadness surrounding her that she would do her best to take away. So after a few nights Hermione started singing at Chateaux Enchantez, Estelle gave Hermione a surprise – a dressing room of her own with a very sophisticated yet sexy wardrobe of clothes to go with, plus the many bouquets of flowers from the admirers that Hermione had already attracted.

On one evening a gentleman requested a song for he and the lovely lady were celebrating their engagement. Hermione sang Whitney Houston's "I Will Always Love You" with a smile on her face, though her heart couldn't help but feel bittersweet.

The design of Chateaux Enchantez allowed Hermione to be viewed from both the restaurant area and the open bar area. And that night she wore a one shoulder-sleeved emerald green cocktail dress which left her other shoulder bare.

It was also that night a man entered the bar area and saw her. Request after request for encore was made till finally it was past time for her to leave. Hermione arrived to her dressing room to change to find not only the usual abundant bouquets, though it did astound her as to the number of admirers she has, but also the gift of a single rose with no card attached to it.

A rose of unique colour.

Bluish-purple.

It was the Blue Moon.

Could it be *him*?

No, it couldn't be. Could it?