

# Daughter of the Snake

by kyasky

PostHBP: spoilers. Hermione, an Auror, makes one drunken mistake and finds herself on a new path towards love, adventure, and the discovery of her true heritage. Eventual HG/SS with some HG/HP

## Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 5

PostHBP: spoilers. Hermione, an Auror, makes one drunken mistake and finds herself on a new path towards love, adventure, and the discovery of her true heritage. Eventual HG/SS with some HG/HP

Disclaimer: I don't own shit, and most definitely not Harry Potter or any HP characters. So, sorry, I can't take all that money I know you want to give me. Dammit. Also, this is posted on fanfiction.net under kyaxskyxgoddess, who is also me. I am not plagiarizing.

Warnings: Rated for mentions of sex and swearing. Eventual SS/HG with a little HP/HG

A very special thank you to my beta Dawn.

Chapter One

*Hermione stood atop a dark hill. She wasn't alone, she knew that, but who she was with she was not sure. There was Harry, and Ron lay in a puddle of ... blood? And then there was a figure, a figure that filled Hermione with dread, pure terror and bile building in her mouth as adrenaline pumped through her veins, making her body shake. She clutched her stomach and screamed*

Hermione jerked upright in bed, shaking hands clenched over her mouth, body drenched in a cold sweat. Harsh screams that she refused to voice tore at her throat as tears ran down her cheeks. The urge to set the screams loose was almost unbearable to resist, but Hermione refused to let her basic instincts get the best of her. It was her body, dammit, and she would control it!

After a few moments Hermione felt able to control herself. She relaxed her stiff back and removed her hands from her lips, noticing absently as she rubbed her cheeks with delicate fingertips that she had dug tiny crescent-moons into her own flesh with her nails. Still shaking slightly, Hermione carefully got out of bed and walked towards the half-closed door across the room.

The tiny bathroom held only a cramped shower, a toilet, and a dingy (though immaculately clean) sink. Hermione bathed her face in cold water, washing away the tears and, to some extent, the lingering dream. *It wouldn't be so bad*, Hermione thought to herself, *if it weren't happening so frequently lately. If it were only every now and then I'm sure I'd be able to cope better*. Unfortunately, it was happening frequently; the nightmare, which had haunted Hermione ever since the night of her seventeenth birthday over three years ago, was occurring three times a week now, more frequently than ever before.

What was worse, the dreams were stronger now too. The first time she had ever experienced the dream, Hermione had been shocked and frightened, but hadn't felt the same stomach-wrenching terror she now experienced on a nearly daily basis. Furthermore, once she had awoken from the dream, it was hopeless to try to go back to sleep that same night. Sleep was too elusive.

Glancing at her Muggle alarm clock, Hermione saw that it was now a little past 3:00, October 30th, 2000. *Great*, she thought wryly to herself, *I'm awake three hours earlier than I need to be for work. Now what?* Sighing, she returned to her small bedroom and scanned her bookshelves for something to read. "I need to buy more books," she murmured quietly, looking over the nearly 200 books she owned, which she had already read, some of them several times. Crookshanks, who regarded her from her bed, yowled his agreement. Choosing a textbook on potions she liked, Hermione settled into her reading chair and dove into the book, intent on distracting herself for the next three hours before readying for work.

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"Hermione "

Hermione jumped, eyes flying open as she came out of her light doze. "Sorry, what?" She mumbled confusedly, trying to organize the papers on her desk and remember what she had been doing.

"I just wanted to ask if you were alright. You've been awfully tired lately." Harry leaned against the doorframe, gazing into her office with a puzzled look in his eyes. "Have you been getting enough sleep? It's dangerous to be too tired these days."

'These days' meaning wartime. With Voldemort still roaming the country at large, all Aurors had to constantly be ready to spring into action. While Voldemort rarely showed himself in public lately, one never knew when a Death Eater attack might pop up. Almost four years after the death of Dumbledore, few places were truly safe, even Hogwarts.

One of the papers on her overcrowded desk caught Hermione's attention; it was the report she was working on for an attack three weeks ago. A group of Death Eaters had held a rally, gotten drunk, and attacked a young Muggle couple. The woman had been raped and the man beaten so severely he was almost killed. Unfortunately there had been no arrests; Muggle attacks were harder to monitor and Aurors almost never arrived in time to prevent anything. Situations like this mostly called for clean-up.

Wanting to think of anything else, Hermione rubbed her eyes. "I'm okay, I've just been having some bad dreams," Hermione's brow furrowed in irritation. Now the blasted nightmares were interfering with work too! "I'll be alright if I can get some rest." Seeing Harry still lurking self-consciously in the doorway, Hermione gestured him forward. "Come in. I could do with some company."

Harry strolled in, taking the seat across from Hermione's cluttered desk. He had grown tall and rangy over the years, his natural slenderness combining with his acquired muscles to give him a lean, well-toned look. His jaw was set more sternly than it had been in childhood, and worry was creating a crease between his brows at the tender age of twenty. He smiled wryly at the papers piled haphazardly over the desk, kept company by a tiny grinning pumpkin, Hermione's only attempt at Halloween decoration.

"Even the Great Book Worm can't keep organized these days, hmm?"

Hermione returned his wry smile with one of her own. "Too much paperwork to file from all the attacks. I'm sure I'd be afraid to look at *your* desk."

"My desk! *I'm* afraid to go into my *office!* There's parchment everywhere!" Harry almost laughed, but not quite. Nor did his smile quite reach his bottle-green eyes, which held only a look of tense strain. Hermione knew that the same look must be in her own eyes. Lately everyone she knew had lost the ability to completely enjoy anything, even friendly conversation. "I have reports to complete as far back as that meteor shower five months ago," Harry added. He meant the meteor shower the Death Eaters had caused over Hogsmeade village. There had been only one casualty, but many injuries. Tragically the only death had been that of Madam Rosmerta, the attractive owner of the Three Broomsticks.

"Well, if you spent more time at your bloody desk, instead of mine, maybe you would have some of it filed by now," Hermione sniffed primly, smiling to make it clear that she was joking. "So, what brings you here today? Any raids?"

Harry shook his head no. "Actually, Ron has invited us to go out for drinks tonight with him and Lavender. I think they've gotten engaged or something. He's been hinting about proposing for a while now. Wanna come?"

"Why not." Hermione shrugged. "Nothing better to do. But you do realize we'll be drinking, most likely getting drunk, on a Monday, right?"

"Not just any Monday," Harry shook his finger at her in admonishment. "Do you realize what tonight is? Besides the day before Halloween of course." At Hermione's blank look, he shook his head and clucked his tongue in disappointment. "And you call yourself a bookworm. It's the day before Samhain! At midnight tonight it'll be a holy magical day, not to mention the magical new year "

"First of all," Hermione began snobbily, *you* call me a bookworm. I have never used that term to label myself. Second of all, Samhain is a pagan holiday, and the mainstream wizarding population hasn't practiced any of the pagan holidays since Christianity was introduced to and became prevalent among most Europeans. Not to mention the only way that Samhain would be even remotely important to me would be if I intended to *try* to communicate with the dead tonight, which I have absolutely no intention of doing."

"There's the bookworm we know and love," Harry tugged a frizzy lock of hair teasingly. "Either way, Ron's probably gotten engaged and it's an excuse to get smashed."

Hermione shrugged again. "Whatever. Like I said, I've got nothing better to do. I do not, however, intend to get smashed."

Hermione vaguely remembered those words several hours and many pints later. Blinking blearily at her friends, she opened her mouth to say something, then realizing she had no idea what she meant to say, closed it. Remembering, she opened it again.

"May you have the best of happiness," she slurred, lifting her glass of ale in Ron and Lavender's general direction. "And may you have many red-haired children." She giggled and burped quietly. "I can't remember the last time I drank this much," she murmured to Harry.

The four friends sat in the Leaky Cauldron, filling one of the few occupied tables in the pub; after all, few working witches or wizards would go drinking at the beginning of the work week. Parvati had been with them earlier, but several shots of tequila had sent her home over an hour ago. Behind the bar Tom was grinning his toothless grin at the drunk group, having supplied the last round for free as an engagement gift.

"I can't remember the last time I saw you drink at all." He sipped his own drink, slurring even more than Hermione.

"We have to keep our wits about us these days." Hermione gazed into her drink gloomily. Mind functioning for only a moment, she glanced up. "What time is it?"

Harry checked his wristwatch as Ron and Lavender exchanged a tender kiss. "About 11:30. Why?"

"I should get home. We have work tomorrow." Hermione moved to rise, but tripped over her own feet and stumbled into Ron. Giggling, Hermione apologized half-heartedly. "I guess I'm too drunk to Apparate," she announced, almost proudly.

"I'll walk you home." Harry rose only slightly more gracefully than she had. "Drunk girls shouldn't walk around alone at night."

"Hey, I'm a trained Auror," Hermione declared fiercely. "I can fight just fine on my own!"

"Hermione," Harry slurred matter-of-factly. "You can't even walk straight. I don't think you'd have much luck locating your wand right now."

Since there was no way to refute this logic, Hermione found herself bidding the happy couple farewell, waving to Tom, and stumbling away from the Leaky Cauldron with Harry's arm around her waist. They supported each other almost equally, nearly falling several times when one of them swerved too far in any direction. Luckily enough,

Hermione kept a small flat not too far from Diagon Alley, so they didn't have far to walk.

Thanks to low Auror's wages, the apartment was small and fairly cramped. Although Hermione kept it exceedingly clean and neat, years of grime made everything slightly grey. It was still a fairly comfortable home, however, which Hermione appreciated. Once they had stumbled up the single flight of stairs to her home, Hermione struggled to unlock the door before all but falling into the small living area and collapsing onto her squishy red couch. Harry lurked in the still open doorway for a moment, uncertain of what to do.

"You're too drunk to walk home alone," Hermione announced. "You live too far away. Come stay on my couch."

"Okay." Harry shrugged before closing the door and following her onto the couch.

"Unh, I don't feel like moving," Hermione groaned, shifting to give Harry some space on the couch.

"That's fine, we both fit." Harry pulled off his shoes and robes, laying them carefully on the floor nearby. His glasses went on the coffee table and he began to unbutton his shirt.

"Are you stripping?" Hermione mumbled lazily, giggling tipsily.

"Is it okay for me to sleep in my boxers?" Harry paused in his undressing. "It's what I usually do."

"Whatever makes you comfortable." Hermione leaned back, closing her eyes sleepily. A few moments later Harry was nudging her with his feet as he lay down, pulling the small blanket she kept on the couch over himself. "Can I lie down next to you? My room seems so far away," Hermione complained. Harry nodded sleepily. Hermione pulled off her robes and kicked off her shoes before lying down beside him, cuddling up to his warm form. "You're warm," she murmured.

"Body heat," Harry agreed.

"That's kind of nice." Hermione shifted so that she was facing him. She had never been this close to Harry in any situation resembling this one before, and was startled to find that she felt very comfortable. Hermione was rarely comfortable being close to anyone, even men she had dated in the past. But at that moment, Hermione felt closer to Harry than she had ever felt to anyone before. "Do you mind..." she trailed off as she held a finger close to Harry's scar. He shook his head.

Gently tracing the upraised mark, Hermione found herself engrossed in the feeling of his skin. Her hand trailed away from the scar to caress his forehead, and she briefly ran her fingers through his dark, messy locks. Then her hand traveled down his face, running over his straight nose and firm cheeks, which were only slightly scratchy with stubble. One finger ran across his lips, finding them oddly soft after the scratchiness of his cheeks and chin.

"You have nice lips," Hermione murmured, before leaning in and brushing her own lips against them. Liking the feeling, she kissed him again, then again, deeper this time. She didn't notice the clock on her wall hitting midnight and Samhain.

That was the last thing that Hermione remembered when she woke up the next morning completely naked on her own couch, spooning with an equally naked Harry Potter.

"Oh, fuck," was all she could say.

TBC.....

Preview:

"Harry Potter, don't you even think about telling Ginny about this! I will not allow you to destroy things with that girl just because of one idiotic mistake. Last night will be between the two of us and Ginny never needs to find out. Harry, I know how honorable you are, but last night was not important enough to jeopardize your and Ginny's future happiness. You have to let it go."

## Chapter Two

*Chapter 2 of 5*

PostHBP: spoilers. Hermione, an Auror, makes one drunken mistake and finds herself on a new path towards love, adventure, and the discovery of her true heritage. Eventual HG/SS with some HG/HP

Thank you to everyone who reviewed! You have no idea how much it warmed my heart to get all those positive replies to my first story on this site. It was especially exciting for me to see that some people added me as a favorite story or author, so thank you and I hope you continue to enjoy the story! I love all of you!!!!

Thank you to my beta, Dawn.

Chapter Two

Hermione jerked upwards, falling out of the couch. *Oh God, oh God, oh God.* She ran through her bedroom and into the small bathroom, barely making it there in time to retch helplessly into the toilet bowl. She felt unclean, like the worst kind of whore and bad friend. *Oh, Ginny,* she thought in despair. Deciding she wasn't up to dealing with this situation she fell into the shower, dressed, and left for work. Never mind it was hardly six in the morning when she dashed out the door. She trusted Harry to leave her apartment in decent condition.

Since the office wasn't open until eight in the morning, Hermione went to a nearby café to wile away the next hour and a half. She gazed despondently into her tea, picking at her blueberry muffin until it was little more than a pile of crumbs. How drunk had she been to do something like that with Harry? How drunk had Harry been to forget Ginny?

The official story from both Harry and Ginny was that they were "on a break" a.k.a. waiting until Voldemort was gone before they could be together. To ensure Ginny's safety Harry had convinced her to hide out in Romania with Charlie until the danger was gone. While neither claimed to be in a serious commitment, it was obvious that they were keeping faithful to one another. Until Hermione had ruined everything, that is.

Pushing her uneaten breakfast away, Hermione set her crossed arms on the table and lowered her head onto them. She had absolutely no clue how she was going to handle this.

Eventually it was time for Hermione to get to work. She strolled slowly from the café to the Ministry offices and made her way to the Auror's division.

"Happy Halloween and a Merry Samhain to you," declared the cheerful secretary as she walked to her office.

"Sure, why not," Hermione mumbled bleakly.

A little later Hermione was deep into her paperwork when she heard a knock at her open door. Glancing up, she saw the one person she had no desire to visit with today. "Harry." She nodded, looking back at her paperwork and continuing to scribble busily.

"Morning," Harry began slowly, watching her carefully. "Mind if I come in?"

Hermione dropped her quill, looked up and gave a large false smile. "Harry, you know you're always welcome in my office. Is something wrong?"

Harry was now looking at her like she had gone mad. "Er, don't you remember what happened last night?"

Hermione maintained her large, overly-bright smile. "Of course I remember last night, Harry. I woke up before you did today. I just don't see any reason for us to discuss it."

"Er, why not?"

"Harry," Hermione began slowly. "When I was a little girl I saw that my uncle, my mother's brother, drank a great deal. When I asked my mother why, or if something was wrong to make him drink so often, she told me that we weren't supposed to talk about it. I asked why. She told me that it isn't nice to talk about unpleasant things and that we should try to talk about something else instead. So, if there's something unpleasant happening, I just don't see why we should be discussing it. It won't solve anything and it's just upsetting."

Harry was now regarding his best friend of ten years like she had just grown another head. "Hermione, I'm pretty sure that's not a healthy attitude. In fact, I read somewhere that supporting an addiction like your uncle's by not acknowledging it can be downright harmful to everyone involved. And you never seemed to mind speaking your mind in the past."

"Harry, I speak my mind when it will solve something. Rehashing the foolishness of last night won't solve anything. What it will do is make us both uncomfortable." Harry knew that Hermione was being ridiculous, but at the same time the idea of avoiding their problems by ignoring them was attractive.

"Fine, we'll never speak of it again. But, Hermione, what about G..."

"Harry Potter, don't you even think about telling Ginny about this," Hermione snapped, dropping her freakishly false smile. "I will not allow you to destroy things with that girl just because of one idiotic mistake. Last night will be between the two of us, and Ginny never needs to find out." Harry looked uncomfortable. "Harry, I know how honorable you are, but last night was not important enough to jeopardize your and Ginny's future happiness. You have to let it go."

Harry nodded brusquely, his square jaw clenched in unhappiness. "As long as this doesn't ruin our friendship," he added.

This time Hermione's smile, although smaller and sadder, was genuine. "Of course not Harry."

After Samhain, or Halloween, Hermione threw herself into her work, distancing herself from Harry and Ron even though she had said she wouldn't. She tried to pretend that nothing had ever happened between Harry and her, but telling herself not to think about something only made her think about it even more. As the brisk fall of October progressed into the chill of November and then the outright cold of December, Hermione had never felt lonelier. Watching the snow fall outside her window every night made her remember all the winters at Hogwarts with her friends.

Of course Hermione still saw her friends. She worked with Harry and Ron, although Ron was rarely in the office because he was a good field agent and terrible behind a desk. After several examples of Ron's horrendous filing, Moody had banished him from the office. She still spent time with them, almost as much as she always had. But the huge secret between Harry and Hermione put something between them and Ron as well as between one another. Being estranged from her friends made Hermione lonelier than actually being alone would have. And of course it didn't help that Ginny would be visiting for Christmas and Ron and Lavender's wedding. Hermione didn't know how she would face her closest female friend after such a great betrayal.

One night at the Leaky Cauldron with Harry and Ron found Hermione feeling particularly lonely. The conversation had been somewhat stilted and awkward because of all the unspoken thoughts between the three friends. After a while Ron caught on to the way Hermione was refusing to look at Harry whenever she spoke, looking instead at her apple-cider. She had decided drinking only led to foolish choices.

"Alright, what's going on between the two of you?" Ron regarded them suspiciously over his drink. "Harry, you've been quiet all night, and Hermione, you haven't looked at Harry since we got here. Did you two have a fight or something?"

Hermione flashed her fake-cheerful smile. "No, Ron, of course not. Nothing's wrong, don't worry." Harry nodded his agreement. Ron, however, did not look convinced.

"Well, whatever's going on between you two, I hope you get over it by the wedding. If everything isn't perfect, Lavender'll pitch a fit, and I'd rather there not be any awkward moments." The wedding was to be on January first. "Promise me nothing'll go wrong?" Ron looked at them pleadingly.

"No worries, mate," Harry tried to be reassuring. "Nothing's wrong. It'll all be fine." It was Hermione's turn to nod.

"Just think about your wedding, Ron," she added cheerfully. "After all, it's supposed to be the happiest day of your life, right?"

After that night, Hermione and Harry tried to act more natural around one another, but it was still difficult to avoid guilty thoughts.

Hermione, in the hopes of stopping her own thoughts at least, began taking long walks through the snow, chilling herself so thoroughly that she could almost numb out her own guilty conscience. Because Hermione walked every day it came as no surprise when she came down with the flu. When the flu persisted for more than a week, Hermione decided to visit a doctor.

"Um, what?" Hermione could feel her jaw hanging open. She sat in the office of a St. Mungo's medi-wizard.

The wizard regarded her coolly, though not unkindly, across his desk. "I tested you three times, just to make sure. That's general hospital policy to avoid unfortunate mistakes. There's no doubt, Ms. Granger, you are pregnant."

"But ... how ..." Hermione trailed off, desolately staring down at the wooden desk before her. Her hands absently moved to cradle her flat stomach. "I guess I haven't been getting my period, but I was just so busy .... This is terrible!"

The wizard looked confused and somewhat distressed. "I'm very sorry, Ms. Granger. Is there anything I can get you? A glass of water or some tea? You look pale."

Hermione felt pale. She also felt slightly nauseous, though that hadn't been an unfamiliar feeling of late. "So, there's no chance this is a mistake." It wasn't a question.

"No, Ms. Granger, absolutely no chance." The medi-wizard still looked troubled. "But, come now, do try to cheer up. Babies are a blessing! Nothing can bring happiness to a family like a baby!"

"Yes, of course," Hermione mumbled. She stood abruptly. "If you'll excuse me, I really must be going now. Thank you for all your help."

"Yes, yes. Well, congratulations, and I will owl you when you need another check-up." At Hermione's confused expression he explained. "It's important to monitor the baby's

progress, make sure everything's going smoothly. Oh, and one more thing!" Grabbing a bit of parchment and a quill, the wizard scribbled something quickly. "Please give this to the witch at the desk. It's for a potion you should be taking everyday. Just a spoonful when you wake up in the morning, some extra vitamins and such. Good day!"

Hermione left in a daze, numbly walking down the corridor towards the outside. Stopping only briefly to receive her potion from the young witch at the desk, Hermione continued on her way, unaware that she had even left the building until a sudden gust of wind made her shiver.

"Oh, God," she murmured, staring at the clear winter sky above. "What the hell am I supposed to do?"

TBC.....

A/N: Short chapters, I know, but otherwise too much would be happening per chapter. Hopefully the chapters will get longer later on.

Preview:

Mrs. Weasley secretly approached Hermione. "Anything you'd like to tell me, Dear?"

## Chapter Three

*Chapter 3 of 5*

PostHBP: spoilers. Hermione, an Auror, makes one drunken mistake and finds herself on a new path towards love, adventure, and the discovery of her true heritage. Eventual HG/SS with some HG/HP

Big thanks to all reviewers and to anyone who enjoys the story. Also, thanks to my beta Dawn. This happens to be my favorite chapter of the ones I've written so far, so I hope you all enjoy it too!

Chapter Three

"You're what!" Harry looked extremely unwell. In fact, he looked remarkably like he had just had one of his unpleasant encounters with Voldemort.

"I'm pregnant, Harry." Hermione tried to seem calm. Inside she was feeling just as bad as he was. "The wizard at St. Mungo's did the test three times. There's absolutely no doubt." It was actually only a little later that same day. Hermione was facing Harry over tea sandwiches at a small Diagon Alley restaurant. She had decided it would be best to inform Harry as early as possible.

"H-how are you sure it's mine?" Harry asked, instantly feeling like an asshole.

Hermione bit her lip to keep from saying something regrettable. Harry was in shock. His reaction was completely understandable, if a tad rude. After all, it wasn't as if they were in a relationship; they had just slept together once.

"You're the only one I've been with in quite some time, Harry," Hermione said quietly, leaning across the table. "The only way it could have been anyone else's would be if I'd been pregnant since last March. As I'm not as big as a house, I'd say that's unlikely."

Harry gulped nervously. "And you're... having the baby?"

Hermione sighed, rubbing her eyes wearily. "I have to have the baby. Only someone raised by Muggles would ask such a question. Abortion is against wizarding law. The population's too small." Harry didn't think to ask how Hermione, a Muggle-born, knew more wizarding law than he did. She knew everything. "I could give the baby up for adoption, to wizarding parents only of course, but few would want the child of a Muggle-born. Add to that the fact that it will be your child and it's a tricky situation."

"So you're keeping it?" Harry leaned back, still looking extremely pale.

Hermione sighed again. "I think I have to. I can't come up with any other solution."

"I'll help," Harry volunteered weakly. "I'll take responsibility."

"I know you would, Harry." Hermione smiled at him sadly. "But you don't have to. I'll take care of everything. You really needn't worry."

"God, how can I explain this to Ginny?" Harry ran his hands through his hair. "Do you think she'll ever forgive me?"

Hermione's eyes flashed. She loved Harry like a brother (excluding what had happened between them of course) and she didn't want to see him unhappy. "We won't tell anyone it's yours. I'll say I was seeing a Muggle man, we broke up, and I learned I was pregnant after. No one needs to know."

"Come on, Hermione!" Harry exploded. "Another secret? It's bad enough having to cover up what happened, but this? This is a human life we're talking about! This is our child!" He sat up straight in his chair, glaring at Hermione intently. "I hate lies."

"Then don't think about it as me helping you lie to Ginny," Hermione insisted logically. "Consider this. What if Voldemort, who has spies *everywhere*, learned that I was having your child? That would make both me and the baby targets. Do you *want* to endanger us?"

Harry collapsed in his chair, slouching his shoulders and leaning forward despondently. When he looked up Hermione almost cringed at the look of defeat in his eyes. "That was a cruel card to play, Hermione." Hermione looked away, remembering the way Harry always blamed himself for the deaths of those around him. "But you're right, as usual. So I'll go along with this madness. The baby isn't mine."

"Thank you, Harry." Hermione reached across the table, grasping his limp hand. "Thank you. It's better this way, really."

"But I will help." Harry squeezed her hand back, smiling tentatively to show that he forgave her. "Every month I'm going to have some gold from my account transferred to yours, to help the baby. And if you ever need anything....."

"I know, Harry." Hermione smiled back, feeling tears in her eyes. "We are still friends after all, right?"

"Of course."

Hermione couldn't help but walk around the table and hug Harry right there. "Thank you."

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"Happy Christmas!" Hermione walked through the unlocked front door of the Burrow on Christmas Eve, boxes of presents spilling from her arms and her small bag trailing behind her of its own accord.

"Hermione!" Mrs. Weasley ran from the kitchen to hug Hermione, arms and festive green and red apron covered in flour. "Welcome, welcome! Happy Christmas to you, dear!"

"Hi, Mrs. Weasley." Hermione tried to keep her gifts from falling. "Should I just stick these under the tree now?"

"Of course, dear, of course! Come into the kitchen when you're done. I've got some fresh cookies and a nice bit of eggnog for you. Just leave your bag in the hallway for now."

After depositing her parcels under the tree, Hermione wandered into the warm kitchen. Fred and George were already in there, munching on cookies as they discussed, in low voices, their inventions to be released for the new year. "Happy Christmas, Hermione," one of them said, glancing in her direction. "Hey." The other waved. Hermione nodded her greeting.

"Here you are, dear." Hermione didn't have a chance to protest as a plate of warm cookies and a glass of eggnog were shoved into her hands.

"Please, Mrs. Weasley, do you have anything a little less... strong?" Hermione begged after sniffing the drink. It seemed to have a higher alcohol content than firewhisky.

"Yes, yes." Mrs. Weasley nodded distractedly. "Any particular reason, dear?"

"No, just trying not to drink too much," Hermione lied. She was regarded with a tolerantly suspicious gaze before being handed a mug of hot chocolate. "Thank you."

"Mum?" The shout came from the living room Hermione had just come through. "Anyone home?"

"Of course, Ron, we're in the kitchen!" Mrs. Weasley yelled back, cheerfully running her rolling pin over the cookie dough spread before her. "Come in when you've taken you're cloak off!"

Ron entered a moment later, followed quickly by Lavender and then Harry.

"Lavender, darling, I wasn't expecting you!" Mrs. Weasley rushed to embrace her future daughter-in-law, still covered in flour. "I thought you were spending Christmas with your parents?"

"I am, but I wanted to stop by and wish you a Happy Christmas on the way." Lavender waved at Hermione and the twins. "Hey, Hermione, Happy Christmas!"

"Happy Christmas." Hermione lifted her mug in a mock toast.

"Do you have time for some cookies, Lavender?" Mrs. Weasley raised a plate temptingly.

"Sorry, no. I have to be getting home really soon or Mum'll throw a fit. But I'm glad I got to see you first." Lavender rushed forward for another hug, pecked Ron on the lips, and waved to Hermione, Harry, and the twins once more. "Happy Christmas all!" Then she was off.

"Good girl, that one." Mrs. Weasley nodded her approval. "She'll make a nice Weasley, she will."

"Thanks, Mum." Ron rolled his eyes behind her back, snatching one of Hermione's cookies.

"Don't roll your eyes at me, Ronald." Mrs. Weasley waved her rolling pin threateningly. "And leave Hermione's cookies alone. You can have your own plate."

"How are you?" Harry asked Hermione quietly. "Everything all right?"

Hermione smiled at Harry, refusing to answer his questions. "Happy Christmas, Harry." Rising, she grabbed the rest of her cookies and put them in the pocket of her jumper for later. "I'm gonna take my bag up to Ginny's," she called, making her way out of the kitchen. She grabbed the bag and headed up to the bedroom, munching on one of her cookies as she went. She was happy her stomach hadn't been acting up that day as she had no desire to forgo Mrs. Weasley's cooking. When she opened the door to Ginny's bedroom, she was somewhat surprised to find Ginny already there, lying on her bed with a book.

"Ginny, I wasn't sure you'd arrived yet!" Hermione dropped her bag, rushing forward to greet her friend. "You look fabulous!" Working with dragons in Romania had agreed with Ginny. She was lean and muscular and had taken to wearing her hair in an efficient and attractive French braid down her back. She wore good quality leather clothing, normal garb for one who worked around the ever volatile and frequently dangerous dragons. "Did you know Harry's downstairs?"

Ginny's pale face flushed, making her even prettier. "He is? I hadn't realized..."

"He and Ron just got here." Hermione smiled at her friends excitement, ignoring the stab of guilt it brought. "Come on, I'll go down with you to say hello."

Ginny practically flew down the stairs, meeting Harry halfway. Evidently Mrs. Weasley had just told him that Ginny was already home. The two regarded each other awkwardly for an instant before throwing themselves into a passionate embrace. Hermione watched from the flight above as Harry kissed Ginny deeply, caressing her hair tenderly before pulling back to cover her small face in kisses.

"I've missed you so much." Hermione heard him whisper. "How long has it been?"

"Since last Easter," Ginny whispered back, burying her face in his neck. "Far too long, love."

Feeling like some perverse peeping Tom, Hermione cleared her throat. "Um, hey," she mumbled uncomfortably. The couple laughed.

The three of them returned to the kitchen, joining Ron to reminisce about past Christmases. The arrival of the rest of the Weasleys, excluding Percy of course, made the kitchen, if slightly more cramped, even more homey. Fleur in particular seemed to brighten up the room, as she always did, and her and Bill's daughter was made the center of attention. Like a tiny, golden-red haired version of her mother, Celeste was definitely a charmer.

Watching Harry cradle the infant, Hermione couldn't help but touch her own stomach. Harry saw, and regarded her solemnly. Mrs. Weasley, who caught the gesture but luckily missed the exchanged glance, gave Hermione a questioning look with one raised eyebrow that spoke volumes.

It was only a little past noon, but preparations had to be made to feed the huge family, so Mrs. Weasley shooed the menfolk from the kitchen and asked, more like demanded, Hermione, Ginny, and Fleur to stay and help. Hermione, who found this slightly sexist, pulled on an apron reluctantly, complaining that she wasn't much of a cook.

"Oh, don't be silly, dear." Mrs. Weasley waved her protestations away. "All women can cook, some just don't know how yet." But Hermione was still given the easiest job: peeling and chopping potatoes to be boiled. Mrs. Weasley quickly dressed a massive goose before secretly approaching Hermione. "Anything you'd like to tell me, dear?"



expensive potions ingredient) and a highly polished dragon scale, and Bill and Fleur gave her another leather-bound book, though this one was about defensive spells useful for an Auror. From Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Hermione received a very fine dragon's hide bound journal with her initials engraved across the front along with another, much larger box. This proved to be full of hand-made baby clothing and toys.

"I threw that together for you last night." Mrs. Weasley smiled at Hermione's bemusement. "A baby always needs more clothing and I have lots. If you ever need anything, you just come to me." Hermione couldn't help but embrace the woman tightly, wishing this had been her mother.

The rest of the day was spent playing in the snow and eating cookies, and eventually there was another feast, this one just as satisfying as the one from the night before. Everyone stayed over that night too, but the next morning it was time to go home. Ginny and Charlie were the only ones who would continue staying at the Burrow; everyone else lived close enough that they could easily make it to the wedding from home.

"Happy Christmas, Hermione," Harry whispered, handing her a small parcel as she headed out the front door.

"Happy Christmas." Hermione hugged him before grabbing her bag and Apparating home.

Unwrapping the parcel on her living room couch, Hermione almost cried. Inside was a tiny brown teddy-bear. It was the softest thing Hermione had ever felt and it wore a miniature Gryffindor scarf around its little neck. "Thank you, Harry," Hermione whispered, hugging the bear and leaning back on the couch.

TBC.....

Preview:

"Oh, not at all, sir," Hermione blushed even darker. "I understand it's quite normal for a pregnant woman to feel sick, so I'm not worried."

## Chapter Four

*Chapter 4 of 5*

PostHBP: spoilers. Hermione, an Auror, makes one drunken mistake and finds herself on a new path towards love, adventure, and the discovery of her true heritage. Eventual HG/SS with some HG/HP

Thanks to those of you who reviewed and pointed out my error: Celeste is the child of Bill and Fleur, not Charlie. My bad!

Also, thanks to my interim beta Lucy. I do, however, need a new full-time beta, preferably an accredited one. If anyone who reads this would be interested, contact me!

### Chapter Four

The day of the wedding started out as a complete disaster for Hermione. Although she hadn't been out celebrating New Years Eve the night before like most people, she awoke completely exhausted and bleary-minded. She had had the nightmare again. To add insult to injury her morning sickness was in full-swing and she raced from her bed to retch furiously in her tiny bathroom. After a long shower and a snack of dry salty crackers and soda-water, Hermione was feeling slightly more awake and aware, but was thrown back into a foul mood when she tried on her dress.

As a bridesmaid, though not the maid of honor thank goodness, Hermione's dress had been arranged for her early in November, only a few days after she had become pregnant and long before she had found out. It was a distastefully frilly dress and was, predictably enough, lavender in color. Crookshanks had been sleeping on it, so the dress was covered in a thick layer of orange fur. But it wasn't the dress's hideous appearance that distressed Hermione: she had long ago resigned herself to that, and it was easy to clean off the cat hair. What bothered Hermione was that when she pulled the dress on she discovered that it was a little too tight. At three months Hermione's stomach was still mostly flat, but she had put on about five pounds which made the dress a little too snug.

"Dammit!" Hermione shrieked, throwing the dress away in irritation. It was a simple matter to charm the dress to fit better, but it was infuriating that she had to. "Anything else?" she demanded of the ceiling. Predictably, there was no answer.

XX

"Hermione, you look great!" Ginny ran to embrace her friend. "How're you feeling?"

"Nauseous, and you?" Hermione hugged her back, fighting down another wave of the morning sickness which had returned with a vengeance when she apparated to the Burrow.

"Wishing Lavender had picked any other color." Ginny smiled wryly. "Red hair and lavender dress clash something awful, don't you think?"

Hermione had to agree that the dress was not a flattering color for Ginny, but as the groom's only sister she had been pressed into service as a bridesmaid quite against her will. "At least you aren't too fat to wear yours," Hermione complained. "This morning I had to charm the damn thing just to fit. I've gained weight already."

"That's normal." Ginny patted Hermione's arm. "Come on, let's get our bouquets."

The wedding was to take place in a small church not far from the Burrow. Mrs. Weasley had wanted the ceremony to be performed in her backyard, but it was far too cold and Lavender had insisted on a January wedding claiming, rightly enough, that there was no time to be wasted in "these troubled times." No one could refute that claim, so Mrs. Weasley had relented. Ron, Harry, and the other Weasley men were all at the church already, but the bride, her mother, Mrs. Weasley, and the bridesmaids would get ready at the Burrow and drive to the church shortly.

The bouquets were laid out on the kitchen table, all painstakingly assembled by Mrs. Weasley's sure hand. The bridesmaids all had small nosegays of miniature white and lavender roses. Nearby lay Lavender's bouquet, a huge affair of normal-sized white and lavender roses with some baby's breath and a few white lilies added in for contrast.

"Wonder if she'll tip over from all those flowers," Ginny whispered into Hermione's ear as they grabbed their nosegays. Hermione giggled her appreciation and sneezed.

"Hermione, there you are!" Lavender rushed forward, followed close behind by Parvati, the maid of honor. Hermione could barely take Lavender's appearance in as she was embraced tightly and engulfed in voluminous white cloth.

The wedding dress was long and tasteful, not nearly as frilly as the bridesmaids' gowns. It draped elegantly over Lavender's slender frame and had a lavender sash



fastened around the waist. A coronet of tiny white roses crowned Lavender's head, from which hung a thin veil.

"Lavender, you look lovely," Hermione told her friend. "Nervous?"

"I think I'm going to vomit." Lavender laughed, looking pale under her make-up.

"Well, that's two of us then." Hermione smiled.

"Oh, Ron told me! Congratulations!" Lavender embraced her again.

"Thank you."

"You look like you're glowing," Parvati added.

Ginny inspected Hermione carefully. "You know, I believe you are. I guess what they say about pregnant women's true after all. You really do seem to glow."

"Oh, that's just the cold." Hermione blushed, shrugging off their compliments. "Are we going to the church soon?"

The women all crammed themselves into Mr. Weasley's new car. It was much like the old one in that it expanded to fit everyone as they climbed in, but it was still crowded due to the large skirts and the great amount of flowers. Hermione sneezed, remembering her pollen allergy. Unfortunately for Hermione the church was similarly decked out in flowers. Bunches of them hung from every surface of the small sanctuary along with white draperies and a multitude of candles.

Parvati, Hermione, Ginny and Fleur (also a bridesmaid) all preceded Lavender into the hall, but after the bride had been escorted down the aisle by her father, they all sat except for Parvati. Similarly, Harry lurked behind Ron, waving at Hermione and winking at Ginny who blushed prettily.

Hermione couldn't really remember the service later. She was too distracted by a runny nose and an upset stomach to pay much attention to whatever it was that the vicar said during the ceremony. She assumed that there had been a point where Ron and Lavender had recited some vows, and maybe said "I do," but other than that she had no clue what happened.

Hermione did remember the reception, however, which was held at the Burrow. Mrs. Weasley must have been cooking for days to prepare all that food, which fed about one hundred witches and wizards. Hermione hadn't been sure that everyone would fit, but it seemed to work out all right, so she relaxed. Because Ron and Lavender, as the center of attention, were always busy, and Harry and Ginny were spending every moment together, Hermione spent most of the reception hiding out in the kitchen. She had never been comfortable in crowds, and besides, she didn't even know most of the guests.

"Miss Granger, a pleasure indeed." Hermione almost jumped at that familiar voice.

"Professor! Ron invited *you*?" Hermione hadn't meant to make the 'you' sound quite so incredulous. She blushed at his raised brow.

"Quite alright, Miss Granger." Professor Snape chuckled darkly but did not smile. "No, Mr. Weasley did not, in fact, invite *me*. He did invite Headmistress McGonagall, however, and she brought me as her 'plus one'."

"Of course, sir." Hermione inclined her head politely. "Did you enjoy the ceremony?"

"Far too many flowers. Other than that, it would appear they are legally married, so I suppose the ceremony was a success," Snape responded dryly. "And you?"

"Oh, I wasn't paying any attention." Hermione giggled self-consciously. Even after graduating and being considered a mature, adult witch, her old Potions professor still made her exceedingly nervous. "I was too allergic to the flowers, and I've been feeling unwell all day."

"I hope you are not sick, Miss Granger." Snape raised his brow again, this time in faint, surprisingly polite concern. "Anything I can do?"

"Oh, not at all, sir." Hermione blushed even darker. "I understand it's quite normal for a pregnant woman to feel sick, so I'm not worried."

Now both brows were raised in very obvious surprise. "Congratulations, Miss Granger. I had no idea. Or, rather, is it a Mrs. Something now?"

Hermione thought that her face would burst into flames, she was blushing so furiously. "No, still Miss. I'm currently on my own, sir."

"Forgive me, then, Miss Granger. And congratulations." Snape also looked uncomfortable now. "Excuse me." With a slight bow, Snape left the kitchen, returning to the safer conversation of McGonagall.

"Stupid." Hermione banged her head lightly against the table-top. "Stupid, stupid, stupid...."

"You thinking about me again?" Ron grinned as he sat down across from Hermione.

"Ronald." Hermione sat up straight again, smiling at her friend and letting warmth infuse her voice. "I suppose I should think of you as a man now, but you still look like the fourteen year old boy I used to have a crush on."

"Really?" Ron looked rather pleased with himself. "I liked you too for a few years. Think it would've worked out?"

Hermione raised her brow in mock disbelief. "The Quidditch fanatic and the bookworm? You must be joking, Ron. No, I'm just as glad we never tried anything. I like it better this way."

"Would it insult you if I agreed?"

"Of course."

"Then I will continue to pine for you." Ron laughed as Hermione rolled her eyes. "You're looking down, though. Is there anything I can do to help?"

"No, I'm just feeling a little low. Don't let me spoil your day for you though, go dance with Mrs. Weasley."

"Mum?"

Hermione had to throw a napkin at Ron's laughing face. "I suppose that could get confusing," she admitted, giggling. "After all, now there's a Molly, a Fleur, and a Lavender. Go dance with Mrs. L. Weasley."

"Will do." Ron gave her a mocking salute before racing off to be with his bride.

"Have fun," Hermione called after him. Sighing, she stood from the table. Well, if she couldn't enjoy herself she might as well go home. At least Crookshanks would keep her company. As Hermione left the kitchen she ran straight into Ginny and Harry.

"Hermione, having fun?" Ginny gasped, laughter in her eyes. She and Harry had been dancing.

"Not really; I think I'm just gonna go home." Hermione tried her best brave smile, but couldn't quite make it reach her eyes.

"Oh come on, you have to stay." Ginny grabbed Hermione's arm as though to stop her. "Dance with Charlie; he hasn't got a partner."

Before Hermione knew what was happening, she had been all but thrust into Charlie's arms. "Hey," she murmured awkwardly as he spun her around the living room, which had been cunningly converted into a dance-floor by removing all the furniture.

"How are you?" Charlie asked, looking only slightly less awkward. Charlie was basically a taller, much more handsome version of Ron; he wasn't above being uncomfortable in close quarters to girls.

"Nauseous, and you?" Hermione replied tartly. "I was going to go home, but Ginny insisted I stay."

"Well, I'm glad you're still here." Charlie smirked. "As long as you don't throw up on me, that is."

"Ha ha," Hermione responded dryly, though there was mirth in her eyes. "When are you and Ginny going back to Romania?"

"Tomorrow morning." Charlie glanced to where Ginny and Harry danced together, looking for all the world as if this might be their own wedding. "I guess she'll stay at Harry's again tonight. She's really missed him, you know."

"Yeah, so has Harry." Hermione looked away, wishing even more now that she had been allowed to leave. "But you never know, any day now it could be safe for them here."

"Could be." Charlie twirled Hermione one last time as the song ended. "Do you still want to go home? I wouldn't mind a bit of company, if you wouldn't mind going for a walk or something."

Hermione was almost tempted. Looking at Charlie's face, she was surprised to see that he seemed to be flirting with her, in his own, quiet way. "As nice as that would be, I really should go home. After all, I wouldn't want to go and throw up all over you," she joked.

Charlie had the grace to smile back. "Take care of yourself, Hermione. And congratulations."

"Thank you." Hermione gave him a brief hug before departing. Not long ago she probably would have gone for it, too. Charlie was kind, handsome, and clever enough. He also happened to be a Weasley, her favorite family. No, Charlie wouldn't have been a bad choice, but now she didn't have that option. It wouldn't be fair to become involved with Charlie, not with a baby on the way. Especially not with Harry's baby on the way.

Hermione pulled on her cloak and Apparated home without bothering to go outside the Burrow. It was generally bad manners to Apparate within another wizard's home, but Hermione didn't feel like getting cold today. She wasted no time in changing into her pajamas and climbing into bed.

"Hey, Crookshanks," Hermione murmured as the cat snuggled up to her. "You're the only man I need, anyhow." Crookshanks' only response was to purr deeply, but that was just what Hermione was looking for. "Who needs humans when I have you?" Curling up with her cat, Hermione dozed off.

XX

Severus Snape was generally not a wedding person. He didn't have anything against them, per se, he merely found most ceremonies tedious and somewhat foolish. Furthermore, the institution of marriage was unrealistic. Pledging to love one person for the rest of your life? Madness. Therefore, Severus hadn't been exactly excited by the prospect of Ronald Weasley and Lavender Brown's wedding, but he had agreed to go to keep Minerva happy. Since the loss of Albus, Minerva was prone to fits of loneliness and Severus thought it was the least he could do to alleviate that pain. After all, he had been the one to cause it.

Strolling through the Burrow during the reception had strongly reminded Severus of the last time he had visited this house. It had been the summer after Albus's death, at Bill Weasley's wedding to the French witch, Fleur Delacour. Fleur Weasley, now. The wedding had been Severus's only opportunity to Obliviate everyone who knew the truth about that night on the Astronomy Tower. Everyone who knew that he had murdered Albus Dumbledore. Because of this, Severus wasn't exactly in the best of moods at the reception. Until he had wandered into the kitchen.

The sight of Hermione Granger had surprised him more than it should have. It wasn't the fact that she was there, that would be obvious to anyone as she was the groom's best friend. Severus vaguely recalled seeing her as a bridesmaid at the church, though truth be told he hadn't been paying much attention. What did surprise Severus was how Granger had appeared. For one thing she was not the child he remembered; she had grown into a reasonably attractive young woman in the years since he had last set eyes on her. Even more surprising was the way she seemed to... glow.

The discovery that Hermione Granger was pregnant and unmarried had added on to Severus's surprise. Then he had grown irritated with himself for caring. What business of his was it what the foolish girl did with her life? He damned himself for pitying her; life would not be easy on an un-married witch with a child in tow. He had returned to Minerva's side, wrapped up in his own thoughts until he spotted Granger dancing with one of the older Weasley boys... Charlie, that was it, the dragon tamer. Severus wondered briefly if the boy might be the father of Granger's child, until Granger gently turned the Weasley down. Severus almost gloated at that; after teaching so many of them, the Weasley children were hardly his favorite people.

Severus didn't stay much longer than Granger had. After seeing her Disapparate he quickly became bored; he no longer had anyone to spy on. Making his excuses to Minerva, Severus had made use of the fireplace in the Burrow's kitchen and Flooed back to Hogwarts.

"So, Granger's going to have a baby," he murmured to himself. He was relaxing on the couch in his sitting room, enjoying a glass of scotch and gazing into the fire. "I suppose I'll have to teach the brat. Damn, Weasley better not be the father. I couldn't bear another one." Remembering that one of the Weasleys, the one who had married the French girl, already had a child, Severus cursed. "Oh well, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger."

Severus was used to talking to himself these days. He used to spend most of his evenings conversing with Albus, but that was no longer an option. Not unless he felt like breaking into Minerva's office and speaking to Albus's portrait. He and the portrait had an understanding; the painting would never tell anyone who had killed him just as Severus would never tell anyone he had been the killer. But Severus still felt uncomfortable speaking to the semi-ghost of his old friend. It brought back the memories of his betrayal.....

Severus downed his scotch and poured another glass. It was hard, these days, to get any rest unless he had drunk a few glasses first. His mind refused to rest. Pausing on the way back to his couch, Severus had a thought. "Granger's an Auror, isn't she? Hmm, I doubt that will continue much longer." The idea of a pregnant, active field-Auror was preposterous; it was far too dangerous. "Oh well, her problem." Severus settled onto his couch, sipping his drink and gazing into the fire once more.

TBC.....

Preview:

As the glass eye moved to regard Hermione's midriff Moody's real eye widened and he leaned back in disbelief. "Granger, do you have something to tell me?" he growled.

# Chapter 5

Chapter 5 of 5

Hermione must face a career change.

Huge thanks to my new beta, Althea, and apologies that this took so long to post.

Chapter Five

"Granger, are you alright?" The gruff voice of Alastor Moody brought Hermione out of her daydream.

"Yes, sir, perfect. And you?" Hermione sat up straighter, scrambling to organize the scattered sheets of parchment on her desk. Halfway through January and she was still swimming in paperwork.

"You don't seem perfect to me," Moody stated matter-of-factly. "You haven't been paying attention at meetings, you come in late, you fall asleep, you spend half your time in the bloody bathroom, and you haven't been finishing your reports nearly as fast as usual. None of this would upset me much, but it isn't like you "

Sitting in the chair across from Hermione, the scarred old Auror regarded her with both eyes, although his false eye moved around sluggishly. As the glass eye moved to regard Hermione's midriff, Moody's real eye widened, and he leaned back in disbelief.

"Granger, do you have something to tell me?" He growled.

Hermione flushed. She hadn't thought to alert Moody before now, partially in embarrassment and partially in simple absent-mindedness. "Sir, I was getting around to telling you, I just couldn't find the right moment"

"Couldn't find the right moment " Moody yelled. "Granger, you could have been called into the field at any moment What if there had been a bloody attack, eh, what then? Would you let me be held responsible for a miscarriage?"

Hermione paled. She honestly hadn't even considered that. "Sir, I wasn't thinking. But look, I'm fine Just keep me at the desk until the baby's born, and everything will be fine, I swear "

Moody shook his head sadly. "Granger, don't you know anything? There are no desk-Aurors. If you can't go into the field, then you can't work at all. What would you do, report details about cases you haven't even seen?"

"What are you getting at, sir?" Hermione asked slowly. She was afraid that she already knew the answer.

"Look, you aren't married, right?" Hermione shook her head. "A boyfriend to help?" Again, no. "Then there's nothing for it. Hermione Granger, you are being put on an extended leave of absence. You can't work when you're pregnant, and to have a single parent working a life-threatening job is plain reckless."

"Sir, you can't mean"

"I'm sorry, Granger, but there's nothing for it." Moody looked genuinely regretful. "Until that child is a legal adult you can't work as an Auror."

"No "

"There's nothing for it," Moody repeated slowly. "I can't change policy, and even if I could, I wouldn't. This is for your own good, Granger, and much more importantly for the baby's. Clear out your office."

Hermione could feel her eyes filling with tears. Shock, outrage, and despair mingled as she fought to keep the tears from spilling.

Seeing this, Moody sighed sadly. "I really am terribly sorry, Granger. You're a good Auror: you do well in the field, you follow orders, and you process this damn Ministry paperwork faster than anyone else in this bloody department. But think; if you were to be hit in the field with almost anything, you would miscarry. And even once the child is born, there's always the extreme dangereven likelihoodthat that child might become orphaned. I can't have that on my head."

Moody stormed out of the office, leaving a stunned and teary Hermione in his wake. She felt almost paralyzed, too upset to move. If her next move would be packing up her desk, then it was a move that she had no desire to make. They had planned everything She, Harry, and Ron, they had planned to become Aurors together so that when the time came to fight Voldemort once and for all, they would be ready. Now Hermione had been neatly cut out.

"I'm gonna be sick," Hermione groaned, jumping from her seat and racing down the hall to the women's lav. Heaving dryly, Hermione remembered that she had already thrown up her breakfast earlier.

When the bout of illness had passed, Hermione collapsed against the door to her stall. Burying her face in her hands, she wept silently. What next?

xx

"What will you do?" Harry stood, quite at odds, in Hermione's cramped apartment. "Do you have any money saved up?"

"On what they pay us?" Hermione snapped, sitting on her couch wrapped in a blanket. "Come on, Harry. Not all of us had rich parents leave us mountains of gold."

Harry gritted his teeth. That was low. But, ever a good friend, he let it pass for the time being, knowing how upset Hermione must be. "I'll share it with you. I was going to give you some every month. I'll just give you more, weekly."

"Harry, thank you, but don't be ridiculous. That would be unfair of me." Hermione rubbed her eyes, feeling exhausted. "I can find work, really. If nothing else, I'll move back home with my parents." She grimaced in distaste. "They are dentists after all; they do alright."

"Please, just tell me if there's anything I can do." Harry kneeled beside the couch, grasping Hermione's small hand in both his larger ones. "Anything at all."

"Go back in time and prevent all this," Hermione whispered.

When Harry's expression turned thoughtful, she rolled her eyes in exasperation. "Harry, try not to be so thick; I don't mean you really should."

Biting her lip in thought, Hermione's face brightened slightly. "No, I've had an idea. I think I know where I can go for help."

xx

"I know that I'm too young to be a teacher; some of these older students were here when I was. But I was hoping you would know of some kind of apprentice, or even just assistant, position that I could fill?"



Bored with small talk, Snape turned to other subjects. "Alright, down to business. You will have access to my private laboratory to brew anything you may need. I mostly use it to make Poppy's healing potions, but occasionally I do a bit of research. You may conduct any experiments you wish as long as you notify me beforehand; I wouldn't want any conflicts between our different works."

Hermione nodded.

"If you would like, I can show you the lab now. It's just down the hall."

"Certainly, sir."

Hermione resized one last book before wiping her hands on her trousers and turning towards her former teacher. At his raised brow she blushed, glancing down at her stomach. It had grown since she had last seen him.

Snape almost smiled, but not quite.

"Well, come along, it's this way."

Turning on his heel, Snape moved away, surrounded by billowing black robes.

At least he hasn't lost his flair for the dramatic, Hermione thought wryly. She followed him out her door, but she didn't bother closing it.

"Those are my chambers." Snape gestured towards the closed door directly across from Hermione's. "If there is ever any need, you may find me there, but I doubt that will be necessary."

From his tone of voice, Hermione knew that the only thing he would deem 'necessary' would be a major natural disaster, an attack from Voldemort, or if Hermione had spontaneously burst into flames.

Walking a small distance down the dark corridor, Snape stopped in front of another closed door. Drawing his wand, he tapped the door-knob once, and the door swung open with a groan. "I have already instructed the lock to accept your wand; there are no silly incantations involved. You merely tap it once and it should open. Well, come in."

Hermione followed Snape into the now exposed room. As he stepped in, the cold torches flared into life, lighting the room for Hermione to see.

It was a fair sized space with three long tables, each capable of supporting four medium sized cauldrons. In the corner a space had been cleared for one giant cauldron, large enough to brew enough Pepper-up Potion to support the entire castle for at least two years. The other corner held a stone sink, which stuck directly out from the wall.

Currently the work-tables were cleared, and shelves along the walls held a multitude of cauldrons. In varying sizes and materials, none were quite so large as the huge one in the corner. Some were silver, most were iron, there were a few copper and ceramic ones and one shining gold cauldron.

Hermione slowly walked around the perimeter of the lab, running her hand over the many cauldrons. "Pretty," she whispered to herself as she rubbed the gold one. "Wonder what you would brew in that."

Snape didn't answer.

"I keep a large variety of ingredients in there." He gestured towards a closed door, presumably a storage closet. "I should have everything you need, but if you can't find something, come to me, and I can order it. Don't worry about cost. The school is well-endowed and receives discounts from almost everywhere."

Pausing, Snape turned to Hermione, regarding her studiously. "I should warn you to be careful in there. Don't inhale any powders, even ones that seem harmless. In your condition anything could be potentially harmful."

Hermione flushed.

"Well, that's the lab. As you can see, I'm not currently brewing anything, but that is a rarity. Don't be afraid to come in here." Snape paused again, awkwardly. "Well, I'll see you at dinner."

With that he swirled dramatically out of the lab.

XX

Dinner that evening was surreal. It was both comforting and extremely odd to be back under the enchanted ceiling of Hogwarts' Great Hall. Stars glittered behind a thin veil of cloud, and the moon was a pale sliver in the false sky. Tiny snowflakes drifted lazily down, only to vanish above the students' heads.

None of this was strange; what was different for Hermione was the fact that rather than being seated at the Gryffindor table she had a seat next to Snape on the high table. Another strange thing was the sight of McGonagall in Dumbledore's seat. True, the elder witch had become Headmistress in Hermione's seventh year, but it was still strange not to see Dumbledore.

Upon walking into the mostly empty hall, Hermione had immediately been swept off her feet and crushed into a giant bear-hug from Hagrid. Never the same since Dumbledore's death, Hagrid sobbed into Hermione hair in happiness. "Oh, 'Ermione, it's great ter see ya. An' yer lookin' all grown-up. 'Ow's 'Arry an' Ron?"

"They're fine, Hagrid," Hermione gasped, hoping that Hagrid wasn't crushing her stomach. "Can you put me down?"

"Oh, o' course." Hagrid dropped her and leapt back clumsily. "Sorry, 'Mione. Got a little carried away."

"It's okay, Hagrid. I understand." Reaching up to link arms with Hagrid, Hermione guided him up to the head table, catching him up on the latest news.

Hagrid hadn't been able to make it to the wedding; he had grown increasingly reclusive in the last few years, rarely venturing off of Hogwarts' grounds. The rest of the teachers welcomed Hermione warmly, all remembering her fondly from her years as a student.

Hermione and the other teachers had already taken their seats before most of the students filed into the Great Hall; few noticed the new addition to their teaching staff. Only when the hall was almost full of loud, hungry students did McGonagall rise and call for silence.

"Good evening everyone," she began in her clear, clipped voice. "As some of you may have noticed, we have a new face among our staff. Hermione, dear, could you stand up?" She waved one imperious hand in Hermione's direction.

"You may remember her as the Head Girl three years ago, but now Professor Granger has become Professor Snape's teaching assistant and apprentice. You must all treat her with the same respect and deference that you would give to any other Hogwarts teacher."

She regarded them with a keen look for a moment, making sure they all understood. "Alright, back to your meal "

Hermione picked at her food in disappointment, too nauseous to enjoy Hogwarts' excellent cooking.

"Not hungry, Miss Granger?" Professor Flitwick's squeaky little voice came from her elbow. He sat on several thick books and a cushion to reach the table.

"No, sir, my stomach's just a little upset." Hermione rubbed her little belly awkwardly. She didn't know if McGonagall had told the other teachers yet.

"Miss Granger is expecting," Snape subtly informed Flitwick, leaning across Hermione to grab the pitcher of wine in front of her.

"Congratulations, child " Flitwick almost fell off of his perch in happiness. "Congratulations indeed "

"If you are having trouble with morning sickness, I can brew you something to help," Snape added gruffly.

"I'm already taking some kind of multivitamin I received at St. Mungo's, and my research says it should be ending soon." Hermione sipped her water and bit into a slice of bread, the only things on the table she could bear to eat.

Snape shook his head, his greasy black hair moving with him. "This is something else; multivitamins don't do anything for the sickness."

"And even if the sickness will end soon, there's absolutely nothing wrong with treating it for now. If you wouldn't mind, I can show you how to make it after dinner. As my apprentice, I should be teaching you how to make these kinds of things."

"Thank you, sir." Hermione went back to shoving her food around her plate, sighing mournfully. "I'll be happy as long as I can eat again."

TBC.....

A/N: Kind of an awkward ending, but that's the way it goes now and again.