

Pas de Deux

by Lady Strange

Response to WIKTT's 'Love in four stages' challenge, written as a ballet performance, where SS and HG fall in love gradually moving from acquaintance, mutual respect and admiration, mutual trust and love.

Tale opens following the post-Shrieking Shack incident and ends at the end of the 7th book. Severus is harangued by Dumbledore and his own feelings of self-loathing; Hermione apologises to him and defends him against the rest of trio. Yet, all is not well...

Chapter 1 - Entree

Chapter 1 of 5

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Brief Author's Note: This is written in response to the WIKTT "Love in four stages" challenge. Details on the challenge are as follows...

(A) Basic Idea: Some people speak freely of "love at first sight". Neither Severus Snape, Hogwarts' cruel Potions Master nor Hermione Granger, resident know-it-all, believe in such a thing.

(B) Point of the story: Your task is to make them fall in love GRADUALLY, with a growing certainty, moving from acquaintance (teacher/student relationship), to a bit of mutual (although not necessarily simultaneous) respect and admiration, and then to mutual trust, and finally, to love. These two characters must learn to love each other as the reader learns about the inner workings of their hearts and minds. The problem is that you won't have all the time in the world, just 4 chapters (plus an optional epilogue) to put them together in a believable way.

(C) Requirements:

(i) Each chapter originates from one episode involving both Snape and Hermione which has happened in canon (e.g. the Yule Ball), which could have happened in past books (e.g. a conversation at Grimmauld's Place) or that we could see in future books (e.g. the Final Battle). So, as J. K. has stated that she hasn't the intention of writing books about the future of our dear Dream Team, your fan fiction can't portray a twenty-five-year-old Hermione, for example.

(ii) Each chapter can be any length you want.

Even though the fic must focus on the Hermione/Severus relationship, you can include other characters from J. K.'s rich universe.

(iii) Keep everything "in canon", please: be realistic and faithful to J. K.'s work. If you want Severus and Hermione to develop a sexual relationship, I won't stop you, but don't

"Are you better, sir? You were bleeding and..." she said weakly, deciding against telling him of her theft of his potions store. "I'm sure you have your reasons for doing what you did, but you could have considered the other side of the story."

Severus shuffled a stack of parchments in front of him and glowered at the girl. "Ten points from Gryffindor for your cheek*girl!* I've been told the other side of the story already. Get lost before I decide to fail you in your final examinations!"

Expecting nothing less from her truculent Potions Master, Hermione quietly wished him goodnight and fled to Gryffindor Tower. Angry that a chit of a girl had taken it upon herself to apologise when the other two of the trio clearly wanted him dead, he poured his frustration into marking the potions exam scripts. It would be the end of the school year soon and he could be left alone once more, he thought as he graded the parchments with a flourish of vindictiveness. "Damn!" he exclaimed to himself when he came upon Potter's papers. "The boy actually passed!"

He looked through it again to see if he could deduct any more marks but after half an hour, he gave up. It would not do him any good to get increasingly cross. He then took up Hermione's paper. The girl knew what she was about; even he could find no faults with her answers. He was thankful that at least one third-year Gryffindor spent more time in her books than in heroics. Surprisingly, he found that he was a little calmer after going through Hermione's examination answers. He was still incensed with Black for that childish prank to kill him years ago but he was no longer irrationally and excessively so. "Damn!" Severus cried flinging away his quill. "And I who pride myself on my logical abilities!" He laughed in a lowly bitter and dangerous tone. "An insufferable know-it-all had to tell me I was being illogical and irrational! How could I have allowed my base emotions to get the better of me? Damn! Damn! Damn!" He pounded the table. "I will try as far as possible to be cold, calm and resolute. I will think before I act rashly. Never again!" he vowed with vehemence. Feeling better after that promise to himself, he returned to marking the rest of the examination scripts.

* * *

The Great Hall was decorated in the colours of red and gold for the Leaving Feast. Excited students were running around the place without causing either infectious mayhem or themselves grievous harm. "Pity," mused Severus, frowning at the scene. He had always held that red and gold were ostentatious and vulgar colours, so different were they from the stately colours of green and silver. He strode purposefully in and deliberately walked by the Gryffindor table.

"Snape's a loony, 'Mione. He wanted to kill Sirius and look at the way he treated us!" complained Harry.

Hermione sharply rapped both Ron and Harry's knuckles before informing them in a disapproving voice, "Professor Snape is an impartial man!"

Ron sniggered. "Oh, please..."

"Did he fail any of us in potions? No. Did he harm any of us? No. Did he make any actual move to do anything horrible to us while we were at the shrieking shack? No. He is a Hogwarts Teacher and as such, his duty is to see to the welfare of his students," she interjected before Ron could continue. "No, you two listen!" she insisted in a commanding tone and fierce look that silenced the boys. "I can tell he hates Sirius but that sort of hate doesn't come without a reason. Disliking a person doesn't necessarily equate to a desire to kill that person. His hatred has a deeper reason I could see it in his eyes while we were at the Shrieking Shack. I think it's something that scarred him terribly."

"But he hates everyone except the Slytherins!" said Ron stoutly.

"Especially me," said Harry.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "All this is blind prejudice! He is callous, yes. But have you wondered what made him this way? Professor Snape dislikes us; he doesn't actively seek to hate us. Hate is expressed in the way he looks at Sirius. He dislikes us in the same way that he dislikes Professor Lupin. You don't see him trying to kill any of us or Professor Lupin, do you? He dislikes Neville, but you don't see him allowing Neville to blow himself up. We should give him the respect that is due to him as a Hogwarts Professor!"

Severus mulled over the conversation that he had overheard at the Gryffindor table and covertly made his way to the staff table unnoticed and unheard by the Golden Trio. It disconcerted him slightly that the Granger girl could dissect his actions so plainly. She was actually defending him before her friends! Severus did not know he was capable of eliciting such a cool psychological appraisal from a student. It was almost as if she could peer into his soul, pluck out the heart of his misery and explain it to him. She was more than just a good well-read student; she was observant and analytical. He would have to push her in the right direction then. He would see her excel academically. At least one of his students wasn't an absolute dunderhead!

"Severus, a word if you please," Dumbledore said as he approached the younger wizard's seat, ignoring Severus's hardened and thoughtful gaze at the Gryffindor table. "Have you sent the consignment?"

"I have, Headmaster. Lupin should be receiving the Wolfsbane today. If he needs any more, he can owl me," answered Severus coldly.

Dumbledore placed his hand on his shoulder, pleased that it wasn't flung off. "Severus, my boy, learn to forgive and you'll be more content."

Severus managed a weak nod at the old man before seizing his left forearm suddenly. "It's throbbing," he said matter-of-factly, staring straight into Dumbledore's blue eyes. They both knew that it could only mean that Voldemort was slowly regaining his strength.

Footnotes:

Pas de deux or grand pas de deux is formal five-part ballet sequence for two dancers: (1) the entrée (2) ballerina's partnered adagio (3) male solo (4) female solo (5) coda.

I know the scenes may appear a little discordant or 'choppy' but bear in mind that I wrote the chapters as I would direct a ballet piece. For the first chapter, the entrée, I introduce the male lead, then the female lead and a little of their interaction before concluding the first movement with a brief hint of the ballet plot that will shortly unfold.

This first movement opens at the end of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*.

Chapter 2 - The Partnered Adagio

Chapter 2 of 5

Unable to sleep, Hermione decides to study. In doing, she discovers something about Ron and Harry. Unbeknownst to her, she is watched by a pair of steely black eyes...

Second installment to my 'Love in four stages' challenge response.

Pas de Deux

Chapter 2 Partnered Adagio

It was much too warm to sleep and it would be pointless for Hermione to spend a few hours tossing and turning when it could be better employed. Holding up her watch to the window, she saw that it was a quarter to one in the morning. She squinted to see through the shadows and slowly was able to make out the form of Miss Weasley. She stared enviously at a lightly snoring Ginny Weasley wishing that she shared the younger girl's ability to sleep the moment her head touched the pillow. Since she was used to keeping late hours and living with very little sleep, she would put the time to the worthwhile pursuit of education. She had been doing so while she had been at Hogwarts. Managing to cough out homework and engage in constant revision while running about the school for multiple classes taught her the value and merit of studying at night. It was a quiet and intimately private endeavour. There was no one to interrupt her with requests for pointers on homework. There was no one to cut short her explanation with a less than rousing discussion on Quidditch. "Thank you, time turner for showing me the delights of the night!" she thought as she picked up *The Standard Book of Spells Grade 5*, some pieces of paper and a pencil. Studying at night did have its drawbacks though she frowned while trying to make as little noise as possible. One had to be respectful of others' desire to sleep. It would not be nice to disturb them while they were sleeping. Closing the door quietly behind her, she balanced her things in her arms and tiptoed to the kitchen.

She need not have taken much care in trying to reach the kitchen without waking all the present inhabitants of 12 Grimmauld Place, for Ron was already there with Harry. Harry squinted at her through his sleep laden eyes and yawned a salute. Ron eyed her curiously, surprised that she braided her bushy hair to sleep. "What are you doing here with that book?" he asked. Hermione set her book and writing material down on the dining table.

"I couldn't sleep and you know Ginny can't sleep when the room is lit so I thought I'll study here," she said, her eyes darting from Harry's sleepy form to Ron's chocolate smudge nose.

"Honestly, 'Mione. I don't see the point of memorising all your books before the term opens, we'll be going through them anyway," said Ron as he tried to help Harry put a glass back in the sink.

Hermione was affronted; Ron's comment was as callous as his remark on her noticeable lack of friends in their first year. "And I don't see why the world should revolve around Quidditch!" she retorted, opening her book at the same moment Harry banged into the dining table. "Goodness Ron! You let Harry come down here without his glasses! What sort of friend are you?"

Harry ricocheted off the table and bumped into a cabinet before Hermione gently led him to a chair and coaxed him to sit down. "Do you want to wake your mother?" she hissed.

"Oh, right!" mumbled Ron sheepishly as he flushed as red as his hair. "Didn't think of that. But Harry wanted a glass of water."

Hermione snorted derisively as she flipped a page, "You are a poor liar, Ronald Weasley! If Harry wanted water, he would have put on his glasses and be a lot more awake than he is now. What is it this time? Spying on Fred and George's nocturnal experiments or trying to steal some food?"

"Erhm...I was hungry and I didn't want to come down alone so I asked Harry," mumbled a scarlet Ron, looking uneasily at his feet. Harry had by then, dropped his head to the table and was sleeping soundly.

"Look at him now," hissed Hermione, careful not to wake the boy beside her. "Do you think it was fair asking him to come down here *just because* you were afraid of being alone in the kitchen?"

"Ew!" he exclaimed, ignoring her question, "He's drooling! Gross! Not as disgusting as spiders, but ew...gross!"

Hermione looked up in a silent prayer before instructing firmly, "Eat a few biscuits and take Harry back to your room!"

Ron watched her read the open book when he commented, "You're a bossy thing, 'Mione and don't you think you can appreciate Quidditch a little more?"

Hermione rolled her eyes with barely suppressed irritation. She knew exactly where the conversation was going. "I don't ask you to appreciate books more, do I? There is more to life than Quidditch! You have to respect what I like just as I respect your Quidditch craze."

"I don't follow," said Ron blankly with some nervousness.

"Do we meet on any level, Ron?" asked Hermione with a frown. "Would you have become friends with me if I hadn't lied about the Troll? Would you have followed me to the library if I didn't check your homework? Would you have noticed my gender if it wasn't for Viktor Krum and the Yule Ball? The answer to all these questions is NO. An emphatic NO to every one of them."

"What are you trying to tell me, 'Mione?" quizzed Ron, squirming uncomfortably in his seat.

"I am not romantically interested in you. Ron, I like you very much, but I don't love you the way I do books," she explained patiently. "Let me be honest, the way you hang around me and from what Harry's been telling me, I'm...uncomfortable."

"Tell me what you want and I could try to change," he pleaded.

Hermione stifled a laugh. "You wouldn't be you anymore if you changed. You would be unhappy and what's the point in that? You cannot turn into someone like Professor Dumbledore or Professor Snape."

"Ew," he cried, his face wrinkling in disgust. "They're old, and Snape is an evil greasy git!"

She laughed in spite of her desire to smack Ron on the head. "They *aren't* old! Professor Dumbledore is sensible, kind and thoughtful. He knows when to joke and when to be serious. Professor Snape is a walking library of knowledge. He is impartial, well-intentioned, observant and logical. Imagine what he could teach one! And both share a great sense of responsibility. They are not the sorts who will change a woman to suit them. One will never feel uncomfortable in Professor Dumbledore's presence and one can never feel neglected in Professor Snape's presence. The latter may appear to be nasty, but it proves that he notices one and cares enough to point out one's mistakes."

"But Snape! Ew! But Hermione, I think I love you!" declared stoutly.

"You *think* you do. More than Honeydukes' chocolates? C'mon Ron, we'll always be friends you know, you, Harry and me."

He smiled weakly, "You really think even if..."

"Ron!" she exclaimed with exasperation. "There has never been anything."

He smiled wanly at her with comprehension and regret, "Okay then, I'd better take Harry back upstairs then."

"Use a levitation spell, don't wake him," she instructed and returned to her reading.

A pair of steely black eyes wandered across the kitchen from their hidden position. The owner of those eyes thought that he had witnessed a most interesting turn of

events. So, young Weasley's suit did not meet with success. Just as well, Weasley wouldn't know how to appreciate a tenaciously intelligent female. He was clearly a selfish pig too, if he dragged someone, whom he considers his friend, out of bed when the other is tired. Evidently, Weasley lacks the sense and common courtesy of Miss Granger. Look at her, studying and making her notes away from everyone else, careful not to wake anyone. She should be applauded for having the right priorities for her age. Miss Granger was not a schoolgirl governed by her hormones.

The eyes followed the movement of Hermione's pencil as she scribbled something. "A fruitful evening all in all," thought the eyes' owner as he noiselessly emerged from the shadows of the back door. "In addition to the information from tonight's Death Eater meeting, I've learnt that Potter drools in his sleep. What an interestingly riveting discovery! I can appreciate Miss Granger's simple looks in this light, her hair neat for once. I have always respected her penchant for learning. I have recently come to admire her methodological mind. This morning, I am pleased to discover that she is not governed by the usual desires of females her age for beaux. All she wants is to study and get the grades for them so that she can do something worthwhile with her life. She is an intelligent creature." He swept noiselessly past the cabinets and sat opposite Hermione, exhaustion written plainly on his face. He gripped the table tightly to steady his shaking hands. The movements made Hermione look up in annoyance. He smiled inwardly so the girl was like him she was obsessed with proving herself academically; she's obsessed with her studies and she doesn't like to be interrupted while working. He was struck how very much like him she was in these respects.

"Professor Snape," she said with concern, noticing his trembling hands, heightened pallor and tattered black travelling cloak over his Death Eater's robe. "Are you all right?"

"Quite," he answered quietly still holding tightly onto the table. "I'll make you some coffee; you'll feel better," she said proceeding to cast a spell on the kitchen utensils for the same purpose.

"I don't need mothering," Severus replied quieter than before. "I am NOT *one of your friends*"

"But I am *not* mothering you, sir," she retorted, placing a steaming hot cup of coffee in front of him. "I'm concerned. You are paler than usual. Have you lost blood? She studied his face closely, hoping to catch his ailment while attempting to soothe his dark mood.

He scowled and narrowed his eyes, saying nothing.

"You've been subjected to the cruciatus, haven't you, sir?" she asked, her eyes resting on his trembling hands.

"Insufferable know-it-all!" he spat violently, lacing his fingers around the coffee cup in a bid to stop them shaking uncontrollably. "The remnants of it are not your concern!"

"Still," she offered quietly, "You should inform Professor Dumbledore if you're hurt."

"Do you think, *girl*, he will care if I die? He needs me for information, nothing else!"

"Much more, sir. Professor Dumbledore worries about you." Then she added quickly, "We all do. Tonks says you misinform Vol...(he glared, she lowered her eyes), I mean You-know-who and his followers. You put yourself at great personal risk."

"We, Miss Granger?" I did not know my presence was universally missed. Qualify your statements, silly girl," he said, hiding his amusement at her discomfiture.

"Has the You-know-who found out? The cruciatus..."

"I am alive, Miss Granger. What does that tell you?" he asked in a cold and arch manner, staring down at her from his hooked nose.

"He's punished you then!" she exclaimed, shocked by the realisation.

"Very observant!"

She whispered lowly in as if conspiring to plot against someone, "What did you do?"

"Did I have to do anything?"

"What didn't you do then!" she spat with annoyance.

"None of your concern, Gryffindor know-it-all."

Hermione frowned and looked him in the eyes. "I'll tell you a secret in exchange for yours. You have my word, Professor Snape."

"Your word? What good is your word?" he mocked as he curled his lips in a light smirk.

"Because the secret involves you," she said as she felt his eyes boring into hers.

"It will be nothing that I don't already know," he responded evenly, hiding his intrigue at his student's sincerity.

"I'll tell you anyway. I stole from your private stores in Second Year, not Harry. I was brewing polyjuice for...nevermind what for."

"I know," he said dismissively, drinking the coffee whilst trying to still his lightly quivering hands. "You failed in your attempt. You were a cat, I believe."

"It worked for Ron and Harry!" she exclaimed indignantly.

So, he thought as he raised an eyebrow, she took pride in her work. Rightly so, it was a complicated potion; not as complex as Wolfsbane but complicated all the same.

"Well, sir, I've told you something; it's your turn to reciprocate," she continued, still gazing directly into his hard unblinking eyes.

"I will not answer to a fifteen year old!" he hissed restraining himself from bellowing.

"Sixteen actually, time-turner usage for a year, remember?" she corrected sternly in a manner worthy of Minerva McGonagall.

"Listen, *girl* what I do for the Order outside of Hogwarts and Grimmauld Place is strictly between the Headmaster and myself. Do you understand me?" he snarled, glaring at her, hoping that her glaze would flinch.

"Yes, sir," she muttered demurely and received a glare from Severus. Ignoring his stony glare, she continued, "I think you're very brave for doing this. Showing Mr Fudge your mark, being a spy and a dedicated teacher. You may feel that you have to prove yourself to Professor Dumbledore, Sirius (Severus snorted at this juncture) and the rest and maybe even yourself (he started with a sudden movement); but I think your dedication to us, your students, warrants more than respect and admiration. It deserves our respect and admiration. It deserves our respectful affection so to speak. When Professor Karkaroff burst into the classroom last year to speak to you on Vol...I mean, you-know-who's return, you didn't follow him or initiate a discussion of the topic. Instead, you told him not to interrupt your lesson. You protect your students, sir, and you strive to give them your unwavering and undivided attention in providing us with your brand of quality education. You deserve more than thanks and you should command more than strong dislike and fear. Your actions, at least to me, command a respectful affection."

"Miss Granger, was that eulogy necessary when I still breathe?" Severus snarled with a smirk. Hermione thought he seemed to have coloured a little with the smirk but blinked and saw his scowl and sallow pallor once again.

"Well, sir, I can honestly say that I trust you and should you ever need a listening ear or someone who will not shy away from your, erhm...very direct communication methods; I will be honoured to provide you with a friendly ear," she said, reaching over to take his cup to the sink.

"Thank you, Miss Granger," he said emotionlessly, even though he had an odd feeling in his stomach. He ignored the knotted feeling and mentally reasoned that it was the effects of drinking coffee on an empty stomach. "You already have my respect; some things, however, are not meant for the ears of *children*."

"If you say so, sir," she sighed, overturning the clean cup on the kitchen counter before stifling a yawn.

"I advise you to retire for the night. Return to bed, Miss Granger, you look tired."

"So do you, sir," she answered with a sheepish grin.

"Keep your new even teeth to yourself, silly girl, or I'll turn you into a human beaver as Malfoy did," he growled through his teeth and tired black eyes.

"Very well, Professor. My discretion is assured," she said with another yawn as she offered her hand. "Good night, Professor Snape."

He stared at her extended outstretched hand and flickered his gaze to her eyes. He read only warmth, sincerity and sleepiness there and looking deeper into her mind, he saw that she would keep indeed keep her word. He took her hand and shook it firmly, "Good night, Miss Granger, you have earned more than my respect this evening you have now earned *some* of my trust."

She smiled weakly and gathered up her things from the table. He had returned to his seat and was lost in his thoughts, tracing his lips with his long tapered finger.

"Sir?" she asked when she was the doorway. "There's a hole in your cloak; it looks like something burnt through it."

"No doubt, you singed it," he articulated carefully still staring into space and tracing his lips. "As you had in your zeal to protect Mr Potter five years ago."

Severus heard her gasp and mutter a "but that was for...oh, nevermind..." and a final goodnight. He mentally followed her footsteps up the stairs. He reflected on his late conversation with Hermione and he realised that he had spoken a half-truth. She had singed a part of him; she had burnt and branded something in his mind and in his soul; and she did not know she had done so. Oddly enough, he did not notice the searing mark until a few minutes ago. Severus Snape shuddered uncomfortably at the knowledge that his soul and mind were touched by an insufferable Gryffindor know-it-all's sincerity.

Footnotes:

Pas de deux or grand pas de deux is formal five-part ballet sequence for two dancers: (1) the entrée (2) ballerina's partnered adagio (3) male solo (4) female solo (5) coda.

I know the scene may appear a little discordant but bear in mind that I wrote chapters as I would direct a ballet piece. For the second chapter, the ballerina's partnered adagio, I introduce the female lead with some of the other secondary dancers before allowing them to depart on the arrival of the male lead.

This second segment opens at the beginning of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

Chapter 3 - The Danseur Noble's Solo

Chapter 3 of 5

The private musings of Severus Snape upon returning from a Death Eater meeting. Musings which are exacerbated by memories from the pensieve and a little incident following his return. Third installment to my 'Love in four stages' challenge response.

Pas de Deux

Chapter 3 The Danseur Noble's Solo

I would like to think of myself as a wizard of reflection; a man of the world; a man who thinks before he acts; a wizard *logic and reasoning*. Instead, as I sit here in my chambers drinking straight from a bottle of firewhisky in the manner of the unsophisticated oafs I despise, I realise how far off from that ideal I am. Instead of sound logic and cool reason, I seem to have sporadic lapses in which I lose my carefully regulated self-control. In such situations, my impulses and sentiments, as disgusting and abhorrent they are to me, hold sway and dominate. So much for my lauded and much vaulted ability to control myself and my impulses a self-control that even I am proud of. Ha! These lapses will be the end of me. It pleases me none too much to say this but I do not like myself at all when I am impulsive. I don't generally like myself much on a regular basis unless I'm researching and writing, and maybe insulting the arrogance from Potter's face. But I hate myself when I'm impulsive. It's not even that calculated cold impulsiveness that dominates the Slytherins. My impulses are borne out of pure emotion hate, contempt, anger, desire, pleasure, abject misery and dejection. "Pure Emotion" what a vile turn of phrase!

Why can't I have the calculated impulses of Lucius Malfoy? There's a wizard *whenever* does anything unless he thinks he stands to benefit from it. Why couldn't I have the calculated impulsiveness of Dumbledore? Now, there's a man who will corner McGonagall in the staff room for a kiss knowing full well that the other staff members will likely catch him in the act. He's even done it in my presence! That's calculated impulses for you. My impulses besides getting the better of me, my mind, my logic, my reasoning and everything I hold dear, has the malevolent effect of rendering me a fool. I will often be proven wrong in my judgement, opinions and feelings. Tonight, at the close of yet another school year, I had another such epiphany, all because of the calculated impulses of Miss Hermione 'the know-it-all' Granger. I am uncertain whether it was indeed a *calculated impulse* but I call it thus because she seems to have a studied way about it. Perhaps it's an unconsciously studied impulse, I have observed that she knows much beyond her years and that her knowledge is not derived from books alone. Intriguing for someone this young. But I I, Severus Snape have allowed my emotions, *base emotions*, to get the better of me! I nearly harmed a student! I should do as house elves and punish myself for this if it were not for the fact that I am already punishing myself by serving both the Dark and the Light. All to what end? Redemption! Damned redemption! As if I would actually feel any better about myself! Not bloody likely, especially not after I almost rattled Miss Granger comatose!

My error made itself more blatant and egregious when I re-examined the memory, the scene and the emotions vis-à-vis another that I had in the pensieve. It was not the first time I had attempted to harm her. Doesn't she understand I am mad, bad and dangerous to know! Why does she seek me out so? I, the epitome of self-control almost harming a student, a brilliant student the only student I ever had worthy enough to make me feel as if I want to keep her by my side so that I can impart all my knowledge to her! A student, such as Miss Granger coming to me for help, surely deserves my attention. I have sunk to a new low indeed. Severus Snape, Death Eater, Spy for the Order of the Phoenix, Researcher, Potions Master, Artist, Poet and Philosopher drinking firewhisky in his chambers out of uneasiness and guilt I have sunk low indeed.

Staring at the empty hearth would not do me any good; I would have to wash my face in ice just to keep myself awake and more importantly, sane. Yes, I need to be wide-awake to examine this event. A clear head is what I need for now so that I can put tonight's memory in the pensieve with the others. With any luck, I should be able to resume my regular nightmares of the Dark Lord discovering my perfidy. With even better luck, I might actually die in the nightmare and cease to wake. Any nightmare would be better than thinking on Miss Granger and her penchant for seeking me. It seems that she always picks a time when I had just returned from the Dark Lord's presence and was busy depositing the memories into the pensieve. Tonight was no exception.

I had returned earlier than anticipated and had fortunately indulged in some ablution before deciding to deposit the Dark Lord's latest plans to conquer both the wizarding and muggle worlds in the pensieve. Dressed in my favourite grey nightshirt, I threw my cloak over myself and went to my office. It was the end of the school year, the dunderheads would be celebrating their freedom from books and homework and I could be left in peace to do as I chose. No one would dare impose on the nasty greasy git of the Potions Masters frowning in his quarters! Upon leaving off the memory of the Dark Lord's plans in the pensieve, I had to pinch my nose in disdain. I was more despondent than usual. The Dark Lord's plans were almost complete; he would act soon. What then? What would happen to all of us—my colleagues whom I tolerate and my students whom I wish would be less imbecilic than they already are—what was to become of us? Wrapped in such thoughts, the pensieve's swirling mass propped something up, catching my attention. It was a scene from months ago that was very much like tonight.

Then, as with tonight, I had just returned from the Dark Lord's side. MacNair had found Karkaroff in Kazakhstan and the Dark Lord had apparated all of us there to witness his slow torturous demise. Miss Granger had been waiting for me outside my office, seated cross-legged on the ground waiting. Her eyes were glistening with the cold and concern for that wretched Potter boy. She followed me into my office after I swept in and begged me to take Potter in and to resume his Occlumency lessons. She noticed my Death Eater's robes but she said nothing, making no sign that she understood its implications. She still saw me as Professor Snape, her Potions Master. She knew I was in a dangerous disposition and she quickly laid the issue before me without any of the pleasantries she's so fond of throwing at me. Potter's dreams were becoming more disturbing and insistent. She revealed that she had spoken to him, she had pleaded with him to resume his Occlumency lessons and he had refused to brook her objections. She turned to me with those shimmering chocolate windows to her soul and mind, and I could see that she was so intent and sincere in helping her friend. She practically begged me to help Potter, for his sake, for the good of everyone in the wizarding world. She had actually clung on to my feet and begged me on her knees to help Potter. She even apologised on his behalf for "whatever stupidity he did". "He needs the Occlumency lessons, sir," she pleaded with rivulets of tears down her cheeks. "He doesn't see that his feelings could get the better of him. You must help him! I know you threw him out, but that was merely anger. I'll sit in with him during the lessons; I will act as a check on him. Please, Professor Snape, help Harry."

I shifted uncomfortably at the memory and cursed myself for not bidding her to rise and to cease making a fool of herself with her grovelling. I watched as I shoved her aside and barked at her to leave. She did not. Like a cornered animal, her instincts kicked in and she stood up, looked me squarely in the eyes and fiercely demanded that Potter and I put aside our pride and prejudices to work towards the good that was for the benefit of the whole wizarding community. I merely made a rude comment of having already performed my duty as the Headmaster had requested. I had tried to teach the boy and he had neither the aptitude nor the right attitude to learn. My responsibility was over and with that, I dismissed her. She tried reasoning that Dumbledore would not be pleased with these developments, but I refused to listen, I demanded her departure by telling her that the Headmaster already knew. She then sighed and told me quietly that Potter had been stranger lately; she wanted me to keep an eye on him. "Keep an eye on *all of us*" she added. "You can always tell me anything, sir. I look on you as a friend, a guardian of sorts; for our sakes, keep an eye on us, please."

Such was the memory the pensieve chose to present to me. That contraption is a wondrous thing—it has an uncanny ability to draw the user's attention to things that have been occupying the user of late. Her ability to see Potter for the arrogant fool that he is and her perceptive observation in noticing that I guarded my privacy jealously have always struck me. Her plea that I should *'keep an eye on all of them'* startled me a little, just a little. So, she knew. For all my ability to keep my mind permanently closed, she knew. I was still lost in thought over her insightful perspicacious remarks of that memory when the very same Gryffindor lioness walked into my serpent's lair.

Tonight, Miss Granger must have gotten wind from someone that I had recently returned from my duties at the Dark Lord's side, for she dropped by my office to "enquire after my health". I noticed she did so with several none-too-subtle glances at my hands. Why indeed should she seek me out at night? She was being silly and irrational; enquiring after my health indeed! Does she not know it takes a lot more to kill Severus Snape? I put her behaviour down to nervousness over the OWLs results. I was like that myself at that age. I know what it is like to complete your revision, hoping that the facts stay in your head and fearing that you had omitted something of import in the examination. As is customary for me, I scowled at her and told her off for wasting my time. I made a show of shuffling some parchments at my desk and told her pointed that I had to mark appalling first and second year scripts and as such, was not in any humour to interact with any creature capable of thought and speech. Her eyes lighted on the pensieve briefly before coming to rest on my features. She looked me in the eyes without fear, anger or irritation. My mind devised that she was concerned with the way I looked. Her mind had made it all too apparent. Miss Granger must have learnt the neutral look from McGonagall, it could silence any blabbing boy and make me retreat into my own mind. Fortunately for me, however, Miss Granger lacked the skill to match her neutral look with her thoughts. She stood opposite me, her concern for "my health" oozing from every pore and yet she said nothing. I knew she wanted to sit but she dared not ask because I had not invited her to.

Finally, she broke the mutual scrutiny and told me that I looked gaunter and sallow than usual. She wanted to apologise for contributing to my "altered state". Blast her! Doesn't she know that I'm always like this? Young ladies and their over active imaginations—they think everyone is in need of kindness; they think they see things where only an abyss remains. I have heard enough of such uniquely female sentiments from McGonagall and her quip of "The need for loving and acceptance never dies." It must be a Gryffindor trait; I do not see any of my Slytherins displaying such signs. And to think, I once thought Miss Granger free from it. Ha! I was wrong. Oh, Severus Snape admits he is wrong—Dumbledore and McGonagall would send me to Poppy if they ever found out.

"I'm sorry," she muttered in almost a whisper, apologising once again. Her ego must be bigger than Potter's if she presumes she is one of the causes for my recent loss of appetite. The thought of serving Dumbledore's Order while appearing to be a perfect sycophant capable of individual thought to the Dark Lord is enough to give *anyone* instant cruciatus aftershock spasms—doing that while instilling a belief in the Dark Lord that you are spying on Dumbledore for him is enough to turn my stomach. That, among other things makes me feel too ill to eat. Did Miss Granger consider this? Has it occurred to her that I am afraid of death? NO! Instead, she prattles on—and I sitting here in my chambers drinking myself stupid, I can still hear her voice echoing in my head.

"Professor, please, I am sorry—I know we have been very difficult. Keeping us in line is never easy, sir. But we have tried," she explained in an apology with an earnest look in her eyes.

"There are more things than are dreamt off in your philosophy, Miss Granger. There are things beyond disciplining dunderheads occupying my time," I sneered, examining the petite creature who refuses to squirm under my penetrating obsidian gaze.

"We are friends, well...kind of, aren't we, sir?" she asked abruptly.

"What are you hinting at?" I snapped impatiently. "Establishing some degree of mutual respect and trusts *not* friendship!"

"Friendship *is* predicated on respect and trust, sir," she answered firmly.

"No friendship is ever fully equal, Miss Granger. I am still your professor," I reminded her quietly, studying her features.

She gave me a look of supreme exasperation. "I know that! But it presupposes trust in the better party's abilities. That's what friends do, Professor Snape, we care for each other, we respect each other and we put up with all their hang-ups because we accept them for what they are."

Tracing my lips for a while, I notice that she is staring at me intently as if entranced by my habitual thinking pose. I think she coloured before firmly shaking her head. Impossible! The Gryffindor lioness is incapable of blushing violently at my words. "Perhaps...it *may* seem to you that we have *nearly* reached such a level," I acknowledged in circulatory manner, proud that my features did not reveal that I was pleased with her analytical surmise.

"I have not reached that level alone, sir," she replied, a small smile playing at the corner of her lips. By Merlin! She had smiled shyly at me. The heavens rejoice! Miss Granger complimented me! Me, the greasy acerbic git universally hated by the student body and she complimented me!

"Now that we have resolved that issue, Professor Snape," she continued briskly in a business-like tone reminiscent of McGonagall in her Transfiguration class. "Professor

Dumbledore trusts you as do I we were all upset with Umbridge. I know the teachers have to manage the administrative matters in addition to their students and classes. It was particularly trying when Umbridge proclaimed herself queen. All of us, I dare say, all of us, students and teachers alike were grossly insulted. The odium I felt when she doubted the teachers' abilities and the way in which Professor McGonagall was treated was something that I had never experienced before," she frowned, pausing to meet me gaze for gaze. She bit her lower lips in slight nervousness and her eyes seemed to be studying my every movement. I felt the tense tremble of a nerve near my lips as I traced it in thought, considering how best I should respond to this presumptuous student.

"Miss Granger, you are tired and I want to be alone," I enunciated slowly and deliberately in a low voice.

"I will not go till I finish what I want to or have to say to you. Harry and Ron may not see you for what you are, but I do! You did not leave us in the lurch last year when Professor Karkaroff interrupted your class last year. You did not abandon us when you chose to stay here and show Mr Fudge your mark. You did not abandon us when we were at the Ministry a fortnight ago either. You informed Professor Dumbledore that we had likely followed Harry's hero complex and would have gotten ourselves killed at the Ministry had not the Order arrived. You had waited for us to return from the forest," she pointed out quietly, slightly out of breath. I could not help but muse at the irony of it all it must have difficult thing for Potter and his fan club to realise that they were indebted to Severus Snape.

"I did nothing of the sort, Miss Granger," I insisted with all the contempt I could muster before adding, "My patience has its limits and it is, at present, thinner than the night air you breathe."

"Harry can choose to believe that you didn't help us at all because you weren't at the Ministry helping us. But I know you feel obliged to care for us. If Harry wasn't so blinded by his hero complex..."

"If you can see Mr Potter for what he's worth an aspiring hero who endangers the people he purportedly cares for, then you would have sense enough to have refrained from participating in his suicidal activities!" I interrupted with a sharp hiss, narrowing my eyes and drumming my fingers.

"The fact that you are capable of showing anger proves that you're a man of great emotion, sir even if you refuse to see them. I have observed that much in you, Professor," she said, approaching me in small steps, not bothering to break our eye contact.

"If you pride your observations thus, you would have noticed that I despise vile human emotions," I explained in a clipped low tone.

"But your eyes glittered when Professor Dumbledore told you of Sirius's death. You've lost your temper at us in our third year and you were barely civil to Umbridge. You can feel, sir," she challenged, folding her arms in front of her, shivering a little at the dank dark sanctuary that is both my comfort and misery. "You want to be like this dungeon in perpetual winter, but Harry's told me about your father...and how you were treated by his father and Sirius in your youth. He spoke to Sirius about..."

"He what?" I bellowed, as I quickly hid my hands to prevent Miss Granger from noting how much I quake with anger. I will not appear to lose control of myself in front of her. Alas! It was not to be. However much I tried to school my features into indifference, I found my lips curling in repugnance for the boy-who-lived-to-tell-my-memories. He dared to reveal my humiliation to his friends! "That *BOY!*" I declared firmly in a dangerously moderated tone, "has presupposed too much. He had imposed upon my time with his stupidity at Occlumency," I continued, removing myself from my seat and drawing closer to Miss Granger, forcing her to back away into my private store cupboard. "He couldn't keep his hands to himself and he peered into the pensieve. Damn him and his confounded arse of a father! He will rue the day he abused my memories and privacy! Undoubtedly, he got caught because he wanted to complain about the greasy git to his dear godfather! He must be very pleased with himself now!"

Miss Granger could back away no further by this time because I had effectively pinned her to the store cupboard. I do not mean this physically, of course; rather, I was a fence that prevented her from making an easy and hence fortuitous escape. Although she was cornered, Miss Granger gave no sign of alarm; she stared hard at me with a triumphant glow in her liquid eyes seemingly lighting up her face, "You feel betrayed and used. I don't blame you. Professor Dumbledore may think you are, shall we say, 'immature' for harping on your past miseries, but I think it takes great courage to keep the memory if you'd only allow it to help you grow, sir!"

"Cease your idle blathering, Miss Granger. I am a Death Eater in the Headmaster's Order, think, how incongruous that is. I serve only myself. Your delusions must remain your own!" I hissed, clenching her shoulders and desperately shaking her in a livid impotent stab at her determination to be the salve to all the mistakes of my life.

"These are *not* delusions, sir!" she retorted indignantly in a shaky voice, quivering from my unwarranted shaking of her body. Her untameable hair tumbled about her face and tears had begun to form at the corner of her eyes, but she still trained her gaze at my eyes.

Hearing the continuous rattling of her brain against her skull snapped me out of my irrational anger, I realised that I had been physically assaulting a student by shaking her senseless. I cannot allow her to return home to her parents tomorrow in a comatose condition. Releasing my grip on her, I turned away to lean on my desk, resting my weight on my hands before commanding quietly, "Leave me, Miss Granger."

Instead of obeying my injunction, she saw fit to respond in an equally quiet voice, "You have always been there for us, Professor. Just remember that I am always here for you as well. I am truly honoured to call you a friend even if you won't or *can't* acknowledge it. Goodnight, sir." Then she reached to pat my hand, which I immediately withdrew at the touch of her soft, warm fingers. And she left after another half-strangled murmur of "good night".

That was what happened tonight. I have physically hurt a student. Yet despite that, Miss Granger had considered me a friend! I was incredulous. She wants me as a friend? She respects me and challenges me and yet It then occurred to me that I had been thinking of her as Miss Granger. I took another swig of firewhisky and stared into the cold hearth again. I had been thinking of her as Miss Granger for almost a year now. Miss Granger not the silly girl, not the insufferable know-it-all, but Miss Granger. I know she still is the insufferable know-it-all, but now, *she's the insufferable Miss Granger; the presumptuous Miss Hermione Granger.* Perhaps I've come to regard her in the same way I do Dumbledore and McGonagall. What a revelation! Severus Snape is congenial with a third of the golden trio!

And to think that I had harmed her and she did not reproach me no scathing remark though her eyes studied me with the intensity of a basilisk; her eyes were throwing daggers at me, yet no reproach passed her lips. Why? She controlled her tears of humiliation and uncertainty. Why? Why wasn't she affrighted by what I was? Why wasn't she repulsed by what I am? Why wasn't she repulsed by my mark, my teeth, my hair, my behaviour or my manners? Why? Why? Why do I now feel guilty? Was it because she was kind in almost the same manner as Dumbledore? She defends me against Potter and Weasley as Lily Evans did against Black and Potter senior, yet I don't want to call her a filthy mudblood for not leaving me to my own methods and devices. I had called Lily that, why can't I call Miss Granger the same? I tell myself she thinks me a charity case, but when I look into her eyes and subsequently, mind, I can see that she is utterly sincere. And while I am usually disgusted with it, I am not. I am not just a charity case with her she respects me as a person, as an individual.

If only Potter and Weasley were capable of seeing Miss Granger as a person instead of a bossy female. I want to knock sense into Potter and Weasley for exploiting her talents and her intellect; I want to transform Malfoy and his coterie into worthless insects for insulting my best student. Why? I don't understand this! I don't feel, I don't know how to feel I'm numb. I'm cold, calculating and aloof nothing has yet unfazed me, yet, Miss Granger has. When I consider her keen analytical mind and her love for learning, when I can see how well put together she is for a Gryffindor, I have such thoughts that would have ensured my certain expulsion. What a mind that young lady has! Damn Miss Granger! She has befuddled my mind that I so prize without the aid of magic. Either she's more intelligent than I presently give her credit for or I'm in need of more firewhisky. Hmm, firewhisky then. A longing of firewhisky is rational, it will block out this damnable onslaught on emotions. "Very well, Miss Granger, you have won this bout," I announced to my chambers as I lifted the bottle to my lips. "To what we are and what we may be!"

Footnotes:

Pas de deux or grand pas de deux is formal five-part ballet sequence for two dancers: (1) the entrée (2) ballerina's partnered adagio (3) male solo (4) female solo (5) coda.

I know the "scene-within-a-scene" flashbacks may appear convoluted but bear in mind that I wrote chapters as I would direct a ballet piece. The Danseur Noble is the principal male dancer in a ballet troupe. He is the male Prima Ballerina as it were. For this third chapter, I have utilised the concept of the male solo, which I have titled 'The Danseur Noble's Solo' and turned it into a monologue. Severus is in his chambers mulling over the events of the evening. The conversations are either pensieve memories or his recollections. Hermione does not actually appear in this chapter.

The lines "There are more things than are dreamt off in your philosophy..." and "to what we are and what we may be" are borrowed from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The original lines are "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy, Horatio" and "Lord! We know what we are but not what we may be" respectively.

The "Mad, bad and dangerous to know" quote was used to refer to Lord Bryon, Snape is a Bryonic anti-hero of sorts here.

This scene occurs near the end of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

Warnings for next chapter: Will contain references to an Opera and there will French here and there (towards the end at least), I will provide a glossary.

Chapter 4 - The Prima Ballerina's Solo

Chapter 4 of 5

Hermione's reflections on particular events when everyone else is away at the final battle. Severus "guest stars" at the end. Fourth installment to my 'Love in four stages' challenge response.

Pas de Deux

Chapter 4 The Prima Ballerina's Solo

It is much too quiet. It could be my imagination but I am positive that there is an almost perfect silence. Even the neighbours appear to be unusually subdued. There seems to be nothing stirring in the heart of winter but I know better. I took a walk outside after dinner in the garden at the back and I couldn't hear a thing. It was as if time had stopped but it couldn't have, as the neighbours turned on their lights at that time. It is extremely disconcerting not to hear the nosy neighbour's radio tuner or the telly. I couldn't hear a cough or my footsteps in the snow. The air has been heavy and stagnant since the morning. Nothing seems to be willing to stir; it is as if everyone, muggle and wizard alike could feel in their hearts that something is amiss, that something is about to happen. The muggles may not know what it is, but I do. I have been nursing this general sense of foreboding ever since I started my seventh year at Hogwarts. Whatever happens today or tonight, time is irrelevant now whatever happens, it will have far reaching ramifications for all of us; I can feel it. I know how it is, for I am at Number 12 Grimmauld Place awaiting the outcome of what the Order of the Phoenix hopes will truly be the *real* final battle. There had been a skirmish last year where we lost Tonks and a few others; and though Voldemort's forces had been cut back, he is still strong. I earnestly hope that the strength of Voldemort and his Death Eaters will fail them today and that it will all be over tonight. I am unable to participate this time because my left arm is broken. So here I am three days before Christmas waiting in the kitchen with my books and broken arm while Crookshanks explores the attic.

Dobby is around, somewhere, cleaning and whatnot. I am proud to say that Professor Dumbledore agreed to pay him an extra galleon a week for cleaning Grimmauld Place. Kreacher, bless his little neglected heart, was found dead in the attic in June last year; in all likelihood, he had starved himself to death, but no one seemed to care.

I looked at the clock and realised that it has been almost twelve hours since they left for Voldemort's latest den and I am worried. My arm hurts less now than it did in the morning. Everyone was very kind about it when it was apparent that they did not have the time to heal me. Professor Snape alone did not seem pleased with my insistent pleas that I was able to join them. If I didn't know better, I would say that he deliberately broke my arm in a roundabout manner. He had told me once before the winter school break that he did not want me exposing myself to dangers I knew nothing of. He had reasoned that Harry would have tried to protect me as he did Ron last year. And Ron Ron, had died in the end, despite Madam Pomfrey's care. On hindsight, I can see his point of view, having reflected on it for the last few hours. However, I was so infuriated then that I called him a two-headed snake. I didn't mean it, of course, but he thought I did and retreated to his chambers leaving me to finish my NEWTs potions project for the night alone and unsupervised. The stalemate lasted a week in which we neither spoke nor acknowledged each other's presence. I was embarrassed and I gathered that he was understandably hurt. When I tried to apologise, his eyes momentarily pierced my soul and I found myself speechless with something I still cannot describe. He surprised me by apologising instead. Professor Snape is the kind of man who will not hesitate to say "I am wrong"; it takes great courage to admit to that, doubly so, given his disposition. Lately, he and I seem to be frequently arguing over these inconsequential things and I don't know why.

Professor Snape had not spoken to me in the last two days even though I know he has been watching me intently. I found it odd that he was not at the breakfast table this morning, but I kept it to myself. Mrs Weasley informed us that he had asked for a cheese sandwich and a pot of coffee, but I doubt it then. I dawdled around the table until everyone had finished eating and helped wash up; I feared that it would be the last time I would see them. However, I had to excuse myself from Professor Dumbledore's last minute 'prep talk' to return to my room to get properly dressed. I had almost reached the topmost stair when Professor Snape dashed out from his room in his Death Eater's robes, with dark circles under his eyes, looking much older than I remembered. His sudden entrance caught me by surprise, I was so startled by his abrupt movement that I not only lost my guard, I lost my footing as well and proceeded to fall down the stairs, no, *tumble* unceremoniously down the stairs in tune to the strains of Bizet's *Carmen* from his open door. He sought to catch me but he did not appear to be making any effort to do so. By the time the rest flocked to me, they were ready to leave. I cursed myself silently for not following their example of dressing *before* breakfast. The Havanaise from the opera seemed to be mocking me as I winced in pain at my attempts to use my left arm. It would be useless to send me to Madam Pomfrey as she had left at dawn to heal the stragglers and survivors of the first wave of attacks that began the previous night. Throughout my agonised attempts to use my arm, *Carmen* kept singing; she must be a very inconsiderate woman to be singing about love at a time of war. And for the first time, I saw Professor Dumbledore trailing his eyes at Professor Snape before resting his gaze on me with a rather sad smile. For the first time, Professor Snape *really* touched me. He held on to my good arm gently, helping me to sit, scowling and snarling at everyone to give me air. The opera continued and everyone looked bewildered.

"It's *Carmen*," I muttered and heard the strains of the intrepid heroine singing '*Mais si je t'aime. Si je t'aime, prends garde à toi!*' At that point, Professor Snape silenced the opera with a spell. He had been holding on to my wrist as he lifted me up and as he did so, he quietly slipped a piece of paper into my hand, whispering in my ear to only read it when they were all gone; following which, he quickly announced that he would wait outside for them and he strode out the door. Professor McGonagall then transfigured a sling for me while Mr Weasley promised to take up my suggestion of campaigning for a programme teaching wizarding families to regard their house elves with a modicum of dignity *if* they made it back. He flashed me a kind smile expressing the same fear that had been hanging over us for the past two days he feared that none of us would survive. It was not a time for long goodbyes and I watched them disappear in a loud 'pop'.

I spent the rest of the day trying to study but found my mind wandering to my friends and professors and Professor Snape's strange note. It had said very simply, "Miss Granger, I did what was necessary. It was beyond my control. In the event that I do not return, you are to have all my books. Consider them a Christmas gift. Yours, Severus Snape." He spoke as if he would indeed perish on the battlefield today. He was to bring the group to Voldemort on the pretence of having captured them and there, they were to attempt to defeat that fiend. Before that, however, they had to roundup all the other remaining Death Eaters, remand them in custody and so on. Only about six would finally face Voldemort with all my heart, I hoped these six would win and return to Grimmauld Place. If Professor Snape's treachery were to be uncovered, he would be instantly killed and the Order had no contingency plan they needed Professor Snape to convince Voldemort that they were his prisoners.

Enough! Enough! It won't do me any good to be either envious or be angry with them. I could only wait. While waiting, I went up to Professor Snape's room and reread his

note. Sitting on his bed, I examined my surroundings. It was sparsely decorated with a bed, a chair, a wicker basket and a desk. On the desk were scattered papers, a coffee jug, ceramic cup and a magical music box. Upon closer examination, I came to the deduction that the music box was charmed to play one's favourite music. I opened it and strains of *Carmen* filled the air and his note seemed to make sense. It was a confessional. He did not want me at the battle for fear that I would be an impediment to the task at hand. Not only would Harry have tried to protect me, Professor Snape would have as well. It was indeed beyond his control because I refused to accept his reasoning. And he wishes to compensate me with his books! Is that all his books? He hadn't so much as looked at me when he helped up or handed me the note. And now this! What does it all mean? He had signed off "Severus Snape", not "Professor Snape". There was no "et cetera" after his "yours" merely an eloquent, "Yours, Severus Snape". A lump came to my throat as I wished that his "Yours" was truly meant for me and not a casual sign-off. I sat at the desk and noticed several drafts of this simple note - all of them much longer than the one he gave me this morning. It was apparent that he had been writing drafts and listening to *Carmen* all night. Then, the lyrics came unbidden to me again, "Si je t'aime, prends garde à toi."

Of course! In one of his drafts, he had clearly written and crossed out "Declare, je n'os" after telling me why his books were the only things he could give me. Silly man, I thought before flinging myself to sob into his pillow. Dobby had heard me and tried to comfort me but he was unable to do anything other than leave me a cup of green tea. As I stilled my tears, I realised it all made sense. Good, I understood his intentions at last. I *am* right; he *is* an honourable man.

I slowly made my way downstairs and tried to focus on my books as to steady my mind. I had to study for NEWTs but found that I was unable to concentrate. I reread the same sentence continuously before giving up. Many things have appeared too incongruous of late SPEW wasn't taking off as most house elves did not want either freedom or remuneration; but at least Mr Weasley would be able to create greater awareness to the issue house elf treatment. No, SPEW and NEWTs do not bother me that much both have rational solutions to them. Policies can be made to improve the lot of house elves and NEWTs scores can be attained by study. Professor Snape is the incongruity in my ordered world of books and knowledge; I suppose he feels likewise about me. He always addresses me as Miss Granger nowadays and he treats me like a colleague of sorts when I'm working on my NEWTs potions project. While I enjoy the independence of doing a potion project with him, it seems to me that he has become more restrained in my presence, more so within the last six months. There is sometimes a very tense quality to our conversations. I remembered one where he invited me to call him by his name and retracted the offer within an hour. I had thought that it was because he had noticed how I was unable to stand without trembling in his presence. I had even thought that he was aware of my keen study of his every gesture and look. No, I was mistaken. He did not see what I sought to conceal; his note and the drafts prove it.

I remember the name incident well. It was a rainy September day, the day after my birthday in fact and he had instructed me to commence brewing my experimental potion as I wrote it. Then, as he cut up slivers of dragonfly wings, he suddenly said in a quiet manner, "Call me Severus, Miss Granger." His head was bent over the cauldron, inspecting my potion; his hair slid down from behind his ears and curtained his face. It is a fitting name. "Severus," I tried, watching him drop a vial in surprise. He refused to meet my gaze. I pretended to return to work but I couldn't help noticing (as I do now) how lightly his name rolls off my tongue. It is a strong name, a name with character and distinction; a name hiding a man of great feeling under a mask of stern impassivity. "Don't call me that again," he said in a neutral tone as suddenly as his invitation had been issued.

Really! I would have only addressed him as 'Severus' in private! The manner in which he invited me to use it intimidated as much! Didn't he trust me enough to know I was aware of the public and private divide? At that time, I believed it was just as well that he rescinded the invitation; it would not have been a good idea for me to be getting frissons in his presence or by saying his name. I had asked myself once whether it was an infatuation, but I thought against it since it had been happening so gradually I did not realise it until the name incident. Succeeding that, I considered whether I had an unhealthy obsession with him, but I put that down as unlikely as I could see his flaws. I know he's not handsome but that is inconsequential; others can say what they like about him to me, he has an almost regal bearing and the most expressive eyes I have ever seen. His eyes, however, are nothing compared to his magnificent mind he quotes from Plato with the right stephanus numbers; he can sniff out ingredients in a potion; he has an innate instinct informing him when a cauldron could explode; he knows when someone has made a mistake in class; he can recite the ingredients and methods for most potions from memory he is an *all consummate thinker*. I've always liked to watch him but it is only recently that I found out how I admired his meticulous ways in the classroom. He pays attention to every nuanced detail of our work. He is exacting but not unfairly so. He has his reasons for being what he is to non-Slytherins and I accept that. I trust him enough not to question some of his methods. I've seen his mind at work several times he would sit and allow his long tapered fingers to trace his lips slowly as his eyes glazed over deep in concentration all that intensity just on the thought process, what if it were an intellectual exchange?

We used to have good intellectual conversations last year when we were working on my advanced potions project. Last year, my sixth at Hogwarts, we discussed art, philosophy, potions, transfiguration and arithmancy till the late hours of the morning every Saturday. We had even exchanged plans for the future: I told him that like him, I wanted to teach and research; in turn, Professor Snape revealed that he wanted to concentrate on research in the dark arts and potions. Then suddenly, the conversations ceased. Perhaps he felt uncomfortable exposing so much of himself to a young girl (he undoubtedly saw me as one), I never asked him. I have learnt that there are some things Professor Snape should not be asked if self-preservation is utmost in one's mind. For his part, he has extended the same courtesy to me. When Ron was killed in last year's battle, Professor Snape bade the staff to leave off their questioning; he had even demanded that I help him brew potions for Madam Pomfrey so as to keep me away from Harry's sullen bursts of temper at the death of another friend. Professor Snape, unlike Professor McGonagall did not question me about Ron, yet he always tried to make me feel better by silently handing me a cup of tea. I like to pretend that he watches me whenever I work; sometimes, just sometimes, I think I catch him examining my gestures and words. He has been stricter with me than with anyone else in the last two years; it is apparent in the way he marks my parchments. My parchments will always invariably return with a sea of red, his neat spidery hand issuing comments and suggestions. Funny how he speaks more on paper than in actual speech. In the last assignment he returned before the winter break, he had written at the bottom of my parchment, "You are Hermione in the *Odyssey* no longer". I am ashamed to confess that it took me a long while to uncover his meaning. The Hermione in the *Odyssey* was a source of contention between her two suitors at the height of the Trojan War. Ron was dead and after Harry's offer was rebuffed, he settled for Luna Lovegood. Now, regardless whether I'm right or wrong, I will talk to Professor Snape when he gets back that is *if* he returns. I must tell him what I've surmised from *Carmen* and his notes. Professor Snape deserves to know.

At that moment, exactly fourteen hours after the Order had left, the back door at the kitchen swung open to reveal Madam Pomfrey and Professor Snape.

"It is over," he said, looking haggard and bedraggled as Madam Pomfrey healed my arm. Gradually, I could hear most of our number returning. As they seemed to be in various degrees of injury, Madam Pomfrey had to leave the kitchen to attend to them. Sounds of chattering, laughter and moans flooded the air but I ignored them; to me, the kitchen was still silent. Oddly, there was no one else in the kitchen other than the Professor and myself. He sat down, clearly exhausted with blood matted in his hair and tear marks on his once scrupulously clean robes. He looked meaningfully at me before closing his eyes and muttering, "It is over."

"I know, sir," I said after casting a few healing spells on his wounds.

His eyes flickered opened and narrowed. "What do you know, Miss Granger?" he challenged lowly.

"Nothing much," I answered in an equally quiet manner. He smirked at my reply.

I turned around and made a great show of making a cup of coffee before finally saying, "J'attendrai, si vous voulez. Si vous attendrez, j'attendrai." I sensed him starting but his movements were arrested.

"Je ne comprends pas, Mademoiselle Granger," he answered in a slow deliberate silky voice, sending a frisson of shivers down my spine.

"L'havanaise dans l'opera *Carmen*," I said placing the cup of coffee before him.

He looked despondently at me as I made my way behind his seat. Then, with something akin to a sigh, he snarled, "It would behave you to heed it."

What could I do to tell him? I gingerly and tentatively bent over his chair to embrace him from behind. He did not overtly struggle; instead, after a lapse of a few minutes, he patted my arms and stroked my cheek, which I pressed next to his. At length, I broke the silence by informing him, "I *will not* beware. I *will not* take care. I *will not* take heed. I *will*, however, disregard your warning."

He laughed bitterly before asking in a dangerously low tone, "Why *vous*' and not *'tu*'? This isn't a game."

I made a rude choking noise as I was mildly annoyed with him. "Very well, since you've invited me to si seulementu veux, j'attendrai."

"Miss Granger, Hermione," he whispered at last. "Stubborn Girl! You had better return my books if you want to wait."

It was then that I knew it was truly over we were finally at peace.

Footnotes:

Pas de deux or grand pas de deux is formal five-part ballet sequence for two dancers: (1) the entrée (2) ballerina's partnered adagio (3) male solo (4) female solo (5) coda.

I know the scene may appear discordant but bear in mind that I wrote it as I would direct a ballet piece. For the fourth chapter, the female solo, entitled "The Prima Ballerina's Solo", Hermione muses over her thoughts on Severus while everyone is off at the final battle.

It can end here, unless you want an epilogue. I've written one, but I am hesitant of releasing it as there is a final twist somewhere. I'll stick with the ballet structure then - you *will* see an epilogue. Those fond of my poetry will get to see one in the last installment. Stay tuned...

Glossary:

"Vous" is formal French for "you", while "tu" is informal for the same.

"Mais, si je t'aime. Si je t'aime, prends garde à toi" can be translated as "But if I love you. If I love you, take care" or "But if I love you. If I love you, beware". It depends how you want to read it.

"Declare, je n'os" can be translated as "Declare, I dare not". The spelling for "je n'os" is deliberate. It's kept informal and semi-poetic. It's how they spelt in the 14th-16th century. Henry VIII of England 'declared' to Anne Boleyn using this motto (as it were) on his shield in a joust. I wanted to bring the significance of that into this story. And I applied it here because we know how 'antiquated' our dear Severus can be, n'est ce pas?

"J'attendrai, si vous voulez. Si vous attendrez, j'attendrai" can be translated as "I will wait if you want me to. If you'll wait, I will wait".

"Je ne comprends pas, Mademoiselle Granger" is "I don't understand, Miss Granger".

"L'havanaise dans l'opera *Carmen*" means "The Havanaise in the opera *Carmen*".

Epilogue - Coda

Chapter 5 of 5

We return to Hogwarts after the final battle. Loose ends (most of them anyway) are tied. But, there is a final twist - Severus is still keeping Hermione at an arm's length. Why? Final installment to my 'Love in four stages' challenge response.

Pas de Deux

Epilogue Coda

The end of the war against Voldemort did not precipitate any lasting feelings of euphoria amongst its survivors. Certainly, it could be said that everyone involved reaped what they deserved committed Death Eaters were locked away in Azkaban, prominent members of the Order of the Phoenix received order of Merlin medals; Arthur Weasley became Minister of Magic and on Miss Hermione Granger's insistence he launched a campaign to create greater awareness to the treatment of house elves. For the students of Hogwarts, however, the end of the war only meant a reduction of their number. Most of the sixth and seventh year Slytherins who had joined Voldemort and refused to be rehabilitated were to serve life sentences at Azkaban; several muggle-born Hufflepuffs, Ravenclaws and Gryffindors were killed in the run up to the final battle; and of the remaining students who survived, nearly all of them were somehow traumatised by the loss of someone dear to them. To the great consternation of the student body, examinations were *not* cancelled. Even though Hogwarts was short staffed following the deaths of Professors Trelawney, Grubbly-Plank and Moody, the day-to-day administrative matters were almost as efficient as ever. Professor Dumbledore, who had been severely wounded in the battle, only regained his former strength at the close of the NEWTs. Prior to his recovery, the school was very managed by Professors McGonagall and Snape. Like Professor Dumbledore, Harry Potter had been gravely wounded and though it was popularly rumoured that he was tittering on the brink of death every other night, his full recovery by the commencement of the NEWTs dispelled any report of his permanent incapacitation.

Despite Harry's late recovery from his injuries, infrequent revision, less than perfect academic track record and his penchant for Quidditch and heroics over books, he had, rather miraculously, passed all his NEWTs subjects. As such, despite the difficult time during the reconstruction of the wizarding world and the short-lived gaiety, the staff at Hogwarts, with the exception of Professor Severus Snape, was pleased to find that Harry could now fulfil his dream of becoming an auror. Many of them felt that Harry had enough practical experience to warrant his success in his chosen field. Severus alone, however, noted with an almost malicious glee that Harry Potter had only achieved a marginal pass in all his NEWTs subjects. He contented himself with thoughts that no amount of natural talent and practical experience could make up for aptitude and intelligence tests that were necessary for admittance into the Auror Training Programme at the Ministry of Magic. Despite evidence to the contrary that Harry had indeed obtained all marginal passes on his own merit alone, Severus was inclined to believe otherwise. In fact, he staunchly insisted that the NEWTs results had been deliberately tampered with so as to accommodate and reward the boy-who-lived-to-vanquish-Voldemort-again. So strong was his belief that he had insisted that the young man would get through all the auror tests on his reputation alone. He had even planned to move to order a formal investigation into the grading of the NEWTs, but was stopped by the Headmaster, Dumbledore on grounds that it would be a waste of resources when the wizarding world was trying to rebuild itself. Disgruntled and unwilling to acknowledge that Dumbledore was right, Severus retreated from the Great Hall, presumably to sulk in his chambers.

Hermione Granger followed his exit with her eyes and wondered at the irrational prejudice of her former Potions Master. Although she wanted to go after him, she knew he needed some time by himself to think. It was often a useless endeavour to attempt any conversation when Severus was in a temper. When the full results of the NEWTs were finally released to the student body, no one but Hermione herself was surprised to discover that she had been the top student. She was even more astonished to discover that she had shattered the top scores of one Severus Snape by ten. The results, however, were less important to Hermione than her present plans. She had been called to the head table for a tête-à-tête with Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall. The news that they jointly revealed was most exciting. Not only was she the top Hogwarts student, she was to receive a full scholarship to study at Glasgow Wizarding University and was assured of a teaching position upon graduation. She was eager to share this information with Harry or in fact, anyone who would partake in her joy. She was to be disappointed in this. Harry had met Hermione's rapturous squeals of further education and teaching with a polite lukewarm "congratulations" and hug before he joined Luna in more quiet speculations on their future. Harry had not been the

same ever since Ron's death in his sixth year. He had become more withdrawn and relied heavily on Luna and Hermione as an emotional crutch and a confidant respectively. Yet, after the final battle, he seemed to have almost slipped into a world of his own, whispering speculations of life and death to Luna, who was the only one who could bear him with patience and equanimity.

Devoid of anyone who truly understood her, Hermione made her way to the dungeons to break the news to the one person she thought would truly be happy for her. She was disappointed to find him conspicuously absent. She tried looking around his office to see if he had left a note as to his whereabouts but gave up upon realising that Severus Snape was a man who guarded his privacy jealously. She could not help noticing that his papers were in disarray and that the cup of coffee was still warm. It could only mean that he had suddenly left his sanctuary. She would find him and she would tell him the news. Before she could leave, however, a parchment with his neat spidery hand caught her eye. It was not one of his scrawls that he often made when he was working on improving one his potion formulas, neither was it a detailed analysis of a draught he created for the purpose of curing werewolves. She knew that those two were his overwhelming current research interests and he would usually have written all over the parchment in various coloured inks to denote the stages of his experiments and thought process. The writing on the parchment was ordered and the words were cryptic at best. It was clearly not his research notes. Hermione looked at the top and saw the title. Rereading the parchment again, she felt as if another piece of the puzzle of his mind had come into focus for her. She felt a renewed urge to seek him out. Carefully, she rolled the parchment and pocketed it. Armed with a wanton disregard for rules, she proceeded to dash to the infirmary where he would sometimes take stock of the potions he would have to replenish for Madam Pomfrey. He was not there. She bit her lower lip in dismay she did not enjoy hunting down people, it was a cruel sport and utterly unnecessary, but she was determined to play out the bout because she needed to know its outcome.

At the staff room too, Hermione met with failure. Noticing her anxiety and the almost desperate wild look in her eyes, Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall, though disquieted by her sudden entrance, kindly instructed her to try the Astronomy Tower. Thanking them and leaving them to their prior activity, she made the long and meandering journey to the Astronomy Tower. She smiled in spite of herself. "So the rumours are true! Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall are shamelessly carrying on!" she muttered to herself with a faint laugh. It was true then, the need for loving and acceptance never stops. While walking briskly to the Tower, she ignored many stares in her direction as she talked quietly to herself. "Of course," she mumbled, as she arrived at the spiral stairwell leading to the Tower. "It's far away from everyone else and he always wants to be alone to reflect. I should have known."

Quickening her pace, she almost ran up the stairs with the certainty that he was there and not expecting her. Hermione was proved wrong again, for she was nearly at the topmost step when she was greeted by a sharp, "Ten points from Gryffindor for running up the stairs, Miss Granger."

She was startled by his voice; she did not know he had already sensed her presence. If it were not for the firm grip of his hand on hers, she would have surely tumbled most unceremoniously down the stairs.

Pulling her up and safely depositing her beside him, he turned away from her. "I was not aware that broken arms are the latest accessories du jour," he mocked in a serious tone, narrowing his eyes at the sight of the Forbidden Forest. "If you wish to send yourself to Madam Pomfrey in broken shards, by all means, hasten to hurl yourself down."

Deciding that it was best to ignore his comments, she approached him and began breathlessly, "Professor, I have news to share!"

Severus closed his eyes momentarily and leaned against the wall before staring out beyond the parapet at the forest. "Make it quick if you don't want to suffer any further shocks today!" he cautioned with a scowl.

"If that's the way you feel, I will leave you now!" she threatened hotly, visibly annoyed with his uncalled for behaviour. She had done nothing to offend him and was indignant as to his tone with her. Yet, she was curious as to the reason which drew him away from his office to Astronomy Tower.

"You should have done that years ago when I first asked you to," he answered in a carefully quiet hiss. "You didn't think, did you, Miss Granger?"

Hermione noticed a chair in the corner and dragged it to a position where she could examine his features to her satisfaction. "Are you still taking points from Gryffindor?" she asked, forcibly calming herself.

"Of course, Miss Granger," he answered in an even low tone, staring into her eyes.

"Is this about the scores then?" she asked

"Do you expect me to congratulate you? Look for it elsewhere, I am not in a giving mood."

She sighed and saw that there was no way about it if he was determined to be difficult. "Professor Snape, there are bound to be people out there who are better than one at certain things. You cannot be all perfect and all knowing all the time. Isn't that what you taught us? Didn't you say no one is indispensable?"

Severus spun around violently and grasped her chair tightly, effectively fencing her in her seat. "In that case, Miss Granger, tell me what am I still doing at Hogwarts now that I have outlived my useful purpose?" he spat.

"You are a good teacher. A good teacher has every purpose to remain at Hogwarts," she offered, glaring at him. "I won't be leaving Hogwarts permanently, sir," she added slowly, giving the impression that she had chosen her words with great care.

"Is McGonagall keeping you behind for a project?" he sneered, "You have allowed yourself to be used again. Let this be a lesson to you!"

She snorted derisively as she continued to hold his gaze. "Will you please listen to me? I'm attending Glasgow Wizarding University in the autumn, sir. I will need to remain here for the practical sessions. Effectively, I will be living at Hogwarts." Hermione thought she caught a flicker of astonishment and a slight smile on Severus's face, but was positive that she had imagined it, for he was presently scowling at her.

"Do you mean to inform me that you will be here to torment me for another three years? Do you mean you will continue bombard me with worthless questions without any repose? I must speak to the Headmaster about this!" he exclaimed in an agitated and irate tone. He made a move to go but she stayed him by holding on to his hand. He raised an eyebrow at her and curled his lips contemptuously at her attempt to hold him back, but made no attempt to fling off the light grip of her soft warm hand.

"I'm in the Alchemy programme, sir. You will have to grade my practicals and final project. Upon graduation..." she paused uncertain whether she should continue. Drawing a sharp intake of breath, she quickly continued, "Upon graduation, I will assume your position and..."

"WHAT!" Severus bellowed, causing the birds on the school grounds to take off in fright. He fought the urge to shout, "What will I do? Where will I go?" but he steadied himself on feeling the affectionate pressure of her hand on his. He decided to control his temper to rage at Dumbledore later. "When did the Headmaster decide to retire me before my time?" he snapped, his eyes glinting at her with something akin to betrayal and pain.

Hermione reached forward to remove a stray lock of hair from his face and neatly tucked it behind his ear. "He planned to tell you when it was time for you to assume the Defence Against the Dark Arts position," she answered in quiet nervousness, unconsciously increasing her pressure on his hand.

Severus was stunned. He looked deep into Hermione's eyes and saw that she had spoken the truth. For the first time in his life, he was rendered speechless. He would be getting the coveted Defence Against the Dark Arts position at last. So that was what Dumbledore and McGonagall had been discussing all morning. They had arranged with Glasgow Wizarding University to allow Miss Granger to undertake her practical sessions at Hogwarts so that she could understudy him. He had his wish, he could keep her by his side and impart his knowledge to her as he desired. For the first time in a long while, he was overjoyed. However, he deigned not to show it and at that moment, Hermione released his hand, blushing that she had actually held it for so long. It was a shame she let go, he thought, he was getting accustomed to it.

"Is that all, Miss Granger?" he asked imperiously, curling his lip with impatience, wanting desperately to return to his office.

She coloured violently as her hand found the parchment she had pocketed. She would ask him now and if he said no, at least she would know and would cease to live in

notions of what-ifs-and-what-might-have-been. "Do you want to accompany my parents and I to Glasgow tomorrow, sir?"

"Whatever for?" he asked in an awkwardly cold manner.

"Oh!" Hermione exclaimed. Her eyes shone with tears at her disappointment. "We're still waiting then? Of course, stupid me! I would still be almost your student if I were to remain here, wouldn't I? It would be unethical, I hadn't thought about your sensibilities," she continued logically.

"Miss Granger, I demand you cease your incoherent babbling! If you must speak, make a conscious effort to speak in truths."

She frowned at his inability to remember their promise. "I thought it was agreed that so long as you wanted it, I will wait."

"So," he laughed in a bitter and ironic manner, "*Carmen* has come back to haunt me! Do you know why I have ordered you away? To save you from myself!" He laughed bitterly again before singing in a deep baritone, "Mais si je t'aime, prends garde à toi."

Unable to watch the spectacle of a bitter Severus Snape warbling the Havanaise from *Carmen* without reacting, Hermione stood up and shook him by his arms. "You do have an excessively dramatic way of displaying self-pity. How long have you been wallowing in it? Is it so difficult to believe that I will accept you for what you are because you have always accepted me for what I am? We respect and trust each other, they put up with each other's psychological hang-ups and moral egoism. We know when to leave the other alone; when the other needs encouragement and when the other needs a little cuddle," she lectured vehemently, arms akimbo.

"And am I to think that a mere seventeen, no, eighteen year old knows what she wants out of life?" he questioned in that voice of dangerous purring silk.

"And what do you know of life other than abject misery?" she retorted. "You will not cut me off. Like you, I will not be denied. I know that I want to study. I know that I am happy in an academic environment. I know that I am happiest when I am at Hogwarts. I know that I want to be a good Potions Mistress, perhaps with your guidance, almost as good as you are. I know that I feel strangely comforted around you. I know that when I look at you, I am always amazed at the marvel that is your mind. I know that with you, I will have intellectual stimulation and conversations about life, potions, books, philosophy and every other issue under the heavens. I know that everything else between us in such a partnership will be incidental. I know that we will respect each other because you know I can read your moods; and you, my mind and desires. I know that we will respect each other because you know I am more adept emotionally and I know you are my intellectual superior. I know that we will be moderating forces on each other!"

"So young, so hopeful, so idealistic! Need I tell you Miss Granger that it doesn't last! I mangle and blight everything I touch. Happiness is a harbinger of sorrow and misery. I will not allow you to be miserable!" Severus reasoned, his voice quaking with a mixture of self-loathing, anger and admiration for the young lady confronting him.

"Do you realise how pompous you sound? How dare you presume to my decisions for me? You did the same in this..." she announced, holding up the parchment.

He looked at it dismissively and schooled his features into contemptuous indifference before waiting for her to make her move. "You compiled a list of my faults! Well done, Miss Granger, very methodological," he snapped.

She smiled stealthily, like a cat who knows that the mouse she caught had nowhere to run. "It's an interesting title, 'Pas de Deux', isn't it?" she drawled in a soft hiss reminiscent of his own. "Let's see what you wrote, shall we?" She watched him pale slightly as he struggled to successfully regain his composure. She cleared her throat dramatically and read:

"Should we or shouldn't we?

This objective seems to be increasingly clouded

By numerous preliminary hearings

Affiliated with multiple scribes report playing.

Perhaps we should

Considering the carrying capacity of our affection

Full of intonation without inversions

Unmodulated respect shall continue to abound

If we agree on a downcast prelude signed.

Yes, let's go ahead

Formalise the process with a higher engagement

Exposing the grand mutual entrapment

Humming itself as your chartered wings

To mark me with a nip on my lips.

No, I must disagree

Sweet as your offer beckons

It's nothing more than a fantasia

Marking a sorry duet with a divertissement

Rendering all to the impossible and flawed.

Should we or shouldn't we?

This objective seems more and more malignant

Slowly brewing discontented attitudes

Sung un-charismatically by inadequate bids

Representing a demented off-key impasse."

"How did you find it?" he queried quietly with an edge of annoyance in his faltering voice.

"Your office when I was looking for you. You presumed to write my response for me. Do you take me for a fool? I know what a pas de deux is. The fourth stanza is the

equivalent of the female solo. How are you so sure that I will refuse?"

Severus cast her a pained look. "It is for your own good. I'm a decrepit old man with odd tempers who will terrorise you day and night. I will corrupt your soul."

Hermione snorted indignantly. "What I see is a man with a terrible inferiority complex! When I gave you my word, Severus Snape, I meant it. I don't know exactly when it happened, but I can tell you for a fact that I love you. I love you, greasy hair, temper, impatience, formidable mind and all. It's not a heady floating on air love, but one founded on respect, admiration and appreciation. Even though I disagree with your methods, I adore the way you think, the way you trace your lips absentmindedly. I will wait for you as long as it takes, a month, three years, thirty years, I will wait," she said quietly, lowering her eyes in embarrassment.

He stared at her stunned by her words. She would wait for him! He looked at her tired face and saw a tiny smile as she pushed aside her bushy untameable hair; it was a reconciliatory smile. It was a smile of peace. It was a smile for him. Severus's mind lurched at the thought that Hermione Granger had smiled for him. She trusted him and she wanted him just as he was temper, irrational outbursts and all. It would be comforting to return to their chambers and see her there, preparing her lecture notes, biting her lips in annoyance as she marked the dunderheads' parchments. It would be nice to have her notice he was back. He could picture her giving him a slight smile before she returned to her work. He could picture the conversations they would have in front of the fire; he would be seated on the carpet and she would be resting her head on his lap and around them would lie several opened books; and they would talk till dawn about everything and nothing. Severus realised that if he didn't repulse her and she was willing to wait for him, it meant that she was as frightened and uncertain as he was. He looked at her playing with the ends of his robe sleeve what wasn't there to love in a woman who had an insatiable thirst for knowledge and would settle for the whole package that was Severus Snape?

"Ethical philosophy has never been one of my strongest subjects," he sighed, gently stroking her cheek with some reserve. Although he was strangely moved when she turned slightly and lightly kissed his palm, he did not show it. "I will not take this opportune time to do something ridiculous like declaring myself," he said sternly, silkily modulating his tone as if he hated the very idea of playing the gallant chevalier. He proffered her his arm, which she gratefully took with an amused laugh. "Tomorrow, my dear Miss Granger, we shall make for Glasgow and discuss your final project. Milady, a simple ground rule: I am Severus only when we're alone" he continued in a warning, patting her hand stiffly and tucking it properly on his arm. "Now, shall we see the Headmaster and discuss the small matter of your living quarters?"

Unbeknownst to the shy couple, they were being observed by a tabby cat with slight squarish markings around its eyes. The cat watched them leave the Astronomy Tower from the shadows and licked her paws thinking, "Albus was right! That means I have buy him a month's supply of his ghastly sweets. No matter, it's for a good cause." With that thought in her head, Minerva McGonagall padded her away to her office.

Finis

Footnotes:

Pas de deux or grand pas de deux is formal five-part ballet sequence for two dancers: (1) the entrée (2) ballerina's partnered adagio (3) male solo (4) female solo (5) coda.

The poem is mine, if it's awful I apologise. And the ending is slightly AU - if it offends, i apologise as well.