

Vengeance is Sweet!

by Southern_Witch_69

A spiteful Severus decides the only way to bed Hermione before Harry does is to pretend to be a gigolo for one night. Inspired by Betz's Gigolo Challenge at WIKTT.

Muahahaha!

Chapter 1 of 15

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Disclaimer: All characters are for J.K.R. of course. Plot thought of by Betz. The other stuff belongs to me!

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Severus ducked down into the shadows to eavesdrop on the quarreling pair. *I knew the little bastard was trying to fuck her! I just knew it!* He grinned evilly to himself as he heard the boy being rebuffed. He'd been coming to this section of the library each day for two weeks to work on some research he'd been doing. For the last three days Potter had been coming in to try to talk to Granger. This was the first time that they'd been close enough for him to hear exactly what they were saying.

"Harry, no, I can't. You just don't understand," she said sadly. "It would be...odd."

"Oh, come on, Mione. Just this once. Spend the weekend with me, make love to me all weekend, and then we'll go back to normal. I just want to see how it feels to be loved by you." Harry's voice was full of disappointment as he tried to coax the girl to have sex with him.

"Make love? Harry, people have to be in love for them to actually make it." She sighed. "I don't know. I'll think on it. Let me talk to Rolanda and get some advice."

"Rolanda?" Harry asked incredulously. "Are you going to listen to what that mental witch has to say? Look, you slept with Ron! What's the difference in being with me? I have deep feelings for you, Hermione. You just drive me crazy when you are near. It feels like if I can't have you, I'll explode."

Severus shook his head in disgust. The bloody brat-that-lived-again was actually begging a woman to have sex with him. Granger no less! Hell, why would he want to be with her? She had that rat's nest hairstyle, her arse was a bit too bony from what he could make out, and her breasts were a tad on the small side. Not that he'd been looking, mind. He strained to hear what they were saying as they walked off.

"That's a bit much, don't you think?"

"I suppose, but it's the truth, Mione. I want to fuck you and make you scream my name."

"HARRY!" Hermione admonished. "What if a student should happen in and hear you?"

"There are only a few students that stayed over the holidays, and I doubt they would be holed up in the library!"

"Look, I'll see what Rolanda thinks about...this. I will talk to her tonight in the staff room, and I'll get some womanly advice," Hermione said softly.

"But, Hermione, why do you need another woman to help you make a decision? Can't you just make one on your own? Right now?" Harry asked hopefully.

"Because, Harry, if I made my decision right now, the answer would be a firm no. Now, wouldn't you rather I talk to Rolanda?" Hermione asked sarcastically.

"Right then," Harry said. "I see your point. I'll talk to you tomorrow. I have to meet Bill tonight for a bit of drinking."

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

Severus pondered over what he'd heard all day. He'd not been in a better mood all year...well since that berk Potter came to work at Hogwarts. It was great. Harry Bloody Potter, savior of the ruddy Wizarding world, was actually begging someone to sleep with him. Not that Severus cared, but he hoped that Granger wouldn't give in to the brat. He deserved to have at least one woman turn him down. From the way others talked, it seemed that every witch and wizard, he shuddered, was practically standing in line for a chance to bed him. He'd been so happy when the Dream Team had graduated. He'd hoped to never set eyes upon them again. The next year Granger was back and apprenticing with Madame Pince in the library. The year after that, Pince retired, and Granger took over as Library Witch. Severus sighed.

The tasteless witch did have a knack for working there, he'd give her that, but the worst thing about her working at the castle had been the frequent visits from Potter and Weasley. Hell, even worse than that, Potter had taken the Defense Against the Dark Arts job at the beginning of the current term. All he needed now to be completely lodged in hell was for Weasley to worm his way into a job at the castle. Deciding he wanted to hear the brat's fate, he went up to the staff room before any others arrived. This was where she would talk to Rolanda. They always chatted for a little while after the evening meal. Severus went about setting up his table as if he had been doing some work. He scattered parchments, opened a large tome, and placed two bottles of ink and quills on the table.

He was scribbling hastily on some parchment when the two laughing witches came in.*Ha! They'll never suspect a thing!*"Oh, Sev, old boy," Rolanda said, yellow eyes gleaming. "Hope we won't disturb you!"

"Not at all, Rolanda. I'll put up a Silencing Charm." He sneered at the pair for a moment to show that he loathed the disruption, and he pretended to put up a Silencing Charm. In actuality, it was a charm that would pick up even the faintest whisper, and he'd be able to hear it as clearly as if they'd spoken it to him directly. He smiled smugly as he bent down over the parchment to write once again. The two began talking, each eyeing him from time to time.

"Well, I think you should do it," Rolanda said. "Hell, if the boy who lived came down to me on the Quidditch Pitch asking for a shag, I would give him one. Why? Just because he is the boy who lived, after all. I think that you should do the same. I hear he is worth it."

"Oh, I know. That's just it. I think I would really like to, but I have a bit of a confession to make." Hermione looked around uneasily. "I lied to him. I told him that Ron and I slept together once. I said it when I was angry about something, and well, if I sleep with him, he'll know I lied."

"Bloody hell. How's he going to know? Did the other bloke scribble his signature there with a permanent quill?" Rolanda asked.

"No, it's not that. There was no other bloke. I'm a virgin. It was all a lie because he was making fun of me. Ron was just the first person I thought of," Hermione admitted.

Severus Snape nearly fell out of his chair. Weasley hadn't tainted her! She wanted Potter to taint her! Disgusting! "All right, Severus?" Rolanda called. He couldn't look or acknowledge that he'd heard, or they would know that he hadn't put a spell up to block their conversation. He simply pretended to cough and patted his chest before going back to his parchment.

Rolanda turned back to Hermione. "Well, come on down with me. I'll break away your maidenhead." More coughing from Severus. "Old boy really ought to check into that. Sounds rather nasty." She grinned. "Don't look so horrified. It's just a thought. I could just reach on in, and ta-"

"Sorry, but I don't think I would feel comfortable with that," Hermione said, laughing lightly. "No offense."

"None taken. Everyone knows I'll play on either side of the pitch." The yellow-eyed witch sighed. "Well, you need to either tell him or get someone to shag you."

"I can't tell him. I'd never live it down." Hermione smirked. "There is certainly nobody *here* that I would willingly allow to touch me. Do you know anyone?"

Rolanda looked thoughtful for a moment. "Well, all right. Sometimes I venture into Knockturn Alley for a bit of fun. I hire a man. Always the same bloke. He is brilliant in bed, and his-"

"You hired someone? Good Lord, woman!" Hermione said incredulously. "I wouldn't dare. Sorry."

"Why not? Who is going to know? It's right private, you know, and if you do that with him, Harry will think that you really have slept with his mate at least the one time. Then, you can get his sexy arse in the sack, and come back to tell me all about it," Rolanda said, wriggling her eyebrows conspiratorially.

"Perhaps." Hermione brought her hands to her face for a moment. "What is his name? How much does he charge? Is he clean?"

"Yes, he's clean! Uses Purification Charms each time, just to be sure. Never can tell, you know. His price varies. It depends what you want. Though with you giving him your virginity, he might charge more, thinking he'll have to take extra care. I can owl him and ask."

"What's his name?"

"Darach, why?"

"He's Irish then?"

"So?" Rolanda's eyes narrowed. "It doesn't matter what he is. He wears a mask anyway. Can't see his face."

"No, I don't care where he is from. That name means oak tree in Irish. I was just wondering what his personality would be like, and if he was named that for a reason," Hermione said thoughtfully.

Severus smirked. The little tart was always worried about the meaning of things even when she was considering paying a hired man to deflower her. What a little pillock! Rolanda interrupted his thoughts. "Oh, let me tell you, the name fits then. This one here is hung like a Hippogriff, I say."

"Good Lord," Hermione said in disbelief. "That doesn't matter! Er...does it?"

"Not if the bloke knows what he's about, no, but if you get a green, fumbling berk, then, yes." Rolanda laughed loudly. "I always imagined Weasley to be one of those that would explode before he ever got it in. Hahahahaha!"

"Oh, honestly," Hermione admonished. "Owl this fellow. I need it done soon. Harry expects an answer. Can I trust you to be discreet on this, Ro?"

"Sure," the witch said. "I'll be here just a bit for a few swigs, and then I'll be off to Hogsmeade to owl him. Don't want to use a school owl, after all."

"Right. Thanks," Hermione said. "I'd better be off to take over for my helper. She'll make a great Apprentice if she decides to stay on."

"Night then."

"Night."

Severus couldn't believe the two witches! Was this the type of conversation that they all shared? Good God! And, Rolanda wanting to aid Hermione in her deflowering. He shook his head in distaste. That was a man's job. Pity it would fall to some hired man or to Potter. "You can stop acting like you don't hear me, Severus," Rolanda said angrily. "Don't you think I know that spell when I hear it? Silencing Charm, my arse!"

"Finite Incantatem," he said in a bored tone. "Sorry. I didn't catch that, but I saw your arms waving about. What?"

"You heard every word, didn't you?" Her yellow eyes were lit with amusement. "Don't deny it. If she had been looking like I was, she could have seen you hanging on to every word we were saying. So, what do you think? Did I give her the right advice, mate?" She pulled out a chair, turned it around, and sat down backwards to face him, leaning her arms on the back.

"I think that hiring a man for sex is...sordid. Surely, if you were to get antsy, Rolanda, you could find someone better than a hired lover. Then, the poor girl, not that I give a fuck, is going to go off and lose her virginity to someone she doesn't even know. Tsk. Tsk. What is this world coming to?" He made a sour face before looking back down to his book to pretend to be reading something.

"Pity," Rolanda said. "I just remembered that Darach said he was off to Egypt for a bit." She rubbed her chin. "I could always look about though and find another bloke for her. Oi! You have any spare Polyjuice Potion?"

"Whatever would you need that for, Ro?" he asked suspiciously. When this woman was onto something, things could get pretty wild. He'd never met anyone like her.

"Well, she won't know the difference. I told her that I would like a taste of Potter if it was offered, but I would also like a bit of her, if you know what I mean. Her damn perfume turns me on, I say." Rolanda stretched like a cat. "I've played the man a few times before. I could do this favor for her, make me a few galleons whilst at it, and have a bit of fun myself."

"But...you know her. You would do that to her?" Severus couldn't believe his ears. This woman was ludicrous.

"Hell yes. I'd just be priming her up for Potter anyway. I knew what Hermione wanted to talk to me about before she found me down the corridor. He'd already been to see me, begging to me to talk Hermione into sleeping with him," she said, summoning a glass and bottle of Firewhisky.

*Potter! The bastard. He always gets his way, doesn't he?* Aha! "Rolanda, perhaps we could do something else."

"Why, Severus, I don't know if I like that gleam in your eye, old boy. What is it?"

"Why not let me fill in as the gigolo. I'll pretend to be this Darach. As you said, she'll not know the difference. You can have whatever galleons she gives me," he said, smirking evilly.

"But, mate, you don't even like her. Why would you want to bed her?"

"Because I hate Potter. Just knowing that I was able to bed a woman that he wanted, gaining her virginity in the process, would keep me happy for years. Each time I would look at the little brat, I would know that I had someone he wanted first."

Rolanda's mouth gaped open. "Severus! You are forty years old and acting like a teenager! Can't you let the past be gone?"

"I will not be forty for another three weeks, Madame," he said curtly. "Besides, she made, what was it, yes, twenty-one back in the beginning of term. Our ages aren't so bad off. As far as she knows, this Darach is just a bit older than she is. I'll wear a mask as you said, charm my hair and voice, disguise my old Dark Mark's scar somehow, and she'll not know."

"And, I get all the galleons you say?"

He nodded. "Every one."

"I wonder how much we should charge? Say," she said suddenly, reaching out to try to cup him. "What?"

"What the bloody hell are you doing?" he asked disbelievingly, pushing her hand away.

"Well, I told her Darach was hung like a Hippogriff. Don't want to be called a liar. Might be something else you need to charm. Was just having a check, is all," she said indignantly.

Severus smirked. "Trust me. I can fly with any Hippogriff. That good enough for you? She'll not be disappointed, and besides," he chuckled evilly, "she's not looking for romance. Just a simple, quick shag to deflower her. That's exactly what I'm going to do."

"All right, mate. What night can you meet her? She needs it soon, before the weekend in fact."

"Any night. Tomorrow," he blurted, thinking of being buried within a woman. He tried to push her face out of his mind. He wondered if he could get her to wear a mask as well or sip on Polyjuice Potion. He sighed. That would be unlikely. No matter. He would blow the candles out, turn the lamps down, and keep his eyes closed. It's not like he had to kiss her. He just had to do his deed, deposit his seed, and be done with it.

"Deal then. You'd better not stiff me on any galleons," she said huffily.

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

Hermione nervously awaited the man she was to meet. He'd responded to Rolanda quickly and had decided to meet with her. She'd charmed her hair to look red, and she'd changed her eye color to blue. She'd even applied make-up and dressed sexily. Her hair had been tamed and properly straightened thanks to Sleekeasy's Hair Potion. He was costing her fifty galleons. He'd better be as good as Rolanda claimed.

CRACK! Someone Apparated in just to her left. She eyed him warily. He was a good bit taller than she was; he had a lean build, dark blonde hair flowing about his shoulders, and he had a mask on his face. This had to be him. "Darach?" she asked cautiously.

He looked at her, and she saw his mouth gape open. "Hermione Granger?" he asked, seemingly uncertain. She smiled, thinking he sounded a bit like Seamus Finnegan, only with a richer voice.

"Yes."

The man walked over to her. "I will Apparate us inside." She nodded and allowed him to pull her close. CRACK! She looked around and found that they were in a small room. It was warm thanks to the cozy fire near the bed. "It's not much. I couldn't get any better on short notice." Severus wanted to laugh at her expression. He could feel her shaking nervously in his arms. Ha! *Too late to be scared, little girl. You should have just let Potter do the deflowering. Now you're playing with fire. I'm going to burn you.*

"It's fine," she said, stepping away.

He looked at her openly. She'd put a lot of time into her appearance for him. If she would do this each day, she might attract more wizards to her bed, and she wouldn't have to worry about ruddy Potter! Hooch was right. She smelled delectable. Why hadn't he noticed that before? He shrugged. "Do you have the galleons?"

"Here," she said, handing him a small pouch. He placed it into his pocket before he took off his cloak. She took her cloak off as well, and his groin lurched. He had an ample view of her cleavage. Severus' brow furrowed. *Didn't she have a small chest?* Perhaps, she'd charmed herself somehow. The little dress hugged her figure nicely, creating curves where he knew she had none. She'd always been a small thing.

"How do you want it, Miss Granger?" he asked, crossing his arms, awaiting her response.

"Oh, Good Lord! Call me Hermione. You just reminded me of my old Potions Master," she said giggling.

"Very well," he said, trying to slouch. "How would you like it?"

"Well, to be honest, I have never done this before. The man," Severus snorted, "that I am seeing this weekend thinks that I am...experienced. Well, I lied to him. I told him that I slept with someone. So, imagine his surprise when he would find out that I'm untouched. I need this taken care of," Hermione said, sounding much like a business negotiator.

He took two steps towards her and pulled her into his arms roughly. "I don't care why you are here, Hermione. I want to know. Rough or easy?"

She gasped. "I don't want you to strike me or anything, if that's what you mean. Just fuck me, I suppose." She didn't know where she had mustered the courage to say that! Such foul language! The man had clearly been trying to intimidate her. She could see the desire he felt for her in his light blue eyes.

He ran his fingers through her straightened hair. It looked really nice this way. Damn! What was that perfume she had on? He'd never smelled anything like it. He'd have to ask Rolanda. She was striking with her different colored hair and eyes. There was no way that this shapely figure had been hiding under her robes undetected. He began to slowly peel down her dress. When she jumped back and seemed to tremble, he didn't know if he should feel exasperated or sorry for her. "We'll need your clothes off, my dear."

"All right," she agreed. "I just...no man has ever seen me out of my robes yet. It's just a bit awkward, but to hell with it. As I don't know you and will never see you again, do it."

He smirked. Very brave indeed. In a matter of seconds, he'd pulled her dress down and nearly fainted. She had on the sexiest bra and matching knickers that he'd ever seen. They were dark green silk with touches of light green lace. A silver snake clasped the bra together in the front between her two luscious mounds. He sneered for a moment, and then remembered he was not himself. "Have a thing for snakes, do you?" He wondered if she'd been pining for any particular Slytherin, one that he might know perhaps. His ego was deflated a notch as she replied.

"Well, my friend that I spoke of is a Parselmouth. I thought it would be a nice touch. Supposedly, you can speak a bit of snake language, and it'll open right up. Same for the clasps here." She pointed on either side of her hips where two more silver snakes sat. He'd never seen panties that had fastenings. What the hell kind of outfit was this? So, she was studying diligently and intending to practice hard for Potter, was she? "Do you like it?"

"Indeed," he said. "I'm partial to snakes myself." He reached out to unclasp the bra. Simple enough. He didn't need to speak Parseltongue to get into this witch's knickers. He deftly unfastened them as well. Leaving her clad in only her high-heeled shoes.

"All right. Let's see then," she said impatiently as he took entirely too much time to gape at her again. The bloke seemed surprised that her body wasn't all that unpleasant to look at. What the hell had he expected? She couldn't wait to see his body. "Need a little help, Darach?"

"Not at all," he said, waving his hand over his attire. Everything disappeared: clothes, shoes, socks, all of it. And, he most certainly was hung like a Hippogriff.

"Good Lord," she said.

He arched an eyebrow and smirked proudly. "Is there a problem, Miss Granger?"

She gasped. "Good God, you sound just like my old professor sometimes. You even have his mannerisms."

"I'm sorry?" he offered, not sounding sorry at all.

"No. Oddly enough, it's turning me on." She licked her lips naively. She could feel her core heated up at the thought of Snape's melodious voice whispering seductively in her ear. "Would you mind terribly if I charmed your voice to sound like his?"

He gave her a genuine smile. "All right." He knew her little enchantment would only distort his true voice, so he would whisper his own spell to change his voice back the second after she did hers. He grabbed his wand up and aimed it at his throat while she was reaching for her wand. "I think I'll reinforce my mask's charm. Feels a bit loose." She attempted her spell on him. He nodded and whispered his own spell. Pretending to check his mask's grip on his face, he spoke, "How do I sound?" She visibly shivered. It was, indeed, his true voice that was now speaking freely to her. "I sound odd to my own ears," he lied.

"You sound like music to mine. Not that I didn't like your voice, but wow. It's like you are Professor Snape, except for your hair and eyes," she said, giggling slightly.

"Snape? Of Hogwarts?" he asked, feigning disbelief. "I know of him. I hear he's an arse."

"Oh yes," she agreed. "He's definitely hateful, but there is just something about him that is so sexy. I would never tell anyone this though. They'd laugh at me probably."

Wench. "Are you quite finished daydreaming? Let's get on with this," he said, clearly annoyed. Her eyes widened. "What?"

"Could you call me, Miss Granger?" He nodded hastily and moved her towards the bed. "Thanks, Darach."

"If you are quite through with your delaying tactics, I believe I want to be buried inside of you, making you scream my name," he said, enjoying that his voice had that effect on her.

"Aren't you going to kiss me?" she asked uneasily. "To put me in the mood."

He scowled at the witch. "I don't kiss, Miss Granger. I apologize. As far as you being in the mood, I can already sense your arousal." At her look of disappointment, he pushed her down to lie on her back. "But, I shall use my tongue to bring you great pleasure," he said huskily. His hands began fondling and caressing her body as his mouth assaulted her neck. One spiked shoe dropped to the floor, followed by the other. *Yes, get comfortable, little girl.*

Severus' tongue slipped down to encircle one breast and then the other. He then flicked over one of the nipples to make it harden. He nibbled lightly on it before sucking deeply. "Aah," she breathed. She liked it. Damn, he was good, wasn't he? If his mouth weren't busy, he would have smirked. His mouth glided over to the other waiting peak. He lazily licked and suckled her breasts until she was sighing, moaning, and writhing beneath him. He then made his way up to her neck, just behind her earlobe where he knew he would find a sensitive spot. "Severus," she breathed.

He froze for a moment. What the fuck? "What did you call me?"

"That's his given name," she said breathlessly. "Don't stop."

Satisfied with her answer, he went back to what he was doing. It felt oddly nice to hear Hermione's voice panting out his name. Thinking along those lines, his mouth traced the contour of her cheek and found her lips. To hell with not kissing. The lips were already parted, as she was in the midst of a whimper. He devoured her mouth, tracing her lips with his tongue before darting in. She tasted as if she'd eaten raspberries before she visited him. This time it was he that moaned into her mouth as one hand found its way to his hair, and the other was tightly wrapped around his throbbing erection. Fervently, he deepened the kiss hoping to speed up her strokes. When that failed, he dropped a hand down to delve into her wetness.

She was hot, tight, wet, and ready. He could slam into her and be welcomed. He decided it would be prudent to stretch her a little first, so he used his one finger to open her slightly and move quickly in and out. The strokes on his penis quickened, and she was now whimpering into his mouth. He left her mouth to lazily lick his way back to a breast as he added another finger. "Oh my God, Severus," she yelled gleefully. "Don't stop."

He had begun to grind into her hand at the sound of her calling out to him in such a way. If he didn't be very careful, he would spill all over before he even plowed into her. "Miss Granger," he barked, "control yourself, lest you want this over before we even start."

"What are you waiting for then?" she asked cheekily.

Indeed! "Very well," he said, pulling away from her. The glistening of his extracted fingers mesmerized him. What would the great Hermione Granger taste like? Slowly, watching her intently, he brought one finger to his mouth for a hesitant lick. She tasted like...nothing. What trickery was this? He inserted the entire finger into his mouth and sucked it clean. Nothing really. Moving to lick his other finger, he noticed the surprise on her face. "You, my dear, are a very clean woman." He cringed inwardly. What the hell kind of compliment was that? Fuck it. What did he care? She thought he was some twit named Darach. Hahahahaha!

"Thanks?" She didn't seem all that thrilled either, and the little witch was rubbing his thighs as if to coax him to move. "Darach? I'm feeling quite...randy. I want this. I hope you don't mind me calling out his name. It seems oddly...kinky, and," she bit her lip, "I quite like feeling naughty. Tonight at least."

He waved a hand dismissively. Who cares? He wanted to taste her. There was sure to be something that he wasn't detecting. No woman, none, and he'd had many, had ever been so intriguing and addicting. Addicting? He began laughing lightly. It would do well to remember this was Hermione Granger. Only the eyes and hair, and possible body parts, had been altered. "What's so bloody funny?" she asked defensively.

Think fast. "We've been so excited about getting things going that we've not talked about contraceptives or cleansing potions. Your absolute cleanliness makes me wonder if you've taken care of that already."

"I'm on Muggle contraceptives." He lifted an accusing eyebrow at her. "It's for feminine issues that I'll not bore you with, so I thought we were quite safe. As for being clean, I didn't know that was a sin. I bathed just before I came," she said hotly, cheeks turning red again. "Oh, right. I did Scourgify everything as well. Is that bad?"

Hell no, he thought, remembering an encounter with Vector. That witch had a serious problem with... He cringed, pushing the distasteful memory away. "It's fine," he assured her, dropping between her legs.

"What are you playing at down there?" she asked breathlessly, trying to sit up.

"You'll like it. Lay down, Miss Granger. *Now.*" The witch smiled and threw her body back onto the mattress. He looked at the treasure before him and was impressed. She had clipped and shaved some of her hair away, leaving only a small amount around her opening. He'd never seen any witch do this. It was odd, yet fucking sexy. "Miss Granger, I would have never thought that you would be so creative as to design your pubic hair in such a manner."

"Doesn't everyone groom themselves?" she asked, puzzled. "And, Darach, you've not known me long enough to form a true opinion about how I might groom myself."

He didn't bother to answer. What the hell was he doing making small talk when there was a perfectly tempting, untried fanny in front of him? On that thought, he leaned forward, opened her folds slightly and inserted his tongue. Addictive. Damn. There was that word again. Hell, no. *Granger. Granger. Granger.* He said her name over and over mentally to remind himself that this was a Potter groupie that was sprawled out before him. Tomorrow she would be back to her normal appearance. This weekend she would be sprawled open for Potter to feast upon, but not tonight. Tonight she belonged to him. He felt a swelling sense of satisfaction course through his veins. He was where Potter wanted to be. He'd gotten here first. Hahahahaha! Severus began lapping frantically.

When she bedded Potter, she would no doubt compare the two. He'd be sure to outperform anything that little berk could do to her. She would always remember this love session, and he nearly laughed wildly with his next thought. What if she liked it so much that she tried to see Darach again? Hahahahaha! Imagine her surprise when the bloke had no idea who she was nor had any recollection of a love session. Hell, he'd pay to see that. Claws digging into his hair brought him back to reality. Hermione was moaning and grinding into his face. He moved up to lave her nub, causing her to screech like a banshee. *Good Lord, maybe I should put a Silencing Charm on her.* "Oh, don't stop!" She began twitching and shaking. No fucking way. She was coming already. "Severus," she screamed. His cock jumped. She was calling to him, and unbeknownst to her, he would bloody answer her call.

Severus positioned himself over her quickly, not waiting for her to finish shuddering. There would be more where that came from. "Hermione," he said quietly. No response. Her eyes were closed, and there was a lazy smile on her face. "Miss Granger, I am going to fuck you. Do you hear me?" She nodded. "I'm going to pump into you so hard and fast that you'll be screaming out again in no time. Hold nothing back." He dipped his face to hers for a kiss. She eagerly opened her mouth. The kiss was short and scorching, as he wanted to waste no more time on such trivial affections. His lips found her shoulder, and he deftly bit into her.

"Ow! What the bloody hell was that for?" she asked incredulously, opening her eyes to glare at him. He slammed into her roughly, breaking through any barrier she had. "Oh," she yelped.

"I was drawing your attention away from the inevitable, Miss Granger." He smirked as she nodded. Testing her, he pulled away and plunged in again. There was a slight grimace, but nothing of displeasure. He repeated his movements a few times, and he was finally rewarded with a moan of acceptance, gripping hands, and clinging legs. Over and over he ground against her, taking extra care to rub against her sensitive spot on the outside and then hitting her sensitive spot on the inside. Her lips found his neck, and she suckled him like a Vampire lacking teeth might.

Her claws were scraping across his back as they rutted physically. There was no sickening love making here. Here there was merely sex. Pure physical lust. The pounding sound of flesh hitting flesh, moans and grunts filled the air. He could feel the building within her as she bucked and arched in more spasmodic strokes, anxiously searching for fulfillment. The whimpering began, and he evilly increased his pace and force. She couldn't exactly keep up, and he was sure she wasn't trying to. She was simply trying to assist her orgasm along. "Bloody hell! Severus! Darach! Bloody hell!" He chuckled as he continued to pound into her through her convulsions. He was so damn good that he had her all befuddled. She didn't know if she wanted to call him by his 'real' name or her old professor's name.

Looking down into her awestruck eyes, he smiled slightly. Not exactly sure why, he placed a languid kiss on her mouth, slowing his strokes for a moment. A hand grazed her left breast and hard nipple quickly before moving up to brush away a damp, sweat drenched tendril from her face. Both of their bodies were slick with sweat. He could feel that his back was glazed over by the way her hands slid around smoothly. Realizing he was wasting time and had his own climax to achieve; he began to pound into her, jabbing over and over in a way that best suited him. Hell, she'd had two orgasms already. This was his turn. After a moment, he pulled completely out. She protested only slightly as he flipped her over to position her on her knees.

"Put your head on the pillow. Very good, Miss Granger," he mocked, before finding her entrance and sliding back in. This time they both moaned appreciatively. It was like finding his way home. Deeper and harder he plunged into her until he could feel his bollocks begin to tighten. He was almost there. To his surprise, she was pushing back against him, meeting his every stroke. She wanted him to have his pleasure as well, eh? Why disappoint her? As his own tremors began to travel through his body, and his seed spilled into her, he yelled triumphantly. "Granger, you minx! I'm coming!"

When his strokes finally slowed, they both collapsed in exhaustion. "I never imagined it would be that way," she said breathlessly.

"Yes, it was good, wasn't it?" he asked arrogantly. "You are a very quick learner, Miss Granger. Ten points to..." Damn. He'd nearly slipped.

"Gryffindor," she said. "That was my House."

"Ten points to Gryffindor, then," he said with a chuckle. He leaned over to whisper into her ear. "Make that a thousand points. You were bloody brilliant." He could see the smile brighten her face. Why not give her a bit of confidence? He wasn't lying. She was rather satisfying. More so than he would have ever have thought of the little mousy girl. He pulled her close to cuddle with her. Cuddle? What the hell? He placed a kiss on her cheek, and he got out of the bed.

She turned over to look at him. "Leaving?"

"Yes," he said simply, issuing cleaning spells on himself. After a moment's thought, he went ahead and sent one her way as well. "I picked up a potion that will help with tenderness that my girth usually causes. Being a virgin, I would think that you'd need it. Would you like it?"

"That was very nice of you," she said softly. "I think I'm going to need it. I feel a bit tender. Raw almost. Hope nobody sees me walking oddly."

They both chuckled as he summoned the vial over. "Take it all tonight. You should feel comfort immediately. I really must go, Hermione. I want to thank you for a most pleasurable night."

"Darach, I really appreciate this. I've never felt so...wonderful." She sighed contentedly. "My mate will never know what hit him this weekend, and I owe it all to you." He sneered at the vixen on the bed as he hastily used magic to clothe himself. Now he regretted his generosity of bringing along that potion to soothe her. Harry Bloody Fucking Potter. He hated that brat. The witch smiled softly, getting up to summon her clothes to her. "I don't think that anything can compare to you though, Darach. I'll never forget you."

With his now soothed ego, he looked at her and graced her with a tight smile. "I'll not forget it either, Hermione. Good luck." CRACK! He Apparated away. Just in case she went back to the castle as well, he made sure to go to his old Apparition point in the forest out behind Hagrid's hut. He quickly changed his hair back, his eyes, and took off the mask. He disenchanting his Dark Mark, and he changed his robes back to his normal school robes. Whistling brightly, he made his way back to his dungeons.

He couldn't wait until the next day. He would be able to watch her for any signs of discomfort or recent love making...er...sex. Severus smirked smugly. Potter would still be panting after her, never knowing that Severus had been the first to visit her folds. Hahahahaha! Pity that he could never throw that in Boy Wonder's face! Not that he would care if Granger found out about his deceit. He would, but he wouldn't. It would bode well for her to know that someone she knew had been the one to please her and take her virginity. She was the one that also said he was sexy. For some reason, that unsettled him slightly. Why? What would that slip of a girl...*woman, you do!* *You've seen what she has under those robes now...*be doing thinking that he was sexy? He'd never been nice to her. Not even since she joined the staff. He was cordial to her, being a colleague, but he was never friendly. Nor would he be. Ever. Hahahahaha! Vengeance was so sweet.

The next morning Severus made sure to make his way down to breakfast. He would not miss this exchange for the world. After a moment of hesitation, he decided to bring Rolanda her pouch of galleons. If he didn't, the woman might start a row in front of everyone, and then Hermione, no, Granger, would get suspicious. Sure enough, Rolanda was sitting in her seat next to his, smiling in a conspiratorial way. He sat down easily and passed her the pouch under the table.

"Well?" she asked in a hushed voice.

"The deed has been done. She's lost her virginity, I've had an acceptable piece, I now have something that I can secretly dangle over Potter's muddled head, and you've made your money." He smirked at his friend. Rolanda wasn't bad sometimes.

"Here they come," she said with a giggle.

He looked up and shook his head slightly. Hermione was walking very slowly, and Potter was a little behind her, obviously just catching up with her. They made their way to their seats next to Rolanda. Potter's whine was heard first. "Come on. Just tell me. Are you coming or not?"

"Yes, I guess, Harry," Hermione said, sounding bored. "Now leave off so that I can eat in peace."

Severus smirked and took a bite of a biddy. He heard Rolanda whisper to Hermione. "How was it?"

"Bloody brilliant. Maybe I'll call on him again. I shall let you know if I have the need," Hermione said.

Hahahahaha! His plan had gone off without a hitch. The only bad thing was that she might want another go with him. Too bad. She'd have to get the real Darach or Polyjuiced Hooch! Maybe. He looked over at the young witch. Perhaps she wasn't all that bad to look on now that he actually had a look at her. Her bushy, frizzy hair wasn't as bad as he'd remembered, and her own eyes were nice enough. An evil grin replaced his smirk. He wasn't really attracted to her. He simply knew how she looked under her robes and what it felt like to be buried within her. Taking another biddy, he rose. "Good day," he said to Rolanda and walked smugly out of the hall. He'd fucked Potter's love interest and gotten away with it. Life had never been better.

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

Rolanda watched the self-satisfied wizard leave the hall before she pulled out her pouch of galleons. "Did he even count them?" she asked Hermione, grinning madly.

"Not at all. Stuffed them into his pocket and set about his task," she said with a giggle.

"Well, was he as good as Vector said?" Rolanda asked.

"Bloody hell, Ro. The man is not only a Potions Master, but he is a master in the art of having sex. I'm so glad that we decided to trick him into this." Hermione laughed slightly. The night had been brilliant. She'd wanted the man for three ruddy years now, and she'd finally figured out how to have him. There was only one way to get into a man like Severus Snape's boxers. Use underhanded, sneaky, Slytherin tactics.

Harry leaned over. "Oi! Where's my share of the loot?"

Rolanda threw a few galleons his way. "Now shut your trap, or you'll give us away."

"Thanks again, Rolanda," Hermione said.

"I feel bad for taking your galleons," she said.

"Oh, rubbish," Hermione said. "It was only twenty, as we agreed. Well, minus Harry's few, and now you can put it towards that new broom you wanted. I couldn't have pulled this off without you." Harry scoffed. "Either of you," Hermione amended.

"Yeah," he agreed. "Now the old blighter thinks he got something that I wanted." At Hermione's evil glare, he adjusted his words. "Not that I wouldn't want it, mind, if it was freely offered."

Somewhat mollified, the cleverest witch of the age smiled. "Well, I suppose I'll be off. Lots of books to shelve." As she made her way to the library, she prayed that it never came out that she had known it was Snape and not that fictional Darach bloke. He'd kill her and then kill her two helpers. She froze, seeing him waiting outside of the library door.

"Miss Granger," he purred silkily. "It's about time you stopped prattling on about Potter to Rolanda. I need to pick up a book that I left here yesterday."

"Oh, I saw that book. I picked it up for you. Didn't want any students to happen upon it. They might learn how to Disillusion their hair and eyes. That would mess things up for us a bit if they turned into sneaky little blighters." She liked the look of discomfort that passed along his features. "Why did you need that any way?"

"An experiment," he said curtly. "If you don't mind, Miss Granger, I don't have all day." She smirked and led the way to her office.

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

A/N: This was really fun to write. Hehe! I love that Snarky Severus thought he'd gotten away with shagging someone that Harry wanted. I had a little extra time over the weekend, and I started this. I finished it this morning, and I thought I would like to share it. I really like Betz's Gigolo challenge, and this was just a quickie version of one.

I would not be opposed to a sequel of sorts if it would be requested. Do you want Severus to find out that he's been duped? I wonder what he would do? Surely, he would try to wreak havoc on them. Would you want a happy ending? Let me know. Either way, I'll try to get it done.

If you would like to read a longer version of the Gigolo challenge that I have written, please search for my story, "Libertine."

Bwahahaha!

Chapter 2 of 15

What happens when a coniving gigolo finds out that he's the one that's been tricked? Read here to find out.

Disclaimer: All characters are for J.K.R. of course. Plot thought of by Betz. The other stuff belongs to me!

As always, a big thanks to the brilliant Charmed Nay for being my beta!

***** SS ***** HG *****

Severus left the library feeling smug about what had happened. Granger seemed to be oblivious to anything that had transpired the evening before. Life was grand. Potter would be able to sleep with her now, but who cared? He'd been there first, and he'd left his mark. Potter would have his seconds. A slight vision of the young boy climbing over Hermione's wanton form passed through Severus' mind. He stopped walking suddenly. The little bastard didn't deserve to have someone as responsive and pleasing as the girl. What could he do to intervene without them knowing that he cared? Hang the fuck on! Care? He didn't care, per say, but he did have an interest. Why should Potter be able to have a slice of Granger pie at all? There were plenty of little tarts running about that wouldn't mind bedding him. There was one witch that could help him. Rolanda!

He had retrieved the book that he'd been looking at the day before, and he intended to read more into the enchantments within. There were very interesting things to try. Severus' groin tightened as he thought of the reason he'd sought out the book in the first place. It was to trick Granger into bedding him. Her tightness sheathing him had honestly felt better than any other woman he'd had. As if she was naked before him again, his groin began aching for her. He opened his eyes. Damn. When had he closed them? His dark eyes dropped down to the book in his hand. Severus Snape smirked and if anyone had been looking, they would have noticed a skip in his step as he made his way out to the Quidditch Pitch.

He saw his fellow conspirator immediately. She was setting up brooms for her first class in rows along the grounds. "Bit cold for a flying lesson, don't you think?"

"Sev, old boy! What brings you to lurk about my Quidditch Pitch?" she asked, yellow eyes filled with mirth. "Come to give me those details that I've thought about since yesterday evening?"

"Of course not, woman," he answered brusquely. "I was wondering if she is indeed going to spend the weekend with Potter." He hoped she wouldn't read anything more into his questioning than there was call for.

"As far as I know, yes," the woman said with a sigh. "Just think of it, Severus. Two fresh, virile, young friends becoming lovers for the first time. Lovely."

Severus sneered at the witch. "I don't care to imagine anything of Potter, thanks, which leads me to my next issue." He smirked for a moment, allowing her anticipation to build. "It isn't enough that I was able to have Potter's woman. I don't want him to have her at all." He raised an eyebrow. "Or, he can at least suffer a bit."

"Well, that's real interesting, Severus, but I'm afraid I don't see how we can stop it." Rolanda chuckled. "I never thought I'd see you lowering yourself to such levels, old boy. Are you sure you just aren't trying to get into her knickers again? That good, was it?"

"Nonsense, Rolanda. I've told you my reason. I do have a plan," he said with a malicious grin, hoping she would take the bait. He'd lied, of course. He certainly wouldn't mind bedding the witch again. She was very responsive, tight, wet, and extremely hot to touch. In fact, if he had his way, he would-*Enough!* Those thoughts were not welcome.

The gliint in her eyes told him that she was interested. "What's your plan, Severus?"

"Simply talk Miss Granger into doing something else this weekend. Lead her to believe that perhaps sleeping with Potter would ruin their friendship." He smirked. "I'm sure that she would prefer her friendship to remain intact. Talk her into going to The Leaky Cauldron in London. Be sure she wants to stay the night."

Rolanda chuckled. "Is Darach going to make an appearance?"

"Severus Snape might just make an appearance, if I'm feeling a bit randy. Just keep her away from Potter. If she is here, he might try to slip into her chambers," he said, nodding slightly. "I must go now to prepare for the first wave of dunderheads."

"All right, old boy, but I must ask. What's in this for me?"

The sly wench! He might have known she'd have a price, what with the way she snatched up those galleons last time. "What do you want?"

"Polyjuice Potion," she said immediately.

"What?" he asked incredulously.

"I don't have to tell you why, but that's my price. When can you have it?" she asked eagerly.

What did she have planned? "Considering the ingredients and the position of the moon, I would say nearly a month. Is this acceptable?" he asked, thinking about the possibilities of having Polyjuice Potion. Maybe Rolanda was on to something.

"All right, Severus. Deal. I'll talk to her about it this evening. You can guarantee she won't be there for Potter this weekend, and I'll get her to come out with me to London. Whatever you decide from then out is up to you," she said, rubbing her hands together, smirking evilly. "I must say that I can't wait."

"We've only three days before Saturday. I'll talk to you more before then to see how things are shaping up," he said. "Good day, Rolanda."

"Good day, Severus," she said to his retreating back. "Good day indeed," she whispered to herself. This was going to be interesting. She had been wanting some Polyjuice Potion for a little naughty excursion of her own. She would have to keep Severus' end of the deal this time, or he'd never trust her again. Pity. Hermione was fun to consort with, but it was fair play. She'd pulled a prank on Severus. Why not turn the tables? The conversation with Hermione would indeed need some trickery. What reason could she have to get Hermione to go along with it? An idea occurred to her. She wondered though if the dark man intended to show up as himself, someone else, or not at all for their weekend adventure. Humming, Rolanda went about getting ready for her first batch of blighters.

Just after the noon meal, Rolanda slipped into the library for a word with her accomplice. "Hermione, a word please," she said as quietly as she could.

Hermione jerked her head towards her office door and moved to enter. "What's up, Ro?"

"I have some news for you!" Rolanda said excitedly. She knew just how to keep Severus' secret and make Hermione happy.

"What is it?"

"Severus was down to see me this morning, and he wants to make a deal with me," Rolanda said mysteriously.

"Oh, good Lord! Has it something to do with me?" she asked. It would be a very interesting turn of events if Severus Snape had finally taken an interest with her. He hadn't treated her any differently even though they'd shared a bed the night before. Hopefully he'd told Rolanda about it.

"It has everything to do with you," she said jovially. "He is going to brew me a batch of Polyjuice Potion if I make sure that you don't bed Potter this weekend." Rolanda sniggered. "All I have to do is make sure you spend the night at The Leaky Cauldron. That will prove to him that I've held up my end of the deal. Will you go along with it?"

Hermione's mind began thinking about the reasoning behind his request. Was he jealous of Harry? Was he interested in her? "Why, I wonder," she murmured.

"Says it's not fair that Harry should have his way. I think he might be feeling a tad possessive, being your first lover and all." Rolanda smiled. "What say you?"

"Is that all he said?"

"Of course not. Said something about Severus Snape might just make an appearance, so I don't know what that means," she said. "Maybe he is going to show up as himself and try to get you to share a bed. I think we need to stage a talk at the table so that he can believe that I've talked to you. Will you?" Rolanda asked hopefully.

"Sure," she said, feeling disappointed. She had hoped that maybe Snape had decided that he fancied her a little since they'd been together. It seemed that he was only worried about seeking revenge on Harry though. "Let's figure out what we're going to say."

"I knew I could count on you," Rolanda said excitedly. There were so many possibilities with Polyjuice Potion. Severus wouldn't know that she'd told Hermione the gist of what he'd said. She shrugged slightly to brush the thoughts away. They would have to bring Harry in on it again. They had already planned for Harry and Hermione to be away from the castle this weekend to let Severus believe they had gone to have their trysts. This was much more exciting. Damn! She should have demanded some drinking money for her troubles. Blast! If it came up again, she might mention it to him.

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

Severus looked into the mirror. "Very good work," he said to himself. He would not need a mask to approach Hermione this weekend. His hair and eyes had been changed to those of Darach's. His nose had been transformed, his eyebrows lightened, and even his cheekbones had been altered. If he didn't know it was he, Severus wouldn't recognize himself. The book had come in handy. He undid all that he'd changed, and he tried them all again. He repeated this over and over until he did it smoothly and flawlessly. Yes, he would have Hermione Granger in bed again. This Saturday night. Smirking evilly, he made his way up to the Great Hall where he'd check with Rolanda to be sure all was handled. He seriously hoped that the young witch would not go off with Potter.

As he sat at the table, Minerva leaned over to talk to him. "Severus, are you all right?"

"Yes. Why do you ask, Minerva?"

"You seem...odd."

"I'm fine," he said, quirking his lips upward slightly. He nearly panicked as Minerva's eyes moved from him to Hermione. What did the woman know? Had she guessed? Heard something? Impossible! He'd have to be more careful. A few moments later Rolanda took her seat next to him.

"Severus, Hermione," she said. "Bout time they have something good for the evening meal!" She began putting things onto her plate. "Where's Potter?"

Hermione answered meekly. "He's a bit angry. I told him that I had changed my mind for now about this weekend. Don't think he took it well."

Severus smirked to himself upon hearing this. Hahahahaha! Life was grand. Potter was off sulking. He tucked in to his Shepherd's pie with gusto whilst listening to the pair of witches next to him.

"See, eh? I told you to not go through with it. If a decision such as this messes with the foundation of your friendship, just imagine what a night of hot sex would do to it. It would be awkward after, but as I told you before, that is your choice. I just got to thinking on it a bit. Didn't sit right with me," Rolanda said. "You are still coming to London this weekend?"

"Yes, I'll be there," Hermione said softly. "I wonder if Darach would be free."

"Dear girl! Why? We can find some other bloke or witch in London," Rolanda said wickedly. "I've a mind to have a bit of fun myself."

"I don't want to be with just anyone though. I want to be with him again." Hermione sighed. "I suppose you are right though. Besides, he is probably booked up."

Severus nearly choked on his drink. She wanted him again. Just like a little wanton! He'd be happy to oblige. It was along the lines of what he'd planned anyway. Rolanda looked his way for a moment to see if he was interested, and he gave a slight nod.

"Want me to send him an owl then? Won't know unless you ask," she pointed out.

Hermione smiled. "Do you think he would think badly of me? For calling on him again?"

"Flattered would be the word," Rolanda said. "I'll do it this evening. I've a few things I need in Hogsmeade."

"Thanks, Ro. Please just don't mention this to Harry. Just tell him we are going away, and I don't want him to know where. He might show up. I never thought he'd be so persistent."



"My lips are sealed. Now enough of this. I aim to eat my fill," Rolanda said, serving herself another helping. "A witch has to keep her strength up. Never know what vigorous exercise might be required."

Severus ate the rest of his meal in silence. Minerva kept fidgeting. What was her problem? He'd have a talk with her. "Minerva, are you going to the staff room after?"

"Not tonight. I feel a bit under the weather," she said. "I think I'll turn in." She put a hand on his shoulder. "Take care of yourself, Severus."

The way she looked at him made him wonder if he'd forgotten to change something back to his normal appearance. He watched the older witch leave through the staff exit. He hoped nothing serious was wrong with her. She was a good friend to him when he needed one. Seeing Albus looking at him, Severus scooted over to Minerva's vacated seat. "Hello, old man," he said with a slight smile. "All right?"

"Yes, Severus. I was just noting that you look years younger. It seems as if a load has been taken off of your shoulders." Albus looked him over. "Are you wearing cologne, Severus?" he asked in disbelief, eyes twinkling. He lowered his voice. "Tell me that you and Rolanda haven't become a couple?"

"Certainly not!" he exclaimed indignantly. "I just thought I would give this scent a try is all. I shall cease to wear it. You and Minerva both seem to think that something is wrong with me."

A slow, soft voice said, "Severus, may I have a seat here?"

He turned and nearly cringed. Vector. Good Lord! She wanted to sit in his chair to have a word with Rolanda. At least he hoped it was with Rolanda. He'd not be having a conversation with her any time soon. She'd likely try to accost him yet again. "You can sit there if you'd like. I was just on my way out."

"Oh," she said in disappointment as she slid into the chair. "I was just going to have a word with the girls anyway."

He nodded curtly and turned back to the grinning wizard next to him. "Good evening, Albus." There was no way he was going to be suckered into sticking around. He had a potion to start. Rolanda's potion to be exact. Brewing it would be worth it. They had much to talk about, he and Rolanda. It seems that Darach's services were required again. On his way out, he decided to pay Minerva a visit. Something wasn't quite right. He knocked twice before she answered.

"Severus," she said, clearly surprised. "What brings you by? Come in."

He felt a bit guilty as she was already in her nightclothes and had her hair down. He hated imposing. "I wanted to be sure that all was well, Minerva. You acted strangely throughout dinner."

"Really. I am fine." She said, taking a seat before the fire, gesturing for him to do the same. "It's you that I am worried about, Severus. Albus and I were talking, and it seems that Rolanda is up to something. I heard snippets of conversations. I am just curious as to what she is up to."

"What have you heard?" Severus asked cautiously. He certainly hoped that she wouldn't find out anything about how he'd tricked and bedded her little cub, Hermione Granger.

"Rolanda and Vector were talking last week. She was asking all sorts of questions about you. Mind, some of them were rather personal," she said with an indignant expression. "I told them to keep it down, as there were students about that could have heard."

"I appreciate that." Vector! Would he always regret his folly? One night of too many Firewhisky shots had landed him in a spare room in town with her. He barely remembered the act itself, but he knew that he'd hated it. Mostly. Even thinking about her brought him displeasure. When they had woken the next morning, she had wanted another go. He'd, as kindly as possible, told her that he preferred to keep their relationship platonic, as they were colleagues, and sexual relations might interfere with things. She'd been upset, but she understood. Ever since then she had been trying to win him over. Pity she wasn't anything like the delectable Miss Granger. He felt his pulse quicken at the visual of her face contorted in ecstasy below his.

Hell, who would have thought he would have wanted to see that again? Before he'd been with her, he'd been tempted to request that she wear a mask as well, but once he'd seen her that night, he'd forgotten all about it. *Aha! It had to be the eye and hair illusions that she had on. Likely her body illusions as well. She was not that sexy under her robes. She couldn't be.*

"Severus? Did you hear what I said?" Minerva asked, breaking through his thoughts.

"No, sorry. I was thinking about Vector and Hooch, wondering why they would be talking about me," he lied.

"Well, that's just it. It seems, or so I thought, that Rolanda was planning on...having relations with you! I couldn't believe my own ears! Just be careful where you tread, Severus. I think something is amiss," his friend said.

He nodded. "I thank you, Minerva. If you should hear anything else, please let me know." He stood. "I will leave you to your rest."

"Very well," she said, smiling. "I hope you don't mind, but I mentioned this to Albus."

"Not at all. I'll see myself out," he said, holding a hand out to stop her from rising. "Good evening." He left quickly and decided a walk up to one of the rooftops would be in order. It had been a while since he'd visited the Astronomy Tower. With a smirk, he traveled that way. There would likely be little berks running about. He could possibly have points deducted from the other houses. On his way back past the Great Hall, his plans were disrupted as Rolanda called out to him.

"Oi! Sev! This way, mate," she said, leading him towards the entryway. He followed her out onto the grounds.

He wanted to ask her about her little conversation with Vector, but he didn't want to betray Minerva's confidence. "What is it?" he asked impatiently.

"Well, are you going to make a show in London or not? I would like to know now." The witch punched his arm playfully. "You heard! She wants to shag Darach. Will Darach or Severus make an appearance?"

"If neither does, then what?" he asked, eyebrow raised.

"Pity you don't have any of that Polyjuice Potion ready for what I would like to do. However, there are other people that I know that could help two witches along in the ways of having orgasms." Rolanda laughed at his incredulous expression. "Oh, come on, Severus. You act like I'm too old to have fun."

"You are old, Rolanda. Have you forgotten?"

"Ah, but I am blessed with hardly showing my age," she said with a smirk. "Another good trait I inherited from my mum. The other one being my eyes."

"Darach will make an appearance sans mask. I have perfected the use of illusion charms. I will approach you and tell you hello before I look to Hermione. You can then tell her that I am Darach." He smirked. "I'll take over from there."

"All right then," the witch said enthusiastically. "We'll have such fun. So, do you mind if I have a watch? She and I will likely share a room."

"Get your own bloody room," he spat. "I don't care to have any voyeurs about. I think I'll stay a bit longer this time. As before, you can keep the galleons. Tell her since I enjoyed it last time. I'll only ask for twenty."

"Fair enough," she said. "See you."

He nodded, turned on his heel, and made his way down to the dungeons. He decided not to go to the tower after all. There were charms to perfect and fantasies to think about. How would he take her this time? Would she still feel as good as she had last time? Damn! Would she look like herself? Would she have her illusions on? Would he want her, really want her, if she looked as she did each day during meals?

Yes. He would. So long as she never knew it. Hahahahaha! This was just too good. He was getting another session with his inexperienced witch, and Potter was being turned down. He couldn't wait until it was time to be with her again. Severus knew he should thank Circe, Merlin, God, and whomever else that might be listening. It seemed that things were finally going his way.

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

Hermione smiled smugly at herself in the mirror. She felt a little confidence budding. Her hair didn't look half bad. The curls were not as wild as they used to be, and it wasn't exactly frizzy any longer. The extra hour of care she had taken on it did have a little to do with it, but it wouldn't be that horrible to go through once and a while for a bit of change. She had decided to keep her own eye color and simply fix her own hair for this night.

She was ecstatic when Rolanda said that he had taken the bait once again. That must mean that he'd found pleasure in their first coupling, and he truly wanted her again. Or, did he want the Hermione she had been that night. She'd given him her virginity willingly, and she had known it was Severus the entire time. It had been three long years since she first set her sights on him. He just never paid any attention to her. When she found out that he'd slept with Vector a couple of years earlier, she'd been insanely jealous and had cooked up a way to have him.

Thanks to Rolanda and Harry it had been the best experience of her life. She felt slightly guilty for tricking him, but why deny herself the pleasure of making love...er...having sex with Severus Snape. It was better than she'd ever imagined. She supposed it could be because she had no other experience to compare it to, but how could anyone feel so right? She wished that he had stayed with her after they'd finished the last time. He seemed to want to at first by the way he'd pulled her possessively against him, but then he remembered who she was, she supposed, and pulled away from her.

"Who's there?" she called out, after hearing a knock on the door.

"Ro," came the reply.

"Come in. I'm decent."

The door opened. "Wouldn't matter to me if you were or weren't," she said slyly. "Oh, you look marvelous, love. He'll appreciate it. Ready to go down for a few drinks? He should be along later."

"Has Harry brought his cloak?" she asked.

"Yes, and I still say he shouldn't have come," Rolanda said sulkily. "If Severus sees him, there will be hell to pay."

"Oh, he won't see him. I'll keep him busy up here after we come up. Then, you can take Harry, go to your room, and have a few drinks." Hermione smirked. "Why, Rolanda, you don't have something planned with my best friend, do you?"

She whistled mysteriously as she made her way to the door. "Come along," she said. "Oi! Why do you have to wear that fragrance?"

Hermione faltered. "Don't you like it?"

"That's the bloody problem," the witch growled. "Ah, sod it. Come on."

Hermione grinned as she followed the witch. She could feel her dress sneaking up slightly, and she deftly swatted the air to her left, making solid contact with some part of Harry's body. "Oof," he said. "Damn, Mione. Good punch."

"Keep your sneaky little hands to yourself, Harry, or I'll not sneak you any liquor," she said cheekily.

"Sssh, you two. We'll take that table in the corner. Harry can sit next to the wall, and I'll slide in next to him." She shook her head as invisible fingers brushed through her hair. "Stop it, you."

Harry chuckled and said, "Sometimes being invisible has its perks."

Hermione had begun to think that Snape had changed his mind. They had many rounds before she heard the Irish accent bid everyone hello. She looked up and startled slightly. He was handsome. It was an odd mixture of Severus and the imaginary Darach. She could see the Severus in him, but if she didn't know that it was Severus, she would likely have never known. He had changed his hair back to the dark blonde color, and his eyes were once again stormy blue. "Hi," she said breathlessly. She suddenly wished that she had charmed herself as she had the week before.

"Rolanda, Hermione," he said cordially. He held out a hand to the witch. She took it quickly, not even looking to her drinking mate. Severus smirked. She really wanted him, didn't she? "You look lovely tonight," he said softly. To his horror, he meant it. She hadn't charmed herself, but she had dressed up nicely. He was going to see how it felt to bed Hermione Granger as she was. He noted that her cleavage line wasn't as enticing as it had been the week before, but it held its own temptation in its natural state. Ha! So she had charmed her body for their last meeting. But, why not this time?

"You look lovely as well." She blushed profusely. "Sorry. I mean to say, you look handsome, Darach."

"Thanks. Where is your room, my dear?" he asked, eager to get her disrobed and trembling beneath him. Her hair looked nice once slightly tamed. Her face was made up lightly, but one who didn't know her would think it was natural. Damn! She was wearing that enticing perfume again. He would really have to ask what scent it was.

"Follow me," she said, leading him up the stairs and down a long hall to her room. "Here we are. Rolanda is just across from here." She unlocked her door and let him pass by while she closed the door. As soon as she closed the door and turned to him, he pounced on her, pushing her up against the door. "Oh, my," she breathed before his lips met hers.

The kiss was intense and delicious, just as he'd recalled since their last meeting. He had her pinned against the door with his body and used his hands to begin undressing her while keeping their kiss going. Her little tongue and lush little lips were warring with his own, causing him great excitement. If she could tempt him like that with a kiss, what could those lips do should they travel down to his...? "Yes," he hissed suddenly as she boldly groped his erection.

Her neck arched slightly, and he took that as a cue to suckle upon it. He obliged hungrily, inhaling her scent. He successfully unfastened the clasps on her dress, and it fell away, leaving her clad in nothing but her shreddies. Dark, green silky material he noted as his hand made its way over her bra. He peeked down at her breasts for a moment. Lovely. Even though they weren't charmed, they were still enough to keep his hands busy. He put a hand on each breast and rubbed erotically, allowing her nipples to harden.

She gasped slightly and tightened her hold on his cock. Hermione's eyes opened, and he stared into them for a few moments. Yes, he could see why Potter would want her. She wasn't just Granger, a sidekick to Potter. She was Hermione, a tempting woman. The young witch was very responsive, passionate, and not hard to look at. And, for the second time this week, she belonged to him. "What the...?" He couldn't believe it. Her sexy bra and matching knickers were Slytherin green, and there were small silver potion vials plastered throughout as decoration. He questioned the witch with a raised eyebrow.

"I...my colleague and old Potions professor. I had these made since our last meeting. It was a complete turn on with you sounding like him," she said, flushing slightly. "I really thought they were cute."

"Cute," he repeated. What a disgusting word! Potions and cute did not go together. However, it was...endearing in a way that she would have more knickers designed for her own amusement. These favored him and his potions instead of Potter and his ruddy snakes. He stepped away from her, pointing his wand at his throat. "How is this?" he asked, once again speaking in his own voice.

"Fucking sexy," she said, pulling him back to her for another scorching kiss. He allowed her to begin unbuttoning his shirt and trousers while his hands expertly caressed her body. It appeared that the only part of her body that she had charmed last week had been her breasts, not that it mattered now. She was enticing nonetheless. Her robes hid her lovely form very well. Blasted clothing! He pulled away to unbutton his cuffs, but instead, he impatiently grabbed his wand to charm his clothes away, save his underpants.

It was Hermione that raised an eyebrow this time. "I remembered that you said you were a Gryffindor," he murmured by way of explanation. His underpants had been something he'd debated on all day, and he'd finally decided to do something nice for the woman he was tricking. He would wear her wretched old house's colors. It had been easy to change the color from black to crimson. The silver threading had been a bit tricky, but he'd been able to switch it to gold in the end. "Forget our underwear, Miss Granger. I want to be inside of you. Any objections?" He waved his wand, and they were both left naked.

"No," she said quietly, stepping into his arms. He picked her up easily and made his way to the bed. Once he laid her down, she said, "Darach, maybe we sh..."

"Let me be whomever you'd like. Call me Severus," he instructed. He crawled over her slowly and bent his head down to whisper in her ear. "I'm going to have you twice tonight, Miss Granger. Are you willing?"

"Yes," she whispered back.

"Excellent," he said seductively. "I aim to please." With that said, his tongue snaked out to lave her earlobe. She whimpered and twitched under him just the way he liked it. He nibbled, licked, and sucked his way down to her collarbone, her chest, each breast, her stomach, her thighs, and then to her treasure. No. His treasure. All of her belonged to him. His fingers had already been working to loosen her, and his little witch was already wet for him. He needed only to slide in to have her, but he wanted to show her pleasure. For some reason, it was very important that he make her fantasies come true. He decided to play the part of the professor for a bit.

Laving at her crux until she began arching into his mouth and pushing him through his hair, he brought her near climax before pulling away. "Tell me, Miss Granger. What is the most important part of a Billywig as a Potion ingredient?" His tone was the exact one that he used with his students in class.

"Wh-what?" she asked, stunned.

"Tsk. Tsk. Five points from Gryffindor, Miss Granger. Need I repeat myself again?" he asked, sneering slightly.

"Their stingers," she answered finally, panting slightly.

"Finally," he scoffed. "I should take more points for having to think about it. I would have expected more from our resident know...er...cleverest witch of the age." Shit! He'd almost called her a know-it-all. That would not have bode well.

She smiled. "You do him so well."

He nodded and grinned evilly, going back to her folds. As in their previous meeting, she was nicely clipped and partially shaved. It was quite pleasing. He wondered idly if he should perhaps groom his own pubic area? It seemed so much neater. He mentally shrugged the thoughts away as he inhaled her scent. She had sprayed that blasted perfume on the lower part of her body as well. He loved the smell, but he was a bit disappointed. He wanted to smell and taste her natural scents and juices. She had no taste as last week. Undoubtedly, she had used another cleansing charm on herself.

Next time he would tell her to not use one.*NEXT TIME?* This would likely be it. There would be no next time. For Darach and certainly never for him. Would he want to continue this? Yes, he would, if it would remain this way. It wouldn't do for her to know that he was this fake gigolo. "Don't stop!" She screamed. Her sensual plea and the tone of her needy voice allowed her to come to full climax this time. He'd intended to pull away again, but he didn't want to be cruel. Besides, his cock was aching with hardness and needed to be satiated quickly. "Severus," she hissed in a whisper as she came down.

He growled before kissing those lips that had called out to him. Good Lord! What was she doing to him? He had hoped she would call to him, and his heart leapt when she had. Severus had longed to hear her lips utter his given name again. He shook himself mentally. *This was no way to act. Not towards her. Not for her. Potter's groupie.* Right then. He slid a hand down to her succulence and spread it over his erection to lubricate himself. Severus moved over her to position himself. "Are you ready for me?" he asked quietly. She nodded jerkily. "Open your eyes," he instructed.

"No, I want to pretend that you are him. I want to keep my eyes closed so that I can imagine his hands and mouth upon me. His body becoming one with mine. Just let me hear you and feel you," she said hoarsely.

"As you wish," he said silkily. No woman had ever said such a thing to him or about him. Why her? Why him? What did she really want? Did she feel more than she had admitted? Would that make a difference in the way he saw her? No, he thought sadly. *I could never approach her as myself.* This was likely just some act anyway. Sod it. He had other things to be getting on to. He found her opening and began to slowly inch in. He saw Hermione bite her lip and suck in a sharp breath. She was holding it as he moved in.

Severus pulled back slightly, noting the smoothness of his stroke, thanks to her extreme wetness. He pushed all the way in, deeply, groaning as he did so. He felt, as before, like he had found his way home. She released the breath in a rush of whimpers, and her legs automatically found their way to fit snugly around his back. He began moving within her and dared not close his eyes. He kept his eyes trained on her face, her closed lids, and her mouth. He didn't want to miss it if she looked at him. Her expression changed from semi discomfort to open enjoyment.

He could feel her breasts crushing against his body as he moved in deep, rapid successions. The little minx had learned his strokes and moved with him, pulling back and pushing forward as he did. She was squeezing him internally with her already tight encasement. Severus wouldn't be able to take much more of this. He began to grunt with each slam into her body. "Don't stop," she said softly. "Come for me. Call me Hermione."

"Yes," he agreed and pounded into her relentlessly. He could feel her begin to convulse inwardly as she squeezed his cock through her climax. She bucked against him wildly, clawed at his back, and called out for him again. This was his undoing. A few final thrusts saw his release. "Ungh. Yes. Hermione. Goddess. You feel so right."

"I know," she whispered, eyes still closed. She pulled his sweaty body to lay flush on top of hers. "Stay for now. Please."

He kissed her lips and pressed his forehead to hers. "Miss Granger? Hermione?" Hell, what should he call her? She opened her eyes. "You are brilliant."

"You too, Severus," she said softly, kissing his lips. "Sorry, Darach. It's just so easy to think of it as being him here with me."

"How long have you wanted him?" he asked, nearly a half an hour later. They now lay spooning under the light duvet. "It can't be just for the last couple of days."

She sighed. "You are right. I didn't want you to know the truth about my infatuation, I suppose." She turned to face him, placing her cheek against his chest. He tightened his hold on her. "Three years. Since the end of my last year at school. It's why I never really slept with anyone before now. They just wouldn't compare."

"Except your snake friend."

"Well, yes and no. I really didn't want to be with him." She sighed softly. "Those underwear really weren't for a Parselmouth to enjoy. They were made for the Head of Slytherin and his snakes. If one was to whisper his name and title, they would unclasp. It's him that I fancy."

"Why?" he asked incredulously.

"Oh, different reasons. I used to worry about him. He had grown quite thin, rarely ate at meals, and I doubted he slept much, being a spy for us. He would go out nearly each day to put himself at risk out of loyalty to our headmaster. For us all actually." She licked one of his flat nipples languidly before continuing. "My worry turned into affection. It was only then that I noticed more than his bravery. His eyes are black. It's like you can look into them and fall into nothingness. It's scary and exciting at the same time. His hair, though a bit oily, frames his face handsomely. I'm not sure if he styles it himself, but it's of perfect length and shape."

Bravery? Well, hell yes. He was brave, and it's about damn time one of the members of the Golden Trio admit it. So, she did know how much he'd sacrificed for them, and she even went as far as to appreciate it. Why? His eyes narrowed slightly. He'd never been nice to her. Ever. Even now that they were colleagues, he made sure to project a surly attitude towards her. *She worried about me, and her worry turned to affection.* His eyes were scary and exciting? His hair framed his face handsomely? What the fuck was all this? "Hermione, is he what you would consider a friend? Does he know?" Hahahahaha! He would find out the answer to all of his questions.

"I could never approach him. He doesn't like me much. It would be likely that he would be suspicious of my motives and cast me aside. Well that, and he also hates my best friend. He's not a friend to me. He's quite hateful at times, but you have given me a great fantasy. I don't pretend to think that things will ever change, and I am afraid this will have to be enough, until I find another lover to enchant me as he has for the last three years."

"Do you *love* him?" he asked incredulously. He hoped not. He might actually feel a little guilty about it.

"Of course not," she said immediately. "I don't know him well enough to love him. Not really love him. But, he does venture into my thoughts all the time. I wonder if he's eating enough, sleeping enough, seeing any women, what it would be like to kiss him, to make love to him, and how it would sound for him to call my name out." She kissed his chest lightly. "Thank you for giving that to me. I love the thought of loving him, but no, I can't say that I am in love with him. I would never set myself up for such a fall."

He had to get out of here. He needed to think about this. Severus suddenly felt some sort of...guilt wash over him. He'd taken advantage of her. Twice now. It was wrong. He moved to get away from her limbs and body. "I have to go."

"No, please don't. Not yet," she pleaded, trying to hold him to her.

"I just...I have to think about this, Hermione. Let me go," he pleaded. She bit her lip and nodded. He moved away from the bed and began to summon his clothes to him. "It's not you," he said quietly. "It's me."

"What have you to think about? Did I hurt your feelings by talking about another man to you?" she asked softly.

"No. Yes. That's it. I feel as though I have stolen something from you." He quickly cleaned himself and used magic to put his clothes on. "I'm sorry."

Just as he reached the door, she said, "Wait!" He paused, but he didn't look back. "Your galleons are on my dresser."

"Keep them, Hermione. Consider your words as payment enough." With that said, he swept out of her room. On the other side of her door, he leaned back against the frame. What had he done? He felt...horrible. The poor girl...no! She had paid a man to deflower her. That was not his fault. If he hadn't taken Rolanda up on her idea, she would have said those things to a stranger. A stranger that may not have taken care to treat her as she deserved to be treated for her first couple of sessions in the ways of love. As he began to stride off, he saw the door across the way creep open just a bit. He heard Rolanda's voice.

Severus smirked to himself. She was carrying on wildly. "Must have found a bloke or chit to spend the night with her," he mused aloud. He took two steps and stopped. Potter. Harry Bloody Fucking Potter was in there with her. He listened to what they were saying, quietly moving closer.

"I'll say," Rolanda laughed. "Been on about him for a long time. Hope she's enjoying it."

Harry laughed. "After he had her last time, she never stopped smiling. I'd say the bastard knows what he's doing all right."

Severus' brow furrowed. What was Potter doing here? Wasn't Hermione and Rolanda supposed to be keeping away from him? Potter knew about the gigolo? What the bloody hell was going on around here?

Rolanda said, "You're telling me. All she says was that he was bloody brilliant. Sort of made me wonder about it as well. I told Severus that I needed some Polyjuice Potion, but I didn't say for what. I intended to make myself into him to have a go at Hermione if she'd be game, but I might turn myself into Hermione and have a go with Severus."

The pair laughed loudly. Potter said, "I just hate that we had to stage all of this to get him to sleep with her. I've told her over and over to find someone worthy, but she keeps on with her Snape this and Snape that. Fuck, I don't care if he looks a bit tired."

They knew. The lot of them! They all knew. Hermione knew he was not Darach. Rolanda and Potter had been in on it. They were now sitting around and laughing about it. Hermione had lied to him. Why had she said all of those things to him? He'd felt guilty for no reason! Something he'd not felt before about anything, and he'd let her pretty, fake words touch him. He pulled his wand and made his way back to her room. He put a few cloaking charms on his person to keep his presence undetected. She wouldn't hear or see him approach her. He opened the door and made his way to her bed. She was hugging his pillow and tears were gliding along her cheeks.

He jerked his extended wand away. Bloody hell. He'd been about to hex her. Why was she crying? Severus could feel the rage flowing through his body, and he wanted to lash out at her. Make her hurt for playing him for a fool, but something was keeping him from doing so. The girl in the bed below him inhaled the scent of the pillow. "It still smells like you. I'm so sorry, Severus." He backed away. She didn't know that he was here. There was no reason for her to lie now. She might have been telling the truth. As if in answer to his inner queries, she whispered, "I do love you. I just couldn't really let you know."

That did it. He had to leave again. He no longer felt guilty, but he felt...compassion. Something definitely foreign. Oh, he'd have his revenge. He would not let this lie for long. There were three people he would seek his vengeance on, and it would be sweet. He knew exactly what to do with Rolanda and with Potter. He left Hermione's room for the second time that night. Oddly enough, the door across the hall clicked shut quietly. A look in the hallway told him that he was alone. He thought he saw the back end of a cat go around the corner. Great! He never did like sleeping or eating here. Some of the people that came through were nothing more than riffraff, and they just let their pets wander about to wreak havoc on whatever they chose to.

Severus Apparated to Knockturn Alley. He had a score to settle. He would settle two scores the next day: Potter and Granger. Rolanda would get her comeuppance as soon as she tried the Polyjuice Potion that he'd begun to brew for her. The witch! She'll never trust him again, and she will learn her lesson about double-crossing him.

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

Harry made his way out to the Quidditch Pitch for his Sunday morning flight. The air was crisp and fresh, and the slight breeze blew through his untidy hair. A day such as this made him happy to be alive. Surprisingly, he had no hangover from the binge the night before. He'd passed out on Rolanda's couch in her room at some point. When they awoke, Hermione was gone. He hadn't seen her since but shrugged it off to needing some rest. *I guess old Snape really let her have it!* He chuckled to himself and straddled his broom.

When he tried to lift off, nothing happened. He tried to get off of his broom, but he couldn't. "What the bloody hell?"

"Oi, Potter. Fancy meeting you here," a drawling voice said.

"Malfoy? What are you doing here?" Harry asked. It had been a long while since he'd seen Draco. The last he'd heard was that Draco was traveling abroad.

"Well, I've come to see you of course." The arrogant blonde wizard pulled out his wand and hovered Harry off to a group of trees. "How does it feel to be stuck on your broom like that?" he asked, sniggering.

"You've done this? Why?" Harry couldn't get off, nor could he remove his hands. He was literally stuck to his broom. Luckily though, he was able to keep his balance, or he might flip over.

"You know why," Draco said with a smirk. "Missed me, did you? Been thinking about me, eh? Wishing you could have a look at me naked?"

"What? You're mental," Harry said, starting to laugh.

"Very good, Potter," Draco smirked. To Harry's surprise, he opened his robes slightly to point to an impressive bulge. "Just the thought of shoving something up your willing, tight ars-"

"Oi! What the fuck?" Harry asked, beginning to panic. Malfoy was serious. Draco Malfoy wanted to have sex with him! Bloody hell.

"Well, you told me to catch you just like this and pretend to be the bad guy. You would pretend to not want me, but you really look afraid, Harry." Draco stepped closer. "Don't worry. I'll be gentle. It's all in the lubrication and movement."

"Like bloody hell you will! Geroff!" Harry said, losing his balance. He flipped over upside down on the broom. His robes flying over his head, leaving his arse exposed. Was that a zipper he heard? "Malfoy, I didn't send you anything, I swear!" All it would take was a few magical maneuvers, and Draco would have him right where he wanted him. Harry decided to plead with his long time nemesis turned friend. "Really, Draco. I swear. Let me up."

To his surprise, he dropped to the ground with a loud thud. "What do you mean? Didn't you send this?" Harry looked up in time to see the blonde pull out a parchment. "Have a read." He shoved it at Harry.

*Dear Draco,*

*I've been doing some thinking, and I remembered a comment that you made sarcastically. It was after Ron had said something stupid. You laughed and said, "Well, fuck me flying! The boy is a genius."*

*Wouldn't it be interesting to try it out? You are my closest friend, of sorts, that goes on either side of the pitch, so I am requesting that we try this out. If you are interested, I will be at the Quidditch Pitch tomorrow morning for my Sunday ride. Why don't you come on down?*

*You could be the bad guy while I maintain the pretense of the trapped good guy. I have always wished to see you naked, and I have been missing you. If you don't want to come, then don't, and please don't tell anyone about this. Either way, I'll still be on my broom tomorrow morning. You can stick it to me or not. Your choice.*

*Friends and hopefully more,*

*Harry*

Harry looked up at Draco in shock. "I did not write this, Draco. I swear."

"Of course you did," he said huffily, throwing his robe to the ground. "Er...maybe we should go into the forest a bit," he suggested.

"No. I don't want to do this," he said. "Really. I didn't send this, Draco. Someone is playing a foul ruddy trick on us."

Draco zipped his trousers and buckled them back up. "You know, Harry, I don't appreciate you making me come out here. That is your seal on the parchment. Don't act like you didn't send it!"

Harry looked down at the broken seal. "No, it's not. Look. Those snakes are upside down! The Phoenix beak is all wrong."

Draco shrugged on his robes as he looked. "Someone was just fucking with me then? That is horrible. I'm embarrassed. I thought you really wanted... Forget it."

"Wait! Draco!" Harry called after the blonde, but his friend kept going towards the castle. "Stop!"

Finally, he turned around. "Harry, if I had put the Silencing Charm on you as I had planned, I would have thought that your attempts to fight me off were part of the plan. I would have...attacked you. I don't like being the arse of someone's joke."

Harry nodded agreement. "Hell, me either. I'm really sorry."

"So am I," Draco said. "I'll see you later."

Harry watched him leave. Damn! Who the hell would do such a thing? It had to be someone that knew him well. Someone that knew Draco well also. Ruddy practical jokers! Hell, if he hadn't known better, he'd say it was the job of a Weasley! He'd never play another joke on anyone again. That was just too scary. Harry paused. Snape. Had Snape found out about his part in their prank? Nah. Couldn't be. Regardless, he wanted no part of Rolanda's schemes any longer. It was no fun being the arse of someone's joke.

Draco made his way to the castle. He moved up to the second floor, stepped into an empty classroom, warded the door, and began to transfigure his clothing. He unzipped his trousers and pulled out the thick, penis-shaped wedge of wood. Hahahahaha! Harry's face had been priceless! He actually thought that Draco Malfoy had a hard on for him. That was hilarious. His body began twitching and tingling. He put a hand in front of him to watch the transformation. The fingers lengthened and filled out as his true form returned. He'd cut it close.

After the transformation was complete, Draco Malfoy had gone, and Severus Snape had returned. That Polyjuice Potion that he'd bought from Knockturn Alley had really come in handy. It was priceless. Hopefully, Potter would learn his lesson from this. Maybe he wouldn't play a joke on anyone else in the near future. He did wish, however, that he could be a fly on the wall when the pair did meet again. Young Malfoy would have no idea what he was talking about. Hahahahaha!

Now, it was time to pay a visit to his witch that claimed to fancy him. She wanted to know how it felt to be with Severus Snape. He would bloody well show her. He'd been up nearly the entire night thinking about everything that she'd said, and he'd been trying to search his soul. Could he care for her? Would he bother? Was she worth it? He would never wear his heart on his sleeve. NEVER. "Fancies herself to be in love with me, does she? Well, let's just show her the real Severus Snape."

He stalked toward her chambers and instructed her portrait to let her know that he wished to visit. A few moments later, a tousled headed Hermione appeared behind the portrait. "Se...Professor Snape. What brings you to my chambers?" she asked, shocked to see him there.

"May I come in, Miss Granger?" he asked formally.

"Of course," she said, moving aside to allow him access. Once they were in her living area, he spun around on her quickly. She blinked in surprise. "What is it, sir?"

"You can drop the act, Hermione," he said coldly, crossing his arms in front of him. "Did you think that I wouldn't figure out that you knew it was me? I'm not as idiotic as you believed me to be." He smirked as she took a step back. "I must admit that I was fooled for a little while, but as I thought about it, I assumed that you knew. Were you trying to give me a subtle hint? Did Rolanda tell you right away? Was it something you had planned?"

"Severus, I just wanted to-"

"Yes, yes. You wanted to see what it would be like to have sex with Severus Snape, to have him call out your name when you brought him to a climax! I remember well." He stepped closer. "Do you still wish to know?" he asked quietly, eyes glinting.

"I...yes," she said.

He smirked triumphantly and pulled his wand from its sheath. "Where is your bedroom?"

"Just there," she said, nodding to a door behind her.

"Go on," he instructed. He would give her only one more chance to back out of this before he took her like Severus Snape would take her. Not some weak Darach bloke! He followed her to her room, enjoying the sway of her hips beneath her sheer nightgown. Once inside, he whispered, "Are you sure?"

"Yes."

He nodded, and with a few waves of his wand, they were nearly completely undressed. She had on another pair of knickers with silver snakes for clasps. The coloring was a horrible pink. "Severus Snape, Potions Master of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry." To his amazement, the snake unclamped, and the knickers fell to the floor. She hadn't been lying about that. He charmed away his boxer shorts, picked her up, and plopped her down onto the bed.

Instead of bringing his lips down to kiss hers, he opted to seduce her responses through ravishing her neck and breasts. She still faintly smelled of her perfume, and it excited him. She was his again. She wanted to be his. Severus Snape's lover. Nobody else had been with her before him or since him. Or, would be again? He had no idea and would not dwell on that. Not now. "Oh, yes," she whimpered, moving against him. His fingers delved into her and slid over her nub expertly, applying a fair amount of pressure.

"Do you like that?"

"Yes."

"Tell me."

"I like it. Don't stop. Please, don't stop."

"As you wish," he said, quickening his strokes and caresses, bringing his lips to press against hers for only a moment. "There you go. Come for me, Hermione."

"I will. I am. Severus! Oh my God, don't stop!" she arched wildly against his hand and fingers. "Severus." After her tremors passed, he rubbed his cock along her folds to lubricate himself. He deftly flipped her over. "What are you doing?"

He smacked her bottom lightly. "Face down, Hermione. Bring this up for me," he said, pulling her waist up. He spread her knees further with one of his knees before positioning himself to take her in his favorite position. He growled as he slid into her. "You little minx. Do you not realize how good you feel?" Without waiting for any response, he began pounding into her tender flesh to find his own release. He leaned over to steady himself with one hand while the other found one of her breasts. He nipped and suckled her shoulder and back. As he felt his climax approaching, he moved back up and guided her hips to meet his thrusts. "Ungh," he groaned with his final thrust. "Hermione!"

They collapsed in a heap on her bed. After he was able to breathe steadily, he moved away from her. "That, Hermione, is what it feels like to bed me and have me call out your name. I hope your fantasies have been fulfilled. It's been quite entertaining. I thank you." He made his way to his clothes and began to clean himself off.

"You're just going to leave me?" she asked in disbelief. Who would leave after such intensely sensual sex?

"Yes. Think about what it is you want, and think about what it is that I am able to give you. My heart isn't something I give lightly, and I can boast that nobody has ever owned it. Can you live that way? Do you want to rut with me like this often? Dare you try to get to know me, the hateful bastard?" he asked, part of him hoped that she would say yes.

"You tried to bed me without me knowing it. How does that make you better?" she asked, rising from the bed to grab her own wand. She cleaned herself and summoned her gown to her.

"You were a pawn in a little game, Hermione," he spat. "How does that make you feel?"

"Horrible, I suppose, but I knew that already. I don't care."

"But, you do care. Is that not what you told me last night?" he asked, buttoning his robes.

"I do."

"Then this," he gestured to himself, "is whom you care about. Think on that. You know where my chambers are should you want to talk. Good day, Miss Granger." Severus stormed out of her chambers smiling, leaving Hermione standing there with her mouth open. He knew it was cold, but he had to do it. If she truly fancied him, then they needed this to happen to clear the air. There would be no false pretenses between them. He wasn't a lovable, pleasant man. It was best that she realized that now before she got hurt. "Two down, and one to go," he said aloud, thinking of Rolanda's punishment.

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

Minerva shook her head sadly as Severus walked past the spot that she and Albus were hiding behind. "Do you see, Albus? We shouldn't have meddled in their affairs!"

"No, my dear. We've done the right thing. He wants her, and that is his way of telling her. I'm sure she will see it before all is said and done," Albus said wisely.

"I still say that I shouldn't have charmed that door to open for him to hear the two. You saw how he reacted! When you followed him into Hermione's room, you said he nearly hexed her," Minerva said, clearly distraught.

"But, he didn't, and I wouldn't have allowed it. You know that. I think Hermione has a lot to think about, don't you?"

"Yes, and you were right to set up Severus to think that I was concerned about some trickery that Rolanda was up to."

"Exactly right. Now, he will come to you for a chat about it. You can give him advice in Hermione's favor. I shall do the same if he comes to me," Albus said happily. "Should Hermione seek out your advice, give her some in Severus' favor."

"I shall. I just don't like this eavesdropping, manipulating, and snooping about. I hate to meddle with their lives just because we think it's a good thing," she said tartly.

"My dear, Minerva, if I didn't meddle in their lives, what else would they call me? I couldn't be known as a non-meddling, old fool, now could I?" Albus' eyes twinkled

brightly. It was about time that Severus finally saw the way Hermione looked at him. He needed her in his life whether he would admit it or not.

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

**A/N:** Sorry this second bit took so long to get up. I hope you have enjoyed the second part to my second gigolo challenge answer. Please review and thanks for reading. I'm happy to entertain. I think the story does well to end here, but I am a crowd pleaser. Also, a thanks to June W for the idea about her knickers unclasping for Severus with only a few words.

What would you like? This is sort of a happy ending. You can assume it to be either way you'd like. Let me know. I'll do whatever you like. Want some more mean Severus? Want to see what happens to Rolanda? Want our lovers to fall in love?

## Retribution!

Chapter 3 of 15

Hermione and Seveus decide on what to do next. Severus plots against Rolanda and Harry.

**Disclaimer:** See Previous chapters

**A big thanks to my beta, Charmed Nay!**

\*\*\*\*\* SS \*\*\*\*\* HG \*\*\*\*\*

*He left. He really left!* Hermione stared at the door to her bedchamber for a long time. She was simply shocked. How could he just leave after this? Didn't he want to talk about what she'd done to him? What he'd done to her? She'd thought that since things were suddenly out in the open, he would stay for a while. He hadn't even kissed her this time. He did seem like a different man.

When he was pretending to be Darach, he seemed more affectionate. Not overly, but just enough to please her. Their second coupling had been a better experience than their first. She'd been so happy after he'd left her the night before. The first thing she'd thought about when she awoke was Severus. She'd wondered how he'd taken the words she'd said. Would he be angry? Would he avoid her? Would he try to approach her as himself? She'd come back to the castle and felt like lying about. It had been a surprise to see him standing at her door. For a few brief moments, she'd dared to dream that he had come to tell her that he was interested in her.

Unfortunately, he had another agenda. He'd come to approach her as himself all right, but the Severus that had made love...er...had sex with her was not the same man from her two previous encounters. He hadn't even looked at her when they'd had sex. He had made her turn over! What the bloody hell was that all about? Although it was an interesting position, she had wanted to look into the eyes and face of Severus Snape as he slid into her.

How had he guessed about her deception? She should warn Rolanda about his figuring things out. What would he do to Ro? *Thank God he doesn't know Harry is involved!* Hermione smiled softly. "I've shagged with Severus Snape! Three times!" She felt giddy. It was in the open. Surely they would move forward. He was probably just furious about being tricked when he thought he was doing the tricking. Well, he'd taught her his lesson. He did say that she could go to his chambers if she wanted to talk, after she'd thought about whom she fancied.

The true Snape. Blast! Would he always be so abrupt? So cold? No. Things would change eventually. He might be able to care for her one day. How could she face him though? What if she was wrong? What if he detested her? His words came back to slap her in the face. *My heart isn't something I give lightly, and I can boast that nobody has ever owned it. Can you live that way? Do you want to rut with me like this often?* Things would never change, would they? He would be so bent on making sure that she never broke through his outer layers that she wouldn't have a chance to really get to know him.

How did he feel about bedding her then? *You were a pawn in a little game, Hermione.* He would never care about her. She'd really messed things up. Apparently, she was good enough to have sex with, but she wasn't good enough for other things. What had she done? It was fine when he thought he was fooling her, but now that he knows that she was dishonest... "Damn it," she said, plopping down on her bed. "What have I done? I've driven away someone that might have looked my way one day." Who was she kidding? He'd never looked her way, and the only reason he had this time was because he thought he was pulling one over on Harry. A commotion in her living area brought her out of her thoughts. Her painting was calling to her, saying she had a visitor.

She opened the portrait hole, and her hopes were dashed. It was Minerva. "Good morning, Minerva. What brings you by so early?"

"Why are you crying?" Minerva asked, looking horrified. "Hermione? What's he done to you?"

"Crying?" Hermione turned to look into the mirror. Bloody hell! She had been crying. "Oh, Minerva, really. I'm just...hang on! What's she done to me? What are you talking about?"

"Well, if you must know, Albus and I were just around the corner, and we saw Severus stalking away from here. I assumed that you'd had an argument, and from the look of your face, I would say so," Minerva said, putting a hand on her shoulder. "What's happened?"

Hermione sighed. What could she tell her? This was her mentor! She would be disappointed if she knew what she'd done. "It's complicated. The only thing I can say is that we've had a little disagreement."

Minerva smiled softly. "Hermione, I have to be honest with you. I overheard Rolanda and Harry talking. Are you and Severus an item?"

"No," she said softly, wiping new tears from her face. "I do fancy him, but he doesn't reciprocate my feelings. I think he wouldn't mind a certain type of relationship, but it's not the kind I would like. Do you understand?"

"I see," said Minerva curtly. She was going to throttle Albus as soon as she saw him next! Hermione was a mess! Severus had been a right bastard to her! She should have never gotten herself involved! But, she had. She had no choice but to follow through. They could be happy if they gave it some time. "Hermione, sit with me. I want to talk to you about Severus for a moment."

"All right."

"Severus has always been a private man. I've seen the way you look at him at times, and, if I'm not mistaken, I have caught him looking at you as well. I think it's just hard

for him to really trust someone. Look how he's spent his entire adult life. It's in his nature to always look for deception." She smiled. "Give him some time. I don't want you to get hurt, but there is always hope. Maybe stay away a few days. If he comes to you, then you'll know he is interested."

"Don't worry. I'm a bit embarrassed to go anywhere near him for a while after what we...er..." She blushed profusely.

Minerva nodded. "It's all right. You are a woman, Hermione. I've been in your shoes before. All you can do is try. If he doesn't come around, then it's his loss. I just think you should give it some time. Don't put any pressure on him."

"I don't plan to pressure him. Trust me. I won't go near him, but you are right. Maybe I should wait him out and let him come to me, if ever." Hermione took Minerva's hand. "Thanks for this talk. I only wish that he didn't intimidate me so much."

"You've never been intimidated by anything."

"Well, now I am. When I try to talk to him, just one look sends me away. Blast! I have to go. I promised to meet Ginny in London today!" Hermione smiled at Minerva's concerned expression. "I'll be fine. I will give him some time. If he doesn't come around, well, then he just doesn't."

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

"Albus, what are you doing wondering about the dungeons this early on a Sunday morning?" Severus asked snidely. "I was about to take a shower."

"I can see that I interrupted," Albus said, eyes twinkling. "I think your bathrobe gave it away. Go on. I'll wait here and have a read."

"Is it something important?" Severus asked, sitting down. Surely he wouldn't be so insistent about staying if it wouldn't be.

"Severus, I was in the corridor earlier, and I saw you leaving Hermione's chambers," he said slyly. "It's not my concern really, but--"

"You're right. It's not," Severus said brusquely.

"However, when I see a staff member in tears, I do believe it is my job to make sure things run smoothly here," Albus lied. He hadn't seen her in tears, but from what he'd sensed, she had been. "What's happened?"

"Albus, Miss Granger and I had private matters that we needed to discuss. I would appreciate it if you didn't meddle in my affairs," Severus said, feeling as if he private life had been invaded again.

Albus looked at his young friend. Why couldn't he see her for what she was? She could be a good thing for him if he would just let her in. "Had I known that you and Hermione were an item, I would have never questioned you about Rolanda. I apologize for that. It makes sense that you would choose someone like Hermione. I've noticed the way she's been looking at you for a long time now."

"Don't go getting ahead of yourself, old man," Severus said. "We are not an item. We are simply two people that had something to discuss. Now, if you would excuse me, I should like to take a shower."

"All right, Severus, if you say so," he said disappointedly. Minerva wouldn't like this. Hopefully things went better with Hermione. "I simply hope that you won't let something that could be great pass you by. Until later."

Severus watched his friend leave through narrowed eyes. Crying in the corridor, eh? He smirked and made his way to his shower. It served her right. She should never have tried to trick him. *But, you tried to trick her as well, Severus.* Who cares? They had both gotten what they wanted. While he was angry at the deception from her, it angered him more that Rolanda and Potter knew he'd been tricked. He chuckled, remembering the brat's scared eyes as 'Draco' began descending upon him. Rolanda was next. She would get hers. Potter had his payback. Hermione...damn it! Granger had her payback. Things would be grand. He couldn't wait to see her at the noon meal. Would she dare show her face? Not likely. She would probably wait until the evening meal before daring to face him.

When he'd answered the door for Albus, he'd half expected it to be her standing there. He had almost hoped she'd come to beg forgiveness and agree to continue what they'd started on an occasional basis. He could do with a willing woman nearby and available for bedding. He stepped into the spray of warm water and wondered how she would look with her hair plastered to her face, body wet from the water, and her little voice whimpering from his ministrations.

A sudden surge of emotion flowed through his thoughts. *She loves you.* He smirked. "She loves some fantasy version of how she thinks me to be. She can't love *me*, as she doesn't truly know me." He'd never wanted a relationship anyway. Never thought about one actually. Willing women were easy to come by when he needed one. Having one so young, so responsive, and so close would be a change. An interesting change. If she decided to continual sexual relations, he'd be sure to have her as often as possible.

Albus' words came back to haunt him. *I simply hope that you won't let something that could be great pass you by.* What was so great about being in a relationship? Why pretend to be caring and nice when it was far from who he really was? He liked being alone. He liked never having to answer to anyone. He'd learnt long ago that the only person one could depend on was himself. If he would *care*, he would eventually only get hurt. He saw it all around him with everyone else.

She cried for you. She felt guilty. She wants you. "Shut up," he growled, plunging his head under the spray as if to drown the offending thoughts. Whatever happened, happened. He would not go to her.

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

### THREE DAYS LATER

Where the bloody hell had she been? She hadn't been to one meal, and he hadn't caught one glimpse of her since he'd left her chambers. Did she hate him? Severus smirked. So much for loving him. He knew it! Ha! This was why he didn't put trust in people. Most never really meant what they said. If she truly loved him, she would have come down to his chambers. He'd left the invitation wide open. He was curious as to why she'd been avoiding him. Hate? Regret? Embarrassment? There was only one way to find out. But, how could he go about it without appearing to care? "Which I don't, of course," he hissed to himself. Caring was a weakness. He was not weak. What excuse could he find? The book! Of course! The bloody book that he'd taken from the library.

He snatched up the book and made his way to the library. It would be time to close it down in approximately ten minutes. He would slip in undetected, allow her to run the brats out, lock the door, and then he would approach her. Severus wondered what all she'd told Rolanda and Potter. Rolanda acted as if nothing was amiss. She'd even gone as far as to question the Polyjuice Potion. Bitch. Traitor. She'd get hers. He entered the library and made his way to a stack of books to his left. She hadn't noticed him, as she was too busy herding up a few stray students. Before long, they were gone, and she warded the doors. He stepped out and followed her to the counter where she placed a stack of books.

"Good evening, Miss Granger," he said silkily. She jumped but didn't turn around. He placed one hand on the counter to the left of her while he placed his book on the counter to the right of her, leaving her pinned between the counter and his body. Leaning forward, he whispered in her ear, "I've come to return a book. I do hope there is no penalty for keeping it for as long as I have."

He relished her reaction. She'd shivered slightly when his hot breath blew against her ear. He could see her hands begin to shake and knew that he still had an effect on her. "N-no, you've not had it long at all. It's fine." She tried to speak confidently, but he'd caught the slight stammer. She was nervous.

"Well, I thank you," he said softly, rubbing his nose along her hairline, pressing his body into hers. She stiffened slightly, and then, he felt her shift against him. "Where



have you been, Hermione?" he asked, sounding huskier than he'd intended.

"Busy," she said breathlessly.

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Did you not wish to see me, Hermione? Is that why you've been staying away at mealtimes?" he asked, resting his forehead on the back of her head in order to inhale her flower-scented hair. "Are you not interested in what I had to offer you?"

"Severus, I just couldn't face you yet." She swallowed. "Not knowing if you hate me for my deception. I was embarrassed."

"I don't hate you," he said, moving to bring his lips to her ear once more. "I desire you," he said seductively. He pressed his erection into the small of her back. "Do you feel that?" he asked in a whisper. A slight whimper was his only answer. "What do you expect, Hermione? Are you interested?"

"I am," she said after a moment.

"What do you expect? I've told you that we could never have anything else besides *this*," he said, grinding against her backside.

"I do," she said.

"Do what?"

"I do want you," she admitted, pushing back against him. She turned her face to kiss him, but he moved his mouth to her neck, twisting her around to face him. "Oh!"

Severus pulled her up to seat her on the edge of the counter, his lips never ending their quest to taste her cleavage. Her partially unbuttoned robe disappeared with a soft murmur and a flick of his wand. He tore open her blouse, sending buttons flying. No bra? What did he care? It was easier for him. His mouth found her breasts and began nuzzling each, licking circles around each hardened nipple before actually suckling on one.

"Oh, my God," she breathed.

"Yes, I am," he said arrogantly, hiking up her skirt around her waist. He raised an eyebrow. She had on a pair of black knickers with silver snakes. "Severus Snape, Potions Master of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry." When the knickers splayed open at his command, he felt a rush of power. He owned her, didn't he? He looked at her face and saw that her eyes were closed. "Look at me," he said, testing his power over her. Her eyes fluttered open. He could see her desire there, and he knew that she would be ready for him. Slipping one finger between her now parted legs into her body, he was able to feel her complete arousal. His wand had rolled away, down the counter, but that didn't stop him from quickly unfastening his trousers and releasing his hard cock.

Realizing that she was about to be had, her legs snaked around his back and pulled him closer. Their eyes had never wavered from each other. He moved his free hand down to guide himself to her opening. In one swift motion, he slammed completely into her. Her eyes widened and her hands immediately went to his shoulders to steady herself as she gasped at his invasion. "Severus," she whispered as he pulled back slowly. He slammed completely in again, maneuvering his body to better brace himself.

"Whom do you want?" he asked, still looking into her eyes.

"You. Oh," she said as he buried himself within her again. "Always you."

"You shall have me," he said silkily, moving closer to her face. He nearly kissed her, but realizing his folly, his lips found her shoulder and nipped at her flesh a few times. He would not kiss her. It was too intimate. Severus Snape would not show her a weakness. He was in control. She began arching into his strokes and attempting to move with him as his lips found her breasts again. "Yes," he hissed as he felt her legs began to tremble, and her insides began to tighten in odd spasms.

"Severus! Don't stop," she said with a moan. "I'm almost there."

Stop? He had no intention. His rhythm was his own as he arched back away from her to plunge in with rough, steady strokes. "You are mine," he growled, piercing her eyes with his dark gaze. "Mine." She smiled faintly before beginning to chant his name. He felt the heat of wetness burst around him just as his own climax had come for him. "Hermione," he whispered a moment later, resting his forehead against hers. "Thank you." He didn't pull away until her legs fell limply at his sides.

Hermione watched as he moved away to get his wand, clean himself, and fastened his trousers. That was it? He was leaving again? "Are you leaving?" she asked in disbelief. She noticed that he seemed annoyed with her question.

"I have some things to attend to, and I'm sure you need to finish up here," he said smoothly, casting a cleansing charm on her. She slid down from the counter and picked up her knickers to stuff them into her pocket. She repaired her own blouse before putting on her robe. He walked up to her and his lips quirked up slightly.

"I'll see you tomorrow. You need to start eating again," he said.

Touched that he cared, she smiled. "I've been eating alone or with Harry."

His look soured. "I shall pay you a visit in your chambers tomorrow evening about this time. Is that acceptable?"

She nodded. *Say something! Make him talk!* "Good night," she said quietly, standing on her toes to place a kiss on his cheek. He seemed startled for a moment but nodded nonetheless.

"Good night," he said, swiftly exiting the library. That went rather well. He did hope that he didn't seem too eager. Just being near her made him want to be inside of her. Perhaps this arrangement wasn't so bad after all. She was eager to please him, and that made him feel emotions he'd never felt before. A woman had been longing for him. Not just any woman either. A young, fair looking woman, that happened to be an excellent lover, wanted him. Just as he thought nothing could ruin his good mood, Potter stepped out to greet him.

"Snape," the boy spat. "What are you doing around here?"

"Potter," he said with disgust. "What I do and where I go is none of your concern. It would do well for you to remember that, boy."

"I don't like how you've treated Hermione. She told me that you stopped by the other morning and had a go at her for her trick. I think you're lucky she even looked twice at you," Potter said angrily. "Stay the fuck away from her if you can't treat her with respect."

"Respect, Potter?" Severus asked incredulously. "I only treat those worthy with respect. Plotting against me to get me into bed isn't a very noble deed, now is it? Tell me, Potter," he said quietly, stepping closer. "Did you partake in that trickery?"

The boy swallowed. "Just leave her alone, arse. You don't deserve her."

"I never claimed to," Severus said with a smirk, brushing past his pest. He paused a few feet away and sneered for a moment. "But, I shall not refuse what is freely given. Stay out of our business, Potter, or I shall have to let Draco know that you've regretted your hasty decision of turning him away."

Harry nearly went for his wand. If the man had stayed there any longer, he would have. The nerve of that bastard! What the bloody hell did Mione see in him? Greasy git!

Harry decided to visit Hermione another time. It was apparent that they'd just finished...! How disgusting! Rolanda would know what to do. "Ruddy bastard knows about Draco. That arse just had to go blab his mouth!"

Still fuming, he made his way to Rolanda's chambers. She grinned brightly when she saw that Harry was at her door. "We need to talk," he said quickly, moving into her room. "It's about Snape."

"What's he done now?" Rolanda asked. Damn! Those two were going to mess up her chances of getting her Polyjuice Potion if they kept bothering Snape. "Go on."

"He's shagging Hermione!" Harry ranted. "I just met up with him down the hall from the library! He was acting smug and as much as told me what he'd been up to. What can we do to stop this? It's going too far."

"Well, Harry, from what she said, they had a bit of a row because of some things she'd said. It's her fault, you know! He hasn't breathed a word to me, and he still intends to give me what I want. I say to you, lad, leave them be."

"You just care about your ruddy potion! What about Hermione? He's obviously using her. It's partly our fault. We shouldn't have gone along with this," he said, wishing things hadn't gone so far.

"It's what she wants, Harry. If he went to her tonight for a shag, who are we to stop it? She's obviously getting what she wants. Let them work out their own problems. Our meddling will only add to it," she said wisely. "I say we just mind our own business for now. If things get bad, well, then we step in. Fair enough?"

"Yes," he said grudgingly. "She is an adult. I just don't like that he doesn't appreciate her the way that he should. She's too good for him if you ask me."

"Well, I didn't ask you. Come on. Might as well have a match while you're here."

Harry nodded and followed the witch to the table near her fire. He would let Hermione make her own decision about Snape...for now, but if that bastard ended up hurting her, he'd have to deal with him.

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

ONE WEEK LATER

Severus smiled smugly at his reflection while he combed his hair. This past week had been most satisfying. He'd been up in her chambers nearly each night. If he felt the need to have her, he simply told her at the evening meal. Of course he didn't say it aloud where the other meddlers and Potter could hear, but she knew what he meant by a certain look and nod. It had been two nights since he'd had her, and he was in need. She'd been on his mind all day. He wanted her so badly he could almost taste her and feel her when he closed his eyes to conjure her image.

Their relationship was working out well. *Relationship?* He supposed it could be considered a mutual agreement instead of a relationship. They agreed to have sex on a regular basis with no further expectations. Severus frowned for a moment. She often tried to kiss him and hold him after they'd been satiated. He would pull away. It seemed harder to not kiss her. He'd slipped and kissed her when he was Darach. It hadn't really mattered then though because he wasn't really himself. If he held her for long, she would think she had something over him. That would never do. He fastened his robes and made his way to her chambers.

Hermione stepped out of the tub and looked at her clothing. Why bother putting on clothes? He'd only come in and spell them away. She decided to slip on a silky robe and leave her nightclothes for later. She went to her living area to await his arrival. Each time they joined, she felt like she gained a small part of him. Without realizing it, he would flash her a small smile or a possessive look, letting her know how much she meant to him. *You are nothing more than his whore.*

She pushed the thought away. She preferred to think that things would change. A piece of her heart was given to him each time she gave her body to him. He consumed her thoughts each day. Hermione wanted a future with him. If she patiently waited for him to realize that he wanted a real relationship, it would be worth it. The only thing that she hated was that he left her feeling slightly cold each time. Why could he never kiss her lips? Oh, he kissed her body *everywhere* else, but never would he even brush his lips to hers. Would it be too much to ask? Why couldn't he stay and cuddle with her as he had done the second night they'd been together?

She decided to ask him to stay tonight. She would not give up. Things could work out for them. She just needed to give him time. No pressure, just as Minerva suggested. He had come to her first, hadn't he? That alone meant that he truly was interested in her. *Only for your body, Hermione.* "Shut it, you," she told the ruddy voice. That nagging voice sounded suspiciously like Harry's. Poor Harry. He'd been eyeing her oddly lately, hoping to get her to talk about things. She didn't want to involve him any further. They'd done enough already. This was her life. Her decisions.

"He's here," the witch in her portrait sniffed.

"Thanks," Hermione said softly, moving to open the portrait. "Hi."

He nodded, taking in her appearance. "Your hair is damp."

"I can spell it dry," she offered.

"Leave it," he said, lifting her up to straddle his waist. She began kissing and nibbling on his neck. She had to express her affection somehow, and this was the one way that seemed acceptable to him. He seemed to enjoy when she explored his body. "Here," he said, standing her near her bed. He opened his robes to reveal nothing underneath.

Grinning mischievously, she opened her bathrobe. She heard the slight intake of breath as his gaze settled over her body. A moment later, he pounced on her, positioning over her immediately. "I should have come last night," he said before slipping into her. "Yes."

They frantically moved together until they found release. He lingered only a moment before he began to pull away. "Stay," she requested softly, touching his arm.

He paused to look at her. For a brief instant, she could see his longing to stay, but then his eyes darkened. "I must decline," he said. She watched as he cleaned himself, slipped on his robes, and walked to her door.

"Severus."

"Yes?"

"That's my password. Your name." She wished that he'd been facing her to gage his reaction, but he hadn't turned back to her.

"All right," he said, and he was gone.

She made her way to her bathroom and got back into the shower. She would ask him to stay until he relented. He couldn't push her away forever.

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

### ONE WEEK LATER

"Severus, would you have some time to come up to my quarters after you've finished eating?"

He spun around in his seat to glare at the woman. Vector! Was she still at it? "I have another engagement this evening," he said coolly, turning back to his plate.

"I will wait for you to be done. It doesn't really matter what hour you come," she said in a low, suggestive voice.

Severus noticed Hermione's narrowed eyes. She'd heard. Even Potter was watching with an irate glare. Damn! He was simply grateful that Rolanda wasn't present. She would have made a scene. "I really must decline. I do not know what time I shall be free. Surely you can say whatever you have to say right now." He raised an eyebrow at her silence. "No?"

"You know, Severus. I think you are lying to me." Vector's voice was quiet, but Hermione had still heard her.

She couldn't let that woman trick her man into going to her rooms. Hermione knew they'd shagged a while back, but she would be sure that nobody else would be with Severus again. In a bold move, she removed Vector's hand from its perch on Severus' shoulder. "I do believe he's told you that he is busy."

The outraged witch looked at Hermione incredulously. "What business is it of yours?"

Severus threw his napkin down and stood up. His voice was so low that both witches had trouble hearing him. "You will never make a scene in front of the students again. I have plans tonight. In fact, I will always have plans. Do not approach me again." He looked to Hermione. "I think we can leave now. It's nearly time to add an ingredient to the potion." Hermione nodded and followed him out of the hall without looking at anyone.

She knew that no students had actually heard or likely noticed anything, but he seemed annoyed at Vector's audacity. To her surprise, he didn't escort her to her own chambers, but he went straight to his. She knew where his chambers were, but she'd never been inside before. Hermione didn't have time to look around. Severus rounded on her as soon as they entered.

"What were you thinking?" he asked angrily.

She blinked in surprise. "W-what? She was touching you!"

"So?"

"So? Well, I didn't like it."

"You have no say in who touches me, Hermione! I think I can rebuff unwanted attentions on my own." He kicked over a nearby chair. She flinched slightly, and he felt a moment of guilt. "Why?" Her answer shocked him.

"Why? How dare you ask me why? Wouldn't you care if someone touched me?" she asked in disbelief. "You wouldn't, would you?"

He opened his mouth to answer and closed it. How would he feel if someone touched her? What could he say? He was not her...partner. They were merely lovers. "Whether or not I like it, you make your own decisions. I have no say in what you do. As such, you really have no say in what I do."

"I see," she said, feeling tears welling up. He really didn't care, did he? "I have to go."

"Do not leave," he commanded.

"I really need to," she said firmly. "I will talk to you later."

"Hermione, stop," he said, pushing her against the wall with his body. "Don't leave yet." His lips crushed hers roughly as she struggled against him. He felt her tears on his face, but he didn't care. She opened her mouth, stopped struggling, and began to kiss him back. He couldn't fathom why she would be crying at such an inopportune moment. The kiss was intense as he tried to possess her mouth with his. *You are kissing her like a weak fool! Stop! She will think that she has a right to tell you who to see and what to do.* He pulled away. What was he doing?

She looked him through half-opened eyes. "Severus?"

He stepped away and wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his robe. "We will not speak of this again," he said shortly. She nodded. He turned and left her standing there. Hermione couldn't believe what had happened! He'd kissed her! And, then he'd left. She fled his chambers quickly. She had never felt more used. He didn't care. He would let her leave with a man at any moment as long as he was still able to visit her bed. Something had to change. This was getting too hard, and it hurt too much to know that after two weeks, he still didn't care any more than he had in the beginning. She needed to see Harry.

Later, Severus walked to her chambers. He didn't want to wake her. He simply wanted to check on her. Why? What had compelled him to feel so utterly guilty? As he approached the portrait, the haughty witch smirked at him. "Too late, you are," she said. "She's gone for drinks with her friends in Hogsmeade. Another man was with her, you know."

"Not that I care," he said hatefully, walking down to the main entrance. Perhaps he should venture into Hogsmeade to check on her. It was rather late for her to still be out. He Apparated just on the outskirts of the village and had to quickly dodge behind a tree. She was walking towards him with Weasley. Rolanda and Potter were far behind them singing as horridly and as loudly as possible. His eyes narrowed when he heard Weasley's words.

"You don't really want to walk all the way to the castle. Let me Apparate us to my flat. You can sober up there, have a little fun, and come back in the morning," the boy said, slurring horribly.

"Shove off, Ron. I told you no," she said. Severus could tell that she was also inebriated. To his annoyance, Weasley stopped and pulled her close to him.

"Just give me tonight."

"No."

"What's wrong? Not good enough for you?" he asked angrily. "You can sleep with Snape but not me, eh? Why? What's so good about him?"

"Who told you that?"

"Harry did! Doesn't know what to do about it," Ron said. "You need to leave that git alone. You're too good for him, Mione. You need someone that knows you. Someone that appreciates you. Why do you think Harry set this up? He wants us to try."

"Let go of my arm, Ron. You and Harry should not bother with my business," she said. "We are just friends. I don't want to ruin that by doing something we will both regret tomorrow."

Ron couldn't believe it! She had turned him down. According to Harry, she and Snape had a steady thing going. He'd spotted Snape leaving her chambers nearly a dozen times in the past couple of weeks. He looked at her now and saw someone else. This wasn't the Hermione that he knew. She would never have let some bloke walk all over and treat her like rubbish. "You're nothing more than Snape's whore!" The slap to his face was instantaneous.

"I hate you," she said before running towards the castle.

"Mione!" he called. Damn! Why did he go and say that? Suddenly, he was grabbed from behind and Apparated away. "What the fuck?" he looked around and recognized

the area near the Shrieking Shack. "Snape!" His one time Potions Master stood seething before him.

"If you ever touch her again, I shall kill you," Snape threatened. "Do I make myself clear?"

"Kill me, eh? Planning on making an honest woman out of her? Harry says she never eats, and she cries all the bloody time when she thinks that nobody is looking! You don't deserve her, you bastard!" He wasn't expecting Snape to strike out, but a fist suddenly connected with his jaw. "Bloody hell!" he yelled.

He lunged back at the man, and a quick fight ensued. If he hadn't had so many drinks, perhaps he could have landed a few blows on his face. It seemed that he only reached his chest or arms. "Stand still!" he shouted angrily. One last hit had Ron falling on his arse.

Severus stood over the boy, breathing in quick breaths. He hadn't had such a physical work out in a long time. "Never call her a whore again. Never touch her. Remember what I said, Weasley." He Apparated to the gates of Hogwarts before the brat could speak. He needed to find Hermione. His little scuffle hadn't taken all that long, but she was probably just getting to her rooms. As soon as he got to her portrait, the witch made a face at him but opened before he could utter the password.

He found her sobbing in the bathtub. "Hermione," he said, alerting her to his presence. She splashed in surprise, but she wouldn't look to him. He quickly took off his clothing and slid in behind her. After a moment's hesitation, he pulled her back against his chest. "I would hate it if someone touched you."

The small sniffles stopped with his words. "I wouldn't let anyone touch me."

"I know," he said softly. "Nor would I."

She wasn't sure if he meant that he wouldn't let anyone touch her or if he wouldn't let anyone touch him, but she didn't care. It seemed as though there was hope after all. She smiled as his arm awkwardly settled around her in a slight embrace. Maybe they'd reached a turning point. She closed her eyes to relish the feel of him holding her and drifted off to sleep. She awoke a few hours later to a small disappointment. He'd placed her in her bed and left. Sighing, Hermione turned over to pull the pillow next to her into her arms. It was warm. It held his scent mingled with her soap. He had lain with her, and apparently, he'd only just left. Smiling, she drifted back off to sleep.

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

ONE WEEK LATER

Minerva scoffed as Hermione left the table. "She barely eats," she said to Severus. "Don't you notice? She's losing weight. It's unhealthy!"

"What Miss Granger eats or doesn't eat is not my concern, Minerva," he stated. "If you think she has an eating disorder, speak to her about it. Don't badger me."

"Really!" she said angrily, keeping her voice low. "I happen to know that you take a great interest in the things that Hermione does, Severus. I think you should at least talk to her about taking care of herself. Something is troubling her!"

"I've had enough of this conversation," he said, rising from his chair. He sneered at Potter as he walked by his chair. He'd decided on a plan to take that insolent brat down another notch. He had meddled in his affairs again! First, he'd accosted him outside the library, and then he'd tried to set Hermione up with Weasley the week before. Yes, vengeance would be sweet once again. Rolanda's potion would be ready in less than a week.

He smirked as he thought about his plan. It was actually a mix of two potions. One that would work as an aphrodisiac while the other would not change her into the person she wanted to become, but it would change her into her partner's worst sexual fear. Well, now that wasn't worded right. She would turn into the person that her partner wanted to have sex with the least.

At least, she would be in appearance only. Her body wouldn't really change, nor would her voice. She and the other person present would simply imagine it. It was more of an illusion than anything. The person would be appalled, and she would never know why. All she would know is that she needed them, and they were denying her. Potter would be that person. He'd be sure that the brat was there just moments after she drank the potion. Pity it would only last an hour. Both of them would pay for their meddling.

Minerva's disappointed expression flitted through his mind. Was he responsible for Hermione's change in eating habits? She seemed fine to him. He did notice that she'd lost a little weight, but it wasn't much. Hell, things had been working out perfectly. Since their problem with Weasley and Vector the week before, they'd come to a silent understanding. Even though they were not committed to a relationship, they would not see other people. This was perfectly fine with him, as he was completely satisfied with his little vixen. He didn't mention that he'd had a confrontation with Weasley, but from the way she worded something the next day, he was sure that someone had told her.

Things were just as he wanted them. He had his privacy, and he had a woman when he needed her. It was perfect. Wasn't it? He'd still not slept the entire night with her. He stayed a few hours the night she fell asleep in the tub. It had been nice to have a warm body close to him as he rested. He left as soon as he realized that it felt pleasurable. Since that night, he had kissed her twice whilst climaxing. He'd like to think it was simply a reaction, but part of him felt the desire to kiss her. The desire to share such an intimacy was mostly easy to control, but those two times had been unbearable. What did this mean? *I will not care about her.* There. That was the bottom line. They were just two warm bodies taking pleasure in each other.

I do care about her. Damn! What the fuck? Where had that come from? Did he care? Well, he would like her to eat more, but that was only so she wouldn't be undesirable to look upon. Right? That wasn't entirely honest. He wanted her to be healthy. He wanted her to be happy. However, he wanted her to be happy with what made him happy. If that was selfish, so be it. Either of them would end things when it was time to move on. It was a mutual understanding. He darkened at the thought of Hermione breaking things off. He set off to find her.

Hermione was sitting out near the lake thinking about her relationship with Severus. Things had changed only slightly. He was a little more affectionate with her, but she craved more. Maybe he was right to question her before they began seeing each other. He'd been honest with her from the beginning. He'd said that he'd not change, and he'd asked her if she could handle that. She truly had believed that she could at that time. Each crumb that he threw would only satisfy her momentarily. She wanted more. This could not go on.

Harry was right. She was being used. Severus would never love her, and he would never commit to her. No matter how much love she held for him or how much she tried to make him love her, his affection only extended to a few heated kisses. Well, he *had* attacked Ron for what he'd said to her. She smiled softly. Ron deserved what he'd gotten. Even Harry agreed with that after he learnt what Ron had said to her. Those actions had made her believe that Severus cared. She wasn't sure now. It was time to talk to him. If he said that things would never change, then she would tell him that she couldn't allow herself to be used any longer.

As Hermione stood, she felt an arm snake around her waist. "Nice evening," her lover commented. She smiled and pressed back against him. It wasn't often that he touched her this way. Feeling bold, she groped for his other arm and pulled it around her as well. They stood like that for a long time. "Are you cold?" he asked finally.

"Not since you've come," she replied. She turned around to look into his eyes. "Severus, we need to talk." Something flickered in his eyes, and she felt her heart melt. Was he concerned with what she had to say?

"Hermione, you've not been eating much as of late. Are you not well?" he asked quietly.

She was touched. He'd noticed that she hadn't been eating! "I've just had a lot on my mind lately."

"Such as?"

"Us." She felt him tense up for a moment, but he didn't loosen his hold on her.

"Do I not satisfy you?" he asked softly.

"Oh, Severus, you know that you do. No one will ever compare to you," she said.

Her words bothered him. Was she about to break things off? Even worse, was she thinking of eventually having another lover? He would not have it. He could not let her go until he was ready for her to go. He still hadn't had his fill of her yet. A small gust of wind blew hair onto her face. Instinctively, he reached up to move the strands aside. The way she looked up at him made his stomach tingle. Her eyes held such adoration and need. He cupped her cheek and guided her lips up to meet his. The chaste kiss lasted only a moment before he pulled away. When she smiled at him, he felt compelled to smile back.

"I love to see you smile," she said, bringing her lips back to his. This time the kiss held a promise of passion. He could actually feel himself being aroused by her kiss. No flash of skin or naughty vision had a part in it either. It was her kiss. What did it matter if they shared such an intimacy? By the way she was molding her body to his, it seemed that she had been longing for such affection.

He wanted to kiss her again, but he preferred to be in her bed whilst doing it. "Let's go to your chambers," he whispered.

Hermione's decision to have a talk about their future disappeared. He'd smiled at her. He cared about her health. He was holding her! What had she been thinking? She could not end this. She loved him. Harry's words were just poisoning her mind. This was right. Severus was right. "Will you stay with me tonight?"

"Yes," he whispered before kissing her once more. Damn! Why had he agreed? "It's Saturday. I don't see why I couldn't. *That's more like it. Don't be weak.* He relinquished his hold on her, but took her hand in his. They walked back to her chambers undetected.

Once they were in her room and had slowly undressed each other, he lay back on the pillows against the headboard, pulling her on top of him. "Pleasure me." He closed his eyes and let her do with him as she pleased. His Hermione loved to touch, kiss, and lick him. His eyes opened the moment he felt her mouth slide down his erect shaft. He loved to watch her as she licked and suckled on him. Her expression was always the same. She seemed amazed that she was doing something so intimate. When he would grunt his approval, she would always smile faintly, pleased that she'd made him feel good.

She'd learnt so quickly. Everything was always perfect now. One look or gesture would alert the other to what was wanted. Words were no longer necessary. As he felt the familiar sensation forming in his groin, he reached down to still her practiced movements with his hand. Her eyes drifted up to lock with his. He needn't say anything more. He simply closed his eyes again and felt her moving over him. In one swift movement, she slid down onto him. He reached out to fondle her jiggling breasts with one hand as the other reached down to caress her arse. Hermione began grinding in circular movements. "Always need you," she murmured.

He opened his eyes to watch her. Without realizing what he was doing, he sat up to get closer to her mouth. "Kiss me," he commanded. Her lips found his, and when her climax began moments later, he muffled her cries with his tongue and mouth. He enjoyed the feel of her body jerking against his whilst her tongue and mouth plundered his. His release came just as hers ended. Once his passed, she slumped forward slightly to steady her limp body.

"Severus," she whispered, smiling softly.

He brushed the damp hair away from her brow as he pulled her back to lay with him. Her head rested on his chest. "Sleep," he said, shifting them on their sides. Her legs tangled with his naturally. He watched her face as she drifted off to sleep. Holding someone intimately wasn't all that bad. What had made him think it would be weak? It was just one more way of pleasing a lover, wasn't it? Oddly enough he couldn't imagine ever holding any of his past lovers this way. Only her.

No matter how good this felt, he couldn't make a habit of it. She would begin to think that they were sharing something more than just a bed. He could admit to himself that he did care for her, but he wouldn't openly say it to her. It would be something that she could use against him. *Never give the enemy any leverage to use against you/The enemy?* This was no enemy. This was Hermione, his lover. He pushed his thoughts away. There would be time to think of it later. For now, he wanted to rest. When he awoke, he would take her again.

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

#### ONE WEEK LATER

"Severus, I do appreciate you giving this to me. How soon do you say I can use it?" Rolanda asked happily.

"You must take it in precisely twenty minutes. Had you come earlier, you would have had more time to make arrangements." Severus looked at the leering witch. "Remember, one hour. I would take it and be off to where you need to be."

"I've never had to take it at a precise time before, Severus," Rolanda said, rubbing her chin. "Well, I suppose you would know."

"Yes, Rolanda, I would know, wouldn't I? Be glad that I added that extra ingredient to make it taste better," he said slyly. Her eyes had narrowed right away when she first saw the goblet. She'd taken Polyjuice Potion before and knew what the color and texture should look like.

"Lucky for me I've not very far to go," said Rolanda with a slight wink.

"Pardon?"

"I've made arrangements to have a bit of fun with a friend here at the castle."

Severus' eyes narrowed. He wondered just who her friend was. Potter? Hermione? No, Hermione would not be with anyone else. He shrugged. What did he care? Rolanda's mission would never come to pass. "Hurry along to your chambers, Rolanda."

"I'm going that way now. As soon as the transformation is done, I will glide over to Vector's chambers for a visit. See you," she called, already leaving his office.

Glide over to Vector's? Good Lord! What sort of arrangement had those two made? Without any time to waste, he made his way to Potter's chambers. He nearly panicked when he was informed that the brat wasn't there, but once he turned around, he saw his prey walking towards him.

"What do you want, Snape?" he asked suspiciously.

Severus angrily replied, "Your friend, Rolanda, has told me everything! I daresay, you might want to go see about her. She didn't look too well when I left. You'd better watch your back, Potter." The little berk had the audacity to gesture rudely with his finger before stalking off to Rolanda's chambers. He'd timed things perfectly. Rolanda would just be drinking her potion when Potter arrived. Severus followed leisurely, knowing he had no need to rush anything.

Once he was outside of her chambers, he heard a sudden shriek. He quickly placed a Silencing Charm on the door before walking in. Rolanda had given him the password long ago. He was simply thankful that she didn't have one of those ruddy portraits hiding the entrance. He had been tempted on more than one occasion to hex the haughty witch in the portrait outside of Hermione's chambers.

The sight before him was priceless. Potter was standing there with his mouth gaped open whilst Rolanda was grabbing her crotch. "I've got a few extra bits in here," she said. "I'm not supposed to be Malfoy! What the hell?"

Severus wished that he could see what she and Potter saw, but it only worked for the two of them. Potter finally found his voice. "Rolanda? Draco? How did you do that? Why...er, why are you looking at me that way?"

Rolanda licked her lips. "Mate, you just need to relax. It won't take long. I'll have a go first, and then you can have a go at me after."

"Like bloody hell!" Severus snorted as Potter tripped over a small table in his haste to retreat. Rolanda pounced on his fallen form, trying to pin him down.

It was time to make his presence known. "Well, well, well," he said snidely. "What have we here? Two conspirators finally getting their comeuppance, perhaps?"

"What are you talking about, Snape?" Potter asked, pushing Rolanda aside.

The witch flung herself on him again, trying to rip his shirt off. "Who cares about Snape? Let's get this going, Harry."

"GEROFF!" Potter yelled, pushing her roughly and sprinting behind a table. "You did this, didn't you, Snape? Didn't you?" Severus smirked as Rolanda began stalking the brat around the table. "Get back, Draco! Er, I mean, Rolanda! Snape has slipped you something! Fight it."

"You see what happens to people that meddle in my affairs, Potter? Hmmm?" He raised an eyebrow. "I suggest that you stay out of it. Never dare to approach me again. Never dare to send other men after Hermione. Do I make myself clear?"

"Change her back!" Potter yelled, dodging the witch again.

"It's an illusion, Potter. You and she only see her as being and sounding like Draco. He is the person you've had a frightful sexual experience with, isn't he?"

"You know an awful lot about everything. You were the one that sent him that owl, weren't you?"

"Perhaps," Severus smirked. "Have fun, Potter." He began backing towards the door.

"You can't just leave! Change her back!"

"She will change back in, oh, fifty minutes or so. Enjoy," he said sarcastically. Once he slipped out of the door, he placed a ward on it to keep them within. It wouldn't do for the brat to make a run for it whilst Rolanda was still in that condition. There were students about, after all. He smugly made his way to Hermione's chambers. She wasn't expecting him, but he knew that she would not deny him.

He felt such glee that he wanted to express it the best way he knew how. Sex with Hermione, of course. She would have gotten in from the library not long before. Feeling at ease, he entered her quarters and found her sitting in front of the fire. "Good evening. I didn't see you at the evening meal."

"I had things to do," she said. "I summoned some dinner to my office." She turned to face him. "I didn't think you were coming by tonight."

Severus smirked slightly. "I could leave."

"Stay." Her voice was softer than normal. "I am tired, but I would like for you to stay."

"Hermione," he began, "I don't know if we shou-

"It's Saturday," she said, throwing his words from the previous week back at him.

"Very well," he said, going to sit with her. "Why are you so tired?"

"I was helping some students with some research for their independent projects, and I guess it took its toll on me. My back hurts slightly," she said, stretching.

Without warning, Severus picked her up and brought her to her bed. He laid her on her stomach and spelled away her clothing. He took off his robes and sat astride her. He chanted a quick warming spell on his hands and began to knead her tense flesh. "Oh, that feels wonderful," she said quietly. He continued massaging her until he felt her relax.

It was then that he began to place small kisses along her spine. He felt her body shiver slightly, and he was amazed at the gooseflesh that had risen all along her back. "Hermione, I want you," he whispered.

He heard what sounded like an assenting sigh as she turned around to face him. "Severus," she said softly. "I've been thinking...about us."

Severus moved away slightly. "And?"

"Well," she said, sitting up to cup his face. "I need to say something." She lightly kissed his lips. "I don't care what you think or say to me in return." Her lips brushed his again. "I just think you should hear me say it." The kiss she gave him then was more forceful, as her tongue invaded his sealed lips and began exploring his mouth. Severus began to kiss her back, feeling a stirring within his soul.

He knew what she wanted to tell him. He could see it in her eyes. He didn't want her to say it. It was important to not hear those uttered words. Not ~~now~~ *Not ever*, a snide voice thought. When she pulled away, he pulled her back, laying her down gently as they kissed. He would keep her occupied. He'd not hear her words of love. It would mess everything up. It would change things. They would have to end their relationship. He knew he cared, and he would hate for her to have any other lover. However, he could not condone such a declaration and remain with her. If he did, it would appear that she'd won her battle for a relationship to develop. "Hermione," he growled as her hands cupped his arse to pull him closer to her.

Unfortunately, there was another voice screaming out her name. What the fuck? Potter! What was he doing here? She moved away from him, summoning a long nightgown. "Something must be wrong."

Severus followed her out to her living area, thankful he'd never undressed. "Where is he?" Potter stormed in. Severus began chuckling at the spectacle. The boy's normally messy hair was disheveled far worse than it had ever been. "Think it's funny, do you? She's only just realized that she hasn't a prick to prick me with, bastard!" The brat drew his wand quickly.

Severus had been prepared for it nevertheless. His wand also pointed to his foe. "What the hell is going on?" Hermione asked, clearly shocked. "Put your wands down."

"No," Harry spat. "Bloody git deserves to have his arse hexed! Did he tell you what he did to me? To Rolanda?"

"No," Hermione said, moving between them. "What is it?" This question was directed to Harry, but she turned to Severus.

"He knows everything. He knows about me being involved in the first bit, he is responsible for Draco coming here, and he gave Rolanda a potion to make her want me while appearing to look like Draco! She's been trying to...shag me!"

Hermione laughed. "You can't be serious." She looked from Harry's furious stance to Severus' smug one. "Severus?"

"Vengeance is sweet," he said, sneering at Harry.

Her heart sank. It had all been about that, hadn't it? He'd been having relations with her until his ruddy potion for Rolanda had been ready, and then he would have had his revenge on them all. He was going to end things. She could have slapped herself. She'd been about to tell him that she loved him. "Is that what this is?" she asked in a whisper.

"It's all it always was, Mione. I told you he was just using you!" Harry said angrily. "Just getting a few free shags because he knows you love him! All the while, he was planning to make arses out of the three of us."

"Not the three of you, Potter. You and Rolanda, yes," Severus said coldly. "I had secretly hoped that a little more would happen than what you've said. Tell me, how is Rolanda coping?"

To his dismay, Potter began laughing. "Thinks it's rather funny. Now she wants me to go back and have a real go at me. Don't think I will, thanks."

Severus scoffed in annoyance. "Of course, she would find it humorous. I might have known." He hardened his glare. "I warned you to stay out of my business, Potter, yet here you are again. I wonder." He paused for effect. "What should I do with you now?"

"Why you bas-"

"Enough!" Hermione shouted. "When will this end?" She eyed Severus and then Harry. "It won't, will it?" She looked to Harry for a moment. "Leave."

"Hermione," he said in disbelief. "You're not going to let him keep on with it? He doesn't care about you. He never will. Can't you see it?"

"I'll be over shortly," she said, widening her eyes. He realized that she meant to break things off, nodded, put away his wand, and left quickly.

She turned around to face Severus. "I think that maybe we should end this." Her eyes didn't quite meet his, and tears suddenly threatened to spill over. "I should have done this last week when I decided, but then you...oh, I thought that you had changed. I can't do this any longer, Severus."

"So," he said coldly, putting away his wand. "That's it?"

She nodded. "I think so. I can't think straight anymore. I've changed so much that I don't even recognize myself. Harry's right. You will never love me. That's something that I need, Severus. This would have happened eventually. It might as well be now. Maybe it will save me a couple of years of heartache."

"Very well. Good evening," he said curtly, sweeping away.

Hermione began to cry almost immediately. He hadn't even tried to change her mind. He truly didn't care. She'd been nothing more than a possession. It was her own fault. She should have known that she was no match for Severus Snape. She couldn't handle his aloof mannerisms, his need to keep her at arm's length all the time, and his lack of affection for her. She needed Harry. He would know what to say. She quickly pulled a cloak over her nightgown and made her way to his chambers.

Severus watched from the shadows as she exited the portrait hole. She was still sniffing and wiping her face. Her expression was one of supreme sorrow. He had done this to her. She thought that he didn't care. *I do care about you, Hermione.* A part of his mind had repeated the phrase over and over since he'd walked out. He should have told her, but he couldn't. It was better this way. He followed her to Harry's chambers. Potter opened the door and pulled her into a long embrace.

"Mione, I'm sorry, but it's for the best. Stay here tonight," the brat said. Hermione nodded and allowed him to pull her in.

Severus pulled out his wand. He should hex the little bastard! He was going to take advantage of her fragile state. Harry Bloody Fucking Potter was going to get his way after all. He might not have wanted her to begin with, but he most certainly would have her now, wouldn't he?

He, Severus Snape, had allowed this. He'd let his petty mission for vengeance interfere with his sex life. Perhaps he should have told Hermione about his plans. She wouldn't have felt the need to end things if she had known something of his plans. She believed that he had intended to end things.

*I simply hope that you won't let something that could be great pass you by.* Damn Dumbledore! Would those words always haunt him? He put away his wand. What's done is done. It was over. She was gone. The one woman that cared about him had told him that things were over. The past month had been most satisfying. He would remember it fondly. Severus made his way back to his own chambers where he sat drinking Firewhisky. At some point near dawn, he realized that his feelings for her were more than he'd originally believed.

He didn't love her, but he wanted her in his life. He didn't want Potter or Weasley moving in on what was his. Hermione belonged to him. She'd given herself to him and had chosen him above all others. There had to be a way to get her back without appearing weak and without sniveling at her feet. Severus longed to go to Potter's chambers and drag her away from the berk. He really should hex the little bastard! If he hadn't said all of those things, she would have allowed him to stay. She would have realized that he'd only meant to hurt Rolanda and Potter. Rising, he threw his glass into the fireplace just to hear it shatter. He'd find a way to have her again. "She's mine," he whispered. "I will have her."

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

A/N: Sorry that it's so long, but I had much that I needed to write (ducks away from the approaching howlers). Let me know what you think. Was Severus too mean? I'm glad Hermione finally stood up to him.

Reprisal!

Chapter 4 of 15

After a misunderstanding, time apart, and other friends interfering, the pair finally make a decision regarding their relationship.

Disclaimer: Not my characters (sigh), but I would love to own them.

A big thanks to my beta, Charmed Nay!

Hermione woke up with a soft smile. His arms were snugly around her as they had been the previous time he'd stayed over all night. He grumbled sleepily just as she was bringing his hand up to her lips for a soft kiss. He sounded...different. The hand in hers caught her attention. It was tanned, callused, and a bit meatier than she remembered. It reminded her of Harry. *Harry! Bloody hell!* She turned over.

She was in Harry's bed all right. Damn. She dropped the hand unceremoniously and sat up, not caring if she woke him. He mumbled, "Voldemort...going kill them all...Avada..." His face was twisted angrily.

"Harry, you're dreaming! Wake up." Hermione wondered how often he dreamt of ruddy Voldemort. The bastard haunted her dreams on occasion. She never thought about

what memories must do to Harry. She shook him gently. "Wake up, Harry."

He bolted up, breathing heavily. "What? Where is he?"

Hermione grinned softly. "You defeated him long ago, Harry."

He grinned for a moment and fell back on his pillows. "Good morning, Mione. How do you feel?"

"Embarrassed, I think," she said honestly. "I should not have stayed here."

"I'm glad you did," he said softly, pulling her back down next to him. "It also makes me happy to know that you will put your fascination with that man behind you. He's no good, Hermione. He planned to make asses out of all of us this entire time."

"But, he said the two of you. Maybe he truly does care for me, Harry," she said hopefully. "Maybe it wasn't all about revenge. Some of the things that he did could only mean that he cares."

"No. I'll not believe it," Harry said firmly. "Like I said last night, why didn't he try to stop you?"

"Pride?"

"Trust me. If my lover was leaving me, I would make my feelings known," Harry said, kissing her hand lightly. "Leave him to his solitary dungeons, Hermione. It's time for you to return to the land of the living. You've become someone different lately. You barely eat, you rarely talk to us like you used to, and you always seem to be daydreaming. I'm here for you."

"It's not the same, Harry. I'm in love with him. I think that maybe I should have talked to him before telling him it was over. I should go to him right now and try to see how he really feels." Hermione furrowed her brow. "He'll likely throw me out."

"How could you be in love with him? Are you sure that you're not just in lust with him?" Harry asked, grimacing slightly. "I assume he's at least good at that if nothing else. What other reason could he appeal to you?"

"It's more than that, as I told you last night, but yes, he is brilliant," she said sadly. "I'll never be with him again, Harry." She began to tear up softly. "He doesn't want me, does he?"

Harry pulled her against him firmly, allowing her tears to leak onto his bare chest. "Cry it out, Mione. Get him out of your system. I'm sure he wants you. Don't think badly of yourself. He is just a selfish, bitter bastard, and he wants you at his leisure. Don't let him use you."

As Hermione cried, Harry began to feel guilty. Was he doing the right thing by telling her to turn away from Snape? That bastard had been shagging her, making her love him, and had only planned to discard her after the joke on Rolanda and him was completed. She was better off without the lout. In time, she would be over Snape. Maybe then she would move on to someone more deserving. It was apparent that she no longer harbored any feelings for Ron, but what about the other Weasleys? Friends? Neither Charlie nor Fred had yet decided to settle down. Seamus could do with a good witch at his side, what with that wretch he'd just broken away from. When her tears stopped, Harry smoothed her hair back. "All right, Mione?"

"Better," she breathed. "That's it then. I won't go grovel at his feet. I refuse to be used any longer. Thank you, Harry." She moved to kiss his cheek.

Harry turned, and her lips accidentally brushed his. "Sorry," he said quickly. When Hermione didn't move away, he moved back to kiss her again. This time their lips parted, and their tongues met. Both pulled away laughing. "Odd," he said.

"Terribly," she agreed.

He grinned slyly. "I suppose we just don't have that sort of relationship."

"Apparently not. You're no Snape."

He pretended to be offended. "I don't measure up to the bat of the dungeons? Why ever not? Have I not enough grease in my hair? Has my skin seen too much sun?"

Hermione slapped his chest playfully. "You're impossible!"

"I know. Come on. Let's have breakfast," he said, trying to lighten the mood.

"I want a bath and fresh clothes," she said wistfully. "I think I'll need to sneak back to my chambers."

"Well, I'll come with you under the Invisibility Cloak. No students will see us that way," he offered.

"It's early yet, Harry. We've no need for it. Let's just run there quickly, and after I've had a bath, we'll order something for us."

"Come on then," he said, getting up to grab his cloak. He slipped his cloak over his shoulders to cover his bare chest and pajama bottoms. He grabbed a shirt and jeans from his nearby dresser and slipped his trainers over his socked feet. Pulling her by the hand, they left his chambers and dashed for hers. "I'll just get dressed while you bathe," he said. As they rounded a corner, they both stopped.

Severus Snape in all his billowing glory was making his way towards them. He also stopped to look at the pair through narrowed eyes. "Imagine meeting the two of you out so early. Holding hands? Scantily dressed? You do move on quickly, don't you, my dear?"

"Severus," she said, horrified at what he must think. "It's not what you think."

"Really?" he asked, moving forward, clearly uninterested in what she had to say. Hermione reached out to touch his arm. He looked down at her hand. "Kindly unhand me, Miss Granger. I can only imagine where that hand has been."

Harry pulled Hermione away. "Better for it to be on me than any part of you. Come on, Mione. I told you to forget about him."

Severus stepped forward. He could hex the little brat so easily. Hermione was no better. He felt like a fool. He had gone to see if she had returned to her chambers. He wasn't going to talk to her. He simply wanted to put his mind at ease about her going to Potter's chambers. Sleep would not come to him, less he knew if she had or hadn't bedded Potter. "Itching for a duel, Potter? Want to clear your conscience? It appears that we are more alike than you'd like to believe. The only difference in this situation is that she knew I was *fucking* her and not wishing for anything further. You have done it and haven't told her yet that you don't want a future with her either."

Hermione blanched and looked away. Harry threw his clothes down and pulled his wand. She jumped in front of his wand. "No, Harry. Don't. Albus will be angry." She turned to Severus slightly. "Nothing happened. I swear it."

Severus smirked before putting away his wand. "I do not care, and never address me by my given name again." He turned on his heel and made his way back down to his chambers. Potter was carrying more clothes than he was wearing. Hermione was still in the same nightgown that she had worn to his chambers the night before.

She seemed to be telling the truth, but why didn't Potter deny his accusation? He'd even implied that her hand had been on his person. She seemed horrified at the thought of it though. Either they did have sex together, or they didn't. As much as he would hate to believe that any man, even Potter, would allow a woman to sleep near him and

not take advantage of the situation, he was inclined to believe that they hadn't done anything together. However, he would intentionally continue to project the attitude that he believed they had sex. It would be easy to send her glances of deep disgust. He could openly send loathing looks towards Potter and dare him to say anything. "This might not be all that bad," he said, rubbing his chin in thought.

He was no fool. The more he made her suffer, and the more he made her feel guilty, then the more she would want him. Soon she would be asking him to her bed again, and he would accept of course. His little Hermione would be so happy just to have him back in her life that she would take anything that he offered her. He would never offer her anything more than what they had before.

He could hear someone knocking on his door. "What the hell?" It was too damn early for Albus to be nosing about. He opened the door and sneered. "What do you want?"

Rolanda laughed. "Just wanted to stop by and commend you on your little prank. Good one, old boy. Jolly good. Now, about my Polyjuice Potion," she said carefully, "where is it?"

"Polyjuice Potion," he said incredulously. "Dare you think that I would still give you some after what you've done to me?"

"What I've done?" Rolanda asked, the mirth leaving her eyes momentarily. "You are no better than any of us, and I did what you asked. I requested Polyjuice Potion. You agreed. That's an agreement between a witch and a wizard. You'd better brew some for me, Severus. It's only fair. She didn't go off with Potter, and she was in London."

Severus thought for a moment. "Very well. I shall give you true Polyjuice Potion. You are correct."

"And, I think you've had plenty more shags since then, haven't you? I'd say you got more than what you thought you'd get." Rolanda said tartly. "I must admit that I was disappointed that Harry didn't want to have fun last night. Though I had no dangling bits, it would have been quite a show to try it out! Excellent joke, that was." He smirked at the woman. How could one get revenge against her if she thought it to be funny? "I finally got him down and pulled down his trousers. The poor twit was yelling the entire time. I reached into my own pants, and what do you know? The illusion began to break up. Poor bloke. He was terrified. He took off as quickly as he could, breaking a ward around the room as he went. I thought you two would have a duel."

"We nearly did." Severus knew it was time to set his plan in action. He changed his voice to one of regret. "I went to apologize to Miss Granger this morning, and I found her running about the corridor with a nearly naked Potter. I think that they had sex last night. It seems that I was easy enough to replace." He sneered for a moment. "No matter. It's time that I find a woman to couple with. Miss Granger was most satisfying, but experience is always best."

"Too right you are, but for some reason, I think that she meant more to you than what you're letting on." Rolanda looked at him oddly for a moment. "You take care, Severus. Let me know when that potion is ready."

"Certainly," he said quietly. "Oh, and Rolanda?"

"Yes?"

"Never make assumptions on anything that I may or may not feel. She is where she belongs, and this evening, I shall be settling into another lover's bed. Good day," he said icily, slamming the door in her face. The nerve! The witch had the bollocks to assume that he felt anything more for Hermione. No. Granger. "Ha!" Severus made his way to his bed. He really needed to get some sleep. If he were lucky, he'd be able to make the evening meal.

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

#### *ONE WEEK LATER*

"Think about it, Albus," Minerva said disappointedly. "We need to do something to fix this. If we hadn't let him hear Rolanda and Harry, this would never have happened."

Albus nodded. "I fear that I may have made things worse. Hermione hasn't been eating much. Dobby tells me that she returns most of the food that he's brought to her. I think it's time for drastic measures. What say you?"

"I have something in mind," Minerva said with a determined smile. "It will get them talking if nothing else." She looked to see Severus making his way to the table. "I'll start with him. Follow my lead."

Albus nodded. "Certainly. I think I know what you are planning."

"Severus, there is something that I need to speak to you about privately," Minerva said as he sat down.

"You seem anxious. What is it?" he asked quickly.

"Let's just say I think this matter needs your immediate attention. I'll say no more here, nor will I say anything where we might be overheard. Meet me at the Astronomy Tower near ten tonight," she said, remembering that he had a detention to oversee.

"I shall be there," he said. He could see that the woman needed something. He would not turn her away. Minerva, like Albus, had always been someone with whom he could speak to openly. As the woman turned back to Albus, he ate silently, trying to listen to what the prat was talking to Rolanda about.

"Yeah, well, she has to come out sometime. I'm going to go talk to her after I've eaten and gone into town. I think a trip to Hogsmeade this weekend is in order. Nothing like a few drinks to put things in perspective," Harry said.

"Now you're speaking my language," Rolanda replied. She turned to Severus. "Want to come along, old boy?"

Potter scoffed. "What?"

"Certainly not," Severus replied firmly. "I've no desire to be about with any of you." He made sure to look evilly at Potter when he said the last bit.

"Not that any of us want you there anyway," Potter said. "What did you go and ask him for anyway?"

"Well, he sits in his rooms all the time. He needs to get out, I say," Rolanda said, tossing her fork down. "What's so bloody wrong with that? I'll have you know that he can drink more than you and Weasley put together."

Minerva spoke before any more could be said. "He is coming with us. We've discussed it already. No need to worry about his wellbeing, Rolanda."

"Jolly good," the yellow-eyed witch replied, picking her fork back up to finish eating.

Severus eyed Minerva for a moment. They had agreed on no such thing. "I do not remember agreeing to such an outing."

"Bah! Don't thank me, Severus. She was itching to start another quarrel between you and Harry. Quite frankly, I am sick of it. Albus and I were thinking of having a few rounds. I wouldn't mind seeing you come out of your chambers for once."

"Very well," he agreed halfheartedly. What did it matter where he spent his time? He liked getting out on occasion, but he also liked the time alone in his chambers. Time that he could read or research was time well spent. When he finished eating, he turned to Minerva once more. "I shall see you tonight."

"I'll be there," she said quietly. Once he was gone, she jabbed Albus with her elbow. "Your turn. Go find Hermione."

"I'll do just that," he said, sounding amused. "They will know that we've set them up. Are you prepared for Severus' wrath?"

"I've already got an excuse. He'll not know I'm guilty," she said smugly. "Go on now."

Albus stood up and made his way to the library. He had to get Hermione to share a walk with him later. Once he entered the library, he saw her nibbling on a strawberry. Well, at least she was eating a little. "Ah, Hermione. I wanted to talk to you about a few things. I had hoped to see you in the Great Hall for the evening meal."

"Oh, hello, Headmaster," she said, pushing her plate aside. "What is it?"

"I think, my dear, that you would be more comfortable talking away from the ears of the students." He nodded towards a few students at a nearby table. "There is to be a celestial shower this evening. I thought maybe we would go have a walk up to the Astronomy Tower around, say, ten?"

"Of course," she replied automatically, wondering what he wanted.

"I will collect you from your chambers then." He walked away while muttering to himself, and Hermione allowed a small grin to play on her lips. He was up to something, but what was it? Anytime he pretended to be a dotty old man, one could bet he was conspiring to do something.

She sighed and popped another strawberry into her mouth. She wondered what Severus was doing at that moment. Was he working on a potion? No, she'd seen in the staff room that he was giving a detention this evening. Hermione always tried to see what evenings he would be free to roam the castle. On those nights, she would stay in her chambers, making sure she wouldn't run into him. She was too embarrassed to see him.

Rolanda had told her that he had been in the corridor because he had wanted to apologize to her, but when he saw her in a seemingly compromising position with Harry, he'd thought that she had shagged Harry. Ro also said that he seemed to be hiding his emotions behind a mask. The witch actually believed that Severus fancied her! Ha! He was so cold though. Surely he had heard her when she told him that nothing had gone on between Harry and her. It didn't help that Harry allowed him to think what he would. Rolanda did say that Severus had commented on finding a more experienced witch. Perhaps if she had tried harder to please him, he might have been coerced to come back to her instead of going back to seeking out his other witches for pleasure.

Some days she wanted things to be as they were before. At least she would have him in her life. However, most days she knew that she'd done the right thing. She simply wished that it didn't hurt so much. When she kissed Harry that morning, there had been no spark, no feeling. She doubted that anyone could ever please her the way Severus did. What could she do to make him want her again? Was it worth the fight? Worth the heartache?

Her thoughts stayed much the same until Albus finally came for her. "It's a nice night out," he commented.

"Good. I could do with a bit of fresh air," she said softly. She hoped they would be back in time for Harry's visit. He'd sent a note saying that he would be over around eleven. "What's this about?" she asked after a few moments of silence.

"Well, Hermione, I don't like that you aren't taking care of yourself. You seem to have lost a considerable amount of weight, and I never see you during meals. Is there something you wish to tell me?" he asked kindly, hoping she would admit everything.

"Sir, there is nothing wrong. I've really been into my work lately. Most of the students have needed help with the end of the term nearing. That's why I've been trying to make myself more available to them."

"Here we are," he said happily, opening the door for her. "Go on," he urged. She walked out onto the rooftop before him. Once she was out, he said, "Blast! I wanted to bring along a new gadget that is supposed to make everything appear closer. I'll be right back, and I'll ward this door to be sure no sneaky students bother you."

"What?" she asked as the door slammed quickly. She tried to open the door, but it was warded shut. "Bloody hell!" She shrugged and made her way to lean against the stone railing. She never noticed the man in the shadows whose dark eyes were watching her intently.

Severus suddenly felt like a pillock. Minerva and Albus had orchestrated this, hoping to force them to talk. He supposed that he could use this to his advantage. His plan of making her feel guilty had been hard to pull off since he hadn't seen her in the past week. He was sure that Rolanda had told her what he said, but he was unsure about how she felt upon hearing the news. Severus smirked and walked over to her. He stood there quietly whilst taking in her image. The soft moonlight was playing over her delicate body sensually. He ached, suddenly, to touch her. He had wanted her many times over this past week. Wanted her so badly, in fact, that he sought out another. He did it mostly to prove to himself that he could. Yes, he cared about Granger more than he liked to admit, but that didn't mean he was weak! Only a weak man would lay in wait for one witch's affection when other, more readily available witches, were to be had. The witch that he did bed had been nothing compared to her. She had satisfied him, yes, but something had been missing. Perhaps it was the look in the woman's eyes. They lacked the softness that Her...Granger's held. *Damn it!*

The entire idea of seeing another woman had been distasteful, but he had to do it to prove to himself that he could. He needed to be sure that he had not gone soft, that he had not become accustomed to having only one partner. The month long coupling with Granger had left him wanting more, as he hadn't had his fill of her when things had ended. Severus had never had sex with the same witch so many times before. That had to be something else that had felt wrong when he was with the other witch. It was likely that he'd just gotten used to the ease of bedding his young lover. He'd become familiarized to her desires as she had with his. There always was the possibility that she had slept with Potter. He couldn't allow her to be the only one to have moved on so quickly. He really didn't believe that they had though. There was only one way to find out for sure.

"It appears, Miss Granger," he said coolly, "that we have been duped into coming here. I fear that I was led to believe that Minerva wanted a word with me."

He saw her back stiffen, and her hands gripped the stone as if to keep herself balanced. "Hello, Professor," she said evenly, accenting his title with bitterness.

Admittedly, to his ears, it sounded harsh to have her call him by this title instead of his given name. Momentarily, he wished that he'd never instructed her to stop calling him by his given name. He casually leaned against the railing next to her. "Tell me. How is Potter these days? Is he keeping you satisfied?"

She turned indignant eyes to meet his. "Harry is a good friend to me." The anger was apparent. He was right to believe that they hadn't had sex then. She asked tartly, "How are your lovers? Are they treating you well?"

Severus smirked. This was the opening he'd wanted. "Well, to be honest, I've only had one. It has only been a week since you ended things. I think I may try one of her friends next week though. She seemed very interested."

"You are a bastard, you know," she said, not trying to disguise her anger. He could also see the hurt in her expression.

"Yes, at times, I do believe that of myself."

"How can you live with yourself?" She felt tears burning her eyes. "You know how I feel about you, yet you stand here and tell me about your other woman? That's cold, Severus."

"Professor Snape, Miss Granger. I don't recall giving you leave to use my given name again," he said snidely. "Why shouldn't I have gone to another woman? You were in Potter's bed the same night that you ended things with me. Do you deny it?"

"No, but we-

"So, you did sleep with him," he said, raising an eyebrow.

"Yes, but we didn't have se-

"Really! You don't dare think that I believe that! I know," he leered at her body suggestively, "that you are a very passionate woman, Miss Granger. I'm sure that even the berk Potter would not pass up a chance to have a willing woman."

"We didn't have sex. It was just a little k..." She looked away guiltily.

Severus raised an eyebrow and felt the anger wash over him. Something had happened! It wasn't completely innocent. His hand itched to grab his wand. The little harlot! What liberty had she allowed Potter? "A little *what?*" he asked coldly, glaring at her.

"I don't have to tell you anything," she spat suddenly. She turned and went to the door. It was still locked. "Damn it!"

He was at her side in three strides and pulled her around roughly. "Do finish what you started," he said through clenched teeth.

"You are no longer my lover, Snape. I don't have to tell you a damn thing. It seems that you have formed your own opinions," she said angrily. "You went and shagged someone, and you are acting as if I am a whore for kissing someone else. It wasn't even a good kiss, you know!" She shrugged her arm away from him, but he pulled her back to him roughly.

His lips found and angrily claimed hers. The little bitch dared to mouth off to him! She resisted only for a few moments, but then he felt her submit to his will. It would be so easy to drag her down to his bed, wouldn't it? *That would show your weakness. She would know of your need for her. Don't do it!* His lips left hers, and he watched with amusement as she caught her breath. "There is a difference between a man's kiss and a boy's. It would do well for you to remember that, Hermione."

"Severus," she moved to pull his face back to hers, but he looked away.

"I cannot."

"Why not?" she asked, sounding hurt. "You just did."

"That, Miss Granger, was a man making a point," he said blandly. "It was nothing more. Though I am glad that you've found that intriguing temper of yours. I've always found that, at least, attractive about you."

"Right," she said stepping away from him. Why did he have to be so cold? He had wanted her. She felt it. His arms had snaked around her possessively, and she knew it was the thought of Harry kissing her that had done it. He was jealous and was afraid to let her know it. She could use this to her advantage, couldn't she? All she yearned for was for him to care for her. "Will you still never care for me?" He watched her, lips pursed tightly. His eyes were lost in thought. She sighed in annoyance. It was a yes or no answer. He was acting as if either one would cost him a portion of his soul. "Forget it, Snape," she said finally. "I shall definitely learn to live without you."

At that moment, the door banged open. It was Albus Dumbledore. He was muttering distractedly to some sort of metal contraption in his hands. When he looked up at the angry couple, he feigned surprise. "Why, Severus, have you come to join us? What brings you here?"

"I was just leaving," he said, brushing past his mentor.

Albus watched the man leave, feeling disappointed. Minerva had instructed an owl to flutter near his chamber until he returned with a message telling him to not meet her on the tower, as she'd learnt about others going there. Severus would think the owl to be daft, and Minerva would be clear of suspicion.

He looked to Hermione, and his hope dwindled. Maybe the pair wasn't as well suited as he'd once believed. Hermione used to have such a spark in her, but since she'd taken up with Severus, it seemed that the life within her had dulled. "Are you not up to this, my dear?" he asked kindly. The reply she gave made him smile. Perhaps there was hope yet.

"I most certainly am, Albus. I won't let that arse ruin my night or any other night to come," she said firmly.

"Excellent. Shall we?" He offered his arm to her. "I always believed we could see better from the far right. There is a small platform there, which is hidden from the students. I fear they might misuse it given the chance."

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

FIVE DAYS LATER

Hermione had started attending all of her meals in the Great Hall with the others. She never looked at Severus, but she did feel his eyes upon her on occasion. She talked to Rolanda and Harry as she used to, and she agreed to meet them in Hogsmeade for drinks. She put on the last touches of make-up, and she made her way to the front gate. Harry was waiting there for her.

"Where is Ro?" she asked.

"She's not well. Poppy told her to stay in tonight. Hope you don't mind that it's just us," he said.

"Of course not," she replied. "I just want to get pissed. Maybe all of my problems will be gone when I wake up tomorrow."

"It doesn't work that way, Mione, though we would want them to. I've tried that many times, and it's not worked for me," Harry said, looking oddly sad.

"Are you all right, Harry?" she asked, looking into his eyes. "What is it?"

"I'm just wondering about things lately. Is there something wrong with me?" he asked sadly. "Every time I become involved with someone, it turns out to be only a fling. I would commit to someone, really I would. They all shy away from me."

"Harry," Hermione began gently, "you are the boy that lived to defeat Voldemort many times. Most women would be honored to be with you, but I would wager that they don't feel they are worthy of anything other than a shag. Have you ever tried to tell them that you'd want more?"

"Well, no, they usually take off before I decide if I want something more," he said thoughtfully. "I suppose I could ask for a second date. Sometimes I do ask for one, but it's always the same. They want to know all about Voldemort, want a good shag, and then they take off as if I've dismissed them."

"Tonight, Harry, I want you to choose one witch that you would like to talk to. It doesn't matter what she asks you. Answer her questions, but guide the conversation to something that you enjoy. See how she feels about Quidditch, politics, or anything! Don't let it turn into a shag."

"Deal, but only if you do the same. I'm tired of you moping around over Snape," he said determinedly.

"Harry, I've been doing well for the past week."

"Yes, but I still sense the sadness in you. There is no fooling me, Hermione," he said softly. "You need to talk to someone tonight as well. If we don't try, then we'll end up having to get married even though we don't feel that way about each other, just to say that we are married and to have a couple of kids to pass on our legacy to."

Hermione laughed. "Oh, Harry! You are such a brat."

"Trelawny herself told me that! I figured I'd better warn you. She has been known to speak on true prophecies now and again," he said cheekily.

"Oh no," she breathed as they entered the pub.

"What?" He looked around and saw Minerva waving to them. "Blast! ~~He's~~ here."

"Let's just go," she said suddenly. She had faced him in the hall during meals, but this was different. And, what the bloody hell was he doing in a pub? Her eyes narrowed. He was likely having a few drinks before finding another witch to shag. "On second thought, let's stay here."

Harry nodded. "Good girl. Don't let him dictate where you can or can't go. Let's have a seat over here."

After only a few rounds of drinks, Hermione found herself talking to an attractive young wizard while Harry was talking to his younger sister. They were from Spain and were visiting cousins in town. She smiled proudly as Harry and the witch seemed to be talking about a variety of things. The wizard, Ricardo, seemed to be interested in something more than talking. At first, she shied away from his advances, but one look in Severus' direction had changed her mind. She could feel his rage across the room. His words came back to her. *I would hate it if someone touched you.* She ought to let this bloke sit a little closer, and she ought to flirt with him a bit more. That would serve Severus right.

Those thoughts didn't make her as happy as she would have liked. She didn't want to hurt him. If she did, she would be no better than he. She wanted to save herself for someone that she could really love...or for Severus. Suddenly, it hit her. He didn't trust women. He didn't trust anyone. That was why he had proudly told her that he'd never given his heart to anyone. He had slowly been changing in their month together. He'd started out taking her and leaving her. He'd eventually begun to kiss her, hold her, and he'd even stayed the night with her. Things would have changed even more. She believed that firmly.

What had she done? She'd thrown him out after a few words from Harry forced her to draw her own conclusions. Why hadn't she just waited to see what he would say or do? He had told Harry that he'd only meant to make an arse out of Rolanda and Harry, not her. Why hadn't she waited before breaking things off? Then, he had gone to search her out to apologize, hardly believable, but those were his words. He'd found her running around, nearly naked, with Harry. What was he supposed to think?

How could she ever gain his trust if she did things that led him to believe otherwise? When she told him about the kiss that she and Harry had shared, she'd felt his outrage, jealousy, and possessiveness radiating from his touch and his kiss. Now, she was doing it again. Giving him another reason to not trust her. She was simply proving to him that she was like most other witches. She was only showing him that he was replaceable when that was the farthest thing from the truth. She loved him. This Ricardo meant nothing to her, and why was his hand on her thigh? Why was he leaning towards her as if he were about to kiss her? Hermione slid away and landed on the floor.

Harry sprung up to help her. "Are you all right?"

"Yes," she said quickly. "I must go."

She could see the disappointment in his eyes. "Already?" She followed his gaze to Ricardo's sister.

"I'm not feeling well. I'll go back to the castle. You stay here and talk to them," she said, smiling reassuringly. He seemed to understand that she wanted to be away from Ricardo.

"I'll see you to your home," the boy said.

Harry shook his head. "No, she's not far. Stay with us. I want to hear more about your family's business."

Hermione quickly nodded to them and hurried away, leaving Ricardo calling after her.

Severus had seen what happened. *Why did she turn the boy away?* He shrugged. When the boy got up a few minutes later to exit the pub, Severus excused himself. "I believe that I shall return to the castle. Good evening." The pair didn't seem to mind that he was leaving and waved him off heartily as they discussed some legal issue.

He followed the foreign boy towards the path to the castle. His long strides brought him quickly to the boy's side. "Where are you going, boy?" he asked darkly.

"I am making sure that a friend has returned home safely," he said, heavily accented.

Severus smirked. "She's fine. I saw her Apparate a moment ago. Why don't you go back and let Potter know that all is well? I am sure that he is the one that sent you, right?"

The boy seemed stunned momentarily that Severus knew who he was looking for and who he had been with. He also looked a little guilty, as if he had less than honorable intentions. "I will." He nodded and walked back towards the pub.

Severus had to calm his breathing for a moment. He had to fight the urge to hex the wizard. Why did Hermione affect him so *Because you are weak, Severus. You always were.* "I am not," he growled to himself. There was nothing wrong with wanting to protect something that he considered to be his own. That was the gist of it. She belonged to him. Her denial of the boy's caresses told him that she still longed to have his hands upon her. *CRACK!* He Apparated to the Hogwarts front gate and slowly made his way down the path back towards Hogsmeade. Something told him that she hadn't Apparated, but she had made the decision to walk back.

It wasn't long before he met up with her. "I thought you were in the pub," she said suspiciously.

"I was until I saw that young wizard follow you out," he admitted.

"Really? What does that matter then? Did you Apparate him away to threaten him?" she asked sarcastically. "Or, do you reserve that treatment for Ron only?"

"I would have if he had continued to pursue you. His intentions were less than honorable," he said, sounding bored. "As far as Weasley is concerned, I would do the same to him or anyone else that called you anything improper." *What the fuck? Why had he told her that?*

"Oh, honestly! Spare me, Severus. I know you are not as honorable as you claim to be."

"I am honorable," he said silkily. "I've never led you to believe anything other than what my true intentions were. Someone without honor would have pretended to be in love with you." He spat the word like it was a disease.

"What is so wrong with love?"

"Everything."

She brushed past him. "You know, Severus. You don't want me, yet you hate for anyone else to want me. I don't understand. I know you don't care."

He pulled her to him roughly and quickly released her, taking a step back. "Who says that I don't?"

He Disapparated before she could comment. "Bloody hell! Why did I say that?" he bellowed, startling a few birds from their roosts in a nearby tree. He'd Apparated to a spot that he always considered safe when he needed a place to return to. After he'd meet with the Dark Lord, he would always come back to the Forbidden Forest to the same spot. It was a small clearing near a little brook that fed from a mountain and ran into the lake. The slow, lazy current always intrigued him. He had always wondered what it would be like to be swept away from one place to another. He often wondered if the journey from this life to the next was much the same.

CRACK! He jumped up from the rock he was sitting on and faced Hermione. "You really should put an Anti-Tracing Charm on you before you Disapparate next time," she said smugly. "What was that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing. Leave now," he said so quietly that she almost didn't hear him. He hated that she was invading his private place. She did not belong here.

"Do you or not? I would like to know. Do you really care?" she asked, moving towards him. "Please tell me."

Don't be weak. She's simply a witch. One that you have proved to be easily replaced. He looked away from her pleading eyes. She was being weak again. He abhorred it, yet reveled in it. If he admitted that he did care for her, in his own way, it would not be showing weakness. It would simply be insuring that he got what he wanted from her. If he said those words, she would willingly ask him to join her in bed again. "I suppose you could say that," he murmured finally. "Get out of here."

"No," she said defiantly. "Let me stay."

His narrowed eyes met hers. "Why did you turn that boy away tonight? You knew that I was watching. Would it not have been the perfect revenge?"

"I want no one else," she said honestly.

"Hermione," he said in exasperation, "do you not care that I will never love you? Just because I may care about what happens to you, it doesn't mean that I will change. I will never marry. I will never have children. Can you live that way?"

She looked away for a moment, and Severus feared that he'd gone too far. One lone tear slid down her cheek. He lifted his hand to wipe it away. She stilled his hand with hers, turning to kiss his fingers lightly. "I can live that way for now, as long as I know you care for me."

"For now?" he asked incredulously. He stepped closer and brought his lips to her ear. "It's hard for me to let go of something that belongs to me. That's what you are, you know." He suckled on her lobe lightly. "You are my possession."

Hermione was horrified when a slight moan escaped. If he feels so strongly about keeping her in his life, then she would never have to worry about him leaving her. He would change no matter what he said. He had changed over the weeks that they had been together. She was safe with him. He cared about her. That care would turn to love eventually. "Possess me," she said suddenly, surprising herself.

Severus ripped her cloak away in answer. As his fingers began to quickly relieve her of her clothing, she, in turn, began to unbutton his. After a few fumbling moments, he pulled away, grabbed his wand, and spelled away both of their remaining clothing. He also mumbled a Cushioning Charm before dropping his wand next to them and lowering her to the ground. In one swift motion, he was buried within her. They both moaned. "I have missed you," she said, kissing his cheek softly.

He stilled his movements to look into her eyes. "I have noticed an emptiness as well." His lips pressed lightly against hers. As their tongues mingled, her hands found their way into his hair to hold his lips to hers. She wrapped one leg around his waist and the other around his thigh, shifting her pelvis upward to grant him deeper access. One of his hands slid down between them to heighten her pleasure. Their bodies slapped together frantically, only the sounds of grunts and moaning could be heard. It seemed that the forest noises and the brook had been quieted. She pushed the image of puzzled creatures watching their frantic coupling out of her mind and concentrated on her lover. She could feel him throbbing within as he was about to explode, and it drove her over the edge. Their lips parted as they both cried out. The only thing going through her mind while they lay together in the afterglow of their intense coupling was that he was hers again.

Nearly an hour later, after they'd changed positions wordlessly and coupled again, her mind began to think about what he'd said *It's hard for me to let go of something that belongs to me. That's what you are, you know. You are my possession.* She realized that when she had asked him to possess her, she had agreed to the life that he'd described. A loveless life. No marriage. No children. No changes. He would change though. He had to change sooner or later. Her love for him would eventually persuade him to feel something for her other than possessiveness and slight caring. Caring! He'd admitted that he cared for her. *See? That is a step forward, isn't it?* A couple of months ago he wouldn't have given her a second glance, much less have cared for her.

Harry's disappointed face came to mind. She could almost hear him saying how he'd hoped she was better than that. She had always wanted a family and children one day. Even after she became infatuated with Severus, she still figured that she would move on and have a normal life. When he'd finally lain with her, she'd started dreaming of having those things with him. He didn't want those things. It was unlikely that he would even publicly acknowledge a relationship with her. What had she done? She could be content this way for now, and she had told him as much. But, he made it clear that there was no *for now*. This was for always. She had blindly agreed to it. She needed to talk to him about this.

"Severus, please wake up," she said softly.

"What?" he grumbled, turning away from her.

"Will you still see other witches?" she asked suddenly. *Where had that question come from?*

He sat up and eyed her oddly. "You satisfy my needs."

Well, what the fuck kind of answer was that? She supposed that was his way of saying that he would be faithful. "What am I to you now?"

He raised his eyebrow. "What are you getting at, Hermione?"

She swallowed. "Are people to know that I am...something to you?"

"Do you want people to know?" he asked in disbelief.

"Yes."

"Whatever for?"

"Well, I am not embarrassed of you. It will keep women like Vector and whatever tart you've bedded last away," she said determinedly. "Am I so bad that you would not want anyone to know that you are interested in me that way?"

He leant in to look at her harshly. "I will not commit to you. Did you not understand that?"

"You said you would not marry me. There is a difference." She would not give in to this. He would treat her with respect, and their relationship would be public.

"I may not be opposed to allowing others to know that you are mine. I can see your point. This will save me the trouble of turning away your many would-be suitors," he said after thinking it over. "Tell whomever you wish, but do not expect public displays of warmth."

"You will talk to me, won't you? Say, if Rolanda and I swapped chairs during meals, would you talk to me then?"

He stood up and began to dress. "I think I've heard enough of this."

"Severus, wait," she stood up and touched his arm. "You were angry because Ron called me your...whore. If you treat me like one, everyone will say it. I'm not asking for much. Just don't be ashamed of me."

"I am not ashamed of you. I just refuse to have people think that I am some weak fool and am unable to stay away from you," he said coldly. "I will not disrespect you, but I will not disrespect myself either, Hermione. Switch chairs with Rolanda, tell others that we are lovers, and welcome me to your bed at any time I choose. These are agreeable to me, but do not expect anything more. I am warning you."

"If one of us should ever decide that the other is no longer what we want, what do we do?" she asked cautiously. He stopped in the midst of dressing, his shirt still dangling in midair. "That's not what it sounds like," she amended quickly, taking in his angry stance. "If you tire of me, what will you tell me?"

He finished putting on his shirt and turned to her. "I will tell you in the privacy of my chambers, and I will not prolong anything. If and when this arrangement becomes cumbersome, I shall let you know forthwith."

"Then, I shall do the same," she said with more conviction than she felt.

He looked at her for a long moment before smirking arrogantly. "Yes, I'm sure you will." He cast a charm to clean both of them before he finished dressing. "I'm sure, my little paramour, that I will give you no reason to become bored with me."

She nodded, but she had her way out. She could always point to this conversation should their relationship become too much for her. She hadn't said that she would do the same if she became bored. If time passed with nothing changing, she would end things. She had to give this a try. She had to know if things could change. She had to know if Severus could love her eventually.

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

#### ONE WEEK LATER

Severus lay propped up on one elbow, watching his lover sleep. This was the second time this week that he'd stayed until she fell asleep. He liked to watch her. Hermione's youthful face softened, and she looked almost pretty. She was very appealing to him already, but in this contented sleep, he saw her even more so. When had she become so attractive to him? He shrugged away the thoughts. He did care about her, but it wasn't so much that it was weakening him. There was nothing wrong with a man admiring what was his.

*Weak fool. You are letting her decide things.* Damn! What was going on with that? She still hadn't told anyone about the redefining of their association, or, as she would say, their relationship. *Relationship?* He loathed the word. It was worth the bother though, as he now had a frequent, willing lover nearby. Severus knew he was definitely getting the best end of the bargain. Why not let her paint the illusion of them having something more than what they had? With suspicious eyes, he glanced down to the sleeping witch. She still sat between Potter and Rolanda during meals, and she had yet to try to make public conversation with him. Why not? Was she waiting for an opportune moment? Was she trying to catch him unawares? He decided to tell her that tomorrow that she would sit next to him. There. It would be his decision. He couldn't wait to see Potter's startled face. It would prove to be quite amusing.

A sigh broke through his thoughts. Her lips always parted slightly when she slept. He was tempted to slide his finger into her mouth. Would she suckle it unconsciously? The thought of her mouth suckling anything excited him. It had been a while since she had pleased him with her mouth. Since they'd decided to resume their sessions, it seemed that they always rutted like animals. *Or like two frantic people trying to make up for lost time. You want her. You're getting weak. Admit it!* Hell, yes, he wanted her, but he didn't believe that made him weak. He would be weak if he became one of those Arthur Weasley types. They were the men that hovered near their wives at all the functions they attended together in case they needed something. They were the ones that sickeningly fondled their women or showed disgusting public displays of affection. They were the ones that allowed their women to make decisions for them for a roll in the hay.

Sex or no sex, no woman would ever change him. He made his own decisions and would compromise only if it was to his advantage. *You compromised with Hermione.* He sighed in annoyance. *It was to my advantage to compromise. I have nearly unlimited sex, all wizards will know to stay away from what belongs to me, and Potter would hate the fact that I have won.*

"Hermione," he said, nudging the witch.

"Hmmm?" she asked sleepily.

"I want you," he breathed.

Her eyes opened, and she smiled lazily. "What would you like?"

"Pleasure me," he said, moving to lay on his back. As she moved down his body, he put his hand on her shoulder. "You will begin sitting with me tomorrow."

She grinned beatifically. "All right."

"Yes," he hissed as her lips trailed kisses along his inner thigh. Perhaps she was just waiting for direction then. It had to be why she hadn't told anyone or tried to talk to him publicly. She must have been waiting for his permission, for when the time was right for him. Well, that explains things. She deserved a reward for her thoughtfulness. "Turn this way, witch. I want to reciprocate." As his hands and mouth returned the favors she was bestowing on him, he felt content. No witch had ever felt or tasted like Hermione. It was as if she was meant for him, made for his liking.

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**A/N:** Sorry this took so long, mates. I've been sick again. I feel much better now though, and I am currently working on the next chapter for The Succubus. I have been thinking about taking this story a few steps farther than I had originally intended. This would have been the last chapter, but another idea came to mind, swinging this a different way.

## Concurrence!

### Chapter 5 of 15

Severus goes a little too far, and Hermione makes a stand (of sorts). They finally seem to reach an agreement.

**Disclaimer:** Not my characters (sigh), but I would love to own them.

**A big thanks to my beta, Charmed Nay!**

\*\*\*\*\* SS \*\*\*\*\* HG \*\*\*\*\*

Hermione pulled her hair away from her face and fastened it. She felt the need to make herself a little more attractive for breakfast. It would be the first of many mornings that she would sit with her lover. Severus had left before dawn as quietly as he could, but Hermione had been awake. She'd watched him through slitted eyes as he'd dressed. He'd gone towards her door, and as if he'd had an afterthought, he'd made his way back to her still form to run his fingers along her cheek.

The memory caused her stomach to tingle. It was one of his rare displays of affection, and she would relish it always. Things were changing between them. She could feel it. She had decided not to harass him about sitting with her for a while. She knew that he would ask her about it if she kept quiet. She had to be sure to not put any pressure on him. Things would change even more. Today would be the start of something new. She checked her appearance once more before making her way towards the Great Hall. With each step, her heart beat a little more wildly, and it felt as if butterflies had taken flight in her stomach.

She looked to the table, and to her relief, she saw that neither Rolanda nor Harry had come down yet. Severus was there though, speaking with Minerva. She walked towards the table, afraid that he'd changed his mind. What if he embarrassed her? What if he asked her to move away? She had to sit there, or he would believe that she had changed her mind. It might even anger him. She had rightfully negotiated for this. She'd won this small victory, and she would have it.

Pulling the chair away from the table, she sat next to her lover. He turned to her and nodded once. "Good morning," she said softly in return.

"I trust you slept well?" he asked in a polite tone.

"Yes, thanks," she replied while pouring herself some juice.

"What have we here?" Rolanda asked, plopping down next to Hermione. "You've inherited my chair?"

"If you don't mind," Hermione began, "I would like to sit here from now on."

Rolanda looked from Hermione to Severus. A broad grin spread across her face. "Well, all right then. No harm done. Whose idea was this?"

"Oh, well, you see..." Hermione sputtered. She wasn't sure of what to tell her.

"Rolanda, that isn't really any of your concern, now is it?" Severus' voice commented.

"Well, I've just lost the seat that I've sat on for the last five years. I was a bit curious, you know," she said. After a moment, she said, "Well?"

Severus put down his drink and glared at her. Hermione spoke before he could. "Being his companion, I would prefer to sit with him, but if you honestly have a problem with that, we can change back."

Rolanda eyed them both oddly for a moment. "Companion, you say?"

"Are you deaf?" Severus asked brusquely.

"Oh, well, pardon me, Sev, old boy. I didn't mean to touch a sore spot." Rolanda chuckled. "Looks like someone forgot to tell Potter the great news."

Hermione looked to see Harry's shocked expression as he made his way to the table. She smiled lightly and turned her attention back to the breakfast before her. She took a couple of slices of toast. She could feel Harry's gaze on her, but she didn't dare look at him. The slight confrontation with Rolanda was bad enough. She didn't want Severus to be any more uncomfortable than she knew him to be. As she ate her toast in silence, she looked out over the tables. Some of the students were looking at her occasionally, but other than that, nothing seemed to be amiss. She wanted to tell Severus that all was well, but she dared not.

"Is that all you are going to eat?" he asked a few moments later when she put her napkin in her plate.

"Yes, I need to get to the library early," she commented.

"I think not. Have some fruit at least," he insisted.

Touched that he was concerned, she agreed. After eating another slice of toast, a few strawberries, and an orange, she pushed her plate aside. "I really must go. Have a pleasant day."

"I shall." Severus looked back at his paper whilst she exited the hall. He saw Potter sprint off after her and smirked. The brat was probably gobsmacked with the turn of events. It was apparent that Hermione had truly kept their talk to herself. *Good girl*, he thought condescendingly. *It will bode well for her to keep our personal business between us. She is learning so much.*

"Severus, I must admit that I am glad that you and Hermione have reconciled." Minerva said.

"Reconciled?" He sighed. *What in the world?* "We are just two people having relations, Minerva. Nothing more." *Your weakness is showing, Severus.*

She gave him a stern glare before saying crisply, "Relations, is it?" She scoffed. "If that's what you want to call it, who am I to point out the obvious to you?"

"The *obvious*?" he asked incredulously. "Please, do tell me what you've discovered with your newfound skills of Legilimency. *I'm not weak. She is only prying.*

"Oh, enough, Severus," she said shortly. "I'm referring to your relationship. It is apparent that you two care about each other. She more than you, but all the same, you care for her."

"Really?" he asked, raising an eyebrow. "How is it that you've come to this conclusion?" *Wishful thinking, Minnie dear.*

"You just made her eat more."

"So? I didn't want you badgering me." *Not to mention, I don't relish making love to someone too thin. MAKING LOVE? What the bloody hell is wrong with me? Sex...having sex with a skeleton was unappealing.*

"You are allowing her to sit with you, and you are talking to her."

"I see no reason why I can't indulge in one of her requests," he said acridly. "You know, Minerva, I should wonder why you are taking such an interest in this? *You should have denied the little witch's request! See where it has landed you? Hmmm?*

"Severus, as I've told you before, I care about you, and I care about Hermione. I would just like to see you two happy. If that happiness is being together, then so be it."

"Oh, I have no complaints; I assure you of that," he said suggestively. "I will take my leave now. Have a good day."

"You also," she said, watching him leave. She turned to Albus. "Well, he didn't deny that he cared for her."

Albus smiled. "I think we both know something that he doesn't. He'll realize it soon enough."

"I hope so. It seemed as if he was having some sort of internal struggle. I think part of him would like to care, but something isn't allowing it," Minerva said thoughtfully. "At any rate, I think it does more harm than good for either of us to openly meddle with them. Who knows what damage I may have just done by pointing out what I see?"

"It's unlikely, Minerva. He knows you mean well," Albus said quietly.

She nodded, but she wasn't so sure. He seemed slightly offended that she'd said that she believes that he cares for the young woman. A calculating look had come over his expression before an amused one replaced it. She secretly vowed to not comment on things again, not as she just had anyway.

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

"Hermione, what the hell is going on?" Harry asked when he caught up to her. She was walking extremely fast. "Stop for a moment, Mione. You don't open to the students for another forty minutes!"

She stopped. "I just have a few things to do, Harry. Come with me if you'd like."

He followed her silently, but he'd let her have it as soon as they were inside. What had she been doing with Snape? Rolanda had given him a pair of eyes that told him volumes. They were seeing each other again! This had to stop! He'd be sure to talk her into ending things. "Out with it. What the *fuck* do you think you are doing? You are back with him, aren't you?" he asked as soon as she warded the door behind them.

"Yes, I am, Harry."

"He is using you."

"It's a mutual thing. He has me. I have him. It's a satisfying arrangement. Why are you so angry?"

"You are better than this, Hermione. What has happened to you? He treats you like a harlot from Knockturn Alley! He goes to your room, takes what he wants, and then leaves. You've told me that yourself!" He shook his head in disgust. "Just because you love sex with him, Hermione, doesn't mean you love him."

"Look, Harry," she said furiously, spinning around to face him. "I don't want to be rude to you, but I need for you to mind your own business. I know what I am doing. As far as him treating me like one of *those* women, did you not notice where I was sitting this morning? Did you not see us talking? He cares about me, Harry."

"Oh, big fucking deal. So, the great bat is letting you sit by him, and he talked to you just enough to ensure that you'd be available later for a shag! Hermione, he looks at you as if he detests you. Why can't you see what we see?"

"Who is we, Harry?" she asked. She was still angry, but the pain his words were causing was taking its toll on her heart.

"Anyone! Why don't you ask Rolanda what her opinion is?"

"I have. She thinks that Severus does care about me," she said, finding the strength to argue.

"What's so damn good about him, Hermione?"

"Everything, Harry. He needs me."

"He's been doing fine without you all this while. What he needs from you, he can go out and pay for! You're just saving him a few Galleons and a trip from the castle." Hermione slapped him. Harry brought a hand to his cheek. He'd deserved that. "Sorry."

She looked down at her hand. "Harry..." She couldn't believe what she'd done. "I'm sorry."

"No. I acted no better than Ron did for a minute there. It's just that I love you, Hermione. I don't like that ruddy bastard having his way with you and then smirking about it when he looks at me. It's like he thinks he's getting away with something. Hermione, don't you want to marry and have kids? Don't you remember the talks that we used to have? You wanted those things."

"I may still have them," she whispered.

Harry guffawed. "Mione, has he said that he will give those to you?" She shook her head. "Then why bother with him?"

"He will love me, Harry. He's been changing slowly. I can't really explain it to you, but I do believe that for now, my love is enough for the both of us."

"Good Lord, Hermione. You sound like someone else completely! Where is my fiery friend that told Dean to sod off when he'd been bragging about shagging Lavender? Where is the witch that tried to talk people into freeing House-elves? Where is the woman that used to have aspirations, goals?" He pulled her to him and whispered. "Who is this weak-willed girl that has replaced her? I never pegged you for someone who would let someone walk all over you, Mione."

"Harry, why was it okay for us to trick Severus in the beginning, but it's not okay now? I mean, I never expected for him to find out and continue a relationship with me. Why is it so wrong now? It's what I want, Harry. Please don't fight me on this. I love him. I *need* your support," she pleaded softly.

"It was different then," he said immediately. "I'd thought it was about time for you to loosen up a bit. You needed a good shag. If I had only known *that's* would be the result, I would have never gone along with it. I was horrified that you'd chosen Snape, but who was I to interfere? I understood the tall, brooding, mysterious thing that you were going on about. But now...You are too clever to let this bastard use your body. It's about respect." He kissed her hairline. "Please don't let him break you. It seems that love has blinded you."

"I won't, Harry. I'm just biding my time. Things will change. I can feel it," she said softly.

"And, if they don't, what then?"

"Then, I will let him go. I've covered that already. All I have to do is tell him that I'm not happy with things, and we'll part ways."

Harry pulled away. "I'm going to get ready for my first class. I'll support you, Hermione. You know that. I just don't like who you've become lately."

"I'll keep that in mind. I'll be fine," she said, smiling reassuringly. He nodded, unwarded the door, and left her alone. Her smile faded immediately. He was right. She knew he was, but that didn't mean that things wouldn't change. She had much to do. She pushed the thoughts away and began her day.

She worked through lunch and was surprised to find a plate of sandwiches on her desk. Hermione assumed that Dobby had been sent with it and quickly devoured two. "Delicious," she murmured after she'd washed her meal down with some water. "Good Lord! I'm as full as a stuffed pig."

"I wouldn't compare you to a pig, but I do believe the word delicious comes to mind," a silky voice whispered. She jumped and spun around in her chair. He was standing right behind her.

"Severus! You startled me. What are you doing here?" she asked, putting a hand over her beating heart. Had he watched her cram those sandwiches down? Damn. He waved a hand towards her door. It closed and locked. He reached down to begin unbuckling his trousers. "Right now?" she asked in disbelief.

"Yes, I have a free hour, as do you."

"Someone may come in," she said worriedly.

He pulled his wand out and warded the door. "They'll decide that they need to come back later." She simply nodded and reached down to unfasten her robes. "No," he commanded. "Leave them." She looked at him, clearly puzzled. He moved to her, dropped his trousers and underpants, and pulled her up from her chair. "Lean over the desk." She did as she was told and felt him spread her legs further with his knee. "Severus Snape, Potions Master of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry." Her knickers unfastened and fell to the floor. His fingers immediately began to probe her inner flesh. After a moment, he lifted her partially to slide in with a deep groan.

"Ah," she exclaimed from the sudden intrusion.

"I know you like it," he said between grunts. His hands were gripping her thighs tightly as he pounded into her. All too soon, she felt his strokes become erratic, and he exploded within, groaning with release. "Ungh!" As an afterthought, once he pulled out, he snaked his hand around to stroke her crux, applying the right amount of pressure and fondling with precise speed.

Hermione felt the familiar wavy sensations begin, and before long, they came crashing over her. She bit her lip to keep from crying out, instead opting to whimper and moan lightly. She didn't want to risk any student or fellow staff member hearing anything. It wouldn't do to be reported to the headmaster for inappropriate behavior.

"*Scourgify!*" Severus said, cleaning himself. He repeated the spell for her. "I shall see you this evening. I must say that this little tryst was most satisfying." Without a backward glance, he unwarded the door and left.

Hermione pulled up and fastened her knickers. She sat in her chair, stunned for a moment. She appreciated that he'd thought to bring lunch to her, but he'd been motivated by the need for a quick shag! He hadn't talked to her. Well, not unless you considered the sexual instructions and moaning as an actual conversation. He hadn't kissed her or touched her either. "I was lucky he even remembered to pleasure me."

They would definitely have a talk about this. It was time that she stood up for herself. She didn't feel as if he respected her. It was as if... Bloody hell! Harry's words from earlier came back to slap her in the face. *I'm a whore. Nothing more.* "This has gone on far too long," she muttered angrily, straightening her robes as she stood. "He'll see me tonight, will he? Well, I'll just have a few words for him!"

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

Severus watched as his young lover approached. She seemed to have a new determination about her. He nearly chuckled to himself, but hid it behind his napkin as a fake cough. She must be angry about the way he'd treated her earlier. He had to do it that way though. He needed to put things into perspective. It was for her own good, really, and for his as well.

The conversation with Minerva had replayed in his mind all morning. The woman had ultimately pointed out that he was weak. He couldn't have that, now could he? Minerva had likely seen some smug expression on Hermione's face, though he hadn't detected one. Hermione hadn't tried to overdo their conversation either. He'd thought that it had gone well. He didn't even care that Rolanda had tried to ask questions. Potter's expression had made the switched seating arrangement worth it. He'd tried to think about anything that he might have said or expressed that would have made Minerva think that he cared about her. He did care for her, but he didn't care to show it to anyone else. Those were personal feelings that should be between the two of them.

Perhaps he was being slightly paranoid about the witch's words. No matter. He had gone to her on his free hour, even though he had other things to do. He had played the honorable lover by ensuring that she'd had something to eat, and then, he'd taken his reward quickly. Well, to be quite honest, he hadn't planned on having her until after the evening meal, but there was something so alluring about her, something different. He'd wanted her the moment that he'd had her alone. He looked at her face closely. Yes, she'd worn her hair differently. *I will not be weak. She probably fashioned it that way for me.* "You seem to have restrained your wild mane today. Any particular occasion?" he asked by way of greeting. *Fuck! Why did I comment on her hair?*

Her facial expression softened slightly. "None. I just wanted to try something different." Her voice was a bit cool. "Is it all right?" She reached up to smooth away a single escaped tendril.

"It's acceptable," he said, turning back to his plate. She had had a stony expression when she came in, but the moment he'd commented on her appearance, she'd softened. When he admitted that it was agreeable, she softened even more. He smirked slightly. Soon her resolve to remain angry would be diminished. There would be nothing wrong with telling her a few niceties now and again. That was not weak. It was a perfectly Slytherin thing to do. He swallowed deeply and steadied himself. He could give a compliment as well as the next fellow. "I think it frames your face nicely." Severus nearly choked as he said it, but he forced the feeling back as he looked at her. She smiled immediately.

"Thanks," she said with a grin. A moment later, her smile faltered, and her brow furrowed. She turned her attention to her meal, leaving him to wonder what had gone through her mind.

He took a sip of his drink. He'd done his duty once again. That should soothe away the bitterness she may still feel from their earlier interlude. Severus looked back at her. She was leaning over Rolanda to speak with Potter. Potter directed a glare in his direction, which he answered with a sneer of loathing. The little bastard! He'd probably gone to her to try to change her mind. Considering that she'd allowed him to have his way with her after lunch, he knew that Potter's ploy didn't work. How dare she sit there and speak with Potter as if he was the only one worth talking to? What was the point of sitting next to him if she intended to still converse with Potter throughout the meal?

Severus had almost changed his mind about staying away from her rooms as another form of punishment for Minerva's comments, but he now realized that he should stay away. He should never have decided to give her pleasure earlier. She didn't deserve it! He would leave, not say a word, and she would waste her night waiting for him. That would serve her well for talking to Potter. He wiped the crumbs away from his mouth with his napkin, nodded to Minerva, and left the table.

Hermione watched as her lover left without so much as a goodbye to her. She smiled to herself. He was probably angry that she'd ignored him to talk to Harry. It served him right! She felt slightly guilty about it though. He'd given her a rare compliment. *Damn it!* She had nearly forgotten that she was angry with him for a moment. If she hadn't seen Harry's annoyed expression, she would have allowed most of her anger to recede. What was this hold that he had over her? She'd never felt this way about anyone. It was more like an addiction. No matter. When he came to her later, and she knew he would, she would continue to be abrupt. He would eventually give in to ask why she was treating him rudely. She would pass the comment that had he not treated her so rudely, she wouldn't have developed an attitude.

Five hours later found Hermione furious. The bastard hadn't come to see her. Oh, he would definitely regret putting her off. He'd told her that he would be over when he'd shagged her in her office earlier. She paused in her angry pacing. No, he hadn't said that. He'd only said that he would see her in the evening. That could have meant at the meal. He'd purposely made it sound as though he would be coming to her chambers. She couldn't throw this in his face, could she? That infuriating man was just too damned clever for his own good! If she mentioned this, he would simply say that she had misunderstood him, and he would quickly point out that nothing during the meal should have given her the idea that he would be over. Two could definitely play at this game.

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

"Where the fuck is she?" Severus roared at his empty office. She had gone to the Great Hall for all three meals. She'd seemed fine. At the evening meal, he'd told her that he would see her later, and she dared to not be in her rooms? He had even passed down the corridor near Potter's rooms, but nobody was about. The library was locked up tight, and Rolanda was in the staff room with Pomona and Filius. Why hadn't she told him that she had other plans?

He paused for a moment. "So, this is her revenge. She thinks that this will be her retribution for yesterday and last night?" He slammed his fist down on the table nearest him. "I shall not stand for it." He strode out of his office to search for her. No! He was searching for students that may be out after curfew. The little dunderheads had better

hope that he didn't happen upon them. House points would dwindle, and detentions would be issued.

An hour and three sobbing students later, Severus went to Hermione's chambers again. The ruddy witch in the portrait tried to taunt him, but he threatened her with his wand. Hermione was still not in her chambers. It took more willpower than he cared to admit to keep him from going to Potter's chambers. Deciding that he needed to cool off, he opted for a walk out to the lake. Out near Hagrid's, he noticed a small fire, and he could hear slight laughter. Stealthily, he made his way forward, keeping to the shadows as he neared. His eyes narrowed in disgust. She was there. She and her berk friends, both Potter and Weasley.

"Bloody hell! Did you hear that noise? Sounded like a growl of sorts!" Weasley, obviously afraid, looked around uncertainly. "I've gone mental I think."

"You've been mental," Hermione said, flinging a twig at him.

Potter, who was laying near her feet on his back, said, "Watch where you are kicking, you! And, Ron, I think that was your stomach that was growling. You're hungry again, you berk."

"I think I would know if me own sto...right then. Should we go raid the kitchens? You know Dobby would be happy to see us together again, us three," he said hopefully.

Hermione giggled. "I'm not hungry, but maybe I should eat to clear my head. I think I'm a tad inebriated."

"Why don't you trot on down to your lover's lair and ask him for some Headache Potion. I'm sure he'd be happy to help you out," Ron said.

Harry kicked at him. "Shush."

"Oh, it's all right, Harry. He's probably sleeping by now," Hermione said with a giggle. "Maybe I should go wake him up."

"And, you'd likely get hexed into next week," Harry commented. "The ruddy git never cuts anyone any slack. Well, that might not be entirely true. I'd bet that he'd give you a Stunning Spell while giving one of us an Unforgivable Curse."

"Right," Ron agreed. "Don't think I want to be creeping down there anytime soon. The bloke nearly had my head the last time I had a slip of the tongue."

"You deserved it though for what you said to Mione," Harry said sharply. Hermione tsked slightly. "I'm no better, mate. I told her something along those lines yesterday. She hits hard, doesn't she?"

"I'll say," Ron commented. "Well, hang on! Why didn't Snape jump from the shadows, Apparate you away, and hit you?"

"He didn't hear me, I guess," Harry said. "It was just anger talking. I had hoped she was done with the git."

"Excuse me," she said, sounding irate. "I am right here, you know. There is no need to talk about me as if I'm not even here!" She giggled. "I have forgiven both of you."

"Wonder if he'd be peeved to know that you were out here with his two most hated students of all his 100 years of teaching?" Ron ventured. "Oof!" Hermione hit him squarely with a small branch. "All right! Maybe only twenty years. Bet the bloke would come down here and attack both of us."

Harry laughed loudly. "No, you don't see him as I do, mate. He'd just give us one of those scornful glares, say something foul, and expect us to take off."

"If you're quite finished," Hermione chided, "I would like to say that I doubt he cares where I am right now. We hadn't made any plans for this evening."

"Or, maybe," a seething Severus said, stepping out of the shadows, "I might come down to check on my intoxicated lover," Ron groaned, "whilst she gallivants with two young males in the middle of the night." He glared at each of them, but his eyes rested on Hermione's guilty face. "Once I saw that she wasn't being taken advantage of, I would simply return to my rooms to continue marking essays." He turned on his heel and strode towards the castle, purposely making his robes billow out menacingly behind him.

She would pay for this disloyalty. How dare she go out onto the grounds with two men? He'd wanted to do exactly as Weasley had said. He wanted to hex them, all three. But, to prove that he was a better man than that, he played the part of the concerned, yet annoyed lover. That would have her feeling guilty, and it didn't prove that he was jealous. *Jealous?* No, that wasn't the right word. Angry. There that was better. Just as he finally reached the door to his chambers, he heard hurried steps behind him. He pulled his wand and spun around. "Hermione."

"Severus," she said, breathing quickly. "Why did you leave so quickly?"

He looked around to be sure no student or Filch had overheard her disrespectful question. "Get in here," he said, roughly pulling her in by the arm. He released her after he'd locked and warded his door. He began taking off his robes. "Do not question me, Hermione. If I had wanted to stay with a group of imbeciles, I would have." He brushed past her, throwing his discarded robes onto a nearby chair. He walked to his bedchamber and pulled off his boots just inside the doorway before moving towards his bathroom. She had followed him into his room and was looking around.

"Why didn't you ask me to come with you?" she asked, sounding determined.

"I had no desire for company," he remarked unkindly, giving her a pointed look.

"Right then," she said. "Good night."

He waved his hand to close the door before she could exit his bedchamber. "You may stay since you have already come here." A moment later, he sarcastically added, "Uninvited."

"Why stay where I am not wanted?" she asked cheekily. "Why can't you just admit that you came down there for me?"

"Why indeed?" he asked with a snarl as he pushed down his trousers. He eyed her slowly from her furious expression to her petite feet and back again. "I retract my previous statement. You are welcome here." He nodded to his bed. "Get over there." He entered the bathroom to prepare for bed. When he came back out, she was not in his bed. She had remained rooted to the spot she'd been in before he'd gone to the loo. He was completely naked. "Are you deaf, Hermione?"

"Why did you come down to spy on us?" she asked quietly.

"I believe I have disclosed my reasons for being there," he said blandly, moving to his bed. "Come here."

"I am tired, Severus. I think I'll go back to my chambers, thanks," she said softly, shifting uncomfortably.

Severus chuckled lightly. "I think not. Undress and get over here." Hastily, she came to him, throwing off her clothing. She lay down next to him and cringed slightly when he cupped one of her breasts. Her breathing was uneven. "Do you not want me to touch you?" he asked silkily. An annoyed sigh was his reply. "So, you don't want me then?" He rolled her hardened nipple between his index and thumb. She bit her lip in reaction. "I told you that I would see you. Why did you not wait for me?"

She looked away for a moment. Once his hand trailed down to cup her sex possessively, sliding one finger in, she looked back at him. The resentment on her face was obvious. "I think I waited long enough for you last night," she bit out.

He chuckled slightly. "I never said that I was going to your chambers last night," he said softly, leaning down to nip at her nipple with his lips.

"Y-you never said that you were coming tonight either."

His eyes met hers for a moment, and he saw a flash of triumph in them. "Too right," he admitted. "I didn't go to your chambers last night because you seemed upset with me for some reason. I just assumed that maybe Potter was whom you needed to spend time with."

"Upset?" she shrieked suddenly, bolting upright. "You shagged me!"

"As I've done on many occasions," he said, lowering his mouth back to her breasts. He began licking a slow circle around the pinkish areola on her breast. He moved to nibble the underneath of her breast, as he knew she liked, and she began squirming. He purposely sucked hard and left a mark.

"But, you left me," she said finally, twisting away from him slightly. "You didn't even talk to me."

He looked up at her. "We hadn't the time," he said with a slight shrug, moving his face back down to allow his tongue to sweep through the valley between her breasts on its way down.

She pulled his face away. "Severus, I don't want you to treat me that way again." Remembering Harry's words, she added, "I don't deserve that."

Severus took in her earnest expression and noted the firmness in her voice. If he wanted to avoid a row, it would be best to simply agree with her. His hard cock needed to be buried within her. The angry witch was turning him on. He especially seemed to like the fact that she was trying her best to not succumb to his caresses. "Hermione, many couples have trysts such as those."

"I felt like a...harlot. I don't and won't feel that way," she said. "I mean, do you see me that way?"

He gently pushed her back down. *You are my woman. I can do with you as I please.* "Of course I don't. Is Weasley not proof of that?" He smirked for a moment. "If I'd heard Potter's words, I would have done the same to him. You are mine, Hermione. I have you now, and this," he moved over her, digging his erection into her soft belly, "is where you belong." Noting the narrowing of her eyes, he dropped his lips down to brush against hers lightly. He could taste some sweet wine upon kissing her. It was quite pleasant. *Don't kiss her. You're giving in, Severus. Fool!* He pulled away, noted the submission in her eyes, and moved back to ravish her lips again. His hand slid down to guide his erection into her.

Severus inched in slowly, kissed her languidly, and savored the feeling of becoming one with his lover. Once he was completely in, he stilled and continued kissing her. *Stop kissing her! If she believes you to be soft, she'll take advantage of you.* He moved his mouth away to whisper in her ear. "I do enjoy your company at times such as these." He pulled nearly entirely out before slowly pushing back in. It felt too good, and he couldn't be bothered with doing it slowly. He began thrusting into her repeatedly and roughly. It wasn't long before his forceful jabs had her panting and tearing away at his flesh. "Look at me," he murmured. Her glazed over eyes met his. "Call out for me." The second his hand snaked down her body to caress her, her insides exploded around him.

"Severus!" she yelled loudly, beginning a long list of moans, whimpers, and broken phrases. The last thing he heard before she went silent was something about love. Her eyes closed and her face went slack. He triumphantly began his orgasm. Hermione's open admittance of love gave him a feeling of power. He had her. He had all of her. Her heart, mind, and body all belonged to him. Whereas he wouldn't have liked to hear her admission in normal conversation, he didn't mind it in the throes of ecstasy. It seemed to seal their *relationship* and put things into perspective.

"Hermione," he ground out just before he peaked. With a few grunts, his seed completely filled her, and he collapsed atop her. "Very good," he whispered belatedly.

"Mmmhmmmm," she murmured in agreement.

He moved to his side, and instead of holding her, he placed a hand upon her abdomen. He began to ponder a few things. Should he ask her to leave? This was his private space, and he'd never allowed her to grace his sheets. It wasn't that he minded all that much, but he simply didn't want her in his bed. *Because you are weak, Severus. Now that she's been in your bed, you'll never be able to sleep in it again without thinking of having her there with you. Even after you break things off, you'll still think of her.* As if reading his thoughts, she moved away from him and went to shakily put on her clothes. He could tell that her anger had come back. "You don't have to leave." *What?* "I suppose you could stay a while if you'd like." *What the hell?* "Or not," he added, seeing her determination. He reached over to his bedside to grasp his wand. He quickly unwarded his bedroom door and cleaned himself.

"Thanks for the shag," she said, sounding bitter. "I'll see you around."

He didn't try to stop her as she left. He heard his other door slam loudly as she departed. He chuckled slightly. "So, she thinks that she is punishing me by leaving and acting indifferent." *I know that you are many things to me, little Hermione. Indifferent is not one of them.* Severus turned over and tried to go to sleep. His hand reached out to touch the spot next to him. He realized that he truly wouldn't have minded if she had stayed with him. At least for a little while, that is. There was nothing wrong or weak about taking comfort in a warm body. *You don't need comfort, Severus. Only you can take care of yourself. Anyone else will betray you. Never trust anyone.*

The voice was right. He'd let her play her little game. He'd let her think that she had gotten away with something and punished him for the way he'd treated her. So, in the morning at breakfast, he would resume the air of politeness whilst they ate together. He would try to have a genuine conversation with her, and that alone would stopper any resentment she harbored.

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

#### FIVE DAYS LATER

Hermione smiled as Severus pointed out a passage to her from *The Evening Prophet* and chuckled lightly. "What will they think of next?" he asked incredulously.

She shook her head in disbelief. It appeared that the Ministry of Magic was trying to have a new law approved that would allow them to place only Ministry approved Apparition and Portkey points across the continent. They wanted to be able to monitor everyone entering and leaving. This was not a bad idea, but they wanted to charge the Wizarding community excessive fees to pay for the wages of those that would have to keep the wards up and work the stations. They didn't want to pay anything for the upkeep. "I think if it's their idea, they should at least pay for most of it. Besides, I'm sure some families would gladly donate large sums of money to gain standing with the Ministry."

"I agree," he said snidely. "They are backwards. If they want something to appeal to the public, they should learn new ways to approach us. Anything that sounds more like a command than a request is likely to be met with disapproval."

Hermione went back to her meal. It had been nice since she'd gone down to his chambers that night. He seemed to be treating her with more respect. They had been having decent conversations for each meal. He'd even gone to the library once to ask her opinion on a book that he was searching for. It seemed almost pleasant. He hadn't asked to join her in her chambers one time. While this made her happy, it also disappointed her. She missed him and wanted him. It seemed as though she was incomplete without his physical closeness. She was almost afraid to ask him to join her. What if he was waiting for her to do so? What if he turned her down? She would be crushed. *Ridiculous, Hermione! You are a grown woman!*

It was Friday evening, and she had nothing to do. Harry was going into town to meet Ron and Draco for a guy's night out. She had been invited, but being that she was a woman, she declined. They would likely end up in pubs that would make her feel uncomfortable. She'd told him to give her regards to Draco though. He'd just come back to town after a long hiatus on the mainland. Harry had been puzzled when he got Draco's owl. He'd sounded as if he hadn't seen any of them in months. Harry figured that he was trying to pretend that the mishap with Snape's trickery hadn't happened. Hermione sighed and decided she'd go have a read in one of her Muggle novels.

"I'm going to go on to my chambers," she told Severus. "I'll talk to you later."

"Here," he said, rising as well. "I'm finished. Allow me to escort you."

She nodded her agreement and followed him out the back exit of the hall. As they approached her chambers, her stomach began fluttering. Would he ask to stay? She hoped that he would. It had been five long days since she'd been with him. It was not just the sex she missed, but she missed the closeness she felt with him. She'd regretted not remaining with him in his chambers that night. He had told her that she was welcome to stay there, but she had been too intent on teaching him a lesson. Was that what had changed his attitude towards her? Was he sorry for treating her like his personal whore? It didn't matter. The only thing that mattered was that things had changed. He and she were sharing real conversations publicly and learning things about each other. It was time to work sex back into the relationship. If he missed it as she did, then they were both suffering needlessly.

"Well, here we are," he said as they neared her portrait. "Do have a good evening." He took her hand in his and placed a kiss on her palm.

Before he could release her hand, she closed her fingers over his. "Stay with me."

For a brief moment, it seemed as though he would decline. "Perhaps I could come in for a moment."

"All night, Severus," she said huskily. "I need you." The swift reaction caught her by surprise. He seemed to pounce on her. Her body was sandwiched between the stone wall and his body. His hands were on either side of her head as his lips, mouth, and teeth abused hers possessively. She vaguely heard her portrait scoffing about her open behavior in the corridor, and she felt Severus lift her up. Before long, they were on the floor before her fire in her living area, frantically coupling. Both were still partially dressed and panting. It didn't take long for either to find release.

"Would you care for a bath?" he asked.

"I would like that," she replied.

He stood, discarded his remaining clothes, and held a hand out to her. Once she was standing, he removed her remaining clothes as well and guided her to the bathroom. He began filling the tub and stepped in. He reached up to pull her down with him, allowing her to rest against his chest.

"Severus?"

"Hmmm?"

"I've missed you." She hoped he wouldn't withdraw his arms from her. He stiffened for a moment, but he relaxed again.

"I thought it best to give you some space since you were unhappy with our arrangements," he said evenly.

"To be honest, I was unhappy with the way I was treated that day, but I suppose it's in the past. There is no need to whinge about it now, is there?" She pulled up one of his hands to place a kiss on it. "If you want a tryst during the day, I'll not deny you... unless I am busy, that is." She kissed his hand again and smiled as his other arm tightened around her. "I simply request that you go about it differently."

She heard a slight rumble from his throat. She was unsure if it was a growl or a sigh. "I suppose I could concede to you on that point, as I can see where you may have felt slighted by the blatant disregard I had for bestowing affection on you." A few moments later, he added, "Hermione, I warned you about the type of man that I am. More than once."

"I know that, Severus." She pulled his arms tighter around her. "What would it hurt you to make me feel good so long as you knew that I understood that you were doing it only for my benefit?"

"I thought I had been attempting to show more affection," he said indignantly.

"You have, but you know what I mean. What would it have hurt to kiss me that day in my office? If not that, then why couldn't you have had a seat for a few minutes?"

"Enough, Hermione. Leave it in the past," he said firmly.

"This week has been nice though, our talking and such," she ventured after some time had gone by. She reached for the bar of soap and began lathering a washcloth.

"Mmmm," he murmured.

She turned in his arms and began scrubbing his chest lightly. "Did you not like it?"

"I truly did enjoy our chats," he admitted. She noticed that he seemed slightly surprised by his revelation. Had he not realized that they'd been getting along better? She shrugged the thoughts away. She wanted to make up for lost time.

"Let me make you feel good," she said softly, lowering the washcloth to his groin.

"By all means," he said smugly.

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

TWO WEEKS LATER

"Potter! What are you doing here?" Severus asked suspiciously. There was no need for him to be leaving Hermione's chambers at such a late hour.

"Mione is really bad off. Something must not have agreed with her. She is sending me down to Poppy to get a potion," Harry said snidely. "You know, Snape, if you'd ventured out of the dungeons today, you might have noticed how miserable she's been. Guess some things are more important, eh?"

"Not that it's any of your concern, Potter, but she knew that I would be completing the end of term assignments today. Otherwise, I would have noticed." He sneered at the arrogant brat. "There is no need to send for Poppy. Being the school's Potions master should account for something."

"All right," Potter agreed. He paused and looked at Severus for a moment. "Just take care of her. She doesn't need any harsh remarks or pressure to have sex."

"Good Lord!" Severus said indignantly. "I would flee, Potter, before harm has a chance to come upon you. Our personal business is none of your concern."

"Whatever, Snape. No matter what she says, I still think you don't deserve her." Potter turned and left, not looking back.

Severus seriously debating following the brat, but he decided that seeing to Hermione was more important. He found her on her bed with a cold towel pressed to her head. She seemed to be sleeping. He placed a hand on her cheek to try to gauge if she had a fever.

"Hi," she said, barely audible.

"Hermione, what is it? How long have you been like this?" he asked, not liking the sound of her voice or the miserable expression on her face.

"Off and on all day," she replied. "Just after breakfast I felt faint. I wasn't all that hungry, but I did have a slice of toast. When I sat down for lunch, the beef stew nauseated me. I had to hurry away to retch. Since then, I've just felt horrible."

"Your skin is clammy, but I don't think you've a fever. Would you like for me to get you a potion to quell your nausea?" he asked, genuinely concerned.

"I would."

"I'll go down and get it. If you don't feel any better by tomorrow, perhaps you should see Poppy." He quickly made his way to his office, got a vial of the needed potion, and made his way back to her. She was sleeping when he finally returned. "Hermione," he called, lifting her head slightly. She simply opened her mouth and accepted the liquid he brought to her lips. Severus lay down beside her after he undressed. He pulled her close, allowing their bodies to touch, but he didn't hold her. There was no need to since she was sleeping.

Things had been going fine between them. They talked more often, he bestowed small gestures of affection privately, and he'd allowed her to sit with him in the staff room on occasion. The sex had improved since their bath time talk, much to his liking. It seemed that a few small gestures went a long way. However, something had been bothering him for the last couple of days. He was beginning to feel as if things were turning into a routine, becoming too familiar. He didn't like that. *She thinks she has you transfixed. Show her that you will never be a henpecked man. You run your own life.* He sighed, wishing the niggling voice of his father would leave his mind. Things would be much more peaceful.

He would have to end things soon. It wasn't that he was tired of her. Hell no. Sex had never been more abundant or better for him. It was just becoming monotonous. He didn't like feeling as if he was committing to her, and that, to outward appearances, was exactly what was happening. Severus was no fool. He could see everyone smiling at them with knowing expressions. They all thought them to be in love or in the midst of a serious affair. He would prove them all wrong. "I am not weak!"

"Mmmm?"

"Nothing. Go to sleep," he said. The summer holidays were nearly upon them. He would spend time with her until it was time for the next year to begin. Then, they would end things. *Spend the summer? You've gone soft!* He shook his head. "Not soft. Just making the most of a good thing." With that said, he leant towards her and kissed her shoulder lightly. *What the hell?* He sighed and pulled completely away from her, not wanting to risk the temptation to touch her or kiss her. That would not do. He didn't need to display such liberties whilst she was sleeping. There was nothing to benefit from it. He wondered again what would have her so sick. Perhaps the Potter brat was right. Maybe something from dinner the night before had not suited her.

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

**A/N:** Well, I certainly hope that you've enjoyed this chapter. Maybe some of you that hated Hermione for a while might see that she is getting a bit stronger and is now able to voice how she feels. She has a plan to not pressure him into anything, but alas, it appears that he wants to end things.

Do you think he is treating her better? I wonder if he is falling in love with her and not realizing it. I wish that ruddy voice would get out of his head. Unfortunately, I have one of those. I can always hear my mum telling me things. :) More up soon.

## Counterblow!

Chapter 6 of 15

The illness disappears, Polyjuice time, Hermione has enough, a small row, and some bad news can be found here. Why is it when things seem to be going well something always happens?

**Disclaimer:** Not my characters (sigh), but I would love to own them.

**A big thanks to my beta, Charmed Nay!**

\*\*\*\*\* SS \*\*\*\*\* HG \*\*\*\*\*

Hermione could see that the sky was still mostly a deep blue with only a few rays of sunlight peeking from behind some mountains in the distance. It cast her room in eerie shadows, but she could distinctly make out the body lying half under her. Her head was resting on Severus' chest, and one of her legs had snaked between both of his at some point.

The virus that had inflicted her the day before had fled, and she felt vibrantly renewed. In fact, she wanted nothing more than to make love to her lover. While she had on a long nightgown with warm socks and a pair of comfortable knickers, Severus had slept completely naked. From his even breathing, she knew without having to look into his face that he was still sleeping. The hand that currently rested on his chest slid down to nearly the knee of his left leg. Ever so softly, she allowed it to trail back to where it had been. Her fingernails played with the smattering of dark hair while she moved her head slightly. Her tongue darted out to lick the flat nipple that was in reach. After only a few circles with her tongue, it hardened, luring her to give it a slight suck. She felt the arm around her back tighten. *Damn! I've disturbed his sleep and my exploration.*

"I trust you are feeling better?" he asked, voice rough with sleep.

"Yes," she said, bringing her mouth back to his chest. Not having to worry about waking him, she moved to straddle his thighs, still exploring every inch of his chest. One hand slid down to fondle his morning erection. She felt his hands pulling at her nightgown. Hermione pulled back to allow it passage over her head. He looked down to her cotton knickers and raised an eyebrow. "What? I was sick. I wasn't feeling very sexy."

"I think that even in the plainest of knickers, Hermione, you do them justice," he murmured while sitting up to slide the knickers down. She partially stood to grant him access, putting her hands on his shoulders. Severus cupped her arse and pulled her body to his mouth and began nibbling on her stomach. She giggled and toed off her forgotten knickers. "I want you. Are you well enough to...?"

Her heart leapt at the sincerity in his question. The urge to show how much his caring meant to her overwhelmed her. She moved to straddle him again and lowered herself onto him. Since he was sitting straight up, she wrapped her arms around him, trapping his head on her shoulder. Her mouth was near his ear. When she wasn't distracted nibbling on his lobe, she was breathing heavily and whispering to him. Each time she would say something or breathe loudly, he would thrust upward more deeply and rapidly while kissing her neck. She easily found a rhythm that suited them both. Hermione loved the feeling of being in control, as it wasn't often that he allowed her to be completely. "It's...coming. I feel it," she whispered loudly. Her moans and whimpers were becoming louder with each stroke. His hands dropped to her waist to help her ride out her orgasm. She always had trouble keeping steady once the waves washed over her.

"Good girl," he said smugly as her body limply leant into him. He enjoyed when she had an orgasm. The way her inner walls would tremble and convulse around him, the way her legs would tighten and flex, the way her lusty voice would entice him, and the way she appeared so drained after she'd spent herself bucking erratically against him always led to his own release. As if on cue, he flooded her heat as he reached his own culmination. He held her that way for a moment before laying back and keeping her firmly on top of him.

*Waking up to a willing woman is most pleasing. Perhaps I could have her spend the entire summer with me. There would be no others around to interfere with anything. Then, we could end things before we returned to the castle. It wouldn't be amiss for us to remain friends of sorts after. She is nice to talk to now that I actually do so. Severus realized that he was smiling and quickly moved her to his side. "I think I shall have a shower. I've some things to do today."*

"All right," she said sleepily.

He left her without looking back and made his way to her bathroom. The burning need to relieve himself overtook him the moment he neared the toilet. He was surprised he'd been able to make lov...no, have sex with her. He supposed that having his arousal satiated had more bearing than urinating. There was only a few days left before the students would go home for term. They would stay behind for nearly a week or so tidying for the summer, and then they all went to their own homes, leaving Filch and Hagrid behind to look after things.

Severus got into the shower and inspected her shampoo. Muggles had made it. He truly detested the things they came up with sometimes. They were more worried about making things smell and taste good than they were with making them work properly. Nevertheless, he applied a generous amount to his hair and worked it in. As he rinsed the suds out, he was surprised to find that he didn't mind the scent. It reminded him of his Hermione. *Your Hermione? You need no woman, Severus.* He pushed the voice away as he began to wash and rinse his body. Most men his age had already been married and had heirs. What was wrong with having a companion? Perhaps they could continue their association next year as well. It had been nice these past few months. He'd started spending both Friday and Saturday nights in her chambers over the past couple of weeks. It wasn't all that bad. Could he handle her being with him for longer periods of time?

He decided to talk to her after his shower. He turned the water off and dried off his body with one of her towels. He spelled his hair dry, did a quick charm for his teeth, and wrapped the towel about his waist to go in search of his clothes. He heard her laughing in the next room and crept to the door to listen as he pulled on his clothes.

"Dobby is glad to be seeing Miss happy. Miss is looking nice and is eating what Dobby is bringing to her," the house-elf was saying.

Severus had a twinge of jealousy for a moment. Why is it that an inane creature such as this could have a pleasant conversation with her without worrying about repercussions? *What repercussions?* His eyes narrowed. *The ones where people believe you to be daft or inlove or henpecked!* How ridiculous he was being! He shrugged the thoughts away. He could pay her compliments in public and private. The private conversations could be more explicit and more detailed, as they were alone with no gossipmongers about to overhear. The public conversations where he would praise her were all reasonable. He strode into the room and enjoyed the way Dobby's eyes widened.

"I was not knowing that you was here, Professor Snape. I is leaving you to eat in peace." With a pop, he was gone.

"What's all this?" he asked. His lover smiled and pulled him to sit at her table.

"I decided we needed breakfast. Do you mind eating here with me?" She gave him a lovely smile, and he felt a jolt in his lower regions.

"I could use a bite to eat. This will save me a trip to the hall before I go back to my quarters," he said, reaching out to unravel his napkin.

"Here," she said, handing him a glass of coffee. "One sugar, a little milk." Yes, things were falling into a too comfortable pattern *Why not enjoy this for now? I'll never have anyone like this again.* He watched as she scooped eggs into a plate along with sliced tomatoes. She gave the plate to him before doing the same for herself. "Oh, and here. I was in more of a toast mood than a biddy mood this morning. Take these." She piled a small stack of toast onto his plate.

"That's kind of you. I don't mind the toast."

"Mmmm. These are fresh tomatoes!" She looked up at him. "Tuck in, Severus."

His lips quirked up slightly as he spread some jam on a slice of toast. "What are you doing this summer?" he asked suddenly.

She paused in the midst of chewing to look at him. She swallowed, took a sip of her drink, and answered uncertainly. "I was going to do a bit of visiting with Harry, Ron's family, and my parents. Er...what are you going to do?"

"I am going to spend my summer at my estate house. I have a few projects that I'd like to work on, and I suppose an extra pair of hands would be of some help." He sipped his coffee. "However, if you have plans..." He let the suggestion dangle betwixt them. If she was interested, she would ask him to go. If she wasn't, well, it wasn't like he'd come right out and asked her, was it?

"Well, I wouldn't mind helping you, Severus. I can narrow my visiting time down," she said excitedly.

"It's nothing serious," he said quickly. "I have been developing a potion for temporary familiar sterilization in males only. One dose so far lasts only a few months. I would like to get it to stretch to six. I'm sure I have it narrowed down, but there will be plenty of testing that needs to be done. That would be only two required doses per year. Good for any male household familiar, such as cats and dogs."

"That's interesting, Severus. I didn't know you dallied in potions for pets. What made you decide to do that?" she asked.

"Some places that I've been to are overrun with animals. I just think that unwanted offspring should never see the light of day. This would prevent the problem before it started. Mind, these are usually alleys or poor villages. I think I can make something that even they can afford and still make a few Galleons." He could see the approval shining in her eyes. For some reason, this pleased him. He wanted her to think well of him.

"When would you like for me to meet you at your house? How long would you like for me to stay?"

He smiled inwardly. *Ah, yes, so easy to manipulate, wasn't she? It's easy. She always wants to please me.* "I don't see why you couldn't come with me directly, unless you'd like to do some visiting. If you do come, I would ask that you stay indefinitely. I wouldn't want to disrupt the testing stages."

"I could put that off until after." She drank the last of her juice and set the cup down. "I am glad that you are letting me do this." He nodded in reply. "I would have missed you." He nearly choked on his bite of eggs. She kissed his cheek. "I'm off for a shower. If you aren't here when I get back, have a good day, and I'll see you at the noon meal."

Severus simply nodded again and watched her walk away. Damn it! Now she was reading things into his request. Well, that's the price he'd have to pay. Surely she hadn't thought that things had changed all that much. *I would have missed you.* Damn! Fuck! Would he have missed her? Yes. What? No. He would have missed the sex, but he'd not have missed anything else. *Liar.* "I know," he admitted aloud. He fled her chambers as quickly as he could. He needed to put distance betwixt them.

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

"You don't say," Rolanda said with a laugh. "Trust me, I've had enough of this to know. I don't see how you tricked me that last time. I should have known better. This here is enough for three different doses." She rubbed her hands together, grinning wickedly. "I can't wait."

"Be glad that I am giving you the entire lot," Severus said sardonically. "Be glad you are getting anything at all." He watched as the woman dismissed his words with a huff.

"You owed it to me. I did what I set out to do."

"Yes, I suppose," he relented. "You did what you were supposed to do and then some. Still, I got a bit more than I bargained for. The extra is of no use to me. You may as well have it."

"Why, Severus, if I didn't know better, I would think that you were doing a good deed," she ventured. "What's gotten into you? Been getting the goods every night? Keeping you satisfied, is she?"

Severus sneered at the woman. "What I do is none of your concern. I just have no need for it. Trust me, had I needed it or could make a profit of it elsewhere, you would only get the one cup. As it is, you—"

"Yes, yes. Whatever you say, old boy. I'll be off now. I've plans to make for this evening." Her yellow eyes sparkled mischievously. "I wonder what Hermione is up to."

Severus raised an eyebrow. "Are you still on about bedding her?"

"Not really. Just trying to get a rise out of you. Cheers! I'm off now," she said, grabbing up the small container holding the Polyjuice Potion.

He watched her leave and made a mental note that he'd better be careful whilst still at the castle. There was no telling what she'd try, thanks to the potion. Severus shook his head. He should never have been so generous. He settled back into his chair at his desk to grade some last minute extra-credit essays. It took nearly two hours, but he got them graded. He decided to stretch his legs before dinner and have a walk. He decided to walk along the third floor corridor to see if any students were out of bounds.

Before he rounded a corner, he heard a slight giggle. He knew that little laugh. Severus paused for a moment to try to place it. Who laughs that way? *Hermione usually does when she's caught off guard from one of my kisses.* But, surely Hermione was still in the library. He listened to a few smacking sounds, a whimper, and another giggle.

"That feels good," she said. He'd recognize that tone anywhere. That was the tone she used when she was getting aroused, her need building. Someone had his hands upon her. He pulled his wand. Someone was about to be disfigured. He took one step and stopped. He'd heard the reply.

"You like that, do you?" the person said. To his horror, it was his own voice. Rolanda! She'd used the Polyjuice to become him, and now she was seducing an unknowing Hermione. The bitch had gone too far this time. She must have taken a hair somehow. His fists clenched tightly; luckily his wand was strongly made.

"Merlin, yes. Maybe we could help each other masturbate. I am curious as to how it would be. Does your offer still stand?"

"Yes," the fake Severus answered. "My chambers." There was a disgusting kissing noise again and some heavy breathing. "I wish you would let me fuck you."

"No," Hermione replied firmly. "I've told you that already."

Severus' brow furrowed. Something was odd. She never refused him outright. He stepped into view, but neither noticed him. He was shocked with what he saw. Hermione's ill fitting robes were partially lifted as the imposter Severus had one hand beneath them, apparently caressing her breasts. "They are more than a handful. I want to see them."

"No. No peeking by either of us. That would be wrong," Hermione said. "Just touch. Don't look."

"All right then."

Severus had seen and heard enough. "What the *fuck* is going on here?" he demanded roughly, pointing his wand at both of them.

"Shite!" the imposter said.

"Snape," Hermione moaned. She looked to the other and said, "You promised he would be occupied. You said that he wouldn't know."

The fake Severus shrugged. "Sorry. My mistake. Looked busy enough to me."

"You *knew*?" Severus asked Hermione incredulously. "You *KNEW*? You came here to meet someone that looked like me?"

"Er...see, what happened was—"

"*Silence!* You are acting just like a little whore, Hermione. How dare you make plans such as these? Has this been the plan all along? Hmmm?" he asked harshly. His glare turned to pierce what he assumed to be Rolanda. "You shall pay for this, Rolanda. If you want the filthy whore, take her." He turned on his heel and ran right into...Hermione! "What the...?"

"Severus, I could hear you shouting from the stairs. They shifted and brought me this way. Who are you...? Oh! It's me! It's you, too." She backed away a few feet. "Which you, are you?" she asked uncertainly.

Severus spun around to eye their counterparts. The imposter Hermione was adjusting her crotch whilst the Rolanda-Severus was laughing. "It's just a bit of fun, old boy."

"You are touching my woman, and you dare say it's only a bit of fun?" He turned to the fake Hermione. "Potter, no doubt!"

"Harry?" the real Hermione questioned, moving past Severus. "Is that you?"

"I swear, Mione. I didn't look. I didn't even change clothes. See?" He nodded to Rolanda. "She dared me that I couldn't be a woman for an hour. She told me I was going to be her, but then I saw you in the mirror. Honest. I told her no looking."

Rolanda nodded. "So, I accidentally added the wrong hair. Whoops."

"Accidentally-on-purpose maybe!" Hermione said angrily to the fake Severus. She looked to the real Severus. "You called me... Why?"

"Your good *friend*, Potter, didn't care to divulge that he was an imposter! I was led to believe that you knew Rolanda had Polyjuiced herself into my body. That is the same as cheating," he said indignantly. "I should think that it is Potter whom you should be questioning, but once again, I see that he escapes your endless questioning and wrath unscathed." He put away his wand, turned on his heel again, and left the three of them standing there. He had better things to do than to play child games with the likes of them.

"Severus, stop," Hermione hissed from behind after he'd gone to the end of the corridor.

He spun around to face her. "Potter? Is that you? Come to see how a real man makes you feel? The experience with Draco must have you wondering about wizards now."

"It's me, Severus."

He smirked. "Prove it." He was about to say that she could follow him down to his chambers when she spoke to him. He was taken aback by what she said.

"I'll not prove anything. What they did had nothing to do with me at all! I heard your voice, and when I got closer, you were talking in disgust about someone. When I found out it was I, I had every right to question why. If you are going to act like an arse about it, you go right ahead." Her chest was heaving rapidly. "It's not Harry's fault, Severus. She tricked him."

"And, he was allowing her to touch your breasts. I heard them, Hermione. He suggested that they go help each other masturbate," he growled angrily. "You simply dismissed his part in it after he muttered only a few words. There was no questioning for *Potter*, but you have the nerve to question me."

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, but I-"

"*Hurt my feelings? Are you insinuating that I have feelings to hurt?*" He shook his head. "Maybe my pride was bruised, I'll admit that much, but I don't really care enough to have my feelings hurt."

"Then, I think, Severus," she said through gritted teeth, "that you should not come to see me tonight if you care so little." She turned away and spoke as she walked. "It's not Harry that I love. I don't care what he does."

He watched her walk away and was stunned. When had she become so vocal? He toyed with the possibility that it might have been Potter, but it hadn't been. That was his Hermione that had told him those things. He looked at her appraisingly. There might be more to her than meets the eye. A less passive Hermione was appealing. Her breasts had been rising in her anger, and he had been able to make out a slight flush. Her pupils had been dilated, her eyes wild, her cheeks flushed, and her mouth slanting angrily. There was fire in her, and he had to have part of that. His feet quickly moved towards her retreating back.

"Hermione," he said in a roughened voice. She turned around slowly. He stepped up to her closely and wiped the sole tear that was on her cheek. He wasn't quite sure what to say. He said the first thing that came to mind. "Fuck them," he said with distaste. She nodded. "And, me?" he questioned hopefully.

"Yes."

He nodded, took her hand, and led her down to his chambers. "I'll be right with you," he purred in her ear, directing her to his bed.

She stripped her clothing off and sat in the middle of the bed, waiting for her lover *Why do I let him get away with things? Why do I have to love him so much?* There were no more tears. She'd pretty much told him to sod off, and he'd come running after her. She'd told him that she loved him, sort of, and he'd come running after her. He hadn't exactly proclaimed his undying love, but that was likely to be as close as she would get to it. She knew why he wanted to make love to her. He wanted to express himself in the only way he felt acceptable. That had to be it. She smirked slightly, feeling that she'd figured her lover out at long last.

Severus came towards her brilliantly naked and laid her back as he crawled on top of her. She wasn't all that surprised to see that he was growing erect already. He was such a randy and ready wizard. She loved that about him. She loved so much about him. Things were changing between them. They were getting better with each passing day. He brushed his lips against hers for a moment as a finger delved into her. He quirked his lips upwards slightly as he brought the finger to his mouth and licked. A loud rumbling sounded in his throat, and without moving his eyes from hers, he expertly pushed into her. "You are mine, you know."

"I know."

He drew all the way out and slammed in again.

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

#### ONE WEEK LATER

"Yes, Linden, I'll allow you to help me more next year," Hermione said, patting the young boy affectionately on the shoulder. "You'd better be off, or the train will leave without you."

"Thanks, Miss Granger," he said, flashing a toothy grin and running his fingers through his dark hair.

"I think someone has a crush on you," Harry said. "Is that the one that is always in the library hosting study groups and doing assignments?"

"The same," she said fondly. "It's not a crush on me though. It's a love for books and learning."

"Whatever you say," Harry said, waving to a group of giggling students that were approaching. "Shit," he said under his breath; his smile never faltered. "Hi."

They all acted at once.

"Professor Potter, could we exchange letters now that I will no longer be a student here?"

"Here is my address."

"Want to go for a drink in London sometime?"

One didn't bother with the pretenses. She simply kissed his cheek and placed a folded piece of parchment into his hand. Harry backed away from them all.

"Get on the train," he barked. "Now." The pack of girls fled, giggling and waving. Despite his annoyance, he waved back.

"Potter," came a silky voice from behind them. "Picking out the students you'd like to molest for next year? I thought you wanted to play on the other side of the pitch for a while? Or, were you simply saying goodbye to those you will no longer have following you about next year?"

Hermione couldn't believe it. Not again! For the past week, no matter how many times Harry had apologized or tried to explain, Severus had been harassing him. She didn't want to say anything though because he would accuse her of choosing sides.

Harry looked around, and after he was satisfied that no students were about, he spoke in a low voice. "You know, Snape, I'm getting pretty fucking tired of your shit. Have you not noticed that I am no longer a student here? I'm your colleague. In fact, I have the job that you've always wanted. If you don't want to have a working relationship with me, I *don't* care, but keep your ruddy comments to yourself." Harry turned away from the man and stormed towards Hogsmeade.

"Severus, why do you have to get him so riled up?" she asked.

"Because I can," he answered arrogantly. "What are your plans for today? Are you quite done with your flirting?"

"My flirting? Severus, how many times do I have to tell you, Harry and I are not I-"

"I'm talking about the students. I saw the exchanges that you've had with a few of them," he said snidely. "I wonder what gives them the idea that they can be so blatantly disrespectful and get away with it?"

Hermione shook her head. "I have work to do." She didn't want to get caught up in his little jealousy game. For the past week, it seemed as though he'd been purposely trying to get a rise out of her. The make up sex had been great, but she didn't want to always be arguing about something.

Severus grabbed her arm to stop her as she passed by him. "What is going on with you as of late?" He lowered his voice. "Would you like to end things, Hermione? If so,



just let me know."

Damn. He'd turned the tables on her. "I don't want to end things, Severus, but I would like for them to be better. All week you've been having a go at me for one thing or another. It feels as though you try to find ways to purposely back me into a corner. I've done nothing wrong here, and I don't feel as though I should always have to defend myself." She looked down at his hand. "If you will release me, I have work to do."

"I think we should end things," Severus said walking away from her. "You can go ahead with your plans for the summer."

Hermione couldn't believe it. He'd just broken things off. What had she done wrong? He'd be back. Right? Should she go after him? No. This was a test. But, what kind? What did he want? Did he expect her to be strong and not follow him? Did he expect her to go after him, and make things right? She was confused. Ah, well, she'd feel him out at the noon meal to see how he was doing. She made her way back to the library to find Minerva there.

"Oh, Hermione, there you are," her mentor said. "The staff will be gathering in the staff room in about an hour to have a few drinks and lunch. We want everyone there. You can...Hermione? What's wrong?" Minerva asked, concern etching her voice.

"I'm feeling just a bit run down. I don't know if I should cry, sleep, or scream. I guess it's the whole end of year thing. It shouldn't take me too long to do what I have to do. I still have a week to do what needs to be done. I'll be there." She tried to give her friend a reassuring smile.

"I'll see you then."

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

Harry could almost feel the emotions radiating from Snape. The bastard had come in and sat down right next to him. What the hell was he playing at? He usually sat across the room, and Hermione had started sitting next to him. Maybe they'd had a row after he'd left. The brooding git would look at him every few minutes and seem to want to say something.

"What?" Harry finally asked.

"You smell like Firewhisky."

"So? Nobody asked you to come sit over here and have a sniff." The git needn't know he'd spilt his first glass on himself.

"I just wanted to tell you that you have finally gotten your-"

"I wonder where Hermione has gotten?" Minerva asked, interrupting Snape.

"Dunno," Harry said. "Haven't seen her since before I went to have *one* glass of whisky."

"Severus?" she asked when the man remained quiet.

"She is likely still in the library overexerting herself."

"She promised to be here," Minerva said, sounding worried. "She looked horrible earlier. Said she was quite tired. Seemed emotional as well."

Harry turned to eye Snape. His yellowish skin seemed to turn an odd colored white. So the git had something to do with it then. It was apparent that he wasn't going to check on her. "I'll go and find her," Harry said finally. Something must have happened between the two after he'd left them. It was the only explanation. He checked the library first and found it dark and locked. He trekked over to her chambers, and her ruddy portrait started taunting him.

"You know, you really should make a portrait of yourself," she sniffed. "It would only be fair to have you here for us as well as the living."

"Look, I just need to see her. Open up."

"Sorry. No password, no entrance."

"Oh, but if I were Severus Snape, you'd let me in, eh?"

"Blast," the witch said, irritated. The portrait swung open.

"That's more like it," Harry said. It was about time she stopped worrying about the ruddy password and worried about his concern for Hermione. A quick glance told him that she was not in her sitting room. Her bed was also empty, but he heard water running. "Mione?"

No reply. "Hermione? I don't want to walk in on you. I just want to make sure that you are all right." Silence. "Mione? I'm coming in," he said loudly after more silence. He put his hands over his eyes before stepping in. "Can you see me? Hear me?" Nothing. He opened his eyes. The steaming shower was wide open, but she wasn't in it. He turned to his left and saw her near the toilet. She appeared to be sleeping and...naked. *Bloody hell!*

Harry quickly went to her. He could see that she had retched. "Mione?" He shook her, and her eyes opened slightly.

"Harry," she mumbled. "I'm sick."

"Hang on. I'll take care of you." He grabbed a clean washcloth from the shelf near the sink and dipped it under some cold water. He then summoned a large towel to cover her body with. "Here." He placed the cool cloth on her forehead while he put the towel over her. "I'm going to carry you to bed."

"I'll try to walk," she said weakly.

"No, Mione, you look horrible. You can barely talk. I don't think you'll be able to walk." Without waiting for her reply, he reached under her body, picked her up, and carried her to the bed. "What happened?" he asked, as he took the cloth from her to wipe her face.

"I came back to shower. Right after I got in, I felt so sick. I ended up where you found me. I think I retched until I was weak. I don't know what is wrong. I started crying and then sort of passed out."

"There is only one thing for me to do," he said firmly. "I'm going to get Madame Pomfrey."

"All right," she said, not arguing.

Harry quickly left and went to the staff room. He found Poppy talking to Minerva. "I need you to come with me. Hermione was sick and passed out. She looks horrible."

Minerva gasped. "Go with him, Poppy."

"Let's go."

Harry could see the odd look on the woman's face, but he didn't say anything. He followed her towards the door. A voice stopped him momentarily.

"Potter, what's happened?"

Snape. Harry sighed. "Well, come on then." He didn't bother to give the arse an explanation. She would probably want him to be there even though they'd obviously had a row. They followed Poppy to Hermione's portrait. "Open up," Harry commanded.

"I told you. No password, no entry."

"WHAT? You let me in without it last time!"

"You must have made a lucky guess, but you did say the password."

"I can't believe this."

Poppy looked to them. "I do not know it."

Snape spoke. "Severus."

The portrait opened with a, "Humph."

"Well, of course," Harry said sarcastically. He made to enter, but Snape held him back.

"Allow Poppy in first, Potter."

Harry pulled away from Snape, but he did allow the Mediwitch to go in. They found Hermione just as he'd left her. "I brought her in here from the loo. She was sleeping in there."

"You didn't think to dry her hair?" Poppy asked indignantly.

"Uh, no, I was too worried about getting to you," he said sarcastically.

"You could only cover her with a towel?"

"Oh, come off it," Harry said impatiently. "What's wrong with her?"

Poppy scoffed slightly but turned to her newest patient. She muttered under her breath for a little while. Her wand tip would eject certain colors of light and vibrate. For a moment, the woman's mouth gaped open. She looked to Harry and then to Snape. "Leave us," she said suddenly.

"What?" both men questioned at once.

Hermione moved and opened her eyes. "Bloody hell," she said sitting up. The towel fell slightly to reveal one breast.

Harry turned away. Damn! *Hermione sure has grown.* "Er, we'll be in there." He fled to the sitting room. The door slammed, and he turned to see Snape staring at him. "What?"

"You were ogling her! What else did you do whilst she was in that state?"

"Oh, I got in a quick shag. I figured she wouldn't know the difference." Harry enjoyed the glare Snape directed at him. He was tired of the man always having something to say or accuse him of. "You forget, Snape, that I've been *in* her body before. It's nothing new to me."

"Why you little-"

"Oh my God!" Hermione's voice shrieked.

Both men looked at each other, wondering what was going on. Harry pulled Extendible Ears from his pocket, slid one end under the door and brought a piece to his ear.

"Are you eavesdropping?"

"Shush," he said, handing Snape one of the ear pieces. The man shoved it into his ear.

Harry heard Poppy talking.

"I'm afraid so, Hermione. My wand doesn't lie. Seven weeks, I'd say. About the size of your thumbnail right about now. Don't cry, girl."

Harry looked to Severus. The dark wizard shrugged. Hermione spoke next.

"I can't help it, Poppy. I don't understand how this has happened."

"Which one is it? Do you know? Will I have to do another test?" the Mediwitch asked.

"Which one what?" Hermione asked, sniffing loudly.

"Severus or Harry?"

"Only Severus," Hermione said. "Poppy, are you sure? I mean, maybe I'm just sick, you know?"

The old woman replied sternly. "I'm positive, but you can go off to St. Mungo's if you want a second opinion. I won't stop you. I'm getting something extra in my tests anyway. I would need you to come down at your convenience if you'd like me to look into it farther. If not, then I would say you should see someone else."

"I didn't mean to offend you. I'm just shocked. I didn't expect to get pregnant." Harry jumped back, throwing the device down. He looked to Snape who had turned completely white. Harry pulled the piece from the man and shoved the rest of it in his pocket. "Come on." He beckoned the man to get away from the door. When he didn't move, Harry pulled him to a chair. *This is not good. Snape is in shock. Good Lord! Hermione is pregnant.* "Look, Snape, this isn't my business. I'm going to leave now. You need to talk to Hermione, but tell her to be sure to come to me when you two have finished talking. I'm sure she'll need someone else to talk to."

Severus nodded and watched the boy go, barely registering what he'd said. "She is pregnant," he said to himself. She'd planned this. What a fool he'd been to trust her with the contraceptives. It was a trap. She was trying to trick him into marriage. Well, she would be the one that was tricked. He didn't want marriage or a child, and he sure as hell wouldn't be saddled with one. *See what happens when you trust someone, Severus. She's betrayed you. She's done this on purpose.* He nodded. "She knew that things wouldn't last, and even though I told her I would never commit to her, she decided to try to force my hand." *She loves me. This is an accident.* He snorted. *She wants to control you. She wants you to change your life. Don't let her get away with this. Be strong, Severus.*

A click on a door broke into his thoughts. He turned to see Poppy. Her stony expression lingered on him for a moment before her expression softened. She walked to him. "Severus, I trust that you've heard, and by Harry's absence, I suppose you'd like to have a talk with her. She's very worried. I would like to see her soon to check her over

more completely. She needs to start with the correct prenatal potions as well."

Severus nodded. The witch smiled, patted him on the shoulder, and left him alone to think. What could he do? He would not give in. He'd told her from the beginning that he would never marry or have children. He simply wouldn't marry her. He had a fair amount of funds that he'd accumulated over the years, and his mother's family had left him a good portion. He could give her money to help support her. Perhaps she would want to terminate the pregnancy? For some reason, that didn't sit well with him. It was his child, and he wouldn't want it to be killed.

He was partially responsible for the unwanted fetus. He should give her all of the options. There was adoption, termination, and raising it alone. He would not be bullied into marrying her. He didn't love her or the child. The line of Snape would end with him, as it should have ended already. It's what was meant to be. He stood to face her. He decided to give her the options, and he would try to persuade her to raise the child herself. He could give her financial support and see that she and the child were taken care of. *That's a boy. Throw some money to her, and she'll be fine. That's what most witches want anyway* his father's voice whispered in his mind. *She's not like other witches*, his own voice replied.

Hermione couldn't believe it. She'd never missed a pill. Not one. How could she tell Severus? He would surely hate her. Perhaps she could hide it for a few months. He'd broken things off with her, right? There would be no sex any longer. She could buy bigger robes, take a small amount of time off of work to go to her parents' home, have the baby, and let her mum help to raise her. She could get her house attached to the Floo network to be home some weekends and most nights. She could do this. Severus need never know. She began crying slightly. *Fucking hell! How'd this happen to me? I have never missed one damn pill.*

She looked up when her door clicked. Severus had come in, and bloody hell, he looked as if he knew. How? Poppy said she would tell no one, not even Harry. "Sev," shudder, "erus?"

"We need to discuss the options for this...*child*," he said sourly. "There are a few different things that you can do. One," he said, holding up a finger. "You can terminate the pregnancy. I wou-

"WHAT?"

"Let me finish," he hissed. "I would not suggest this, as we are at fault for being irresponsible."

"Severus, we were not irresponsible. I didn't miss any pills. I took them every single day. They are normally 99% effective. I've not had any other medicines that would have interfered with them." He smirked at her and looked into her eyes. She noted that his eyes seemed so dark and cold. "Look," she bounded up from the bed, holding her towel over her body. She went to her armoire, opened it, and pulled out a small box. From the box, she extracted the oddly shaped pill container. "See." She thrust it into his hand. "That is this month." She thrust another into his hand. "That is last month. Shall I continue? I've not missed a pill. I was not irresponsible."

His lip curled hatefully as he looked at the second package. "What is this row of pills here? Didn't miss any? It looks like you've missed a few." He threw it into her hands. "Explain, or I shall be forced to believe that this was done deliberately."

"You should know better," she whispered furiously. "I would never have done this!"

"EXPLAIN!"

"Those are sugar pills. If the woman wants to keep up the daily ritual of taking pills, then she can take those while she is having her menses to just stay in routine. They aren't required."

"If I were a suspicious man, I would wonder if you'd been clever enough to get rid of the evidence."

"Get out!"

"Not until we've had this discussion," he said coldly. "Your next option is adoption. I don't know that I like this one either."

"I will not!" Hermione said angrily. "I didn't ask for this, but I won't abandon my child. I will find a way to make things work."

"How so? You are planning to marry me then?" he asked snidely, raising an eyebrow and crossing his arms. "Well?"

She remained silent. Was this a trick question? "Is that an option?" she asked timidly. She saw an emotion pass over his face before his cool mask returned.

"No, it is not. I told you how I felt about that," he stated firmly.

"Your other option is, of course, to raise the child. It appears that this is something we both agree on. I shall give you a monthly salary to help with expenses starting now and until the child reaches adulthood. We can negotiate a sum," he said.

He was trying to pay her off. "I don't need a fucking thing from you," she yelled. "Get out!"

"You can't expect to raise a child on your own on the salary you have here? It's my responsibility to help you, as I've had a part in making this mistake," he said, moving to stand in front of her.

Hermione bit her lip to hold in a sob, but the tears fell from her eyes. She tried to breathe deeply to calm herself. Finally, she spoke with a hoarse, emotional voice. "I think that my mum and dad are able to help, thanks. I'm not from a poor family, you know. I can still work, and they will gladly help me. Get out."

"You would take the child from the Wizarding world?" he asked incredulously.

"Only until he or she is ready to come to Hogwarts," she said firmly. "Same as me."

"Ha!"

"Ha? Ha, what?" Her lover remained silent. "What?"

"I have to think about this."

"There is nothing to think about. I know you don't," her voice cracked, "want us."

"I don't want to be TRAPPED!" he said, suddenly exploding.

"Severus, you are no more trapped than I am. You don't have to marry me or be a part of our lives."

"*Muggle* contraceptives! You should have known better!" he said.

"I had to take them, Severus. Poppy's potions didn't help me. It's the only thing that could. I have terrible experiences with pain once per month. These helped to clear me up, and as you know, that time of the month only lasted a couple of days. They help to reduce the risk of cancer, and they are 99% effective. I don't know what went wrong. It's almost as if it was meant to be."

"Oh, good Lord! Don't tell me I have a ruddy Trelawny on my hands! You should have reinforced the *Muggle* contraceptive by taking the Pregnancy Potion that Poppy

keeps. There is one that lasts for three months at a time."

"Why do you keep saying Muggle like it's something filthy?" If he had something against Muggles or Muggle-borns she needed to know before things went any further.

"I just can't believe that I trusted..." Severus took a deep breath. "I *trusted* you enough to agree with your decision. *Muggle* contraceptives!" he said angrily. "Just as useful as their makers, as we now know. Well, I have no use for either." His uneven teeth bared in a twisted hiss before closing to reveal his angry, thin lips.

"How dare you talk about all Muggles as if they are worthless, Severus! My parents!"

"I know full well what both they and you are," he interrupted. "A pureblood witch would never have stooped to using something made by Muggles. Now look where you've landed us!"

"So, I am only good enough to *fuck*? Is that it? No place for a Muggle-born witch in your life besides beneath you in bed?" She couldn't believe what he was saying! She'd never seen him look so livid or speak so hatefully to her.

"Well, well, well," he said quietly, stepping close to look into her eyes. "I guess you truly are a know-it-all."

Hermione reacted like a mad woman. She slapped him soundly in the face and began screaming at the top of her lungs about him being a bastard. Her body was shaking with adrenaline. She missed the enraged expression on his face and pushed him towards her door.

Hands of steel grabbed her roughly by the arms and lifted her off of the ground until she was eye level with him. She calmed immediately, gasping with surprise and pain from the fingers digging into her skin. His voice was icy as he spoke. "Never touch me in such a manner again, Hermione. I am not so great a man, like your two friends seem to be, that I can allow such behavior without retaliation. No person, wizard or witch, will handle me in such a fashion." He pulled her closer, whispering angrily, "Is that clear?"

"Y-yes."

He lowered her to the ground and released the grip on her. "I have to leave."

"Wait, Severus," she said, rubbing her arms. She'd likely have bruises.

"What is it?" He sighed. "If I stay, I might not be able to contain myself. I don't wish to harm you."

"I thought you cared about me a little. Did something not change for us?"

"We became too comfortable with each other. I should have not let it go so far."

"I see." Hermione turned away from him. So, she had been wrong. He thought her to be nothing more than a Muggle-born witch worthy of a few shags. He never cared. A pair of hands on her shoulders startled her. She was pulled back against his chest.

"I don't want this," he stated.

It sounded as if he was trying to convince himself that he didn't want her. "I know."

He squeezed her shoulders. "I do care."

I was right. Her body began shaking with uncontrollable sobs. "I'm so confused," she wailed.

"Sshh," he murmured. When her sobbing stopped, she felt a small kiss on the back of her head. "I am glad that you won't kill or give up the child. I must go."

She felt the coldness hit her bare skin as soon as he moved away from her. The towel she was wearing did nothing to help the cold that had crept into her body. He cared about her, but he didn't care enough. She wished that she would know what to do. Should she consider terminating the pregnancy? Poppy had said that she was about seven weeks along. How had she not noticed her missed period? She thought that she'd had one. How could she still have one, yet still be pregnant? It didn't make sense. Hermione walked into the bathroom and stepped under the shower spray. She already felt numb inside. The now icy cold water did nothing to affect her. She had a big decision to make. Could she live with him nearby while raising his child? Would she resent the child?

Faint red marks on her arms caught her attention. The beginnings of bruises! She supposed that she was lucky that he didn't strike her back. He'd contained himself. To be honest, the coldness in his voice, eyes, and mannerisms had scared her more than the grip he had on her arms. She'd told him that she loved his eyes the second night he'd been with her, pretending to be Darach. She'd said that she felt like she could get lost in them. Those eyes made her feel lost. She'd lost herself in them, and she needed to find her way back. A chill swept through her body as she remembered something Severus had told her.

I just think that unwanted offspring should never see the light of day.

He'd been talking about the potion he was working on as a form of contraceptive. It sterilized the male user for a certain amount of time. Would he feel this way about his own child? Did he secretly hope that she would terminate her pregnancy?

I just think that unwanted offspring should never see the light of day.

"Oh..." Hermione wept openly. How could she have fallen in love with such a man? Why couldn't she have had an interest in someone else? She needed to talk to Harry.

A/N: Sorry this took so long to get out. I knew what I wanted to write, but it was hard to put it into words. More up in a few days or so. I have two chapters left of the Succubus, and I want to finish that up. Cheers.

If some of you haven't guessed, Severus will never be a 'sweet' man in this story. I'm sorry about that, but I just wanted to try something along the lines of how I perceive him in canon. I do believe that he can be flexible, and as we've seen, he can be nice to get along with.

So, there will be a love match just for those of you who are anxious to know. Hermione is getting some of her fire back. Yes, there were tears here, but what woman wouldn't be emotional in this instance?

Taking Action!

Hermione takes matters into her own hands with Harry's help. Severus ensures that nobody claims what is his.

Disclaimer: Not my characters (sigh), but I would love to own them.

A big thanks to my beta, Charmed Nay!

"Pregnant!" he roared, lifting the table and throwing it over. All of the containers shattered, the slimy contents leaking onto the stone floor. "A brat!" He kicked his chair, slamming it into the wall. "*Muggle* contraceptives...of all the...DAMN it!"

He summoned a bottle of Firewhisky to him, opened it, and took a large gulp from the bottle. "I should have known." He took another drink from the bottle before throwing it against his wall. He smirked with satisfaction as he thought of the mess that the house-elves would have to clean up. He'd wanted to leave a mess in Hermione's room as well. After the initial shock had worn off, his first instinct was to be hateful to her. Coldness was the most effective way to deal with things. If people thought you to be indifferent, they had nothing to hold over you.

She had been very lucky indeed. When she'd slapped him, he'd wanted to slap her back, just as soundly, but something wouldn't allow it. Yes, he'd probably left bruises on her, but she came off easy. He could not allow her to beat on him. She could never think that she was stronger than he was. She would always try to push him around if that was the case. He couldn't hit her either. He was above beating his lover, unlike his father. *I couldn't hurt her.*

His father had often had rows with his mother. Most of the time they would argue in front of him. When he was younger, he would cry for his mother and try to help her, but then he would be punished as well. His mother made him stay away until his father would leave. He'd still cry when his father was exceptionally angry and thought his mother to be in trouble. Eventually the tears stopped. His father would lecture him about women, about life, about being a Snape, about disgusting Muggles, and filthy Mudbloods. He always aspired to please his father. He'd thought that if he could project the image of a worthy son, things would be all right at home. His mother would not have been seen as a *failure* at raising children. She'd lost a child that would have been born whilst he was still at home. After she'd lost the child, she'd lost all hope for living, and she'd let herself drift away. Severus later found out that his father had been the cause for the miscarriage.

Once his mother had died, a part of Severus went with her. His father was all he'd had left, so he'd been determined to please him. None of what he did mattered in the end. His father had died completely disappointed in him. He shook his head to break away from the memory of his father's dying words. *And, now look! You're landed with idiotic, Mudblood filth, and you have something akin to a little half-breed on the way.* Severus leant against a wall and slid down slowly. She was not dirty nor would their child be considered anything like a half-breed. Times had changed. She was one of the cleverest witches of the age.

"So, what's she doing running after me?" he asked quietly. That was a good question. It didn't matter though. Things would be over. He had a responsibility to take care of the child...and her. He would see that they had a comfortable amount of money to see them through hard times. The thought of a magical child with two magical parents having to grow up in a Muggle world didn't sit well with him. That child would be behind all of the other children. It would have to work extra hard to fit in, and it would likely end up being an overachiever just like its annoying mother. "Hermione," he whispered.

She would have agreed to marry him even though she knew that he didn't love her. He'd seen that in her eyes and heard it in her voice when he'd asked if that was what she'd been expecting. He hadn't meant to blurt that out. It just happened, but once he'd said it, he couldn't take it back. For a moment, he'd almost told her that it was an option, but he'd suddenly realized what he'd been about to say. Why was that? He'd never wanted a wife. Ever. He'd never wanted a child. Ever. Both would likely turn out as miserable as he had been and as his mother had been.

"I will not be trapped," he whispered. What could he do? The staff would look upon him with distaste. He really didn't care what they thought though. Well, Albus' opinion mattered to him. He'd always had faith in him. Undeserving faith, yes, but it was there nonetheless. Minerva would be very disappointed in him for not owning up to his responsibilities. Hell, he'd be giving her money. Wasn't that good enough? *I'm not giving the child a name. I'm making it a bastard.* He sighed. "Being a bastard is probably better than being a Snape." He sneered at his reflection in the glass door of the cabinet. "I've always been described as a bastard even though my parents were married. What's the difference?" He needed to get out. He didn't like being this close to her. As he stood up, he heard his grate come to life.

"Severus?" Albus called.

With a resigned sigh, he stood, squared his shoulders, and made his way into the next room. "Yes?" he asked calmly. He saw that the headmaster was looking around the room as best as he could. "I am alone. What do you need?"

"You never came back. I was wondering if everything is all right with Hermione."

"She's...in her chambers."

"I'm coming through," Albus said.

"No, really." Before he could finish, Albus' head disappeared. Severus had a seat in a chair near the fire just as Albus came back in completely. He didn't wait for an invitation. He simply sat across from Severus, looking at the disaster in the open doorway of the next room.

"Tell me everything."

"I'm sure you already know," Severus said blandly.

"Poppy wouldn't say. I can only assume that Hermione isn't doing well at all, or she's...with child." Albus' twinkling eyes met his. He could tell the instant that Albus saw the truth. His eyes lit with surprise and then hope. "Severus, maybe this has happened for a reason."

"I am surrounded by peers attempting to follow in Trelawney's footsteps! Merlin save us all!"

A stern expression came over his mentor's face. "What do you intend to do about it?"

"I shall see to it that should she keep the burden, she and it will be provided for financially," he said defiantly, meeting his friend's eyes squarely. "I know what you are thinking, Albus, and I refuse to be forced into a marriage that I do not want. I told her from the beginning how I felt. Had she been more careful, we wouldn't be in this situation."

Albus held up a hand. "Stop right there, Severus. You both should have been more careful. Don't lay the blame solely on her. As far as your decision, who has tried to force you into marriage? I've not said anything about it. Has she?"

"Well, no, but..." Severus looked away.

"So...you are the only one talking about marriage. Why would that be?" Albus asked with a grin.

"You can stop that smiling! I mentioned it because I know it's what everyone will think! They are going to say that I should have done the right thing and married her," Severus said indignantly.

"Who says that marriage is the honorable thing?"

"Well, I know that it is," Severus spat furiously. He leant forward and put his fingers to his temples. "I just can't see myself as a married person. I was trapped once, Albus. I won't be forced back into living for someone else or trying to meet their expectations."

"Yes, I can understand that. It's a pity that Hermione has high expectations then," Albus said, pulling a small bag of sweets from his pocket. "Would you like one?"

Severus shook his head. "She never said that she expected anything. She knew that I would never commit to her. I've been honest with my feelings."

"Too right," Albus agreed.

"Why are you being so agreeable? Nothing to add? No guilt to lay at my feet?" Severus asked suspiciously.

The old wizard looked thoughtful. "No guilt, Severus. However, I do wish for you to be happy. If you can both move on happily, I am glad to hear it, but I should wonder what it would do to her if you would ever have another companion here." He sighed. "You are colleagues. I would think that would be uncomfortable for all of you." He chuckled. "I suppose it's a good thing that you wouldn't be abashed by a man taking your place in her chambers and in your child's life."

"What are you on about?"

"Nothing." He sighed. "I guess I should go."

"What do you mean another man?"

"Severus, just because you plan on living the life of a misogynist doesn't mean that Hermione will live the life of a spinster. There will be other men willing to take in her and her child and treat them as they deserve to be treated." He shrugged. "I suppose you really do have nothing to worry about. Well, I'm glad we've had this talk. I know I certainly feel better. Don't you?"

"Hardly," Severus said gruffly. "See yourself out." He slammed into his bedchambers, leaving Albus watching him sadly.

Albus went through the Floo back to his quarters. He hated to push Severus' buttons, but he knew he had to do it. It was the only way to set things right. Severus had marriage on his mind whether he wanted to admit it or not. It was almost as if he wanted someone to push him into it so that he could protest and claim subjection. He'd made sure to mention the fact that he would have to live in the castle amicably with Hermione and the next companion she would find. That one sentence would no doubt set off a chain reaction in Severus' mind. He would come to the conclusion that he *had* to do the honorable thing and marry her. His possessiveness was far too great to allow another to take away what was his. Albus put his head in his hands for a moment, feeling older than he'd felt in a long time. He wished that he could call on his old friend, Nicholas, for a chat. He and his wife had succumbed to death after destroying his stone and using the last of their elixir. The man always had a brilliant, unbiased opinion. He only hoped that he'd made a logical decision when pointing Severus where to go.

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

"That git!" Harry exclaimed. "That's exactly why I didn't want you to be with him! I should have never gone along with this!"

"Calm down, Harry. I don't need this."

He pulled her to him, crushing her tightly. "Mione, I want you to think about what you are going to do before you do anything. Please." He pulled back to look into her eyes. "I think you should keep the baby, Hermione. I'll help you. We'll hire a nanny for when we can't be about."

"Harry, I can't impose on you that way. I am sure my parents won't turn me away," she said thoughtfully. "I hope."

"What will they say? What will you tell them?"

"What can I say?" She shook her head. "The truth is that my friends and I tricked a man into sleeping with me. I agreed to have a sexual relationship with him. He told me he'd never commit to me, and my ruddy contraceptives failed. Now we're landed with this problem." She moved to sit on his couch. "I'll have to tell them who, and they may want to have a go at him. But, it's really not his fault. Any of this."

"Oh, right. He didn't mean to have sex with you. That was an accident. Get a grip!" Harry said.

"Honestly! I am not that thick. Yes, we should have taken more precaution, but I reassured him that we were safe. He told me from the beginning what he wanted, and I was foolish enough to hope for something else. I love him, Harry. I thought that was enough. Ridiculous, isn't it?"

"It is."

She laughed bitterly. "I knew that I was stupid to wish for something more, but there was this hope that things would change. Just as I would have enough, he would do something incredible, and my hope would be renewed."

"And, after I'd gone to Hogsmeade today, he broke things off with you," Harry said dryly. "How incredulous, I say!"

"Well, I'm not certain that he truly broke things off with me. I think he was just trying to test me."

"Hermione, what kind of man gives his girlfriend a test like that?" Harry moved to sit with her and took her hands in his. "Do you know how hard things will be for you both? The staff will be looking at you oddly, the students will be whispering, and the Wizarding world will look down upon you. I can't believe he didn't at least try to marry you."

"Severus doesn't want to be trapped, and *don't* want to trap him. Things would never change for certain. I would rather be alone with my child and show her nothing but love than to raise her in a cold home with resentful parents." She smiled. "I've been ridiculed before. It's nothing new."

"Give it to me," Harry said suddenly. "I'll adopt the baby."

"Harry, I..." Hermione looked away. "No, Harry. I want to keep it. Really. I just couldn't see you with my child and not be able to acknowledge her."

"Remember when we talked about having families one day?" Harry asked quietly.

"Yes," she said with a sigh. "Those days seem so long ago."

"Well, marry me, Mione. Here's our chance."

"Harry, no, I can't do that to you," she said, tears of appreciation shining in her eyes. "If I wouldn't want to trap Severus, I certainly wouldn't want to trap you."

"We've been friends for a long time, and we love each other. We are comfortable with each other, and maybe one day things would develop between us." He smiled. "Your child would have a complete home, and neither of us would have to be alone."

"I don't think so," she said. "I do appreciate it, but I cannot accept."

"Wait." He pulled her back next to him as she tried to rise. "Just..." He moved closer, kissing her on the lips softly. When she tried to protest, he brought his hands to her

face and darted his tongue into her mouth. She allowed him to continue and kissed him back. When they finally pulled away, neither could meet the other's eyes. Harry spoke first. "It wasn't all that bad, Mione. We can work on this together. Just please think about it."

Hermione put her head on Harry's shoulder and hugged him tightly. "I'll let you know something this evening. Meet me out by the lake in a couple of hours," she said, kissing his cheek softly. "No matter what we decide, Harry, thanks." Their eyes met briefly before she walked out. She made her way quickly to her chambers.

After nearly an hour of deliberation, she'd come to a decision. Things would have to be broken off with Severus. Things would never change no matter how much she loved him. If he refused to commit to her even though they were to have a child together, then she had no choice but to move on. Being a single parent really didn't appeal to her now that she'd thought about it. Her child would be looked down upon for its parentage already. Children could be cruel. She well remembered the days when she was ridiculed. She would marry Harry. Her parents need never know the truth. They'd always hoped she would marry Harry or Ron. How could they cope at the castle together? The three of them? Harry and she would have to steer clear of Severus.

*Severus.* How could she ever hope to be happy again knowing that he would never be the one that she woke up to in the mornings? He would never be within her again. The last time they'd been together had been a quick, fervent session. If she had known it would have been their last time together, she would have tried to go slower to make it last, to have something more to cherish. Something occurred to Hermione. There was no reason why she couldn't go to him now. She'd never gone to his chambers and asked to be made love to. There was nothing to lose. If he refused her, she'd understand. If he accepted, well, she would proceed. She quickly readied herself, washing and dressing.

She knocked on his chambers a few minutes later. No response. She knocked again. She heard a few clicks and felt the thick tenseness in the air disperse. He must have released the wards. The door opened, and she saw his wary expression immediately.

"What is it?"

"I need to come in."

"I told you I needed time to think."

"Please, Severus. Let me come in."

He growled in exasperation and opened the door for her. She entered and paused, waiting for him to lead the way to his sitting room. Hermione tried to calm her nerves as she followed him. Once he sat down, she noticed that he looked disturbed. The room was a mess, as was the other room. It was apparent that he'd had a tantrum. "Hermione, say what you have to say, and then leave. I do not wish to be disturbed right now. I have a lot on my mind."

"And, I don't?" she asked, untying her outer robe.

"What do you think you are doing?" he asked, narrowing his eyes suspiciously.

"I want to make love to you," she said, meeting his gaze firmly. The outer robe fell to her feet. She began unfastening the clasps on her long nightdress.

"You came down here in that?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes."

"Stop right there. Do you think that this will change anything?"

"I know it won't," she admitted. "I need you to give me this moment right now if never anything else again. I need this and you, Severus."

He watched her intently as she slipped off the garment, leaving her completely naked and waiting for his approval. He seemed to sigh resolutely, stood, and nodded to her. She took this to mean that her offer was acceptable. She pulled her wand and a bundle of small scarves from her discarded clothing, followed him to his bedchamber, and watched as he slowly undressed. "Well, come here then," he said, sounding annoyed that he'd given in to her request.

"Lay down. I want to please you." She saw the glint in his eyes as he lay in the center of the bed. She pulled her hands from behind her back to reveal the scarves and her wand. With a few quick incantations, the silky scarves bound his hands.

"What do you think you are doing?" he asked dangerously. "Untie me now, or you shall regret it."

"I will, Severus. I promise. I only want to pleasure you." She smiled as he seemed to accept this. "I want to take my time. I will untie you." She said another incantation, and his feet were bound as well.

"Hermione," he said warningly.

"Trust me, Severus."

"I have before, and look where it's landed us," he said bitinglly.

She chose not to answer. She simply said two more incantations. One scarf covered his eyes while the other covered his mouth. "I'm sorry about that, Severus, but I can't have you sputtering your usual hurtful comments. I need this to be perfect." She could see that he was angry by the way he was muttering and pulling against his bounds.

Hermione moved to the bed easily. She'd never felt so confident before. She was in charge. She was in control. She would give him pleasure while finding her own. A tentative hand reached out to cup his jaw. He stilled his movements and seemed to be concentrating on her touch. Emboldened, she traced his entire jaw line softly. "I've always admired your strong jaw." She looked at his chest and noticed his breathing was slow and rhythmic. He didn't seem to mind.

She would take this last chance to tell him everything that she truly felt for him. Hermione brought her lips down to place soft kisses along his throat. She circled around his collarbones with her tongue before moving back up to suck on his neck possessively. She pulled away with a popping sound and smiled, pleased with her accomplishment. "I've always wanted to mark you."

Severus emitted a large breath that sounded like a frustrated groan. She didn't pay attention to it as she brought her lips up to first one earlobe and then the other. "You know, when you do this to me, Severus, you drive me crazy. I feel gooseflesh all along my skin the moment your breath hits my ear, and I feel your tongue taste my skin." There was a slight twitch in his cheek, and she wondered if he'd meant to smile. The scarf was hiding his lips effectively.

Shrugging, she lowered her lips to his chest to taste his flesh there. She breathed in deeply and inhaled Severus' scent. She would never forget the intoxicating mix of his personal scent blended with the, no doubt, self-made fragrant cologne he wore. It was a brew made of greens, rosewood, sage, basil, and crisp jasmine from what she could tell. She'd remember it perfectly for eternity. Her hands had minds of their own as they glided over every inch of available flesh, except for his groin of course. Each time her hands passed by during their exploration his stiff bulge would twitch upward hopefully.

She smirked to herself and felt a surge of power flow through her. He was at her mercy, wasn't he? She laved at one of his flat nipples and then the other, eliciting moans from her lover. Elated with his positive response, she began nipping her way down to his groin area. She bypassed his now angrily colored erection to nibble on the insides of his thighs. He began mumbling immediately, and she could see that his breathing had quickened.

"Severus," she said softly, running her fingernails through the thick patch of hair before her. "I'm going to lick you. Is that all right?"

He arched upward and moaned what seemed to be an affirmative. She used both hands to grope his dangly bits for a moment and leaned down to give one a small swipe with her tongue. A loud, appreciative groan sounded. "Like that, eh?" She gave its mate a timid lick as well and was rewarded with him bucking up into. She giggled, wrapped one hand around his hard cock while still fondling his testicles with the other. Her tongue darted out to lick away the small droplet of moisture on the very tip and lazily encircled the entire head. She cautiously made her way down as far as she could while sucking and licking her way back up. At Severus' grunt and arch, she began working her hand, fingers, and mouth in a casual-paced rhythm. When she felt him getting overly excited and trying to rush her, she left the area all together, kissing her way back up to his earlobe.

"You know, Severus, you are the only man that I've ever longed for like this." One hand reached down to begin stroking him slowly again. "I wish that I could change things, but it's too late for that. What's done is done." She noted that he seemed to be holding his breath. "I wish that I could have had longer with you. Just knowing that this will be the last time that we ever make love is hard for me. I'll get over it...eventually." She kissed his jaw. "Can I kiss you?" No reply. "I want to take off the scarf that's on your mouth. Will you allow me to kiss you?"

He grunted. She untied the scarf and moved it away from his mouth. With one finger, she gently traced his lower lip. "I used to love when you would lecture in class. The way your lips moved would mesmerize me, and your voice seemed to flow through my bones." She lowered her lips to his for a soft kiss. Hermione applied very little pressure and opened her lips slightly. In an instant, Severus parted his to encourage her. She took advantage and allowed her tongue to mingle with his slowly. She could feel him moving in time with the strokes of her hand.

The feeling of being in control and knowing that she was making him feel good gave her a heady sensation. As if in a fog, she moved to straddle him, guided his hard length to her opening, and slid down upon him. They each sucked in a slow breath. Without moving much, she brought her lips back to his. She placed her hands on his shoulders and began grinding against him slowly. She was glad that he couldn't see her expression. She had tears of sadness in her eyes. This was beautiful. Her lover tied and vulnerable beneath her, wanting her, needing her. She could have lived her life making love to him everyday. Why couldn't he love her? Why couldn't he want her?

"Untie my hands," he said suddenly.

"No."

"I want to touch you," he said, voice hoarse.

She obliged after a moment's trepidation and was rewarded with hands on her arse and lips on her breasts. He hadn't tried to increase her speed, but she could feel the beginning sensations of that lovely feeling coming to take her away to a better place albeit only briefly. At least it was a place where she could forget the cold reality. He increased speed the moment she began riding him with purpose. "I'm almost there."

Severus growled and moved a hand down to pebble her crux as she rode his length and ground down onto his magical fingers. "Severus! Oh my God! Ooh, I love you, Severus!" The mind-blowing peak slammed through her body and weakened her, sending multiple tremors through her body, but she maintained her rhythm until she knew he was spent.

"Hermione," he whispered. A series of heavy breathing, deep grunts, and wild upward thrusts signaled his release. She knew it was safe to collapse onto his chest. His arms came up to hold her to him. She reveled in the feel and scent of him for what she knew to be the last time.

Her tears overflowed and spilled upon his chest and shudders ran through her body. This was it. "I will miss you," she whispered. His arms tightened in response. She dared to hope for something for a few happy seconds, but she realized that hoping all along had been her mistake. Now her future lay with Harry and an unplanned child that would never know his or her father. "You were right. I can't terminate the pregnancy, I can't give the baby away, but I have something to tell you. I can't be a single mum. It will be too hard for my baby. I had to endure enough when I was growing up, so I've made a decision." She paused to see if he had anything to say, thankful that she didn't have to meet his eyes. "I've worked out an arrangement that I know can work for us. You won't feel obligated to be involved, and we'll be taken care of. I just need..." Her voice broke slightly. "I need you to know that as of right now, I will always love you. I know that time passes and feelings fade, but I wonder if that time will ever come for me. Our child will be a constant reminder...no, my child will remind me of you. I just...oh, Severus, I'm sorry. Have a good life."

She moved off of him and ran to the next room to throw on her clothing and dashed to her chambers, warding her rooms to keep him out if he came after her. She threw herself onto the bed and cried. As she was crying, she decided to shed no more tears for a man that didn't love her, could never love her. Harry. When they'd kissed earlier, it hadn't been repulsive, but it lacked a spark. It held a promise of maybe something one day. However, that day wouldn't likely be any day soon. They would likely have to down a good portion of drinks to get up the nerve to consummate their marriage. *Blast! I can't drink!*

She would try to care for him in that way one day, but she doubted that she ever would. Her child would have a name that was respected in their world. Harry would be good to her and treat her child as his own. It would be better than being alone. It would be better than forcing Severus to marry her. A loveless marriage would harm her child. She'd never do it, no matter how much she loved him. This was a mess that she made. It was time she began cleaning it up. She cleaned off and changed into appropriate clothing. After she washed her face and brushed her teeth, she made her way out to meet Harry by the lake.

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

Severus was in shock. It took a few minutes to realize that she had truly left. He pulled the scarf away from his eyes and reached down to untie his ankles. She'd come to seduce him. She'd wanted one last time with him in a way that she would deem worthy of remembering. He needed only to close his eyes to feel her tears upon his naked chest, to feel her body wracking with sobs against him, or to hear her pitiable voice trying to explain to him what she'd decided. "What are you planning, Hermione?"

He went to clean himself off and remembered all that she'd said. She didn't plan to try to force him into anything, she agreed that all sexual relations should cease, and she'd found a way to relieve him of all responsibilities to her and their...her child. Why did he not feel content with this? It was what he'd wanted, wasn't it? What decision could she have come to? *Let her go, Severus. A warm witch's bed is a sickle a dozen.* Severus nodded slightly, but then realized that a feeling of loss had entered his heart. She was gone. He would never watch her sleep again. He would never fuck her until she screamed his name again.

Albus' words came back to slap him in the face.

I suppose it's a good thing that you wouldn't be abashed by a man taking your place in her chambers and in your child's life.

That was it. She was going to get married. Albus' voice echoed through his mind again.

Severus, just because you plan on living the life of a misogynist doesn't mean that Hermione will live the life of a spinster. There will be other men willing to take in her and her child and treat them as they deserve to be treated.

Who? Who was this man that was willing to marry someone that he didn't love? Who had she...**FUCKING HARRY BLOODY POTTER!** "Bastard!" Of course! What other bastard would be willing to put aside his feelings and raise his enemy's child as his own? "We shall see about this," Severus said. As he moved to his wardrobe, he noticed the large, dark love bite that she'd left on his neck. A sign of possession. She wanted to possess him. Shaking his head, he said, "I am the possessor, little one." He pulled on some fresh clothes, tidied himself, and made his way to her chambers.

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

"Hi," Harry said shyly.

"Hi," she murmured. "Harry, are you still sure...?"

"Yes." He nodded.



"I don't love you that way."

"Me either, but at least I do love you," he said softly. "Who knows? Maybe...er...one day we will feel something. I mean to say...have you decided to marry me?"

"I hate to use you this way, Harry. You should find someone that can treat you the way you deserve."

"Mione, I told you. Women seem to shy away from me. You're the only one that can be around me and not go on about the past. I am comfortable with you. I've always wanted a family. You need someone to help you out. I don't see this as using me. It's what we both need," he said softly.

Hermione bit her lip. "But, Harry, how can we...you know? It was a bit awkward to simply kiss."

Harry swallowed hard, took a step closer, and pulled her into an embrace. "We're honest enough to talk things through and say what we truly want. We'll work through somehow."

"When should we do it?"

"I'm sure that Albus would do it for us. I'll talk to him, and we can have it done as early as tomorrow. It will give you all night to think about it. I want you to be sure." Harry searched her sad eyes. "I will try to make you happy, Hermione."

She simply nodded. "Talk to him."

After a long silence settled between them, Harry said, "Let me touch you."

"All right."

"Er...where?"

"Kiss me first." She closed her eyes and moved her face up to meet his. The kiss was gentle, *too soft*. Harry's lips were full, *not like Severus' thin yet sexy lips*. Harry took his time and moved a hand to the small of her back to gather her closer. *His hand feels smaller than Severus' hand*. Ever so slowly, they pulled away to stare at each other.

Harry cleared his throat, opened his mouth to speak, but clamped it shut again. He moved to place a kiss on her throat. Hermione sensed that he was a little nervous. As his tongue came out to taste her flesh, a sudden feeling of wrongness overcame her. The hand that had been on her back moved to her arse, and the other one was resting on her side.

"Stop."

He moved away immediately. "Did I hurt you?"

"I'm just not ready." Her hands were shaking profusely.

"I just need time to prepare myself for this, mentally and physically. It seems wrong to be with someone that I do not love," Hermione said. "If we are to be married tomorrow, I think we can wait until then. I also think that you will have to have many cups to get the courage for both of us. Don't you?"

"Yes," admitted Harry, relieved that he wasn't the only one to feel that way. "To be honest, I don't feel right either. No offense to you, but I don't know...I mean to say..." He sighed, trying to find the right words.

"I know what you mean. Maybe this is a sign that this is wrong." She looked into his eyes and found acceptance. He nodded slightly and smiled as if to say all would work out for the best. At the same time, they embraced each other. "I am going to my chambers. I'll send for a meal. I don't want to face *him* yet."

"Want me to join you?"

"No. Have a talk with Dumbledore, and if you don't mind, could you Floo Ron? I don't want anyone else to know the truth though," she said.

"I will. I'll go on down to Hogsmeade to pick up something. See you in the morning?"

"Okay." Hermione stood there in silence as he fled. What was she doing? Could she ever feel things for Harry? She sighed. "Not bloody likely," she whispered, "but I'm going to try like hell." She walked slowly back to her chambers. She lay down on her bed to think and drifted off to sleep.

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

Where the hell was she? She wasn't in the library, the infirmary, or her chambers. He decided to try the grounds. It didn't take long to find her, and he didn't like what he saw. Potter was with her. "So," he whispered to himself, "I was right." He got as close as he could to spy on them from behind a large tree. He could hear them well enough even though he'd missed the first part of their conversation. He almost thought for a second that she'd told Potter to kiss her. Bloody hell!

What the fuck was she doing? How could she let that asshole touch her? Did he know where her mouth had been not an hour earlier? Severus knew that if he didn't turn away he would kill one or both of them. He wanted to turn away from the sight, but he couldn't. He was disgusted and intrigued at the same time. He was also insanely jealous. Unconsciously, his fists clenched tightly, and he began walking forward. *Albus was right. Seeing her with someone else will destroy me, but how does one tell someone that they've changed their mind without appearing weak? She is mine. I want her with me.*

He ducked behind a large amount of shrubbery when he heard her tell the brat to stop. He had to listen to what she had to say. He silently prayed to whatever Deity that might be listening that she spoke the words that he wanted to hear. If she didn't, he wouldn't be held responsible for what he had to do to the bastard who was trying to have his woman.

Hermione told the boy, "I'm not ready."

Severus breathed an unwanted sigh of relief. *She's still loyal to me even after I reacted the way I did about the unborn brat...er...child, even after the way I treated her in my chambers.* His heart uncharacteristically tightened when he heard the next sentence.

"I just need time to prepare myself for this, mentally and physically. It seems wrong to be with someone that I do not love," Hermione said. "If we are to be married tomorrow, I think we can wait until then. I also think that you will have to have many cups to get the courage for both of us. Don't you?"

"Yes," the boy said. "To be honest, I don't feel right either. No offense to you, but I don't know...I mean to say..." The boy sighed.

At least the bastard doesn't appear too eager. Being forced to do the right thing isn't that easy, eh, Potter?

"I know what you mean. Maybe this is a sign that this is wrong," Hermione said sadly.

It is wrong. All of it. Nobody should be forced to marry anyone else, but I will not have anyone thinking that a Potter is more honorable than I am.

Severus watched them as they silently exchanged words with their eyes, and he felt a sudden pang of loss as they each put their arms around the other. She was

determined to forget about him and go off with Potter. He'd really lost her. How? She was supposed to always be loyal to him. She wasn't supposed to be the one to end things. That was his job. He'd not have it. He might not love her or want a family, but by God, no other bastard would move in on his territory. He nodded to himself.

He would form a plan. He had one day to change things between them, or she would be lost to him forever. *Good riddance*. "Sod off, you meddling bastard," he hissed lowly. "You'll not be interfering with my decisions any longer, father. I never was the man you wanted me to be though I tried. You were right. I am not worthy of the name Snape. I should have taken my mother's name. Didn't you say I was a disappointment, and you hoped the line would end before my offspring could taint it further?"

He glanced back at the couple. She was being held softly, as if she was precious cargo. She seemed to like being held that way. He smirked. The boy looked like a fool handling a woman in such a way in a public place. He would never be one of those overly affectionate men, but he would be married nonetheless. They would just have to set a few ground rules. The first thing he had to do was prepare himself, and then he would have to let her know what he'd decided. If she didn't agree, he would see to it that she did. He slipped away quickly before the couple realized that they'd been spied upon.

From a distance, he watched...and waited, plotting all the while. If they went to a room together, he would barge in and put a stop to things. That's right. He'd not told her that he wanted to end things. He'd only said that he needed time. That would be a way to turn things around to have her feel like the guilty party. He could feign being wounded about her running off to the first brat that she saw just because he'd said a few hurtful words.

Damn. He'd toyed with her before they'd found out about the pregnancy, saying he wanted to end things after he saw the pitiful young student trying to win her favor. It had been a test to see how she'd handle it. He wanted to know if she was strong enough to stand up to him about something serious. Fucking an angry Hermione was unlike anything he'd ever experienced. That wasn't quite true either.

The best lay he'd ever had was the one they'd just shared when she'd waylaid him in his own chambers. She'd never been so demanding, and she hadn't only taken pleasure. She'd given it. She'd wanted to give him pleasure on her own terms. Her words passed through his mind.

I need you to give me this moment right now if never anything else again. I need this and you, Severus.

She would listen to whatever he decided. He would tell her that it would be in the child's and her best interest to have a semblance of marriage. He had the rules formed in his mind already. She, being completely in love with him, would agree and tell Potter to bugger off. In the unlikely event that didn't work, he had a backup plan ready. Movement caught his attention as Potter scurried away. Hermione stared after him for a moment and made her way back inside. He'd give her some time, and then he would go to her. He would tell her what he wanted. She belonged to him, not Potter.

His thoughts darkened as he remembered the filthy little bastard's hands upon her and his mouth pressed to hers. They would pay for that. Each in their own way.

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

When Hermione awoke, she screamed. Severus was standing at the side of her bed staring at her menacingly with his arms crossed in front of him. "S-Severus, what are you doing here?" she stammered, scooting back. "If this is about earlier..." She let the words die between them. Dear God! Was he here seeking retribution? He had consented. Even before she'd put the scarves on him, he'd led her to the bedroom.

"It's about a lot of things, Hermione." He paced for a few minutes as she watched him warily.

This was not good if he was pacing and looking sour. Finally, the deafening silence drove her mad. "Out with it! Why are you here?"

"I am here to say that I've taken the time to get my thoughts in order, and after the initial shock passed, I've decided that you **will** marry me."

Hermione's heart dropped. She would have wanted those words at any moment, but it was too late. "Severus..." She was unsure of what to say. He'd likely have a go at Harry and think that they'd planned it somehow. He was a very suspicious man and seemed to not believe that anyone truly wanted him as he was.

"I know. It's a complete change in attitude." He held up a hand. "I assure you, Hermione, that my feelings have not changed. I am not in love with you. I would rather not be tied down to a wife or child. As it is, I have no choice in the matter. I do...care about what happens," he said, sounding as if he'd nearly choked. "It is the honorable thing to do, and I'm sure we can reach some sort of agreement."

Hermione couldn't believe this load of rubbish. What kind of fucking proposal was that? She sprung up from the bed and walked to her sitting room. She poured a glass of water and had a large gulp. A confused Severus followed her.

"I was not finished."

"Well, I am. I cannot believe you would come in here and propose to me like that!"

"Propose? I am simply trying to reach an agreement betwixt us. It's the best thing for *our*," he shuddered slightly, "child, Hermione. I'll not have you scraping by or sending him off to the Muggle world or marrying Harry Bloody Potter!"

"Aha! The truth comes out! You found out, didn't you?"

"I may have witnessed something," he admitted. "Nevertheless, you will marry *me*. Do you not remember what I told you? You are *mine*. He will not have you."

"Severus," Hermione said softly. "Listen to me. I love you, and I wo-"

"Stop saying that!"

She continued through this interruption. "I won't force you into marrying me."

"You can force Potter with a clear conscience?"

"It was his idea."

"You are my woman. You are carrying my child." His voice had lowered to a dangerous whisper. "I will not allow it."

"I'm not in love with Harry, Severus, but he and I will provide a friendlier atmosphere for my child. I won't have you miserable. I love you so much that I am willing to let you go." She reached out to place a hand on his chest. "I don't want to burden you. You don't want us."

"I do," he spat bitterly.

"Do you love me?"

Silence.

"Will you ever love me?"

More silence.

"Would you love our child?"

Still nothing.

"That's what I thought. Severus, you will thank me for releasing you from what you feel as an obligation to do the honorable thing. I'll not have you resent our child or me. It wouldn't work. I know you don't really want this. In fact, you probably didn't want me until you found out that Harry would have me," she said bitterly. "We have nothing more to say. I would like for you to leave."

"So...that's it?"

"Yes." She was taken aback by the suddenly lost expression on his face. She nearly moved to hug him, but she'd seen the calculating gleam come into his eyes *The bastard! He probably hoped I would turn him away. I'll show him that I don't need him.* "I hope we can get along amicably, the three of us."

He leaned in closely and sneered hatefully. "We shall see about this, Hermione. Mark my words; Potter will not have you." He smirked. "And, that's the bottom line." He turned on his heel and strode away from her with his robes billowing behind him.

Hermione sank to her knees. That was the hardest thing she'd ever had to do, but it was the right decision. Harry would never leave bruises on her arms that she would have to charm away. Harry would never look at her with loathing. Harry wouldn't consider her or her child as being of dirty blood. Harry would love her child. That was what mattered. She didn't care if he ever loved her. Severus would own her heart anyway, but her child would have two loving parents.

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

The next morning came upon him quickly. Severus walked down to the Apparition point just beyond the gates of Hogwarts. He'd been up most of the night finalizing his backup plan. He'd been surprised that she'd resisted him. He liked that she'd regained most of her old fire. The last look of grim determination that she'd given him had spoke volumes to him. She was adamant about making the right decision. If he continued to pressure her, she would continue to rebel. Hermione thought that Potter was the better choice just because he was weaker.

You see, Severus, her malicious side is showing. This may have been a game all along. Every Potter always gets the girl, doesn't he? Stop sniffing after the witch. You don't need her. Severus paused. "She simply believes she is doing the right thing. Potter will not have her." His plan guaranteed that. He'd not been a double spy for years without knowing how to be very convincing. There were two people who could help him get what he wanted.

Minutes later he was standing in front of a familiar Muggle home. He'd secretly followed Hermione and her parents' home once as a mission of protection from the Order. Albus had feared that she might have been in danger. He knocked on the door. A tall, balding man answered. "Yes?"

"Good morning, Mr. Granger. I am Severus Snape. I am from Hogwarts, and I am a colleague of your daughter's."

"Is everything all right?" the man asked quickly.

"Well, I will be honest, sir. This is a matter of utmost importance," he said, taking care to look slightly disturbed. The man moved aside and gestured for him to enter.

"Honey, we have a visitor from Hermione's school," the man called out. To Severus, he extended a hand and said, "I'm John Granger."

Severus nodded politely.

"Coming," his wife called from another room of the house.

"Here. Have a seat. Can I get you anything?"

"No, thank you," Severus said politely.

Hermione's mother entered the room. Mr. Granger and Severus both stood respectfully. "Dear, this is-

"Professor Snape," the woman finished for him. "Hello. I'm Jane Granger."

Severus was pleased that she had recognized him. "Mrs. Granger." He nodded, and when they sat, he took his seat again. "I'm here with an important yet delicate matter to discuss."

"Go on, Professor," Mr. Granger said. "Is something going on with Hermione?"

"I've come to ask for your daughter's hand in marriage." He looked at each to gauge their reactions. They looked to each other and seemed shocked. "I see you did not know that we were in a relationship?"

Hermione's mother spoke. "Well, our daughter has been speaking of you for the past couple of years since she's gone to work, but we were under the impression that you weren't interested in her." She looked to her husband. "Are you two serious?"

Severus had sized them up very quickly. Hermione's father would explode angrily if he blurted out the information on the pregnancy whilst her mother would be slightly disappointed. He decided to tell them the truth slowly. It would be the best thing to do in this instance. However, there was no reason why he couldn't tell things in his favor. He needed them to be on his side if he was going to get Hermione to marry him. Part of him wondered why he even bothered. Another part of him wanted him to claim what was his.

"Your daughter is in love with me," he said bluntly. Mrs. Granger nodded, and her father looked between the two of them uncomfortably. "I did not know this until a few months back. To be quite honest, I am a man that is set in his ways. I've never been married, I've never had children, and I never desired to do these things. Once I learnt of your daughter's affections, I had a talk with her. I told her that I was not looking for a serious relationship. Neither would I make any commitments to her. She accepted, and we formed a companionship. As time passed, I realized that I have come to care for her."

Mr. Granger spoke when Severus paused. "How serious have things gotten?"

Severus looked down for a brief moment. "I am ashamed to say, sir, that we allowed our passion to guide us to places we ought not have traveled." He let that sink in for a moment. "It was a mutually satisfying arrangement, as we live and work together most of the year. We had our differences, but we were able to work through them." This was technically all true. He was just polishing everything up a bit. "Up until recently, we'd thought that we'd been very careful." He hoped that he wouldn't have to spell things out.

"Oh, no," her mother said.

"Good Lord," her father said. Both of her parents looked to each other and held hands before returning their attention back to Severus.

"In good conscience, I have to tell you that your daughter is a respectable witch. She has never been in this type of relationship before, and unfortunately, that is where I have failed her." He shook his head slowly. "Being of Muggle birth, she is used to using products from your world. I am afraid that contraceptive pills are what she was using. I pointed out that she should have also used a Wizarding method of prevention since it is always effective, and I'm afraid we had a terrible row."

"Well, why?" her father asked.

"You know how things happen. Words are exchanged. Both parties say hurtful things. Each assume that they know what the other is thinking." He leant forward. "I asked

your daughter for time to think, as this is all a shock to me. I'd never planned to have a family." He sighed. "I had a talk with Headmaster Dumbledore, and he gave me some sound advice." He paused for a slightly dramatic effect.

"Go on, Professor," her mother urged.

"I went back to have another talk with her only to find out that she'd decided to break things off. She didn't want me to feel trapped because she knew how I felt about commitment. She fears that I will resent our child, so she did something that still shocks me. She and Harry Potter have decided to enter a marriage of convenience. I've tried to change her mind, but she feels that since she loves me, she wants me to be happy. She won't alter her decision. They are to be married today."

"Harry!" her mother exclaimed. "But, why would he marry her? They're only friends, aren't they?"

"Trying to be honorable," her father pointed out. "Have you tried to talk to her again?"

"Yes, but she won't answer when I call on her at her chambers. I had no place else to turn. I thought that maybe you could get her to see reason. Surely you agree that the child should be raised by its natural parents? She believes that she is releasing me from my responsibilities by allowing another man to raise *my* child as his own."

Hermione's father stood and fixed himself a stiff drink. "Would you like one?"

"No, thanks," Severus said.

Mrs. Granger had her head in her hands, but she still spoke clearly. "She is willing to let you go because she loves you. That is what one heroine does in a book we used to read together. Tell me, Professor. How do you feel about our daughter?"

Severus' lips quirked slightly. "We've grown quite close, and I can honestly say that I've never felt this way about another woman. I am ~~not~~ in love with her, at this moment, but I would see that she is taken care of for the rest of my life. I can readily provide for a family. My worry is not being given the chance. She is only marrying Potter to keep you from finding out about her promiscuity. She wanted to save you from being disappointed in her, and she wanted to keep me from resenting her for *trapping* me. I say that you can't trap the willing."

"Well, you can't have made a very good try to win her over if she's still going to marry Harry," her father pointed out. "Why didn't she change her mind?"

"As I am sure you know, Hermione is a very headstrong woman. Once she is determined to do something, well, she does it. She thinks that she is doing the right thing, and she refuses to believe in my sincerity. I had hoped to prove that to her by coming here. In all honesty, I should have come here first."

"Too right," her father said, taking a long drink from his cup.

"John," his wife admonished. The pair exchanged words, trying to keep what they were saying from Severus. A few words reached his ears: loves him, seems to care, help him. Mr. Granger still looked hesitant, but his wife was eager to help. "What would you have us do, Professor?"

"Would you be willing to ask her to hold off on her pending nuptials? She's rushing into this, and I'm afraid that once she enters into a marriage with him she'll have a hard time getting out of it should she regret it later. I will not ask you to *force* her into marrying me, but if I have gained your trust and permission, I would like to know I have your support whilst I attempt to make her see reason." He looked Hermione's father directly in the eyes. "I could not fathom another man raising *my* child." That should make him see things Severus' way.

The man nodded in silent agreement. Severus knew that they would help him in anyway possible. "Tell us what to do, Severus," the man said, testing his given name awkwardly.

Taking a page out of his book, he replied, "Well, John, I would like for you to come with me. Maybe you could have a talk with her immediately."

Hermione's mother spoke. "We can't access the castle's grounds. We were told that its charmed to keep people like us away. Can't you just bring her here?"

"I would like to invite you to spend the day at my estate. It will give you a chance to get to know me a little better. We could be there in one minute if you'd like. Once I have you settled in there, I would leave to fetch her. Would this be acceptable?"

"Let's do it."

Feeling smug, Severus pulled out a small box. He opened it to reveal a dainty wedding ring. "This was my mother's ring. I would like for Hermione to have it," he said softly. He closed the box. He'd taken the liberty to prepare an illegal Portkey for them to use. All it needed was the activation code. "Both of you place a finger on this. We will be moved from this location to my home. It will leave you feeling slightly disoriented, but it's completely safe."

Hermione's parents were seated comfortably in his sitting area minutes later. They were drinking tea prepared by one of the two house-elves that he had to keep the home running whilst he was at the castle.

He bid them farewell and Apparated back to the Hogwarts Apparition sight. As soon as he took a step towards the castle, he saw Minerva approaching swiftly.

"Severus! Albus said to tell you that they are in his office, and you would know what was going on!" she said excitedly. "He said to tell you to hurry, as he could only stall for so long."

The headmaster must have figured out that he'd had a plan to stop his lover's nuptials. Nothing ever got by him, did it? The entrance to Dumbledore's office seemed to be expecting him. It sprang open as soon as he neared it and lifted him to the main door. He barged in without bothering to knock.

"Ah, Severus," Albus greeted. "I was just about to begin a ceremony for these two. Have you come to be a witness?"

"Certainly not," he barked.

Potter stepped in front of a shocked Hermione. "What do you think you're doing, Snape?"

"I'll take care of this for you, Potter." Severus pushed the boy aside roughly. "Come with me," he said to Hermione, snatching her hand.

"No, Severus. I will not. I gave you my decision yesterday," she said firmly, moving towards Potter. "Are you all right, Harry?" The clumsy boy had tripped over a small footstool.

"I have no time for this," Severus said, pulling her into his arms bodily, lifting her, and walking with her to Albus' grate.

"Severus! Let go of me," she screeched. "I told you...HARRY!"

Severus grabbed a bit of powder, threw it into the grate, and said, "Potions office!" The fire burned green, and he moved them in. The last thing Severus saw before Albus' office swirled away was an amused headmaster and an angry Potter running for the Floo. Once his office came into view, he pulled his struggling bundle out. "Stop moving about! Do you want to cause harm to our child?"

She stopped moving and looked at him. "Severus, please. This is the only way."

He reached for another handful of Floo powder and threw it into the grate. "Snape Estate, sitting room." This was the only grate connected to his home via the Floo network.

"I WILL NOT GO WITH YOU! YOU CAN'T DO THIS!"

"Come along, my *dear*. We have guests awaiting our arrival," he said acridly.

"Guests?"

"Yes, I've invited your parents over. They'd like a word with you."

"Severus, no...you didn't. Did you?" She tried to pull away from him. "I'll never speak to you again! You are a bastard! How dare you involve my parents?"

He simply smirked and pulled her into the green flames. The moment they were gone. Harry Potter Flooed into the office and was followed closely by the headmaster. "You see," the old wizard said. "I didn't think he'd stay here. They must have Flooed to another room."

"I'll find his arse!" Harry said angrily. "He had no right to storm in like he did. She made her choice."

"She rushed into what she assumed was a good choice," Albus said. "If she truly wants no part of him, there is nothing that he can say that will change her mind. I'm afraid that we must wait, Harry. If you go after him, you'll just cause her more distress."

Harry nodded, but said, "I'm still going to kick his arse."

A/N: There was a good bit happening in two days, but at least we've finally seen a determined Hermione come out to play. She's going to stick around. I wonder if Snape knows what he's getting into?

Who would you chose? Harry or Severus. Do you think that Severus' act for her parents was sneaky? He didn't really lie about things, but he did portray himself as the wounded party. I wonder what Mum and Dad Granger are going to have to say on this.

If you are wondering where I got the description from for Severus' cologne's scent, well, I looked it up online. It's how they describe my very favorite male cologne (I always sniff this out in a crowd). It's called Eternity for Men and is simply delicious.

As far as I know, Hermione's parents' names are not given to us in canon, so I gave them simple names (John and Jane Doe...sorry...Granger).

I post snippets and update information at the following:

Live Journal <http://www.livejournal.com/users/southernwitch69/>

Potter_Place http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Potter_Place/

Unanimity!

Chapter 8 of 15

Severus forces Hermione to face her parents. After a serious row and an assault by Harry, an agreement is reached. Just when things seem to be going well, fate steps in.

Disclaimer: Not my characters (sigh), but I would love to own them.

A big thanks to my beta, Charmed Nay!

"You bastard!" Hermione yelled as she stepped out of the grate, dusting soot from her clothing. "You have no right to do this!" She pushed him away as he tried to steer her to a chair.

Severus knew that her parents were in the room still, so he decided to play things smoothly. "Hermione, stop. You're going to hurt yourself or our child."

"It's not like you care, you ruddy git," she said angrily. "Why did you have to tell my parents?"

"Because it was a honorable thing to do," John Granger said firmly. "Control yourself."

Hermione's eyes widened before she turned to face her parents. Severus watched as tears welled up in her eyes, and her lips trembled. "Daddy, it's not what you think."

"Have a seat, dear," Jane Granger said, pulling her daughter towards the davenport. Once they were seated, she said, "Hermione, why would you secretly try to marry Harry when it's this man that you want? He wants to marry you. He came to ask your father for his permission and support."

Hermione put her head in her hands and laughed bitterly. "Mum, he doesn't want to marry me. He doesn't even respect me. I didn't want to be a single mother, and Harry wanted to help."

"That's not fair to Harry," her mother said softly. "Even though he is being noble and wants to do this, you can't believe it's what he truly would've chosen for himself." Jane looked to Severus. "He has admitted that he's not in love with you now, but all he asks for is time."

Expression incredulous, Hermione looked to Severus. "Did you tell my mum this rubbish? I'll bet you forgot to mention that you called me a Mudblood!"

"I never called you that," he said, sounding scandalized.

"You put down Muggles."

"I said that a witch that grew up in the Wizarding world all of her life would know better than to trust something made by Muggles," he said hotly. He turned to her father. "We have no risks in failure where our Pregnancy Potions are concerned. Her Muggle pill has only a 99% efficiency. I meant no disrespect."

"Bloody hell, Severus! You are changing things around! You said that I was only good for one thing, and that was..." She looked away, not wanting to say the words in front of her parents.

"You said that, Hermione. You were putting words into my mouth," he replied evenly. "I'll admit that I was shocked and angry at the time, but most of what has happened since is because you haven't thought clearly. All I asked was for a little time after I calmed down."

"You said that you would not marry me. That it wasn't an option," Hermione said, glaring at him hatefully. She looked at her parents. "Really. He's just trying to make me look bad."

Severus sighed in a show of regret. "I was not thinking clearly. I've already told your parents that we exchanged harsh words. I simply wanted some time to think. The next thing I know, you have decided to marry Potter."

"Hermione," John said gently, "why would you just decided to marry Harry when you obviously care for this man?"

"Dad, he and I have only been seeing each other for a few months. I've always wanted to marry him, but I didn't want it to be like this. I'll not have him resenting me or our child because of some ruddy Muggle contraceptive!" A lone tear streaked down her cheek. "I wanted him to love me, love our child. Trust me. That will never happen. I can see what a pillock I've been for ever thinking that I could change the way he felt about me."

Her mother smiled softly. "He's asking for that chance now, Hermione. He's the true father of your child. If he wants a chance to be in your lives, how could you deny him?"

"Because I won't marry someone that doesn't love me," she said determinedly.

"And, does Harry love you?"

"Well, yes, in a way."

"And," Severus interrupted, "in a way, so do I."

Hermione's mouth gaped open for a moment before she sneered hatefully. "Oh, that's rich. You're laying it on real thick, aren't you? What the fuck are you playing at, Snape?"

"Hermione!" her mother admonished.

"That's enough," her father roared. "Maybe we should have told you a little more about our life, Hermione. Your mother and I met at university just as we told you. We shared a flat and split the bills. We were friends only. It was easier to have a mate that was also interested in becoming a dentist. We studied together, worked together, lived together, and one night we had drinks together. It was the first time that either of us had done anything like that. We didn't want a relationship, but we decided there was nothing wrong with sharing a bed."

Hermione's cheeks reddened. "Dad..." She couldn't believe what he was saying.

"What he means, Hermione, is that we weren't in love. We decided to seal our dreams of having our own, strong dental practice by marrying each other. It was easier in all things. Marriage came first, but love came later. Relationships aren't always what we read in our books, honey. By the time we found out that you were on the way, we'd fallen in love, and the news couldn't have been more welcome."

Severus watched as disbelief played over Hermione's expression. This was working out better than he'd expected! He hadn't known that her parents married without love. Obviously they'd continued to share a bed and still work together as if the contract binding them meant nothing. Maybe being bound to someone wasn't all that bad when the rules were mentioned up front and abided by. He'd imagined being married meant being trapped. He'd not looked at it from its obvious vantage point. Having a wife meant having a willing witch in bed most nights. It also meant someone would be around to talk to if boredom took over. Being with Hermione over the last few months hadn't been bad. He'd quite enjoyed their discussions, their quiet time where each read their own book, and naturally, their sex. Yes, he could live with that. What of the child? He shuddered slightly, pushing the thoughts of a screaming, swaddled infant away. Instead, he focused on Hermione.

"I must say that I am shocked. I've always thought you'd met in school and fallen in love." She wiped away one other tear that had found its way out. "No matter. I will not marry, Severus. I don't know what he's done to gain your support, but if you would only know the kind of man that he is, you wouldn't give it to him."

"Yet you love him?" her mother inquired.

"Yes, but I'm..."

"You love him, but he's a horrible man?" she goaded. "Tell us, Hermione. What is it?"

"He'll never love me. He doesn't care about me."

"Yes, I do," Severus said, boring his eyes into hers. He hoped they would take it to mean that he loved her. He cared, yes, but love? No. He wanted to marry her though. He had to be sure that no other man had her or acted as father to his offspring. He could humble himself just this once. It was only the three of them present. "I'm not in love with you as of now, but you know my feelings."

"You see," her mum said. "Just give him time, honey."

"Now, hold on, Jane," John said, eyeing Hermione. "Maybe she doesn't want to marry anyone." He eyed his daughter. "Do you want to stay single? We can help you. While we are disappointed that you kept this from us and would have married Harry to hide the truth, we are still your parents. We will love and protect you at any cost."

"Thanks," Hermione said, smiling slightly. "I will not marry Harry...for now. Maybe I do need time to think things through."

"Might I make a suggestion?" Severus asked, raising an eyebrow. This was the opening that he'd been waiting for. "Stay the summer holiday with me as we'd planned. Help me with my research, live with me as a...wife. It's the only way that you will honestly believe that we can live together amicably. Give me this chance." He had to hold back a smirk as an uncertain look passed over her face. It was quickly replaced by one of hope, and then it moved into one of mistrust.

"It makes sense, Hermione," her mother urged. "You love him enough to have desired a life with him. I think you should try this."

"No, I will not be forced into this," she said firmly.

"*Forced?*" Severus asked suddenly, full of emotion. "Our entire *relationship* has been engineered by your free will. *Your* scheming with Rolanda and Potter brought us together. Now, you dare to act as the *forced* party? Let's see what your parents think about that, shall we?" He was beginning to get angry. Why wasn't she complying? She'd been whinging about a relationship, and he'd finally agreed to it, mostly. So, what was the hold up? *Just accept my offer, Hermione.*

Her angry eyes met his and participated in a staring contest. He knew he had her. She wouldn't want her parents to know the truth. She wouldn't want them to know that she'd tricked him by making him think she'd go so low as to pay a gigolo for sex while she and her mates laughed about fooling him. That was his final trump card. He'd blackmail her if he had to, but Potter would not have her. No man would. She belonged to him. She was bearing *his* child, no other's.

"What's he talking about, Hermione?" her father asked uncertainly.

"Nothing much, daddy," she said, swallowing away her anger. "Rolanda, Harry, and I conspired to trick Severus into spending time alone with me so that I might work on gaining his attention. He's right. I think we should marry immediately. However, I want a stipulation that if I am not happy with things that I am allowed a divorce after the baby is born. This will ensure that my child will have his father's name and not be deemed a bastard."

"Well, of course you can divorce," her mother said with a chuckle.

"Not in the Wizarding world, mum. Not unless both parties have that specified in the original marriage contract. The binding magic is too strong to break, but if it is bound that something can be broken later, it allots for it. Most don't think of doing that or feel that there will never be the need for it."

"Very well," Severus agreed. He walked towards the grate and allowed a smirk to work its way across his lips. There was always a way to word things to suit his needs. This would be no different. He'd let her think that she was winning something here, but it would be he who still made the final decision. He threw in a bit of Floo powder. "Ministry of Magic."

Hermione turned to her parents while Severus spoke to a Ministry official. "I really wish that he'd not told you this. I'm really sorry, and I know you are disappointed in my actions. I'm an adult though, and I feel that my relationships, no matter how unorthodox, are my business. I thought I could handle this on my own."

John smiled. "You are too headstrong for your own good. Sometimes, Hermione, you need to turn to others even if you don't want to. This man here came to face us alone, and he told us quite bluntly about you two. That took a lot of courage. I think his intentions are honorable. He's wanting to do right by his woman and child. I can say that I agree. I wouldn't want *any* other man raising my child as his own."

Hermione only nodded. Severus had them fooled. He'd gone there for one purpose only. That purpose was to keep her from Harry. Oh, she'd pretend to go along with his ruse of a marriage in front of her parents, but things would never be the same for them again. He had admitted that he cared for her, and she knew that he did. However, he did not love her, and in her heart, she knew that by forcing himself to do the *right* thing would only lead to a long, unhappy life. She didn't want that for either of them. So, she would use this to her advantage. She would marry him, have their child, and divorce him. The baby would have its father's name and inheritance. That would be enough. *I love him, but I will never make him spend all of his years with me when I know he doesn't want to* She smiled shakily at her mother.

"Things will be fine. You'll see," her mum said. "I can tell that he loves you. It was written all over his face, honey. I think he's just a proud man. He never expected to have anyone, and well, now that he has someone, he doesn't know how to act."

"Time will tell," she replied, mostly to herself.

Severus came back. "Hermione and I have much to discuss and a marriage contract to create. Once we do that, we'll go to the Ministry for a quick binding. I would not object if you'd like to stay."

"No," Hermione said quickly. "I would like to be alone. We'll have to rush back to consu...er...seal the binding anyway." She wanted them to leave so she could let this man have a piece of her mind. Her hand itched to slap the smug smile off of his face, but she couldn't trust him to not hit her back.

"Very well," Severus said, moving to extend a hand to her father. "John, rest assured that we will have things worked out satisfactorily. I shall send word to you each week on our progress."

Hermione glared at him hatefully. "I think I can write to my parents on my own, thanks." She turned to her parents and hugged them tightly. "I love you. I'm sorry."

After a few words of encouragement, forgiveness, and returned love, her parents accepted Severus' Portkey to return to their home. Hermione spun around to find him smirking at her. "You've won nothing here today, Snape. This is underhanded! How could you do this to me?"

"Underhanded? What about you scurrying off to Potter without so much as talking to me about it?" he asked snidely. "FUCKING HARRY POTTER!" he bellowed, kicking over a table and lamp. He lowered his voice to a dangerous tone. "Doing that, Hermione, would have only brought about his death. Think you I would let someone..." He looked away from her. "I would never have allowed it. I would have killed him. No man will raise my child or bed *my* witch."

"Your child? YOUR CHILD?" Hermione laughed bitterly. "You could care less about this baby! I'm not that thick, Severus. I could have gone to anyone else, and you would have been glad to be rid of us. You only want to keep me from Harry."

"I would have never allowed it," he said grimly. "As for the child, I may not have wanted to sire any children, but now that I have helped to create this one, I shall be its father. Make no mistake about that, Hermione. Now, are there any other stipulations that you want to add to this marriage contract?"

"Do you love me?"

"No."

"Why not?" She had to know his reasoning. Why couldn't he feel something?

"I'm not built that way."

"But, you said that you care about me."

"I do care."

She sighed. "If you care, maybe it could develop into something more. Don't you want to have a happy life, Severus? We could be good together."

"We *were* good together," he said curtly, unfolding the parchment he'd gotten from the Ministry.

"I'm not talking about sex! Doesn't it feel good to be held? To know that someone loves you and wants to give you the world?" she asked softly, putting a hand on his arm. "How does that make you feel? You must feel something, Severus."

"It makes me feel powerful. It tells me that I can manipulate you with a twisting of words. It makes me want to possess you and own you...and fuck you until you scream out *my* name." Hermione blanched, dropping her hand away from him. "Not what you wanted to hear, is it, my dear?"

"Severus," she said, trying once more to touch his heart somehow. "I want to make you happy, but if you can only think of me as a possession and not a real wife and the mother of your child... I can't live that way. If things aren't better, we will part ways."

He sneered hatefully. "I'll not let you have anyone else."

"You wouldn't be able to stop me," she retorted, anger building. "Why is it all right for you to go shag someone, but you won't allow me the same indulgence?"

He pulled her to him roughly. "Do you really want someone else? Do you want it to be Potter that slides into you? Do you think your lips will easily scream out his name in ecstasy? Is that what you want?"

"I just want you to love me, to love *our* child. What about that? Will you be a real father?"

"I will be a father to the best of my ability, which is mostly giving it a name and lecturing him on the ways of the world, but raising the child will be your chore. I know not how to handle children," he said, pushing her away from him.

"You lecturing our child on the ways of the world? Oh, hell no," she spat. "Mark my words, Severus, I will not live in an unhappy marriage, nor will my child. I will give you until the time I have this child to change something, and if you can't, I will leave you. Let me see that. Show me where it says that we agree on that. It's the only way I will marry you," she said angrily.

He waved his wand over the parchment. "Oh, it says that right here," he said smugly. "Just there. It's just above the portion that says if you do decide to leave my home and live as a single mother, you will not be eligible for another marriage or any man living in your home."

"WHAT? You can't do that, Severus!" she screeched, walking towards the grate quickly.

He reached her as she tried to get a handful of Floo powder. "Hermione, stop!" He pulled her struggling form back against his chest, pinning her hands to her body beneath his. "I guarantee that you will never have reason to leave me. We can have a mutually satisfying marriage, and we need never explore you leaving or finding another lover." He brought his lips down to her ear to whisper. "I can give you respect amongst our peers, Hermione. I can give our child a name, a family legacy, and a father. At night, I will be the lover some witches can only fantasize about, and during the day, I will be as I have been...a friend of sorts. Do this."

Severus smirked to himself only momentarily as the fight left her body. He knew he'd won. She would be his. Her cold voice wiped the smug expression from his face. "I will marry you, Severus. You remember what I've said. If something doesn't change, I can and will leave...regardless of having no other lover living with me for the rest of your life. A life alone is better than a life with someone yet still being alone."

He released her. "Very well." He pushed the parchment back into his pocket and moved in front of her. He grasped a big scoop of Floo powder and threw it in. Not trusting her to follow him to the Ministry, he pulled her into the grate with him. "And, now, my dear, we wed."

Hermione allowed him to pull her to the correct office, and someone that he knew within the Ministry, the same person to quickly draw up the contract, went over the offending marriage contract with them. She listened attentively and heard nothing amiss. Numbly, she signed her name below Severus' spiky signature. The fellow quickly bound them. She didn't look at Severus as he slid a ring onto her finger, nor did she look at the ring. She couldn't believe that her wedding was nothing more than a quick binding and parchment signing. None of her friends were with her, and she'd not allowed her parents to witness. It was the most horrible scenario that any woman could have hoped for.

"Congratulations," the nasally speaking man said, leering at them through wide eyes. "You are now bound by the Wizarding laws of this country and are man and wife. May your future be bright."

"I appreciate you handling this on such short notice," Severus said, waving the man away.

"Not a problem. Your marriage contract will seal and stamp itself the moment you've completed consummation. Do you understand what constitutes as a consummation?"

"Yes, thanks," Hermione said, cheeks heating. She wasn't about to have lectures on consummating her marriage with this man. It was bad enough that she had to do the act at all. It would be the first time that she could truly say that she wanted no part of making love...er...having sex with Severus.

"That will be all," Severus said shortly, leading her back the way they had come in.

"I...I need to write Harry," she said softly.

"What did you say?"

"I said I need to let Harry know what I've done," she said more forcefully.

Severus chuckled. "I would enjoy watching his reaction in person, if you don't mind."

"I'm serious, Severus. He's probably worried about me and wondering what you've done to me."

He didn't comment. He simply led her to the grate. They Flooed to The Leaky Cauldron and went into Diagon Alley. They went to the local Owlery and rented two owls to deliver parchments for them. He tried to see what she wrote to the brat, but she wrote too quickly, half turned away from him. He scribbled to Albus that they'd been married and would be back at the castle the next day. After they sent their owls off, he led her to a private spot.

"Is there anything that you require whilst we are here?" he asked.

"You can give me nothing I require, Severus," she said blandly. "Shouldn't we be getting back to your house?"

"Our house, isn't it?" he asked, smirking arrogantly.

"I know I'm not really welcome there, and until the day that I am, I will refer to it as your home."

"Whatever you'd like," he said, pulling her close. *CRACK!* She pushed away from him the moment they Apparated outside of the front gate of his home. He watched Hermione as she walked back towards the front door. She looked around the grounds slightly. Her expression showed indifference. Severus felt an odd pang deep within. She should be happy as a new bride. Was this not what she wanted? She supposedly loved him, yet it seemed that she changed the moment she'd gotten what she wanted. It might not be the marriage she'd dreamt of as a girl, but it was a marriage to the one she wanted, wasn't it? *Typical woman, Severus. You try to please them and get nothing in return. You were a fool to do this. You were a fool to marry her. The Snape line should end with you.*

Severus walked towards her and unwarded the enchantments. A gust of wind blew through before he reached her, and her hair covered part of her face. Of its own volition, a hand reached up to brush the locks away. For a brief moment, her eyes softened at his kind gesture, but the look was quickly replaced with a mask of indifference. Part of him longed for her to smile at him. "Hermione, I know this is a little awkward for you, but I just wan-

"It doesn't matter, Severus. Let's just get this over with," she said huffily.

"Indeed," he said, letting coldness seep into his voice. *She's got you now. There's no need for her to be nice or pretend to love you.* Opening the door, he led her inside. "I suppose we should get this over with."

"Fine. Where?"

"I've not given you a proper tour of your new home yet, have I?" He sneered. "You can wait for that I suppose. Follow me." He led her to his bedchambers and watched as her dull eyes glanced at the bed in disgust. *What the fuck is this? I was readily accepted at any hour before this. Shouldn't she want to please me more now that I have made such a sacrifice?*

Hermione began pulling off her clothing slowly. She knew he was watching her, but she didn't care. This was not what she wanted. Yes, she wanted to marry Severus, have children for him, and be a true wife to him, but this was nothing like she'd planned. She never wanted to force him into marrying her. She'd always imagined that he would grow to love her and maybe mention wanting to spend his life with her in passing one day. She lay on the bed, completely naked. "I'm ready."

Severus came to stand next to the bed, and his face held an expression of disbelief. He shook his head slightly but began to unfasten his trousers. He'd already taken his

robes off. She pulled her eyes away from him and looked directly at the ceiling. After a few moments, she felt the bed dip and felt his hands upon her. She closed her eyes, held her tears at bay, and wished silently that things would be different for them. She hadn't much hope that he'd ever love her, what with the conversation they'd had earlier. *Bugger the bastard. I'll have my child's love. That will do.*

His lips found her throat, and she willed herself not to move. She turned her face away when they seemed to be closing in on her mouth. She heard his frustrated growl. A hand reached down to part her legs and explore her depths. He sighed raggedly. "What is it?"

"Nothing."

"Look at me when I talk to you."

She turned her face towards the sound of his voice and opened her eyes. "Just put it in and be done with it, Severus. There's no use to try to make this special for me. Anything that I felt when we made love is gone right now." She swallowed her emotion. "I don't know if it will ever be back." She saw a flicker of disappointment flash over his face before he moved over her, roughly pushing her legs even farther apart. She could feel him fumbling around with himself, arranging himself at her opening, and pushing in slightly. Her mind may have been ready to accept him, but her body was not.

"Damn," he said, pulling away from her. "Maybe if you would help a little," he growled in frustration.

"I only want to consummate our marriage. I'm not in the mood tonight. There's just too much that—"

"That will be all," he said brusquely. He pushed into her again, and she felt her body give a little. There was something strange. He felt...a little flaccid.

"Oh, honestly," she said moving against him to try to help him in farther. "What's wrong with it?"

"Nothing," he said pulling away. "It's you that I have a problem with. I can't *do this* with you just laying there as if my touch disgusts you."

"Well, maybe it does!" she shot back.

"I suppose consummation can wait another day. I shall have to find a more willing participant for tonight, won't I?" he asked coldly, getting out of the bed to dress.

"You wouldn't dare!" She knew he was bluffing. He wouldn't go to another woman's bed on their wedding night. The glare he gave her chilled her. He would, wouldn't he? "Severus, if you go to another woman, I will not consummate this marriage. I will go back to the Ministry and tell them to tear up the contract." Without a word, he left her alone and naked on the bed.

Severus Apparated to Knockturn Alley nearly ten minutes after he'd left Hermione. He'd instructed Dilly, one of his house-elves, to show her to her private chambers. She need not worry about gracing his bed again. There were others that could fulfill his needs.

He made his way into a small, dark pub and immediately found a willing witch. He followed her to a tiny flat across the street. The practiced witch accepted his Galleons and began disrobing. Once she was naked, she lay on the bed, touched herself eagerly, and crooked a finger at him. "Come here, handsome." Severus unfastened his trousers only enough to release his already hardening cock. He pulled his wand out to whisper a Cleansing Spell on the woman. "There was no need for that, mate. I'm a clean witch."

"One can never be too careful." He smirked lightly, casting a series of charms on the woman and himself. He moved towards the bed and looked at the woman a little more closely. She had bony hips, skinny legs, and flat breasts. She was too thin for his liking. He liked a little something to hold onto when he had sex. This woman didn't even begin to compare to Hermione. *This is not Hermione. What am I doing here?*

"Aren't you going to undress?"

"I think not," he said. "I'll be a moment." He quickly strode to the bathroom and closed the door. "What the fuck am I doing here?" he whispered to himself. *You are showing your wife that you don't need her to find release. "My wife."* Severus quickly began fastening his trousers again. *Don't go running home, Severus. You can do this. She can't deny you her body and expect you to not seek another willing one. "I'll not be like that bastard,"* Severus said. His father had flaunted women in front of his mother on occasion. He'd not been married for an hour, and he was starting off exactly as his father would have expected him to act. She deserved more respect than that.

He knew she was in love with him completely, and that did make him feel more than he had admitted to her earlier. For the first time in his life, he felt needed and wanted. Both Dumbledore and the Dark Lord had needed him, but this was different. This was the need of a woman. Part of him hated feeling that way, but a part of him *liked* to be wanted. Flashes of her smile, her face contorted in ecstasy, and her half-lidded, sated eyes passed through his mind. He wondered what she would look like swollen with her...*his* child growing inside of her. Their consummation had gone horribly. It was partly his fault. He'd expected everything to revert to normal. Would he ever have his loving, eager lover back? A thought hit him suddenly.

"Do I love her?" he whispered to himself. "It's impossible." His eyes moved to the mirror. His mouth opened in shock. A lone tear glided down his face. "What the fuck?" he roared loudly. Severus slammed out of the bathroom and made his way to the front door.

"Where are you off to? Come to bed," the paid witch called.

"Keep the money. I've changed my mind," he said, leaving her in shock. He needed time to think about things. He'd mostly come to this paid witch because of his wounded pride at not being able to perform on demand earlier. Sex with an indifferent Hermione was something he never wanted to experience again. She should have welcomed his efforts to seal their bargain. It was the pressure that had done it. The shock of it all maybe. Something. Just knowing that he was married, even though he'd never wanted to be, weighed on his mind, and it must have interfered with his normally matchless stamina. Right, then. Those things combined with her bored expression and lack of desire had done him in. No man, not even he, could be expected to perform under such extremes.

"You fucking bastard!" a male voice said angrily.

He turned just in time to see a flash of angry green eyes, and a fist connecting with his right eye. He staggered back for a moment and felt another blow along his jaw. As quickly as he could, he spun away and pulled his wand. "Potter! I might have known that you would attack a man when he wasn't paying attention. Is that the only way that you know how to fight?"

"Need a wand, do you? Come on, you bastard! It's not bad enough that you snatched Hermione away and blackmailed her into marriage, is it? No, to be even nastier than usual, you had to come here and slum around with a whore on your wedding night! Does she know where you are, Snape?" the brat yelled loudly, attracting attention.

He'd been about to hex the boy when Weasley came behind Potter and threw his arms around him. "That's pretty low, Snape, even for you, you great, miserable wanker!" *CRACK!* Weasley Apparated them both away. Potter was lucky that Weasley had taken him away. Potter was also lucky that he'd caught him unawares. He felt his eye throbbing slightly and decided to Apparate home.

Severus made his way to the bathroom and examined the eye. "Not bad, boy," he murmured. It had been a solid hit, and were it not for magic, he'd be sporting a black eye for a few days. His jaw had only a slightly red discoloration to it. He pulled his wand up to soothe the battered flesh when a shrill voice sounded behind him.

"If you slept with another woman, I will NOT consummate this sham of a marriage. How dare you take off and leave me that way! I couldn't Disapparate! I couldn't use the Floo! All of the doors were warded. What if something had happened? I could have died here!" Hermione yelled.

"I slept with no one," he spat in annoyance. "The house-elves would have brought you to safety if the need had arisen. Go to your room, and leave me be."

"No, I will not be dismissed like a child."

Severus spun around to face her. "Then stop acting like one!"

"What happened?" she asked softly, raising her hand to his cheek.

"It's nothing," he said, ducking away from her hand. She pulled him closer with her other hand, bringing that one back to his face. "Hermione..." What could he say? *could use this to my advantage of course.* "I was attacked by Potter."

"Oh, no," she breathed, pulling her own wand from her pocket. "Close your eyes." He stood by patiently as she mended his bruises and repaired the slight cut under his eye. He was surprised that she hugged him so tightly after she was done. Not knowing what else to do, he put his arms around her. "I'm sorry," she said. "I may have been angry when I wrote to him. It's my fault."

"No, it's not. He's been wanting to do that for a long while," Severus said, making sure to keep his voice low and purposely dismayed. "I suppose I have been an arse to you." There; that was as close to an apology as he would give her. He hoped it would suffice. "I just need to rest. Good night." He moved away from her and began stripping his clothes as he made his way to his bed. He knew that she was following him, so he made a show of rubbing his shoulders as if they ached before he slipped beneath the sheets. "Hermione, what is the meaning of this? I instructed Dilly to show you to your rooms." He pretended to be surprised.

"I'm married, Severus. I do not plan on sleeping in my own chambers like a child instead of a wife." She pulled off her robes to reveal her bare body for only seconds before she blew out the candles on the nightstand. She slipped into bed next to him. "Budge up," she said.

He slid to the middle of the bed, and a true feeling of emotion overtook him. Severus reached over and pulled her next to him. "Stay near me," he whispered, part request yet part demand.

She snuggled closely with her back against his chest. "Severus, did you really leave to find a woman?"

"I've not been unfaithful." *Though I fully intended to.* "I was out, however, as you know. That's when Potter assaulted me. Does *heal*ways attack his opponents when they aren't looking? I mean, the Dark Lord is one thing, but this was a completely unfair fight."

"Save *all* of your love for me, Severus. I won't share it. No matter how much I hate you right now, I'd still rather you didn't go elsewhere. I'll not deny you anything," Hermione whispered.

He wondered vaguely if she'd not heard what he'd said about being unfairly attacked when her bare arse moved enticingly against his loins. Severus wanted her. He felt himself stiffening. Was she gifting her body as a peace offering betwixt them? If so, he accepted. "I shall be faithful," he heard himself saying. *What the hell did I say that for?* Did it really matter? Her hand was now coming around to grasp his arse. He would have to think about things later.

All he wanted to do was please her, and in return, be pleased. He moved slightly and turned her over onto her back. The moment his hands left her body, he tried to see into her eyes. There was nothing but a silhouette in the darkness. To find her lips, he moved a hand across her body. His light caress began at her soft belly and traveled upwards, not stopping to knead her breasts. Once he found her chin, he cupped it and lowered his face. He placed a chaste kiss on her closed lips first, then, he suckled her lower portion and top portion respectively. His tongue licked the crease where the two met. "Let me love you," he purred in a silkily soft voice. *You weak bastard. Words of love!* He shrugged the thoughts away with another thought. *Just a man making sure to get what's his.*

Hermione's lips opened immediately, and his tongue delved into her mouth, slowly exploring. Her tongue tangled with his whilst her hands found their way to his hair. The hand that held her chin captive moved down to cup a breast; his thumb was circling her nipple, making it harden. She moaned into his mouth, and in answer, he groaned back. His hand slid down past her stomach to finger through her hair and find her entrance. He delved one finger in to test her wetness, and this time around, he found her to be ready for him. He inserted a second finger into her and began slowly thrusting them in and pulling them out. His thumb now found her already swelling nub and circled it gently.

It was time. He ended their long, soft kiss and moved his lips to her neck where he suckled and nibbled until he was sure that she was marked. He moved over an inch and did the same there before gliding down. *She belongs to me. This is my wife. My own.* The kneading fingers in his hair only made him want her even more, but he knew she deserved pleasure. She deserved something. Their roles had been reversed. She, not he, had been the one forced to marry. He'd not mention that aloud, but he knew what was going through her mind. She wanted a fairytale romance, and he could never give that to her. He could, however, see her happy. He sighed contently as his tongue laved her taut nipple. Her increased whimpers had his erection ready to explode. When he felt her body arching into him and trying to tighten in preparation for her pending orgasm, he removed his fingers.

"Severus..." she whinged in frustration.

"I'm here," he murmured against her ear, sliding his hard length into her.

"Oh, God, yes."

Her tight, wet channel seemed to have been made for him. Relishing in the feel of her clenching around him, he slowly thrust in and out. His mouth found another spot on the other side of her neck, and he marked her. The fingers in his hair tightened, and she bucked against him in yearning. Wanting to answer her call of fulfillment, he gradually increased his strokes until they were both grunting and moaning. One hand untangled itself from his hair and found her crux to help bring her to orgasm. The cries of pleasure and the convulsing around his cock were too much to stand. He spilled into her and rode out their orgasms with erratic thrusts. He collapsed atop her, not particularly caring if he was crushing her. Her arms and legs quickly ensnared him, signaling that she liked the feel of his weight upon her. To be fair, he placed most of his weight on his knees and elbows. His hands found her hair and pulled the strands away from her face.

His eyes had finally adjusted to the lighting, and he could just make out their gleam in the darkness. "I don't hate you," she whispered.

"I know." His lips crushed hers again. This time passion took over. He was a man marking his territory, and from her response, he could sense that she didn't mind *my wife*. The marriage had been consummated. "Madame Snape," he said aloud. The words sounded odd to his ears, but they didn't sound as offensive as he once may have believed. He felt a small finger trail its way across his jaw and find his lips.

"I love you," she said, pressing her lips to his. She deepened her kiss as if marking him in return. He didn't mind. Feeling his soft penis slip out of her, he turned them over and held her atop his body.

"I know," he whispered. Moments later, sleep found them.

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

Hermione woke up to find herself alone in the large bed. Damn! Had last night not happened? Of course it had. It had been beautiful. It was as if they'd made love fully, as if they were two lovers just realizing their worth to each other. She would not allow herself to read any more into it. How would he treat her? Would he regret being nice? Had he really not gone to another woman? He didn't carry the scent of any foreign perfume, and he sounded honest enough. She put her faith in him. He wouldn't lie to her about that.

She noticed a parchment on the pillow next to her for the first time. She read it quickly. He'd had her clothes from the previous day cleaned, and they were waiting for her in the bathroom. He said that he would be in the study when she was ready for breakfast, and after that, they could go to Hogwarts to ready some of their things and see Poppy. He'd probably written this to avoid any awkward morning after talks. She decided to take advantage of this new, courteous Severus.

She made her way to the bathroom when the ring on her finger caught her attention. It was beautiful. There were diamonds and rubies set in a dainty, platinum band. Where had he found this ring? She'd ask him at some point in the future, but for now, she would simply appreciate its beauty.

As quickly as she could, Hermione showered and dressed. She went to the study and stood next to his chair. He was reading the morning paper. "Good morning," she said. "Anything interesting in there?"

"Not a thing." He turned a few pages and lifted it to her. She glanced down. It was an announcement of their new marital status in the back section. "They work fast."

"They do. Have you eaten?"

"No, I thought I would wait," he said cordially. "Shall we?"

"I think I could do with some toast this morning."

He nodded. "Do you not feel well?"

"I'm fine." She giggled. "So far anyway." She wanted to talk about the amazing love they'd made together, but she knew better than to ruin a good thing with uncomfortable words. She wanted to talk about the baby, but she didn't know where to start. She also didn't know if he would be ready to discuss it. It had been a huge shock to the both of them. *But, if he wants me to see Poppy, it must mean that he's ready to accept things.*

Their conversation was light, touching upon his research for the summer and outlining what they had left to do at the castle before they could come back to his home. "I suppose we should have the house-elves move your things into my chambers since we'll be sharing them at the start of next term."

"All right," she agreed. "I'm done whenever you are ready."

He nodded, folded his napkin, placed it in his plate, and rose to extend a hand to her. They made their way to the grate, and he, once again, put in enough Floo powder to transport the two of them together. From his rooms in the castle, they made their way over to see Poppy.

"I'm glad to see that you've come around. Come here," she ordered, pointing to a small, curtain-enclosed room.

Hermione looked to Severus. "Will you come?" He shook his head slightly and looked extremely uncomfortable. "I won't be long."

Severus watched as she disappeared behind the curtain with the Mediwitch following closely behind her. He strained to hear what was going on, but Poppy must have put up some damned Silencing Spell. Perhaps he should have gone in with her, but for some reason, it felt as if he would be intruding. The shock on impending fatherhood was still upon him. He would allow his wife to have her time alone with the Mediwitch, and then he would allow her to tell him about the visit. It would make things less awkward than for them to try to talk about it with Poppy hovering.

She finally came out. Hermione looked pale and disheveled. For some reason unknown to him, his heart faltered. "Is something amiss?"

"Er...maybe. No. I'll tell you in our chambers," she said quickly.

"Very well," he said, allowing her to slip her arm under his as he led her out. The way she'd said *our* chambers was not lost on him. He was slightly put off, feeling suddenly pressured, but then she corrected him.

"Where are we going?"

"To our chambers in the dungeons."

Her cheeks reddened. "Sorry. Could we go to my chambers? I've been thinking of them as ours for a while now, and it just slipped out."

He nodded in understanding, and they began climbing the stairs. When they reached the second landing, an angry Harry Potter stood waiting for them. "Well, isn't this just fucking cozy?"

"Harry," Hermione said. "You've gotten my owl."

"Yes, I know he blackmailed you into marrying him, forcing you to do his bidding like some private whore."

"Harry!" she chided.

Severus moved away from her and roughly grabbed Harry by the collar. "You will not speak that way about or in front of my wife. Do you understand, boy?"

"You're mighty brave today, Snape! Not going for your wand yet?"

"I've no need for my wand when I can see what's coming," Severus said, smirking when the boy blanched slightly. "Apologize to her."

"She knows that I'm not angry with her. I'm angry about the way you treat her. Did you tell her where I found you last night?"

"Shut up, *Potter!*" Severus warned.

"No! I'll not shut up. You didn't tell her, did you?" he asked, taunting him.

"I told her that I was waylaid by you when I wasn't looking," Severus said, pushing the boy aside. He turned to reach for Hermione's hand.

Potter said, "Didn't tell her that I caught you leaving a paid whore's flat, did you?"

Severus' eyes lifted and met Hermione's. Her eyes immediately began to tear up as she heard what the brat had said. "He didn't," she murmured.

"Oh, yeah, he did. He was checking to be sure that his trousers were fastened as he walked out the door. The bastard fucked another woman *on* your wedding night!"

"Severus?"

He shook his head angrily. "I didn't, Hermione. I told you last night."

Potter started laughing. "You don't expect her to believe that, do you? Both Ron and I saw him Hermione. We called him on it, and that's why he is so angry right now! He's mad because we told you about it before he had the bollocks to do it himself. It appears that he lied about it!"

Severus turned around, drew back his arm, and hit Potter as hard as he could, making the boy stumble backwards and fall on his arse. With satisfaction, he noticed that his glasses had been broken. Rage took over Severus as the boy wiped the blood from his nose and smirked. He moved forward again to attack the brat, but he felt Hermione

clinging to his arm. "Let go, Hermione. He deserves it." He shrugged her off and lunged for Potter again, who had been in the midst of standing. They both fell back onto the stairs. A small shriek stopped Severus in mid swing. He turned to see what was amiss with his wife, but she was gone.

A sickening feeling rooted in his gut. "Hermione!" he called out, rushing across the landing. "Good Lord!" She'd fallen down the flight of stairs and landed in a small heap on the first landing. He went to her immediately. *God, did I do this to her? Did I accidentally push her down the flight of stairs when I pushed her off of me to attack Potter?* "Hermione," he said, voice rough with emotion. "She's breathing," he told Potter, who was now hovering next to him. He scooped her up to bring her back to Poppy. He noticed Potter's horror. "What is it?"

"She's bleeding, Snape! What have we done?"

Severus saw where the boy was pointing. There was a small amount of blood where she'd been lying. "The child," he said quietly, looking into her slack face. She would never forgive him if she lost it. He would never forgive himself if she did either. Nor would he forgive Potter. As he ran to the Infirmary with his unconscious burden in his arms, he could only think of one thing. His mother's face. This was what had happened to her, though his father had done it purposely. History had a way of repeating itself, didn't it? "Poppy!" he called loudly. The moment he saw her, he said, "She fell down a flight of stairs."

"There was blood," Potter chimed in.

Severus hadn't even realized that he'd followed them. He quickly moved forward to put her on a bed for Poppy to have a look at her *Please let my wife be all right. Please let her...our child be all right. I'll try harder. Really I will. I'll not be like him. I won't be like my father. It was an accident.*

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**Southern's Notes:** This was a hard chapter for me to write because I was afraid that I'd made him a bit soft. After going through it with my beta, I don't think so.

I hope that those of you pulling for Harry enjoyed the scene where he attacked Severus. As far as the ending scene, I have an idea of which way I will go with it. What would you like to see happen? I'm almost certain that some of you may have guessed what I've decided to do next.

For update info and snippets, please see my author profile and click on the link to my journal. I post snippets there or at my yahoo!group, Potter\_Place.

Also, I've started a new story, Luring the Enchantress. It's a Severus where we are unsure which side he is truly on. Hermione catches his eye, and he decides a bit of slow seduction is needed to woo her over. Dumbledore has no idea, but Voldemort feels that his most faithful servant deserves a reward. Come check it out!

## Transition

### Chapter 9 of 15

We'll see what the fate of the pregnancy, and we'll see how Severus really does try to change.

**Disclaimer** Not for me, (sigh) but it's fun to play with them, isn't it?

**A big thanks to my lovely beta, Charmed\_Nay.**

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Poppy held her wand over Hermione's abdomen. "Oh, dear! I told her this would probably happen," she mumbled to herself. "Still thriving then...slightly. Damn."

Severus' eyebrows rose quickly. He'd never heard the Mediwitch use profanity before. He looked to Potter to see if he'd heard the same exclamation. Boy Wonder simply shrugged uncomfortably and looked on. Not caring if he had to endure her wrath, he asked, "What's going on with the child? Will Hermione be all right?" Poppy had been examining her for nearly five minutes without any news for them.

Annoyed eyes glared at Severus briefly. "You two will have to leave. She is my patient, and I must ask that you give us some privacy. I have some delicate exams that I need to do."

"Of course," Potter said.

"I most certainly will *not* leave my wife," Severus stated firmly, smirking at her look of surprise. Either she truly didn't know that they'd been wed, or she hadn't believed it. "Well?"

"Of course, as her husband, you will be allowed to stay. I'm sorry, Mister Potter, but you will have to leave." She waved her hand in a dismissive gesture towards the brat. Severus watched as her eyes fell to Hermione's wedding ring, as if checking for truth behind his statement.

"I'll be right outside," Potter said threateningly.

Severus simply sneered at him and turned back to his wife. "Poppy, you said it was still thriving but only slightly. You were referring to my child, am I correct?"

"Yes, one of them. I'm afraid, Severus, that her body is in the midst of expelling the other one. I'm sorry for your loss, but there may still be a chance to save the one that still lives. Stand back," she commanded. He moved aside as she moved to physically examine Hermione.

There were two of them. *No wonder she'd looked so pale.* He glanced down at her form on the table. One arm hung limply off the side of the bed whilst the other curled over her chest. Her hair fanned about wildly, dampened about her sleeping face. "Hermione, can you hear me?" he asked suddenly, taking her limp hand in his. "Poppy is looking after you."

No reaction occurred, but he hoped that she could hear him. He released her hand quickly *He* was probably the last person that she would want to see or hear. She likely believed Potter's version of events, believed that he'd bedded another woman on their wedding night. She might hold him responsible for her fall. If he hadn't slung her away from him as he went for the smirking berk, she might have maintained her balance. This might not be occurring. "Fucking stairs that move!" he barked, knowing full well that the moving staircase had nothing to do with his wife's fall and the death of their child, one of them.

"Severus, look at me," Poppy said firmly. "I told her just before that this pregnancy would likely terminate on its own. She knew she'd probably lose one or both."

"Why? What is wrong with our children?"

"It's the Muggle pills that she took. Work well, they do, but sometimes a little too well. Seems that she still ovulated, at least two eggs were fertilized, but those pills do several things." She shook her head and did a Cleaning Charm on Hermione. "One of the ways it stops unwanted pregnancies is to thin the lining of the uterus, making it nearly impossible for the fertilized egg to attach itself to the uterine wall. When I first examined her, I noticed that something wasn't right. It seemed like a single at the time, but this morning, I caught it straightaway. There were two. However, both were precariously implanted, one more so than the other."

"Precariously implanted?"

"Have you not been listening, Severus? The medicine from the pills was still in her system. You must have had some very determined semen to fertilize two eggs," she said bluntly, causing both to blush slightly. "When she fell, it only brought on the inevitable if you ask me. For now," she looked back down to Hermione's body, "I have to be sure that her body expels all...er...excess debris from the womb. Something isn't right." She stopped talking and working frantically with her wand for a couple of minutes.

*So, she hadn't truly missed a dose. She'd done nothing wrong.* It was his fault just as much as it was hers. He felt like an arse for accusing her in anger, but how was he to know? For all he knew, it was a plan to trap him. Watching the Mediwitch's brow crease with worry didn't help Severus' countenance. "Speak, woman," he growled. A sudden movement from Hermione had him leaning over to see if she'd awakened. "Can you hear me?"

"Sev..." She licked her lips and opened her eyes slightly. "Head hurts. Foggy here."

"You've a concussion, Hermione," Poppy said. "Don't move."

"Listen to Poppy, Hermione. You were knocked unconscious when you fell down that flight of stairs. She's tended to that, but there are other things at risk now."

"Babies?" He nodded. "Severus, don't let them leave me."

Her eyes fluttered closed. "Hermione?"

"She's gone out again," Poppy said. She moved away, came back with a purple looking liquid, extracted some into a needle, and pumped it into his wife quickly. "That will keep her out. No pain for a while at least." She eyed Severus oddly. "I have to ask your decision on something. This will likely be difficult for you."

He could feel sweat lining his brow. *Hermione is going to die. Something is wrong. No. I won't allow it.* "What is it?"

"She is still bleeding. It appears that I would have to go in to magically dilate her slightly and vanish any excess tissues out. The problem with this, I'm afraid, is that the other child will likely be lost as well. I don't want infection to set in because her body hadn't the chance to abort everything before I stopped her bleeding." Her face was grim. "You can save Hermione and lose the child, try to save the child and have only a slim chance of it surviving anyway, or you can possibly lose both."

Severus sat abruptly. "Hermione will be lost if I do not do this?"

"It is likely, depending upon her body's will to fight, depending on her will." She sat down for a moment and looked him in the eyes. "Has she much to fight for, Severus?"

He swallowed guiltily. "I'm afraid not. I've not reacted well *to this*, and I think that she believes the worst of me right now, thanks to Potter."

"Then, I'm sorry. I recommend that you allow me to proceed. It isn't likely that the other will survive anyway. They were both in jeopardy from the beginning. The moment she gets any weaker or stressed in any way, I would say she'll lose this one as well."

"You heard what she asked of me. I cannot condone this."

"Right then," she said solemnly, "but know that you may well be signing her death parchment. Tricky business, this."

"I was reading just last week about a new potion that is being tested. Have you looked at the latest edition of *Healing Potions*? A Healing Witch has been researching ways to stop miscarriages and safely cleaning the womb with a potion! I remember it because I was perusing the section for new information on the prevention of pregnancy for my own research. The potion preserves the living tissue through magical binding whilst forcing the body to absorb the dead tissue. I would be willing to try this. It may be a way to keep them both."

"It's not fully tested! I can't allow that," she said.

"You cannot allow it? I am her husband, and as such, I will not allow you to badger me into making any decisions that concern killing my child, my wife, or both. I have to try this," he said determinedly. *I will protect them.*

A memory washed over him suddenly.

*"Mum? Why are you sick?" he asked quietly.*

*"Because she's weak," came his father's gruff reply. "You're a Snape. You're stronger than she is. She'll never be a true Snape. In fact, the brat that she lost probably wasn't a Snape either."*

*"How dare you?" his mother screamed, throwing a book at his father. She received a sound slap in return, causing her to stumble back.*

*"I'll be in the study, boy, when you're ready for your lesson."*

*"Yes, sir," he answered dutifully. Once his father left the room, he ran to his mother's side. "Mum? Is this about my little sister?"*

*"It is, Severus. I've been weak in body and in heart since I've lost her. Know this, child. I've never been unfaithful to your father, but he's trying to say that is why the child was weak and terminated. The truth is, my son, he pushed me. My fall is what caused your sister's death."*

*"Father did this to you?" His fists balled up. "I'll make him pay."*

*"No, Severus, listen to me. You must do as bidden by him. It's the only way to remain safe. Once you are older and out of this house, be free of him, my son. Go along with him for now, but leave as soon as you can. Never disrespect your wife and family as he has done to us. You're better than he is. Promise me that you will not become him. You will protect your family at all costs."*

*"I will," he said firmly.*

It was a pity that when his mother had finally faded away, allowing her grief to dictate her fate, his father was all that he had. The man twisted him and made him do unbelievable things. Only when he was away from him did he remember what his mother had made him promise long before. He'd finally escaped the man's shadow. He'd never thought that he'd have a family to protect. His father had told him years before that the line of Snape should be allowed to die out rather than procure a line of weaklings. He'd claimed that his mother's side had tainted the Snape side, the bastard. Severus shook his head to clear his thoughts. Poppy's lips had been moving, but he hadn't heard. "What were you saying?"

"I asked what you would decide if you had the sole decision without thinking of what Hermione wanted. Maybe her words are keeping you from a clear decision. I really need to-

"My child will live. He is a Snape," he said proudly. "My wife will live. Do what you have to do to keep them at peace for now. I will go fetch a dose of the potion for her."

To her credit, the Mediwitch nodded agreement and went about trying to help Hermione. Severus strode forward and opened the Infirmary door. "Follow me, Potter," he demanded. The boy looked into the open doorway behind him. "I'll fill you in on the way."

"What is it? How is Mione?"

"She has lost one child. The other's fate is slowly headed in the same direction. Poppy wants to do a procedure to ensure Hermione's recovery, but it would terminate the other child for certain. If this isn't done, then Hermione may be lost to me," he stated forthright.

Potter ran his hands through his hair. "Let Poppy do what she's got to do. What the fuck? Are you hoping that she'll not recover? Think that'll relieve you of two problems at once, do you?"

Severus pulled his wand and had it indented in Potter's throat before the boy could blink. "If you ever say such a thing again," he said dangerously, "I *wikill* you. I want to save them both. It's Hermione's wish. I owe it to her to try." He removed his wand and levelly met the other's gaze. "I need your Invisibility Cloak. I have read of a potion in *Healing Potions* that is being researched. It may be of some help to her. I doubt they will give it to me, as it hasn't been deemed a success. It's worth a try. If I can get her a dose of that and some extra, I can brew more and administer it to her until she delivers if need be."

"I'll be right back," the younger wizard said, sprinting away to his chambers.

Severus wondered if it had been prudent to tell the brat everything, but he was sure that Hermione would eventually get around to it. Would Hermione now insist on leaving him, believing that he had betrayed her? He was stunned to realize that he didn't want her to leave. He wanted her to live with him. He wouldn't even mind the child much if he could have her. She belonged to him. He would never allow her or the child to leave his home. He had to protect him. He had to be sure they were cared for and respected, as his mum would have wanted.

Potter sprinted back to him. "Where are we going?"

"We?"

"Yes, *we*," the brat replied. "This is as much my fault as it is yours. I can create a diversion while you sneak in to get whatever it is you need, being a celebrity and all that."

"Very well. We are going to Greater Hangleton to the Healing Research Centre. Cast a finder on me and follow my Apparition trail," he instructed, moving as quickly as possible to the Apparition point just past the main gates of Hogwarts. Once they'd both Apparated there, Severus took the cloak. "I'm not sure how long I will need, but I do know where the laboratory is located. I also know where they store potions. My time will be used avoiding people, breaking wards, and getting the correct potion." He slid the cloak on and made his way to the front entrance.

Potter walked in first, and after standing there for only a few moments, a squeal was heard as a young witch ran to greet the boy. "Harry Potter! What are you doing here?"

"I have decided to donate some money in the name of a friend to a worthy establishment. I suppose you wouldn't be able to gather some of your mates here to explain some things they are researching so that I may decide which direction to go in." He flashed her a brilliant smile that made Severus' stomach churn. He had to admit the boy knew how to put on the charm when needed. "I just feel the need to give something back to the community that's always giving to me."

"What friend would you like to donate in memory of? Is it a fallen war hero?"

"No, she's still alive. She lost a child through miscarriage, however, and I would like to help fund some research in her lost baby's honor. If only there would have been some way to stop it, the child might yet be alive."

"Oh, Mister Potter! You've come to the right place. Healer Margaret Richardson has been working on something. Come down to the lab with me," the witch said brightly, pulling his hand.

"Sorry, I prefer to meet on equal footing. I'd be out of place in a laboratory. Perhaps you've got a conference room that we can use?"

"Right this way," she said.

Severus smirked as the boy was led away by the giddy wench. He'd had a good plan to get most of the workers away from the laboratory, but if they noticed that something was missing, they may find it odd that Potter had shown up to inquire on it. He shrugged. Let them arrest the Boy Wonder. It was as much as he deserved. In stealth mode, he made his way to the laboratory quickly. He unsheathed his wand to dismantle the light wards when he felt them drop away. Backing against the wall, he waited to see what had caused it. A moment later, the door opened. A group of excited people exited.

"Harry Potter is here! I can't believe it!"

"Maybe he'll stay for lunch."

"I wonder if his eyes are as green as I've heard."

Slipping in through the closing door, Severus made his way through the lab. Only a few people had remained, most busy with their potions. It was easy to find the section he needed. He unwarded the lightly guarded potions and noted that there were many phials. He took three from the front, read over a notepad that was conveniently left open near the storage shelves, and slipped back out the door after unwarding it. He sneered in contempt. "How could they leave something so precious unprotected?" he whispered to himself. Quickly, he made his way back to where he'd last seen Potter. It was easy to find out which room they'd taken him to. A line of workers and visitors alike were lining the corridor.

Chuckling lightly, he hurried to exit the building. *Well, the brat wanted to help, so here is his chance. I have to get back to my Hermione* As quickly as he could, he made his way back to his office, pulled out the magazine, and read over the article once more. Healer Richardson states that the testing all went well, but they'd only tested on animals. It seemed that they would purposely bring on a miscarriage, give the animal a shot of the potion, and the termination would halt through the magical binding and fixing of all problems, leaving the pregnancy in tact and reaching full term. Through a question and answer section, he was able to figure out the size of dose that Hermione would need due to her height and approximate weight. She would need two full droppers each day for the next week.

The potion fought infection, preserved and bound the living fetus to the uterine walls, and the body absorbed any excess tissue or clotting. "I hope I am doing the right thing," he said aloud. He firmly believed that the potion would be of help to her. It would save her and possibly save their child. As quickly as he could, he went to the Infirmary. Albus and Minerva were talking to Poppy. Both looked to him with worried expressions as he entered. He simply nodded, made his way to his wife's side, and pulled her up slightly. One dropper and then the next were easily emptied into her mouth. She barely seemed to notice.

Poppy motioned for him to join her and the others once he laid his wife's head back onto the pillow. "Has she come round again?"

The Mediwitch shook her head. "I performed what needed to be done. The bleeding has stopped. I can only hope that you've made a wise decision," she said sternly. "I've read over the article, and I am not comfortable with untested potions. If it's so great, why haven't they tested on humans?"

"Funding," he said simply. "I do trust Healer Richardson to know what she's doing. She has had many breakthroughs in the past." He looked to Minerva and Albus. "I trust you know everything."

Minerva nodded. The age lines on her face seemed to have deepened in her worry. "Severus, I'm afraid that I don't agree with your decision. Hermione's life should not be risked."

"She requested that I not let her children die. I have failed her where one is concerned. I will not allow the other to meet the same fate." He looked back to where her still form was lying. "It's what she would want."

Albus cleared his throat. "I agree. She would want to at least try."

"Now we wait," Poppy said sadly, shaking her head. "The medicine that I gave her should be wearing off shortly. That means she'll likely wake up. I'll go ready some more in the event that she is still in pain. Nasty hit on her head, that was."

Severus looked to the headmaster. "Albus, I must request that we be given leave to go to my home without finishing our duties here. I will see to it that my wife's things are brought down to my chambers, pack what we need for the holiday, and lock down our rooms. We will simply come back sooner, and I will help her finish what needs to be done in the library to prepare for the students."

"That is acceptable, Severus. I think you should take this time to care for your family, get to know your wife." The old man's eyes seemed a little saddened. "I'm afraid that we all think this is what's best for you, marrying Hermione, I mean. It's unfortunate that it had to occur this way."

"Yes, yes," the dark man said, waving away his friend's words. "I know how you all feel. I think you should have thought about how I felt." He rubbed his temples slightly. "No matter. It's done. I'm going to go see to our things. Minerva?"

"I'll stay in case she awakens, but I'll not tell her the bad news." She smiled slightly. "Wouldn't you like to be here for her?"

"No," he said crisply. "I'm sure I'm not on her list of favorites at the moment. I shan't be long," he said, quickly moving towards her chambers where he summoned a couple of house-elves. He instructed them to bring certain things down to his chambers and to place them all in the spare room. There would be time later to integrate their belongings. He summoned everything that he thought she may need whilst away for the holiday.

Down in his chambers, he sealed his classroom, packed all ingredients that would spoil, and secured his office and personal stores. In his chambers, he oversaw the elves that carted in Hermione's things, packed his own needed items, and decided to sit down for a quick drink to clear his mind. If he'd forgotten anything, he could always come back by and retrieve it. The first question that popped into his mind wondered what he'd do next. *You should never have gotten involved with the likes of her.* He smirked. His father's old teachings and beliefs had poisoned him, hadn't they?

He could always hear the opinion that his father would give if he'd still be alive. "I'll not listen to you anymore, sir," he mumbled to himself, startling an elf that was nearby. He smirked at the creature for a moment. *I've, once again, broken one of the last promises that I made to my mother long ago. Never again will my past or my father be able to control me. I am my own man and my mother's son.* As if resolving an internal battle after years of war, he felt his conscious seem to lighten. He knew at that moment that it was time to start living for himself. The bad thing was that he didn't know how to do that.

He would not truly grieve the child that was lost. Was this wrong? Yes, it was likely. How could one miss something that he didn't know was there? It was a pity, but according to Poppy, they were even lucky that the other seemed to be trying to hold on. What decision would he have made had it been entirely up to him? Severus knew the answer. He would have told Poppy to do what needed to be done just to be sure that his wife would be safe. There would have been time later to have another child.

"Would I have wanted to give her that chance?" he asked softly. He knew instantly that he would have. It was likely that experiencing the complete loss would have devastated her. For some reason, it was important that she be happy, or at least, that she be content. The child could give her things that he never could: open affection, words, and pride. He needed this child to survive as much as she did. There would have been no reason to stay married if the remaining child would have aborted as well. That was still a possibility, no matter what potion Hermione was taking. If she worsened, he would insist that Poppy do her duty, but until then, he owed it to Hermione to try. He owed it to his child.

What sort of father would he be? Would he be as he'd told Hermione? Out of the picture mostly, simply giving lectures on the few things he felt necessary for a Snape to know? No, why would he want that? He'd enjoyed talking with his mother when she lived. Was there no reason that he couldn't enjoy his progeny's company in the same manner? Males always seemed to take on the role of head of family first, provider second, husband third, and father last. It was how he was raised. His father's education had been on prejudices, dark spells, projecting superiority, never appearing weak, and hiding emotions. These were things that he could not and would not pass on to his child. Taking the last sip, he set the tumbler aside and stood. "I'm sorry that you died, child," he said, doubting it could hear, but feeling better all the same. "Perhaps my mother and sister have seen you safely home."

With that, he vanished all of their belongs to their home, and he made his way out of the dungeons. Before he could get back to his wife, he met up with Potter again. "Finished signing parchments, have you?"

"Very funny, Snape," the boy said sardonically. "Listen, I don't like that you and Mione are together, and I hate that she allowed you to blackmail her into marriage."

"But?" Severus goaded, raising an eyebrow.

"But, I think that you did a good thing today by trying to save the baby. I've just been to see her, and Poppy says she'll be fine so long as she isn't stressed and stays mostly in bed until her second trimester, whatever that is." The boy sighed. "I've not told Hermione yet, but I plan to tell her the truth. After Ron Apparated me here and left, I went back to that flat you walked out of. I paid that woman to tell me what happened. I was hoping to have something to collect into a Pensieve that would get her out of your marriage."

"And, you found that I had not committed adultery," Severus stated blandly, feeling the anger rise within him. "Yet, you came here to pick a fight with me in front of her. You wanted her to believe that I had been unfaithful after she and I had already established that I hadn't nor would I do so in the future."

"That's right. Thought it would be fun to see you in a spot. You shouldn't have been there in the first place. She did have a right to know that much. You didn't tell her that though," the brat pointed out.

"Before I left, I did tell her of my intentions. When I got back, I told her that I had not gone through with it. She needn't know any of the details," he said, brushing past the boy. He walked a few feet, stopped, and made his way back to him. "I think, Potter, that you'd better tread very carefully in the future. I'm not sure that my wife will be very forgiving once she knows your part in this. I know that I, for certain, am not. Your cloak can be found in her old chambers. You know the password, I believe."

"You know, Snape," Potter called out, "it's still not too late for her to leave your arse. I think it's you that should tread carefully."

Severus turned on his heel and glided back to the brat. "I've lost one child today, Potter. Part of the reason that Hermione is in the state that she's in right now is because of *our* scuffle. Do you realize that if you hadn't try to waylay us on the stairway that we'd not be as we are? Hmmm?" He knew that the miscarriage was likely inevitable, but he didn't mind making the boy feel a bit guilty.

"I'll be watching you, Snape," he said, backing away slowly. "You'll mess up somewhere along the way, and I'll be there to cheer her on when she leaves your arse. If you hurt her, you'll have me to deal with."

"Oh, heavens no!" Severus said in mock terror. "The great Harry Potter has threatened me. I'd better be on my best behavior. Good day, Potter. I don't want to keep you from your groupies any longer." This time he didn't turn around to answer the boy's taunting. Before he entered the Infirmary, a sinking feeling overtook him. What if she was awake? How would he explain what had happened? How would she feel about losing one child, possibly losing another, and taking an untested potion? He shrugged his fears away. Perhaps if she were worried about those things, she might forget what Potter had said just before she'd fallen. He'd have to tell her later, of course, but he wanted some peace for now.

A quick check with Minerva told him that she'd not awakened. He thanked her and Albus for supporting them, and he made his way to Poppy's office. "I want to transport her home. How much longer will you be here?"

"I leave in three days. Would you like for me to Floo in each day?"

He nodded. "I'll open the Floo from your grate in here to my sitting room. I would very much like for you to have a look at her. For now, I need to get back to make another batch of the potion. I have enough to give her tomorrow and the next day, but I'll need more for the rest of the week."

"Don't worry, Severus. I'll come by." She smiled kindly. "Hermione has less than five weeks until she reaches her second trimester. I would ask that she stays abed, have no duties, no stress, and she takes her vitamins. It's the best bet to keeping this little one alive. Once she reaches that, then we'll talk and examine her some more to see what the next steps will be."

"Thank you," he said sincerely and made his way back to Albus. "I am going to Portkey us home. I think we'll need some time alone. You can both Floo to check on her of course." He pointed his wand at a small cup. "*Portus*." He went to his wife to cradle her, activated the Portkey, and after counting down, the Infirmary vanished. The sensations of being jerked just behind the navel unnerved him slightly, as did the swirling colors and sounds surrounding them.

"Dilly?" The elf appeared immediately. "Is my wife's bed ready?"

"It is, sir. It is."

"Very well," he said, striding towards her chambers. He placed her upon the bed and pulled up a chair to sit next to her. He decided to talk to her, hoping it would jar her awake. He wanted to get the inevitable out of the way. "We're home, Hermione. I see the elves have made an effort to fill your room with the belongings that I sent here earlier." He saw her fingers twitch slightly and heard a soft moan. He knew that the medicine was wearing off. *Now comes the hard part*. He quickly poured a fresh glass of water from her vase and also dampened a cloth. He kept the water nearby in case she wanted a drink, but he wiped her brow and face with the cloth. Her eyes opened slightly. "Welcome back."

"Where?"

"We are home," he said. "Does your head still hurt?"

"Some."

"Does anything else hurt?"

"Babies?"

Severus sucked in a deep breath, placed the cloth on the nightstand, and sat next to her. "Do you remember anything before you fell?" Her brow furrowed as she thought. She nodded slightly. "You had gone to see Poppy, and she told you that you were expecting twins. Both were precariously implanted. She didn't think that one or both would survive. Do you remember that?"

A tear slid down her cheek. "They're gone?"

He took her hand in his. "I am about to tell you something that will be most difficult to hear." Hermione's hand tightened around his. "One child was lost. The other is still as it was, but Poppy isn't optimistic about the outcome."

"One still lives? Oh, thank God! I didn't want to be alone."

"Yes," he said, quirking his lips upward at the sight of her relieved smile. "You were bleeding, however, and she needed to stop it. She recommended that she do a procedure to be sure all excess tissue was removed. Doing this would have terminated the other pregnancy as well. I did not give her permission to do this, but I requested that she please stop your bleeding to the best of her ability. She warned me that by doing so, you might suffer from an infection, causing you to lose the child anyway and possibly your own life."

She closed her eyes. "I feel all right."

He brushed a stray lock of hair away from her face, causing her to open her eyes. "I have given you a new potion that is being developed. It's been proven to work on animals, but it hasn't been approved for use on humans just yet. I trust the Healer that developed it, the properties and ingredients make sense to me, and I have taken some to give to you." Her eyes widened. "It was worth a try. It is supposed to stop infection, force your body to absorb any excess tissue into the system, and more completely bind living tissue to your uterine wall." He looked away and whispered softly. "It's the only way that I knew to save you both. I didn't think that you would want to condemn the child to death without giving it a fair chance. I want you both to live."

"You chose right," she said weakly. "Water."

Taking the glass from the stand, he brought it to her lips, watching as she sipped gingerly. When she was finished, she closed her eyes. He placed the glass back on the stand. "Hermione?" She only smiled faintly. A few minutes later, he began talking. "I don't know if you can hear me or not, but I swear to you that I was not unfaithful last night. My intentions weren't pure, but I decided on my own to not go through with it. Why? I realized that any other woman would be unsatisfactory. You are all I want now."

There was no reply, so he knew that she was sleeping. However, he felt all the better having voiced what had been on his mind for hours. "Potter told me that he knew that I hadn't done anything. After he waylaid me and Apparated away, he went back to the flat I had come out of. He paid the witch to answer questions for him. She admitted that nothing happened. He simply wanted to tear us apart this morning and hurt me." He sighed and laid his head on the bed next to her. "I'm not sure if you'll remember exactly what he said to us, but I thought that you'd likely prefer your own room. I'm also afraid that I might have caused your fall by shrugging you off of me like I did when I tried to get to the Boy Wonder. I know it will be hard to have your trust in me again, but I shall try to earn it. I simply hope that you don't forgive Potter too easily. All of this could have been avoided if he hadn't goaded me...ah, that's not fair, I suppose. I welcomed it, to be honest. I wanted a chance to inflict some of the shame that he'd inflicted on me."

"We've many things to discuss when you are awake and able. I don't know how I am going to be able to tell you this, but long ago I promised a woman that was very dear to me to always protect what's mine. It's unfortunate that I didn't remember that sooner. Most of this could have been avoided," he said darkly. "You are mine, you know." He leant over and kissed her brow. "I shall check on you later." He paused near the doorway. "You will never be alone, Hermione."

Hermione was very much awake as her husband talked to her, but she'd been too weak to respond or even open her eyes. When her eyes were opened, things appeared a bit foggy. Part of her was angry, part of her was disappointed, and part of her pitied her husband.

First of all, what fucking right did Harry have to say such things to fight with Severus? He'd purposely sabotaged Severus in her eyes. Well, that's not completely true. When Severus told her that he'd not been unfaithful, and he further went on to vow that he never would be, she'd believed him. When Harry made his accusation, she simply wanted Severus to reassure her that what she believed was the truth. There had been something desperate in his eyes when he'd looked up, holding his hand out to hers. It was as if his soul was pleading with hers to believe him. Before she'd had a chance to tell Harry to stop and that he must have misunderstood something, he'd gone too far and provoked Severus.

The truth about her fall was that she had lost balance when Severus moved away from her grasp. She finally balanced herself, but she hadn't minded where her feet were. One wrong step back had sent her spiraling down the stairway. Her husband sounded uncharacteristically guilt ridden already. She would not add more to his burden by admitting the reason she fell. She mostly saw this as Harry's fault. If he hadn't chosen that moment to appear and to lie to them, then her babies would be fine. No lie



would have been lost. Yes, Poppy had said that she would likely have terminated at least one of them anyway, but she'd planned to make arrangements with her husband to do what needed to be done to save her unborn children. It would be a long time before she could talk to Harry without being ugly. As soon as she was better, she would write to him and tell him that she didn't appreciate his part in things.

Secondly, who was this woman that Severus had made a promise to? *A woman that was very dear to me.* Had he been in love before and lost her? Was that why he was so bitter and hated to even speak the word love? She would like to know about this woman and exactly why he'd promised her something about protecting what was his. She couldn't help to be slightly jealous. How had some woman accomplished something that she, the future mother of his child, couldn't? She gasped. Did he have an old lover and child out of wedlock? From what he'd told her at first, she wouldn't be surprised if he'd refused to marry someone. In fact, the more she thought of it, she would be very surprised if he truly had been in love. He hadn't said love. He'd said that she was dear to him. An aunt? A friend? His mother? A sister? Maybe she would find a way to approach the subject again.

Thirdly, the man that had been holding her hand, talking to her in soothing tones, wiping her brow, and projecting warm feelings to her had been a completely different man. What had changed? Did losing his child scare him? Did he realize that he cared more than he let on? Did he believe himself to love her? No, that last bit was unlikely. He wasn't in love with her, but she could see where a protectiveness would surge forth after death paid their family a call. Did he pity her? Was he simply being nice until she was well? She had no idea what orders Poppy had given or what the side effects of this miracle potion would be. His words came washing over her. *You're all I want.* She knew he'd meant those words. He didn't know that she was awake. He thought that he was talking to himself. There was no reason to lie to himself.

Sleep was coming. She could feel its claws reaching for her awareness. Would her baby survive? What would it have been like to have two babies at once? She couldn't imagine Fred without George. Tears made their way to her closed eyelids and forced themselves out of the corners. Whatever reason for this, she would only hope that it was for the best. When she'd been told that she carried two babies, she nearly fainted. One had been hard enough to explain to Severus, but she feared telling him about the second and the impending bed rest. Belatedly, she realized that he wouldn't have taken the news all that badly. He seemed to be grieving in his own way.

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Severus wanted to crawl in next to his sleeping wife, but he knew better than to do that. She wouldn't want him near. All too soon, she would wake up and demand answers to Potter's accusations. He was weary of fighting. He simply wanted to coexist peacefully. There was no need for animosity, not now. He knew that he'd been treating her badly. It was the only way he knew how to live.

No matter what she told him or how much she ended up blaming him for their child's death, he would be sure to try to keep her calm, and he would curb his harsh words. He wanted her to live. He wanted the child within her to live as well. There was nothing they could do to bring back the one they'd lost, but he could see that this one survived. He would see that his wife smiled again and held her firstborn.

"How can I right so many wrongs?" he asked softly. Her sleeping form looked so at peace that he pulled up a chair and propped up his feet. *It'll never be weak, Hermione, not even for you.* "What is weak anyway?" he mused quietly. An image of Arthur Weasley doing all that his wife demanded came to mind. At the last meeting they'd all had together, he was stating his opinion about something in the final battle. The obstinate woman had glared at him whilst clearing her throat warningly. The pecked man had quickly changed his views. That was weak.

Would Hermione expect this of him? Perhaps not. She seemed to like him as he was. If she would ever ask him to change, he would not. *already have.* He nodded in silent agreement. Things had changed, hadn't they? Was he comfortable with the person that he was without feeling less of a man? Hell, yes. There was nothing weak about him. What's wrong with a man hoping to save his child's life and the life of his wife? What's wrong with a man wanting to protect what was his? If he had to pretend to be nice to see that those things came to pass, so be it. For now anyway.

He looked at her lush lips and wished to see them smile. She would have a lot to deal with the next day once her head truly cleared. He would be there for her only if she requested it. Whatever it took to keep her quiet and at rest, he would do. "There is only a few weeks left until she can move about more freely. How hard can this be?" Severus decided to make his way back to his laboratory to check on the brewing potion. He'd already alerted her parents to what had occurred so far. He'd assured them that with any change, they'd be the first to know. He was anxious to have their reply. For some reason, he wanted them to think well of him, to be glad she chose him over Potter. *Harry Bloody Potter, the little bastard. He would get his.*

Southern's Notes: A special thanks to GinnyW for reading through my medical type stuff. I was uncertain as to what sounded right or not. She was able to steer me in the right direction.

I'm thinking that wasn't cool of Harry, and I do think he is partly responsible. However, according to Poppy, it was likely that it would have happened anyway. Who's to say that this didn't actually save the other baby in the long run?

Severus is trying to think better of his wife and child, but he was so greatly influenced by his father that he's been a bit warped. How does one act in a situation not prepared for and not wanted? I'm glad his mum made him make that promise. In my mind, he wants to do what's right by Hermione, and he will start being nicer, but he still thinks it's an act. I wonder if the act will become habit?

Acceptance

Chapter 10 of 15

Severus and Hermione settle in to their new life together as a married couple. They are able to compromise on several issues, and Severus begins to question his true feelings for his young wife.

Disclaimer:

A big thanks to the lovely Meredith for being my beta for this chapter. Charmed_Nay is on a vacation, and I didn't trust myself to upload this without a beta. Thanks to all of my friends over at Potter_Place.

Severus was startled as his grate came to life. Who would be Flooing in? He didn't allow...oh, right. Poppy. The Mediwitch stepped out of the grate, dusting soot from her dress. She looked around and met Severus' gaze. "You look horrible," she said, walking towards him. "Have you fallen ill?"

"I've not slept much," he said honestly, hoping she didn't smell the liquor on his breath. He'd been up for hours after only being able to sleep for a short time. There was something niggling about in his mind, keeping him from thinking clearly, and he couldn't quite place what it was.

"Humph. It shows. You've not shaved, your hair is in disarray, and you look ill. Want me to have a look?" she asked pulling out her wand.

"No, thank you, Poppy," he said curtly. "I will show you to my wife's room."

"Her room?" she asked suspiciously. "Wouldn't a newly bound couple want to share a bed? Work through their grief together? Why do you have her locked up in a room all alone?"

"Oh, good Lord," Severus said incredulously. "She's not locked in! How dare you come into my home and insinuate-"

"That'll do," the Mediwitch said crisply. "I'm not that thick, Severus. I just think you are making a mistake here. I've a bit of friendly advice for you, and I hope you'll take it."

"And, that is?" he asked through a sneer.

"Don't let her slip away from you. She's going to need you to be strong enough for the both of you. Shutting her away in a room doesn't take away the problem. This is a time for talking and healing. I suggest you get to it."

Severus' mouth gaped open for a moment. *What the bloody hell has gotten into her? How dare she talk to me in such a manner!* While I do appreciate that you've taken time out of your schedule to come here, I must ask that you not return. I'll not have you-

She raised a hand to silence him. "I'm not being rude, Severus, only honest, which I am sure that you'll appreciate once you've thought on what I've said. I'll give you instructions and be off to see her, allowing you more time to wallow here in self-pity about how you're stuck with a beautiful young witch for a wife and are going to father what I do not doubt will be a lovely child."

He couldn't believe her audacity. The woman always did have a sharp tongue, and she did always take her caring for patients seriously. He'd let the biddy have her say and be done with it. He stood and crossed his arms in front of him. "Go on then."

"Right then. First of all, there is to be no stress. None whatsoever. If by you sitting in here leads to stress, don't do it. I don't trust your miracle potion, and I want you to exercise caution. If she is in bad way, it will likely end up causing fetal distress. No sex at all. It wouldn't do for you to disrupt anything, and her uterus doesn't need any contracting. She needs to stay in bed for a while to be sure that things truly have healed, as I said, I don't trust that potion." She looked away for a moment. "No reaching above her head either, so you will have to help to bathe her. I don't see why she can't walk to the loo herself with you steadying her, but you *will* need to help her. Wash her hair for her and do what needs to be done. Lastly, you need to make sure she is taking her vitamins each day. That's very important at this stage. Now, have you any questions?"

Severus shook his head. He'd heard all that she said, and it made sense. However, he was still dwelling on certain words that she'd chosen. All at once, he realized what it was that had been keeping him awake all night. Quickly, he showed the witch to his wife's room and left her to do what she needed to do. Poppy's words came back and slapped him in the face. *Don't let her slip away from you.*

"Like my mother," he said to himself. It was ridiculous of course. The entire situation was like history repeating itself suddenly. "No, she's stronger than that. She's stronger than mum." His mother's sad eyes flashed before him. His mother hadn't always been a weak woman. It was only after he got older that she started simply living a cowering existence and doing his father's will. The man had finally broken her spirit, and she simply existed. Severus curled his lip slightly. His father had been so cold. Why? What was it about his mother that the man hated?

Shaking himself mentally, everything fell into place. This was a cycle. Hermione was a spirited woman who loved him, and he amused himself with her, not truly loving her, as she deserved. If they remained married, his mother's fate would eventually be hers. He, like his father, was also a hard man. Sooner or later, Hermione's fire would die out, and her spirit would no longer be her own. No, it would be what he made of it. That had to be the reason that his mother simply lost the will to live when she lost his sister all those years before.

That child had been her one hope that she could be happy. Severus had been nearing school age, and she would have been alone with her father all the time. The child would have brought her joy. When it died, so did her hope. "Will Hermione's hope die as our child did?" No, that's ridiculous. She has our other child to live for. She'll not fade away like my mum did. An echo of his father's voice flowed through his mind. It was something that he'd said to Severus after his mother's funeral.

"Severus, do you see how women are? They are never satisfied, they try to take and never give, and when they are finished, they leave. Never fall prey to a woman's clutches. Do what you have to do to find pleasure and leave quickly."

"But, my mum wasn't like that. She loved us."

"Loved us so much that she just gave up and left us," his father said, looking at the vault one last time. "She could have stayed." An odd expression passed through his face before he turned to his son. "She chose this. Chose to leave. Chose that dead child over her living child."

Severus nodded, but he loved his mother. He knew that this man had hurt her deeply with his words and deeds, but his mother had asked him to go along with it until he could be free of him. "You are right," he said, turning away from the vault.

"My God," he said aloud. "I never intended to truly become what he wanted, only pretend for a while." Sighing in resignation, he poured himself another shot of Ogden's to help dull his painful memories. *What if Hermione doesn't have the strength to live for the other child? What if she too fades away? Mum couldn't live for me. What is the difference here?* He sat back down, staring at the mirror to his left. "I've got to find away to be sure that doesn't happen," he said, watching himself speak.

He wondered briefly about that expression on his father's face. What was it? Regret, longing, fear? If Hermione died, he would feel all of those things along with a deep loss. Regardless of what he told her or how he acted, he did care for her. He'd kill for her, and it wasn't only because he felt that she belonged to him. He would literally harm anyone that caused her any pain. Deciding to get on with his morning toilette, he stood and made his way to his room.

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Poppy smiled when Hermione bid her hello. The girl looked pretty good considering what she'd gone through. "I've come to check on you. I hope you don't mind that I'm early."

"Not at all," she said, moving to sit up.

The Mediwitch checked her head. "All signs gone. Did you sleep well?"

"I did."

"Excellent. No signs of head trauma. I suppose I still have the knack for healing." She busied her self with doing casting certain charms all along Hermione's body.

"I've never doubted you," Hermione said sweetly.

Minutes later, Poppy said, "I believe that the potion may indeed be working. Your little one is still hanging on and seems to be attaching more firmly to your uterine wall. There is still some tissue about that I can sense, but its mass has diminished greatly. I admit that Severus made a good call." She moved down. "I am sorry, but I will have to check you physically."

Slightly embarrassed, Hermione slid down to allow the witch to do what needed to be done. None too gently, she felt her stomach being pressed and felt the sensation being carefully probed. When she finally looked to Poppy, she saw the witch had a furrowed brow. "Oh, no. Is something wrong?"

"Not at all. There has been no further bleeding. However, you are measuring a little bigger than I'd thought. It would seem that you are nearly nine weeks instead of just the seven, but it could be due to the twin. I also imagine it'll take a little time to right itself." She smiled. "I believe that you will be fine, as will this little one."

"I'm really worried about that."

"Well, follow my instructions, and I think you'll have a healthy little one. No sex, no stress, and no running about either," she said sternly. "Take your vitamins and Severus' potion. I've instructed him that you aren't to bathe alone and need to stay mostly in bed. If you've a need for something, it will be his responsibility to see that you get it." She patted Hermione's hand gently. "Have you any questions?"

Hermione did have a question. "You told me yesterday that both were precariously implanted and that I would have to take it easy if I hoped to carry them to term. Did you truly think me able to carry them to term?"

Poppy shook her head. "I believe, as I said, that you would have had a difficult pregnancy. Either they would have aborted on their own, or you would have given birth very early. I wasn't optimistic about this pregnancy. I blame it on those Muggle pills that you took. They made it harder for the babies to attach."

"So, you mean to say, that if I hadn't fallen, then I could have possibly lost them both?" she asked quietly.

"Yes. I think that we should be glad that we've saved at least one."

Hermione nodded. "Thanks."

Poppy fidgeted for a moment. "Hermione, I would like to take credit for this seeming success, but I cannot. I wanted to go in and rid you of the...tissue, which would have likely terminated the other life. But, it would have kept you safe from infection." She sighed. "Severus wouldn't have it. He figured you would have wanted to save the child or at least die trying. It was he that thought of the potion and went to fetch it for you. I hope it holds up."

Feeling tired, Hermione closed her eyes and nodded. Yes, she remembered that bit, and she was grateful that her husband had made the right choice. *Husband! It sounds so odd that Severus Snape is now my husband.* She heard Poppy leave but remained abed. She had some things to think through, so she didn't make a move to go to the loo, as she needed to.

She, Rolanda, and Harry had been wrong to trick Severus into bedding her. Twice. It was amazing that he'd found out and still wanted to see her. He'd never been dishonest about what he wanted from her, and he'd warned her repeatedly that he would never commit to her. She'd always believed that she could get him to love her eventually, and she'd figured that if she'd had enough, she could always leave. "Now look at us," she whispered to herself. "I've forced him to commit."

Snorting slightly, she amended those words. *I've forced him to force me into marrying him.* It was a low blow that he would stoop to snitching to her parents about her plans to wed Harry and then to go a step further with the blackmail bit. However, thinking about it now, she wondered if she hadn't gotten what she wanted after all. Harry had been valiant in offering to wed her and love her child, as a father should, but that would have ruined his chance of happiness. No matter how much they loved each other, as friends, they could never be more than that. To live with someone forever, having boring friendly sex, raising a child together...well, that wouldn't have been fair to either of them.

Not to mention that Severus would have likely harmed Harry. He'd told her that he would have, and she believed that would have happened. *Just look how they have been acting the last couple of days. One would have killed the other, and then I would have been alone again.* Realizing how selfish she'd been to run to Harry, she thanked God that Severus had snatched her away. He was right. He could have been told. Instead, she went down to seduce him, told him it was over, and left. She never dreamt that he would come for her or care enough to not want anyone else to have her.

Yes, he'd been using her, but she'd also been using him. He used her for sex at first and then for companionship. She'd used him for sex as well and to feed her delusions that she could be happy just having the man she loved in her bed. She had known from the beginning to not expect anything more unless things changed. She foolishly believed that her love was enough for the both of them. Why love a man like Severus Snape?

It hadn't started out as love, more like an obsession. She'd seen him conversing with Minerva in the corridor one day. She'd borrowed Harry's cloak to sneak down to the kitchens to try to talk to the elves. Severus had seemed too ragged and exhausted, but Minerva had said something that had cheered him up. He'd given her a most dazzling smile. Hermione had been unable to move. It had blown her away that a man such as he could appear so differently when he smiled genuinely. Her heart had gone out to him when Minerva walked away. He'd looked down sadly, sighed in resignation, and placed his mask of indifference back on his face before walking away, slightly limping.

She'd never seen him weak before, and she'd felt so sorry for him that day. The man always did what he had to do for the Order, but what did the Order give back to him? That one conversation had haunted her for days. What had made it worse? When she had gone into the kitchen, she'd seen a few elves standing about and laughing, but the moment they'd seen her, their demeanor had changed. Their happiness had halted because someone was watching. She'd likened the life of her Potions master to those of the elves. Did he feel he was nothing more than a servant? Did he feel that he had to hide his true self away from the rest of them?

After that, she'd become obsessed with him. She'd wanted to watch him at all times possible whether at school, Grimmauld Place, Order meetings, in the battle... Thoughts of him had consumed her. She'd wanted to see him smile again. She'd wanted to let him know that life didn't have to be lived alone behind closed doors where nobody else could see. It always seemed that nobody ever truly appreciated the work that the man did, save Dumbledore and maybe Minerva.

She'd wanted him to know that someone cared and that someone thought of him as an honorable man. At first, she had occasionally sent gifts. She'd never seen him wear the scarf that she'd sent, read the book that she'd sent, or hear him speak of receiving gifts. She wondered if he'd thrown them all out, thinking them secretly hexed. When those gifts didn't work, she tried to talk to him at different times. He would mostly just say something rude, but sometimes she would be rewarded with a normal answer to a question.

Her obsession with him became a fondness. She started looking forward to hearing his voice, watching his hands move as he spoke, or seeing the dark gleam in his eye. Once she started working at the castle, she'd hoped things would change, as she was falling in love with him, but when she'd finally realized that nothing would change without a bit of manipulation, she'd taken matters into her own hands. That's when she conspired with Rolanda and Harry. She'd decided to make him smile one way or another, and it had worked. The only problem was that it had left her wanting more. She had been pleased when Ro had told her that Severus would go to her once again as the gigolo. The second coupling had been better and had made her happy that she'd pleased him. When he'd angrily visited her the next morning, however, she'd regretted her brash decision to deceive him.

Then things had progressed. They'd formed a relationship of sorts, and he'd ended up giving her much more than he'd initially wanted to. Each week would bring about a new change in her lover. These minute changes had given her hope. A hope that she realized still hadn't died. If he could go from not kissing her, to kissing her, from not talking to her in front of others, to courting her openly, then he could very well end up loving her. Were these small changes not some symbolism of loving her no matter how small the change? They were. He loved her. He had to. Everything pointed to his loving her. His possessiveness, though scary, proved that he was jealous of others. She was jealous as well. The thought of Vector or any other woman touching her man only enraged her. She would fight for him in the same manner that he'd fought for her.

In her eyes, being jealous only meant that she cared. If she didn't care, she wouldn't worry whom he was off to have a shag with. He was ~~her~~ her lover. For the first time, she saw things from his perspective, and she agreed that she would have likely done what needed to be done to have him in her life. She'd already proved that long before the accidental pregnancy. There were choices that she could make. She could stay or go to her parents.

Harry was no longer an option. While she didn't appreciate that he'd lied to her just to cause a fight with Severus, she couldn't blame him for her fall, just as she couldn't blame Severus. She would take some time away from talking to Harry to let things cool down between them all. She wouldn't want to hear or say anything hurtful. She did appreciate the sacrifice that he offered to make, but she was thankful that it hadn't come to pass. She belonged with Severus.

Staying was what she would be doing. She owed it to herself, to her child, and to Severus to truly give it a go. The only problem was Severus. How could she tell him that she knew he loved her even though *he* didn't seem to realize that he did? His smoldering gaze, those soft words spoken when he thought her to be sleeping, the gentle caresses, the worry in his eyes that she foggily remembered, and so many other things only pointed out that he loved her. For the first time in days, she had regained hope. She would be happy, and by God, Severus would have reasons to smile and live again.

"Missus, good morning. Dilly is here to be giving breakfast."

"I'm not hungry, but I do thank you," she said softly.

"Master says you is needing to eat."

"Some toast then, please?" she asked.

"Missus, is very kind," Dilly said, bowing down her head while producing a plate of toast. "Kind indeed."

Hermione cleared her throat. "Is your master not kind?"

"The young master is most kind. The old master was not." Suddenly, the house-elf looked horrified and began slapping itself on the head.

"Stop," she commanded. "Don't harm yourself."

"I spoke ill of my family. I is needing to be punished."

"I'm telling you it's all right. He's gone and can't harm you. We shall treat you fairly. The both of you that live here with us deserve nothing less for all of you hard work and loyalty."

Dilly appeared taken aback but simply nodded and popped away. Hermione smiled. "So, Severus is kind to his house-elves. That's just another thing to add to the list of things that I love about him." She ate the toast that the elf had brought to her while thinking of her life. Things would only get better. She'd find a way to talk to him and make some compromises.

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Two hours later found Severus pacing back and forth in his sitting room. He had yet to look in on Hermione. He wanted to, but he was uncertain as to what to say if she happened to be awake. He wasn't quite sure if he was ready to face the questions that she would most likely have. The accusations of Potter being at the top of the list for questioning, no doubt. Perhaps he should wait. Dilly had said that she'd eaten her toast and gone to sleep.

A large brown owl swooped in through his open window. "What the...?" It had a small box attached to its legs. He quickly eased the bird of its burden and smirked as the beast held out a leg to him. There was a small pouch attached. It apparently wanted payment. What arse would send an owl with a package and not pay postage? He sifted through the top drawer of his desk and found a Galleon. "I suppose this will have to do," he said, annoyed at having to pay such outrageous postage fee. He placed the money in the little pouch, and his deliverer flew off. "When I find out whom..." His voice trailed off as he saw the names. It was from Mr. and Mrs. Granger. He opened the package quickly. It seemed that Tom at the Leaky Cauldron had aided them in sending it. Well, that was acceptable then.

There was a letter that was sealed in a Muggle envelope and addressed to Hermione. There was a small box with her name on it as well and also a book. To his surprise, there was a letter addressed to him as well. He opened the letter and sat down, stunned.

Severus,

I am glad that you thought to write to us about what happened. I think it's a shame that one child has been lost, but I must praise you. Your quick thinking has likely saved our other grandchild and maybe our daughter. We are forever in your debt.

For not the first time in our lives, we are glad that she is part of such a wonderful world. If she'd been here with us, both would have likely been lost. You don't know how truly blessed you are to be able to fix things so easily. There is one thing that I hope this book will help you both to fix, and that is your pain. I am sure that you are both wondering what might have been if your second child had lived. We are grieving the loss as well, so we can only imagine how the two of you must feel.

Please read through the enclosed book together. It will do you a world of good. My little girl loves you, Severus. Take care of her, and thank you for loving her so much, as I know you do. It's written all over your face when you talk of her or look at her. We're here if you need us.

Sincerely,

Jane and John

Guilt washed over him. He'd fooled these nice people into believing that he loved their daughter. Even worse, they thought he was grieving for the child that was lost. And, bloody hell! What was she on about? "Thank you for loving her so much, as I know you do." He snorted momentarily and then thought back to the night he was in the paid witch's room. He'd gone there for a shag and left quickly, realizing that no woman would ever be Hermione to him. Could that be love? How did one know what love was exactly? Did his wife's mother see something that even he didn't know was there? "Impossible," he said sourly, putting the letter in his desk drawer.

No matter what he felt, it was imperative that she not be stressed. He would have to try to be as pleasant as possible to keep her from feeling any emotional depression. He didn't want to give her any false hope about what might develop between them, but for now, he had to. She needed to believe that there was hope. He feared that if she thought there was no happiness to be had or a pending love match between them, she might give up and fade away as his mother had, regardless of the little one in her womb. He was a double spy for many years and had fooled many people. He could take on this part as well.

Severus sighed. He had a reason to see Hermione now that her mum had sent the owl to them. He picked up the letter, the small box, and the book to bring to her. Oddly enough, he felt his stomach churning slightly in anticipation. Would she be receptive of him? What would she demand of him first? As quietly as possible, he opened the door and peeked in. Relief flooded over him. Hermione was awake and smiling.

"Good morning," he said moving to sit next to her. "How are you faring?"

"I need to go to the loo. I was just about to get up."

Severus set aside her things, put his arms beneath her, and carried her to the bathroom. She squealed slightly, and he found himself nearly chuckling. "I do believe that Poppy told me to assist you in most things. However, I will leave you to it."

She laughed again. "I do believe I can walk. My bladder needs a little relief. Stay where you can hear me if I call for you."

He nodded and quickly moved into her room again. *Well, that wasn't so bad. No demands were being made yet. She seemed pleased to see me* Obviously, she didn't remember what her precious Potter had said. A moment later he saw her walking slowly out of the bathroom.

"Legs are a bit shaky. You'd think I hadn't walked for a week," she said.

Severus moved to her side straightaway and allowed her to lean on him until they reached the bed. "Now that we've established that you can walk if need be, I would like you to allow me to bring you when you have to go. We can't be too careful." Once she lay back down, he pulled the sheet and duvet up over her. "I've some things from your mother." He placed the items on her lap after sliding another pillow beneath the two she had. "I'll leave you in peace," he said softly, moving off of the bed.

"No, stay," she said quickly. "Please."

Not wanting to deny her, he scooted up against her headboard and watched as she opened the letter. She moved to where he could see what had been written. "It was addressed to you," he said quickly, not wanting to eavesdrop.

"Oh, it's all right. Have a read," she said, eyes never leaving the short letter. It mostly read the same as his had with her mother talking about the loss, the book and how they care for each other. Once they'd read that, she opened the small box. "Oh!" she gasped. "It's beautiful."

It was a gold chain with a small angel pendant attached. "Shall I fasten it for you?" Severus asked without thinking.

"Yes, please," she said. She handed him the chain, leant forward, and moved her hair aside. "It's a guardian angel for the baby."

He easily fastened it, and before he realized what he was doing, he placed his lips at the base of her neck where it met her shoulder. The slight kiss had caught them both off guard. *Damn. Why did I do that?* "It's lovely," he said, trying to act as if nothing was amiss.

"Thanks," she whispered. "Would you like a read in the book?"

"I suppose. You aren't due for your dose just yet. We could wile away some time," he said, taking the book in his hands. He read the title aloud *Accepting Loss*. "She snuggled against him as he opened the book and began reading. "Sometimes fate has a way of stepping in to change the way we perceive things in life. These changes can be a blessing, or they can be a nightmare. We shall discuss what happens when it's the latter. How do we cope with things such as the loss of a loved one? First, we start by accepting that it has happened. We then..." Severus continued to read through the first chapter, and he thought her to be sleeping. He closed the book, set in on the table next to the bed, and leant in to brush some stray strands of hair from her face.

"What did you think?" she asked softly.

Taken aback, he startled slightly. "I think it makes sense," he said honestly. "Have you accepted that there was nothing that you did wrong?"

"Yes, I just wish things would be different. I know twins would have been hard work, but I can't help but to think that I would have loved having them." She kissed his chest lightly. "It's not your fault either. Nor is it Harry's even though he was wrong to say those things. It's just something that happened, like the book says."

He pulled away slightly. "You remember what that boy said to us before you fell?"

"Yes."

"And, do you not believe him?"

"Severus, you told me that you hadn't been unfaithful, nor would you be in the future. I just didn't want the two of you to fight any longer. I suppose you had a right to defend your honor," she said softly.

Severus looked at her intently. She was being truthful. For the first time in a long time, something worded so honestly truly pleased him. He smiled slightly. "I thank you for that. I have been unsure how to approach the subject. I did not want to cause you any suffering. It wasn't only my honor I was defending. It was yours as well."

"What *did* happen when you left here that night?"

"As I told you, I went to a place where I knew I could find a woman. We went to her flat, and before anything at all happened, I came to my senses and left."

"What do you mean came to your senses? Because of me?" she asked hopefully.

He could give her an honest answer that would please her. "Yes. I'm a married man now. I thought you deserved more respect than that. I suppose I was angry because of my lack of ability to have you that night and from your lack of enthusiasm. It's the only reason I went there, but I shall guarantee that it shan't happen again."

Hermione smiled softly, but her disappointment shone in her expression. "I see. Well, thanks." She looked away for a moment and then back to him. "Is that all?"

Severus blinked in surprise. "She didn't compare to you in beauty nor did the idea of being with someone else appeal to me. It seemed that only you can satisfy me now." He hoped that would be enough. From the smile on her face, it was apparent that she'd been searching for that particular answer. "Would you like some lunch?"

"I suppose. Nothing heavy."

"I'll be back shortly," he said. He quickly left the room, requested soup and rolls for their noon meal, and retrieved her daily dosage of medicine and vitamins. When he'd returned, the tray was already there. He handed her the vial with her potion first. "You may need to drink some of your juice with it. I'm afraid it is likely to taste foul." He gave her two small pills. "Take this after."

Once she'd taken everything, she grinned. "Not so bad."

Whilst eating, Severus noticed that she seemed tired, but she was trying her best to hold a conversation. She'd been telling him about her childhood, and she seemed to be hoping that he would indulge some information on his. Thinking quickly, he pulled up a few memories of happier times. Most of them were only of his mother and him, his father having been off cavorting with his friends or mistresses. He decided to be honest with her if need be, but he'd try to avoid her questions. "Your parents are nice people. I can say that they have done a respectable job raising you. You will do well with our child."

"We will do well, Severus, with *our* child."

"Hermione, I should think that you would be more properly prepared to have the most contact with it."

She placed her empty bowl on her nightstand next to his, wiped her mouth with her napkin, and took the final drink from her cup before turning to him. "It's obvious that we've experienced different things while growing up, but that's no reason that we can't work together and change things. I think you could be a good father, but you are going to have to try."

"Is that all you worry about? Trying to change me?" he bit out suddenly, wishing he could take the words back at the hurt look on her face. Poppy's words haunted him once more. *Don't let her slip away from you.* "I apologize. That sounded a bi--"

"No, it's all right. You're just being honest. Tell me then, Severus, if you will, how do you see us living our lives? Will I always be stuck in this horrid room? Will you never talk to me? Will you never talk to our child? How are we going to live?"

Severus thought for a long time and finally answered each question. "I only know the way I was raised. I stayed with my mother mostly for a few years, rarely seeing my

father, and when I was old enough to learn about magic and do a few things on my own, my father began training me. As years passed, my mother died, and I was left with only him." He looked away. "I would rather the child be taken into your care for a longer period of time than for it to suffer my company."

"Is that what you think?" she asked incredulously. "I enjoy your company. *want* to spend time with you. Our child will *want* to know his or her father. I would like it if you would at least attempt to be a father."

"I shall give him or her lectures on the ways of the world, Hermione, and I will pass on to him what my ancestors have passed on to me. I shall help to teach him to defend himself as I was taught, but I do believe that is where my duties shall end."

"But, if we try to rear our child together, we can be a true family. I won't ask for much. My requests are no fighting in front of him. We'll save any bickering for behind closed doors."

"I agree," he said quickly. He'd witnessed too many fights as a young child. They had been most unsettling.

"I *want* to be a real wife. Don't shut me up in this room."

He swallowed away the relief he felt. He wanted her to be in his bed as well. "All right."

"Always be faithful to me," she said.

"We've already covered that," he said, smirking slightly. Her requests weren't so bad. He didn't mind private arguments, nor would he mind the private makeup sessions. He was actually pleased that she would want to share his bed still, and he would definitely welcome her properly once Poppy released her. He certainly had no intentions of being unfaithful. He'd tried that and failed miserably already. Why bother when everything he wanted was with him?

"Love our child."

"Of course," he said absently. "WHAT?"

"You heard."

"Hermione--"

"Don't say that you won't or can't!" she said hotly. "Don't say one word. I'm not asking you to love me. Just knowing you care is enough, but I'll not have you deny our baby." She reached out to touch his hand. "Severus when you hold him or her for the first time, there is no way that you'll be able to not feel anything. You'll see." She brought her fingers to his lips to quiet him. "Just say you'll try then."

He nodded, not wanting to argue with her. She needn't any stress at the moment, but eventually, she would have to see that she couldn't demand such things as love. What if he looked at his child and felt nothing? What if he resented his child? Hell, he didn't know if he resented his wife or not, but maybe in a few years, the feeling of being trapped would take over his mind. His wife slid down and tried to pull him with her. Severus slid down onto his back, and she placed her head on his chest in an attempt to hold him.

"I'm afraid," she whispered.

"Of what?"

Don't let her slip away from you.

"What if something goes wrong? What if I lose this baby too? I know that Poppy feels things will be all right, but I really am looking forward to being a mum and raising your child with you beside me. I don't know that I could handle being pregnant for a while and then losing the baby. Just losing one is hard. I don't think that I could bear to lose the other."

Don't let her slip away from you.

"You have my word, Hermione, that I will do everything in my power to see our child born. You shan't want for anything during this pregnancy. I shall oversee your medicines, get your what you need, and try to make you content," he vowed. "I owe you at least that much."

Those words were the truth. He'd not see his wife or child harmed. They belonged to him, and he would protect his own. He pulled her to him tightly and kissed the top of her head. "I promise," he whispered. Her even breathing signaled that she'd succumbed to a much-needed rest. After lunch, he would bathe her and maybe read a bit more to her. He could do this. It wasn't so bad really. He simply had to remember to pause before speaking to arrange things in an acceptable manner.

The little sigh escaping from her made him smile slightly. At least one of them could be happy. *What would make me happy?* There was no answer to that question. He'd never thought about it before. He'd been satisfied with things as they were. He'd had sex whenever he pleased, he'd done his research, and he'd been able to live life as he chose to without anyone to answer to. Well, since the Dark Lord had been defeated, that is.

He could say that this was happiness. Though he was tied down in marriage, he had a willing witch who seemed to adore him for reasons unknown. He'd never be lonely. He'd always have someone to share his findings with and have an extra pair of hands if needed. She was pleasant to converse with. Yes, they would have a child running about, but surely no child of his or Hermione's would turn out to be a dunderhead.

Severus moved slightly to see her sleeping face and was filled with warmth. He suddenly felt at peace. Was this happiness then? He longed for his own mother. Why hadn't he ever asked her about relationships? Women? He knew the answer. He hadn't cared about those things when his mum was alive. Once he did care about those things, he only had his father or Lucius to talk to about them. Those two certainly didn't give advice about feeling anything. He was sure that he felt content, and he knew he cared for her. He would kill for her, and yes, he would even die for her. Now, anyway. How had this come about? He'd never been so fiercely protective about anything.

Disconcerted, Severus slipped out of the bed. He needed time to think about things. Too much had happened in the last few days. He decided to go down to his laboratory and do a bit of research. At the door, he looked back at his sleeping wife again. Was it weak to want to lay with her? What sort of bewitchment had she placed on him to make him feel content in her arms? He shook the thoughts away, sneered slightly, turned on his heel, and swept away from her bedchamber.

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*ONE WEEK LATER*

"Oh, come on, Severus!" she said hotly. "I feel much better now. Let me just walk there."

"It's too many steps. You may tire yourself. You heard what Poppy said," he bit back, voice rising slightly.

"I've been restricted to my bloody chambers for the past week. You know you could use the help," she pleaded.

"Hermione, no. The cellar is dank anyway. Would you like to sit out back? The weather is nice. I could have Dilly--"

"Whatever," she said, bursting into tears.

Good Lord. This was the second time in the same day that she'd cried. He placed a finger under her chin to lift her face. His eyes bore into hers. "I don't need to go down today. How about we sit outside and read another chapter from the new book we've started?" They'd finished the book that her mother had sent early on. He'd been reading to her all week. Poppy's last visit had been a good one. She'd said that the baby was thriving, and it was apparent that the potion had been a success. Hermione had taken her last dose the day before. According to Poppy, his wife was still measuring slightly more than she should. The Mediwitch supposed that she was possibly a week or so farther along than she had initially stated. Therefore, instead of Hermione being eight weeks along, Poppy decided to claim that she was nearly ten weeks along. Severus wasn't one to argue, as he didn't know anything about pregnancies.

"I have no idea what's wrong with me. I just feel like I'm trapped. I want to get out. I want to move around."

"The baby," he said softly, knowing it was all he had to say to calm her down. Sure enough, she nodded and began wiping the tears away. "Just a few more weeks, and Poppy says you'll be able to do more."

"Sorry. I suppose I am being a bit selfish," she admitted.

"Well, I could be a little more supportive. I'm sure it's not that easy to be alone whilst I'm off in my lab. I shall try to be better company for you," he relented. The odd thing was that he meant it. He didn't want her to be unhappy, and if putting aside his research would keep her content, he'd do it.

"I appreciate that, but I don't want to keep you from working. I know it's important," she whispered.

He sighed. "You are important," he said, adding, "more than any potion." The smile she gave him made him feel at ease. He summoned the current book that he was reading to her, led her to the back patio, and asked Dilly to arrange a nosh for them. The hours passed, and he found that he'd enjoyed himself. They'd moved inside just after their evening meal to have a bath.

Whilst he was washing her hair, the overpowering need to make love to her took over his body. He hoped that she didn't feel his hardness suddenly jabbing into her lower back, as she was sitting between his thighs in the tub. He rinsed her hair and pulled her to lie back against him. "If the water gets a bit too cool for you, let me know. I shall add more of the hot in."

Hermione suddenly turned around to straddle him, kissing his lips with abandon. His hands immediately found her waist as he returned her kiss hungrily. His lips eventually found their way to one breast as one hand slid down to fondle her arse. "God, I need you," she said in a desperate whisper.

"Yes," he hissed. Mentally he calculated how long it had been since he'd had her, and he realized that it was over a week since they were bound. That had been the last time...*Damn!* He pulled away from her slightly. "Hermione, no. We can't."

"Why not? I feel...oh, damn it!" Disappointment lit her face. She sniffed slightly.

*Bloody hell. Not again. Not more tears.* "I want it too, love, but it's a sacrifice that I am willing to make. We have to be sure that our child is safe. When Poppy gives us leave to carry on, then we shall resume *all* normal activities.

Hermione smiled and nodded. *He called me love, and it seems that he hasn't noticed his blunder. Things are changing. He's more attentive than ever!* "Let's have a bit of a snog then." She nipped his neck slightly in an attempt to mark him. She wanted to laugh. He seemed gobsmacked. "People do snog without shagging, you know. I love you. Let me show you," she whispered, claiming his lips in the softest kiss she could muster, lazily licking his lips and delving into his mouth to find his tongue. Ever so slowly, he began to respond to her, gently exploring her mouth. After what seemed like an eon, the two pulled apart, and she put her head on his shoulder. *Snogging sure uses up a girl's energy,* she thought, feeling completely satisfied.

She could feel the change in him almost immediately. He'd stiffened when she'd said that she loved him, and he'd been tentative when she'd pressed her lips to his. If she didn't know better, she would say that was the best series of kisses they'd ever exchanged. She put all of her feeling into it, and part of her felt as though he'd done the same. That he'd given in, at least momentarily, to the longings of his heart. She stayed as still as she could as he began rubbing her back in slow circles. It was apparent that he thought her to be asleep.

"Sleep, Hermione. You've had a trying day," he murmured. He lifted her with him and carried her to her bed. As carefully as he could, he lay her down, cast a drying spell on her, and pulled the bedclothes up over her naked body.

She gave him a sleepy smile and a mumbled thanks and was delighted to feel the bed dip as he lay next to her. She turned over on her side as he slid beneath the sheets to spoon her.

"Are you awake?" he asked in a whisper. She purposely didn't respond, knowing that he liked to ramble when he thought nobody was listening. "I don't know what came over me earlier. I just had to have you. I should be more careful. It's not fair to you to get you excited and then not be able to please you." He placed a soft caress on her shoulder before slowly rubbing her arm. "There is something that I have to say, but I'm not sure how."

She knew that if she gave him any indication that she was awake, he'd never say it. She felt guilty for deceiving him in such a way, but it seemed to be the only way to actually get him to open up to her.

"I've been thinking," he continued. "You have forgiven me too easily. I know that I've mistreated you. I do not deserve such devotion. You would be pleased to know though, that it seems that you mean more to me than I previously realized. I cannot say that it is *love*, as I am quite uncertain if that is what it is. I have a fierce desire to see you protected at any cost. I take pride in knowing that I can make you happy. At least, you seem to be. Each day you become more lovely to me." He slid his arm back over her waist and squeezed gently. "How have I become such a weakened fool in only short amount of time?"

Her heart sank. She heard the disgust in his voice as he spoke the last sentence. Would he ever stop worrying about being weak? She wanted to tell him that he was not weak because he loved his wife, but she didn't want him to know that she'd been listening. What he'd said sounded like love to her. She knew exactly how he felt. She would do anything for him as well. She felt a small victory each time he smiled or said something nice. To pressure him now would be to lose him. Hermione knew that she'd have to bide her time. When he was ready, he would see those feelings for what they were. For now, this was enough.

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**Southern's Notes:** I'm sorry about the time it took to update. Hopefully, this update sits well with most of you. I feel a bit sorry for Snape, as he seems confused. At least he's not listening to what he would perceive as his father's way of doing things, and I think that while he is 'pretending' to be a good husband, he's falling into the actual pattern of being one. Slowly but surely.

Up Next: Harry comes for a visit. Severus finds something shocking in his home that will shed some light on things. Will his questions finally be answered? Will things finally be put into perspective? It's an interesting

\*\*\*\*\***Chapter four was missing. I had chapter three posted twice (one pretending to be chapter four). If you've read this and wonder wtf happened to the big gap, please go back. I do apologize. sw69\*\*\*\*\***

# Quiet Confession

## Chapter 11 of 15

Severus follows Poppy's advice in tending to Hermione. The pair will take a huge step forward. Severus admits to himself that his feelings have changed. He finds something shocking that will change things for him.

**Disclaimer:** J.K.R.'s characters. I'm just having a bit of fun with them.

**Thanks go to my beta, Charmed\_Nay, to Meredith for the advice, and to all of my friends at the Yahoo!Group, Potter\_Place.**

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"Good morning," Hermione said as her husband opened his eyes.

"What are you doing out of bed?" he asked suspiciously.

"I had to use the loo," she said softly. "I see that you stayed with me." She hoped that this would be the correct way to start the conversation that she needed to have. Since they'd been *home*, he'd not slept the entire night with her before. He'd sit in the chair or lay next to her, but she'd always wake in the morning to find him gone and her bed cold.

"It appears that I was a bit too knackered to go to my own room," he said, moving to get up. "I apologize for invading your personal space."

She reached out to place a hand on his shoulder. "Severus, I want you to stay with me." She saw his eyes flicker from her hand to her face. She knew he was debating on what to say and how to say it. "Why am I forced to remain in this room anyway? I thought I was to share your chambers?"

"You haven't been well. I thought it best..." He collapsed back onto his pillows. She quickly curled around him as best as she could. "Are you certain that you don't want to remain in your own chambers?"

"My place is with you," she said firmly. "Now, what are we doing today?"

"We?" he asked, arching an eyebrow.

"Will you not allow me to venture down with you and help on your research?" she asked hopefully. She wouldn't press the issue if he declined. He'd spent the entire previous day with her, and she couldn't continue being selfish.

"Hermione," he began, "I'm really trying to care for you. Trust in me when I say that you'd do well to sit out in the sun and fresh air." He sighed. "A compromise then. I shall spend only the morning hours below, share lunch with you, and then spend the afternoon doing something that you'd like."

She smiled broadly. "I would like that." Remembering his words from the previous night, she moved up to kiss his lips gently. He'd more or less told her that he loved her. One problem was that he hadn't seemed too happy about it. Another problem was that she was supposed to have been asleep while he was talking aloud. He would see it as a betrayal of trust if she told him the truth of the matter. "However, I won't have you skiving off your research because of me. I'm just bored is all."

Severus pursed his lips. In all honesty, he would like to spend time with his research, but he didn't want to cause her any unneeded stress. Poppy had advised him against it. "Would reading suffice for this morning whilst I work?"

"Of course."

"Very well. I shall spend the afternoon in your company. For now, I suppose I should see to breakfast," he said, raising up on his elbows.

"What do you want?" she asked suddenly.

*What the bloody hell is she on about?* "Meaning?"

"A son or a daughter?"

Severus noted the dreamy look in her eyes and bit back his acrid retort. "I suppose I've not truly thought about it," he said honestly after wording things correctly. Feeling extremely uncomfortable, he eased out of bed. Too late did he notice his morning arousal jutting out proudly. *Damn! We slept nude, straight from the bath! She must have put on her dressing gown once she'd woken.* Acting as if his nakedness meant nothing to him, he dared to stretch and yawn. "Why do you ask?"

Hermione's eyes lit up. "I've always wanted a son first." Her voice had taken on a dreamy quality, and Severus nearly wished that he could think or speak so openly about such things. She bit her lip and kneeled up before him. Her hands reached up to his shoulders, and she looked into his eyes. "Your son."

For reasons unknown to him, his mouth crushed hers in a possessive kiss, and he held her tightly to him. At some point during the kiss, her hand had snaked between them and began to fondle his erection. Growling with approval, he tore his lips away from hers, letting his head fall back slightly to bask in the pleasure her hand and fingers gave him. Hermione's lips found his neck and then his chest. He sucked in a sharp breath of air as she began to suckle one of his flattened nipples. Her other hand slid down to fondle his testicles as she stroked him quickly. One of her long nails scraped along his perineum, and the sensation caused him to have an instantaneous climax. "He-Hermione," he said between groans. Her tongue stopped laving at his chest, and her hands slowly came to rest, still groping him.

His arms closed around her as he came down from his culmination. "Good God, girl. What are you about?" he panted out.

"Pleasing my husband. You seemed to need it," she said lightly.

"I am under strict orders to see to it that you can't..." He shook his head. "I will have to leave you unsatisfied."

"Severus, I wanted to give you that. It doesn't mean you owe me anything. I love you. That's what love is."

He cupped her cheek and kissed her once more before pulling away from her. "You're a mess nonetheless." He nodded at the wet spots on her dressing gown. Severus breathed a sigh of relief as she allowed the change of subject.

"Nothing a little Cleaning Charm can't handle," she said cheekily. She moved to pull her gown over her head, and he stopped her.

"Allow me," he purred. "Poppy's orders, after all." He allowed his hands to glide up the length of her body as he pulled her gown up and off of her. "Exquisite," he breathed, eyeing his wife. He felt himself hardening again. How could she bring out such need in him? Why did she make him feel like a weak boy chasing after an available witch?

"Just a couple of weeks," she said, brushing her lips against his.



He knew exactly what she was referring to. "I hope we can last that long." He pulled away from her. "We will. For our child."

She nodded. "Are you to have breakfast in here?"

"No, I think I shall have something quick and go on down," he said quickly. He needed to put some space between them. He needed to think about things. What had happened that had changed things? He nodded and strode to the door that led to his chambers, eyes narrowing as his mind tried to decipher things. *I'm being nice as per Poppy, yet it feels as though I want to be nice. This cannot go on. I will not risk my child's life nor Hermione's, but I shall have to return to my previous demeanor as soon as the pregnancy is out of danger.*

Severus dressed quickly, made sure that breakfast was sent to his wife, wrote a letter to her mother, and went down to his laboratory to delve into his research. He needed to get her out of his mind. It was hard to concentrate on anything, however, as her words played over in his mind. *Your son.* Had she always dreamt of having his son or just since she'd fallen for him? Had she truly wanted him for so long?

Another thing that he mulled over was the selfless giving of the morning and her reasoning behind it. *Severus, I wanted to give you that. It doesn't mean you owe me anything. I love you. That's what love is.* In the past, he would never have considered giving a woman an orgasm without insisting upon having one in return. Would he do this for Hermione? Wake one morning, please her, and simply leave, expecting nothing? Yes. He could do that for her. But, that was different. She was his wife. *My wife.* The words sounded offending yet welcome at the same time. Oh, he'd left women unsatisfied before, but under certain circumstances, it was expected.

Why did he feel this...guilt for not being able to satisfy her? He knew that she loved sex with him and had begged for it in the past. He'd never failed to please her, always making sure that she was satiated. It was almost as if he feared that she'd think less of him, which was ridiculous. He'd clearly stated why he couldn't, and she'd accepted his reasoning. He vowed to give her many nights of pleasure as soon as Poppy said it was allowed. Hermione's words found him again. *Just a couple of weeks.* "Indeed," he said aloud.

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< |>ONE WEEK LATER

"Severus, wake up. Are you all right?" Hermione asked, sitting up to look at her husband. He was flinging about and muttering in his sleep. *Lumos,*" she said sleepily. Her wand lit next to the bed. She could make out his scowling expression and clenched fists. "Severus," she said a little more forcefully.

He bolted upright. "What is it?"

"You were having a nightmare. All right?"

"I was not dreaming," he said indignantly.

"You were," she insisted. "Just as you were last night. Is there something that I should know? Is something troubling you that I should know about aside from being landed with me?" She hadn't meant to sound so cross, but she wasn't feeling particularly well either.

"Where the bloody hell did that come from?" he roared after her words sunk in. "Have I not been good to you? Have I not been trying to make amends for past misdeeds? I wonder if anything that I do is good enough for you!"

To her horror, he bolted from the bed, threw on a bathrobe, and slammed out of the room. "I need to choose my words more carefully," she said softly, tears forming in her eyes. "Why did I say that?" She supposed that she'd simply wanted to take her mood out on him. She'd had a hard time falling asleep, what with that burning sensation in her throat and chest. It seemed like she'd only been asleep for minutes when his thrashing about woke her. To make things worse, the acid indigestion seemed to have come back. "Just bloody great!" she grouched to herself. Instead of summoning a house-elf, she opted to walk to the kitchen. It wasn't that she wanted to save the elf the trouble, but she wanted to see where her husband had gone.

Lifting her wand, she stood and made her way out of their bedchambers. After their talk the previous week, he'd moved her things into his chambers and allowed her to place them as she wished. He'd truly been trying to be a good husband by keeping her content. Severus hadn't deserved the comment she'd given him earlier. Since they'd been back, he'd not made her feel like a burden. In fact, he seemed to enjoy having her around.

Hermione went down to the kitchen as quickly as she could. She hated walking about alone. It always felt as if someone were watching her. When she went down the stairs, she always gripped the railing extra firmly. She knew that it was likely because of the accident, but it never failed that her hair would prickle on the back of her neck. It was as if someone was gliding behind her blowing cool air onto her bare skin to cause gooseflesh to rise. A large fire was roaring in the kitchen, and one dimly lit lantern sat on the table in the center. She quickly fixed a glass of water in hopes of soothing the burning sensation in her throat.

"Do you wish to leave?"

The rich, deep sound of his voice startled her, causing her to drop the glass. It shattered loudly. "Ouch," she squealed, stepping back. "Ouch!" It seemed that she'd stepped on some of the glass with both feet. Strong arms quickly lifted her to seat her atop the table.

"*Reparo,*" he said, repairing the glass.

She felt the tiny shards in her foot exit and make their way back to the glass to fit in where they belonged. Her fingers went to her feet while tears stung at her *eyeb*le *wants me to leave. I should never have said anything.* She made sure to not look at him while he lit more lights and examined her feet. In minutes, all pain and blood had been taken away. "I need some more water," she said softly, trying not to snifle.

Severus filled her glass with fresh water and handed it to her. After she'd taken a healthy sip, he asked, "Are you ready to answer my question?"

"No."

"No, you aren't ready, or no, you don't want to leave?" he asked, eyeing her intently.

"Why would I want to leave?"

"Well, you clearly stated that you thought..."

"I was just grouchy. I've been up most of the night with ruddy heartburn again. I finally fell asleep, and you woke me up again with your nightmare. That's all well and good, mind, but you acted as if I'd lied about it." She looked away. "I shouldn't have said what I did. You've been good to me...to us."

"Very well, Hermione, but never again dare to assume my feelings on anything."

"Do you feel that way? Trapped, I mean?"

She watched the emotions flicker across his face and noted the deep breath that he sucked in and held. "I find our situation acceptable. I had never wanted to marry or have a child, as you already know, but I find myself not minding that you are here. Nor do I mind that we will have a child together."

"Would you change things?"

Another deep breath was sucked in. "No," he said while exhaling.

"Nor would I," she admitted. "Not even..." She hated to voice what she was going to say, but she felt as if he knew, at least on some level.

His hand found her face. "Hermione, I'm not in love with you, but I find myself...deeply appreciating the fact that you are my wife. I believe that we can have a successful marriage." Severus cocked an eyebrow at her. "However, you will need to refrain from such outbursts. Trust me when I say that I would definitely tell you if you were a burden to me. Where I once felt trapped, I now welcome the binding cords. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly," she answered, lowering her head to rest on his shoulder. *He loves me. Everything he says points to that. He would have allowed me to leave if I had said that I wanted to go, binding agreement be damned.*

"Do you still feel trapped?"

"I am coping with our arrangements as well." She smiled and looked at him. "I wanted a life with you. It's not so far from what I used to dream of. I admit that I wish you would love me, but if all I can have is a deep appreciation, then I can be satisfied. You'll not be unfaithful to me, and you will love our child." She placed a finger over his lips. "I am certain you will love your son or daughter, Severus. You *will* be a good father regardless of your childhood."

What could he say to her that wouldn't hurt her? Could he admit that he'd been wondering about fatherhood? The advantages? Could he admit that he'd been reading a book whilst supposedly researching? Though he meant not to have many interactions with his child during the first few years, he was still interested in what to expect during the pregnancy, the birthing, and the beginning of its life. His father had never loved him. His father had only seen him as the next Snape, the boy to teach the ways of the family to, the disappointment. Love was for the maternal parent. No, he could not voice these things to his wife. Not in the present state of things at least, what with her fragile pregnancy. It would be something that she would just have to learn as time passed.

"Come to bed, wife," he said instead, helping her down to the floor.

"I wonder if there is anything I can take for this heartburn," she murmured as she pocketed her wand.

"You can't take anything just yet. It's your body causing it. Some of your muscles have relaxed and allowed acid to seep up into your oesophagus. I would suggest that you eat bland foods if you know that you will lie down. If you don't, stay on your feet for a little while, and the gravity will help to keep it in your stomach. It'll give you a chance to digest it," he said, remembering the information he'd read in his book. *Damn. She's looking at me as if she suspects that I've been reading up on pregnancy.*

"How do you know that?" she asked suspiciously.

He scoffed. "I may have heard it from Poppy."

"Right then." She looked at him slyly. "I wonder if it will last the entire pregnancy."

"For some women, yes, but for others, no. You will likely see it diminish in your next trimester if you are lucky," he said automatically. He realized his error when she smirked at him wickedly.

"You've been having a read about the pregnancy, haven't you?"

There was no need to deny it any longer. "What if I have?" he asked defensively. "It's better to remain prepa..."

"I think it's grand," she said with a broad grin.

"Are you mocking me?" he asked, noting the smug expression.

She stopped, lifted a hand to his cheek, and gently caressed his face. "I respect you for it, Severus. I would never mock you for seeking information on the unknown, especially not where your little one is concerned." All words that he might have said were cut off by her soft lips.

He simply pulled her up to straddle his waist and carefully made his way back to their bedroom. Placing her upon the bed, he broke the kiss to take off his bathrobe. "When is Poppy coming?"

"In three days," she said, lifting a hand to pull him back to her.

Severus groaned. "Three days can't come fast enough." He settled over her between her thighs, as if he would have been about to take her. Instead, he opted on *snogging* her, as she liked to call it. He knew that a few stolen kisses and soft caresses would soothe her and lull her into sleep. She needed some rest. He'd arranged with her parents for a surprise visit the next day. Her mother was coming to cheer her up, wanting to have an active part in decorating the nursery from what he gathered in the last letter.

There were a few rooms that needed airing out and possible redecorating. It was obvious that Hermione would eventually need her own study to house her books and work in. He decided to change his father's old room for her. It had large windows on two different walls, as it was on the corner of their house. The view of the grounds was lovely. She would like that room the best. He'd not been in it since his father passed away, but it was time to open the house up again. A family would be living within. Once that room was changed into a study, they would be left with their bedroom, the nursery, a spare room, and Hermione's old room. Once their child outgrew the nursery, they could move him into the room she had stayed in when they'd first come home.

The fingers that had curled around his hair slid away from him limply. With one last soft nuzzle on her neck, he looked up to find his wife sleeping. He'd made sure to not become too passionate with her, as he wasn't planning to arouse her. He merely wanted her to relax and sleep...and be happy. Annoyed suddenly that the word happy slipped into his thoughts, he moved up and turned away from her to get comfortable. A minute later, she spooned him from behind. Sighing resignedly, he pulled her arm around him and said, "This is becoming a habit."

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**FOUR DAYS LATER**

Hermione was slowly rocking back and forth in the freshly painted rocking chair next to the crib in the nursery. She and her mother had redecorated the entire room with the help of the two house-elves. Severus noted that her eyes were closed, and a small smile tugged at her lips. One hand was placed over her stomach. Why though, he wasn't sure. Her pregnancy wasn't all that discernible yet. As he inched closer, he stretched out a hand to touch her face. Within an inch from her cheek, he snatched his hand away and took a step back. He truly had to stop the madness that had overtaken him. It seemed that he wanted to touch her as often as possible.

*Possibly because it has been a long time since I have had sex.* He raised an eyebrow at the thought of sex. In the past, he would have gone off to seek pleasure elsewhere, but he would never do that. Not to her. Not now. It wasn't that he missed sex. He missed sex with Hermione. She was the only one that knew what he needed by a simple look, grunt, or gesture. No, no woman would ever compare to his wife. He watched the swell of her lovely breasts rising and falling with each breath and yearned to fondle them. "Poppy will be here shortly," he said, purposely breaking away from his thoughts. It wouldn't do to become aroused. He'd planned on having his wife the previous evening, but something had kept Poppy from visiting as previously arranged.

"I'll be down in a few minutes. I'm just thinking about the baby."

Not knowing what to say, he commented, "The room appears acceptable."

"We figured to go with a neutral theme. No matter if we have a boy or a girl, it will work well." She smiled, eyes still closed. "I'm glad you approve, Severus."

"A bookcase in a nursery?" he asked, eyebrow raised.

"Oh, honestly! I don't expect him or her to read, but I'd like to have the books here for when one of us chooses to read." She shrugged. "Besides, I think it looks rather nice."

He wanted to bite out that he'd not be reading any books to their child when he saw the types of books she'd placed there. *Muggle* stories? I will not be reading these to him...or her."

"Those are from my parents. They are the very same books that they used to read to me out of. I just thought I would pass it on. I'm not ashamed of my heritage. I've some Wizarding stories in there as well." He saw that her lower lip pouted slightly. "I'll not remove them, but I'd be willing to change their appearance somewhat, if you're worried about anyone seeing."

What the hell? "That's not...keep them as they are," he said brusquely. "I've just never...where did you get these?" He pointed to the two bookends. They were made of stone and carved to resemble fairies. They seemed oddly familiar to him.

"Oh, we found those in a box under the crib. I thought they made a nice touch. Were they yours?" she asked, moving to stand with him. "I thought it'd be a nice touch. I have your comforter in the crib. Dilly..."

"Not that I know of," he said, interrupting her as he traced the silhouette of the fairy nearest him. "I do recall these somehow, but I'm not really clear on where I've seen them."

"One fairy is a boy, and the other is a girl. I assumed it would be fine no matter the sex of our child," she said.

"Acceptable," he said with a nod, looking at the fairies again. Where had he seen them?

"That one says Samara on the bottom. The girl fairy," she said. "Have anyone with that name in the family?"

He shook his head. "No."

"I've been looking in this book here," she pointed to a slender purple book. "It's a book full of baby names. It says that Samara means to be guarded by God. Isn't that nice? Perhaps someone simply named it."

"If we have a daughter, would you want name her that?"

"No," he said immediately, not sure why. "I won't name my child something like that, especially not knowing where it comes from."

"Do you even want to know what it is?"

He narrowed his eyes. "I thought you found them in a box."

She raised her hands in exasperation. "I'm talking about our baby, Severus. Do you care to know which gender it is? Poppy will be able to let me know today."

Yes. "No, I do not. If you will excuse me, I shall go down to do some research," he didn't like that he'd hurt her, but so be it. The hurt look disappeared and was replaced by a hopeful look.

"You're going to visit with Poppy as she checks the baby, right?"

"No, give her my regards," he said, turning on his heel to leave. He paused at the door. "I will check on you for lunch."

Hermione shook her head sadly. Would he always be this way? He hadn't even let her finished explaining that the male fairy had his name beneath it. Samara had to have been a family member. She'd hoped that he would be interested in what Poppy had to say. Giving him time to get into his laboratory, she slowly made her way down to the study. It wasn't long before Poppy came out and began checking her.

"Just as I said before, you're measuring bigger. I'm officially saying that you are just over thirteen weeks along. The little one seems to be getting on well." She nodded with approval. "I'm glad that my instructions were followed."

"I've mostly been in bed. It was hard, but we managed," Hermione said quickly.

"Ah, here we are. Listen to this," the mediwitch said

Hermione grinned broadly, realizing what the sound was. It was her child's heartbeat. "Oh! It sounds like my dad's windscreen wipers on his car!"

"It's strong and steady. I'd say the rate is at about one hundred and thirty-nine. Would you like to know the gender?"

"I would," Hermione said with an eager nod.

"A son." The older witch was pulled into a hug. "I see Severus isn't the only one that will be happy about this."

"Di-did he say that he wanted a son?" Hermione asked hopefully.

Poppy gave a small smile. "No, lass, he didn't, but don't worry. He'll be happy to know that he has sired a son first. They all are. Family name and all that rubbish."

"Oh," she said, disappointment shrouding her.

"How are you feeling?" Poppy asked, ending the spell that allowed them to hear the heartbeat. "All right?"

"All right," Hermione said with a sigh. "I'm not crying so much. I had that bad for a while. I suppose I was still in the midst of the grieving process. I still am, to be honest. I can't help but wonder..." She smiled wistfully.

"Don't let it bring you down. You've this boy to think on. Your body should be getting used to the hormones being unbalanced by now. It's a big change that's taking place within you. I suppose that you can get back to normal activities just so you don't overdo it. Let's see...ah, yes! Sex, nothing rough for now. Walking, in moderation. No need to overexert yourself. Keep taking your vitamins and rest when you can. Lord knows you'll need it soon enough. Try not to stress over things."

"Fair enough," Hermione agreed. She'd felt a small tingle in her belly at the mention of sex. She couldn't wait for her husband to become one with her again. It had been far too long.

"You've no other problems?"

"Heartburn."

"Tell Severus that it should be safe to give you a mild potion for it. Try to mind what you eat though," she warned. "And, Severus? How are the pair of you getting on?"

Suddenly defensive of her husband, she bit out, "We're getting on fine, thanks. He's good to me."

Poppy waved her comment away with her hand as if to dismiss her. "I am glad that things appear to be working out. I wondered if he'd take my advice."

"You gave him advice? On what?"

"That is between he and I, but I'll give you a bit as well," the older witch said. "You'll need to be curbing your impulsiveness and need to start thinking things through. You can't just be running off when things won't go your way. You're in a magically bound relationship now, Hermione. Your husband may be a difficult man, but he's nothing that you can't handle if you use that head of yours."

Stunned, she watched as the matron put her wand away. "I...all right," she said. "I appreciate your concern, and I am grateful that you're taking time out of your holiday to come here to help us."

A warm smile was her immediate answer. The witch made her way to the grate. "I will see you in about a month. Floo me to make arrangements. If something happens before that, don't hesitate to let me know or to go to St. Mungo's."

"We won't," Hermione said, smiling as the blunt woman disappeared in the Floo. What the hell was that all about? She wasn't one to mince words, was she? She supposed that some things she'd done could be seen as careless or immature, but she'd be damned if anyone could say that now. She was in this until the end. Her marriage would work. In fact, it was time to show her husband how she truly felt about him. Would he be accepting of her proposition? Surely he wouldn't mind an afternoon of lovemaking. She quickly moved to their chambers to bathe and prepare herself.

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Severus checked the lower rooms for Hermione before venturing upstairs. With each increasing step, he wondered if something had gone wrong. He assumed she would try to tell him about the visit immediately. He was so lost in his own thoughts and work that he hadn't noticed. Only the rumbling of his stomach brought his attention to the time. He checked the nursery first. He was surprised that she'd parted from the room. She'd been in it constantly since she and her mother had redecorated it. Quickly, he went to their chambers. Empty. As he turned to leave, he heard something in the bathroom. "Hermione?"

The light extinguished itself, and the only light in the entire room came from a slither of an opening in the heavy drapery. It was enough though. He could see her. She was standing in the archway of the bathroom door. She appeared to have a very short, white nightgown on. He could almost guess which one it was. It had to be the one with the sheer material that he loved to see her in. He made his way towards her, and she began walking towards him. When she was in reach, he asked softly, "Does this mean you have been cleared by Poppy?" Her lips found his in answer, and he groaned. *Yes, I will have you. Too long have I been without you.*

Hermione moved back away from him to lift the nightie over her head. She wore nothing beneath it. His hands immediately went to her breasts. She placed her hands over his, stilling their movements. Kissing each lightly, she placed them back at his side and stepped closer to unbutton his linen shirt. With each button that she unfastened, she placed a kiss on his bare chest while lowering herself. Once his shirt was unbuttoned, she was kneeling in front of him, unfastening his belt and trousers. She smiled to herself as she felt him tense with anticipation as her lips followed his trousers down, placing kisses on his legs. Both boots were quickly discarded, and the trousers were pulled away. As she open-mouth kissed her way back up to his waist, she felt him trying to arch into her, his need increasing. She lowered his boxer shorts and placed the lightest of kisses on the tip of his erection.

"Hermione," he mumbled, grasping her hair with his fingers. Relenting, she tongued her way around his diameter and kissed her way back up his bare chest. Small, appreciative grunts were her rewards. Once standing before him again, she eased his shirt away from his shoulders and watched as it hit the floor. Her hands found their way to his chest and began slowly gliding about. Her nails gently scraped against his skin to erotically trace the hairline down his stomach.

"I'm going to show you how I feel about you," she said softly. Hermione's mouth moved to his chest, and her hands came back up to accompany it. She kissed, licked, suckled, and caressed nearly every part of his chest and stomach until he began to shift anxiously. It was then that she pulled him back to the bed with her. She sat down and left him standing between her legs. She pulled one of his hands up to cover a breast, smiling when he began groping her expertly. Looking into the dark depths of his eyes, nearly uncertain where the shadows ended and his pupils began, she brought her mouth to his for a kiss.

Ever so slowly, their tongues entwined and lips melded together. One of her hands moved to twist through his hair while the other found his firm arse. His free hand was cupping her cheek gently, making her feel delicate and cherished. She broke away from him slightly, resting her hands on his shoulders as she lay back, pulling him down on top of her. His lips found hers again as one hand snaked down to the juncture of her thighs where his fingers began preparing her core for his girth.

"Oh," she murmured, arching into him. He began to caress her more firmly, causing ripples of pleasure to drift through her.

"I've missed this," he said seductively. In one smooth motion, he pulled her up further onto the bed and positioned himself between her thighs.

Hermione closed her eyes as he inched into her. "I've also missed this." She lifted one leg to drape over his waist and let the other snake over one of his thighs to help to anchor her body beneath his. She pulled him close to her once he was completely sheathed within. Severus appeared to be revelling in the feel of her heat, as he hadn't moved since he'd eased in. "What's wrong?" she asked finally, bringing both hands to his face.

He opened his eyes and gazed at her intently. "Will I harm anything? Will our child be all right if we do this?"

She smiled. "So long as we don't get too rough, we'll be fine. Our son will be fine." Seeing the realization and pride light his eyes, she kissed him and tried to pour everything she felt into the kiss. The deeply passionate kiss continued endlessly as he slowly began to move within her, pulling nearly all the way out and easing all the way back in. They moved together effortlessly, each savoring the taste and feel of the other. Finally needing to concentrate on the impending orgasm, she pulled her lips from his to arch into him. He lay his head on her shoulder as he thrust into her with quick yet gently steady strokes. A few grinds from her pelvis had her crying out. "Oh, Severus, I love you. Oh! Yes, oh..." She felt as if she would burst with the feelings flowing through her.

Her husband began his jerky orgasm immediately after, mumbling incoherent words onto the flesh of her shoulder as he did so. Once he stopped moving, she tightened her hold on him, legs and arms entrapping him.

"I could stay like this for always, you know," she murmured and then kissed his head affectionately. Happy thoughts and the feeling of completeness relaxed her so much that she fell asleep.

Severus pulled away from her easily, making sure he didn't wake her. Once away, he found his trousers, pulled out his wand, and cleaned off their bodies. He pulled on a bathrobe and made his way back to their bed. His sleeping, lovely wife lay peacefully in the middle of the bed facing the wrong way. He smirked lightly and covered her as best as he could. Running his fingers through his hair, he almost felt the need to shout, cry, or explode. He left the room quickly and stood near the banister on the landing to look down to the bottom floor.

He'd never experienced anything like they'd just shared. What had come over him? Did she hear what he said as he reached culmination? If she had, she didn't say anything about it. The words he'd mumbled repeated in his mind continuously. *I love you. I love you. I need you. Always.*

Why? Where had those words come from? *It's just been too long since we've been intimate in this way. There is a reason such words would slip out. That had to be it!* "No, I do love her," he said, feeling disgusted with himself. "I've gone and ruined things." He blindly made his way down to his study to open a new bottle of Ogden's Firewhisky. "Impossible," he said, casting an accusing gaze at this reflection. "She's just a girl. Just a...she's my wife." He rubbed his temples as if trying to rid himself of the unwanted feelings, but they remained. Taking his bottle from the desk, he made his way to his father's old room, opened the door, and went to sit near the rear set of windows.

"Well, I suppose you'd be happy to know that I have become a weakened foo..." He sat up quickly, dropping his bottle. "What the fuck is that?" he asked aloud, blinking to be sure he was seeing correctly. A door appeared where there had only been a wall. There was a dusty parchment spelled to stick to it. He swiftly made his way to the door and recognized his father's writing immediately.

Son,

If you can see this, then you've gone against my advice and have fallen in love with someone. It's something that I've always warned you against. I've also warned you about succumbing to weakness. Falling in love will bring about weakness if you don't handle it properly. Everything that you've ever known about me will likely change in the next few minutes. Do not enter this door if you don't want to know the whole truth. It appears that you are more like your mother than I thought possible.

An old fool

Severus backed away until the chair halted his retreat. For some reason, he knew that to go into that room would mean that he'd have to face things that he wasn't ready to face. What secret did his father have? Why would he have to fall in love to read his father's last words to him? What final act of trickery had his father played at? Would he make a mockery of his marriage to his wife? His thoughts darkened at the thought of the old man speaking out against his life with Hermione and his child. But, why would he sign the letter as being an old fool?

"Why now?" he asked scornfully. He plopped down onto the chair and cradled his head in his hands. What should he do? What did the old arse want him to see? What if the room was cursed? The note could have been strategically worded to lure him into a false sense of security. Maybe the moment he entered, a hex would befall him or worse...maybe the bastard had found a way to harm the one that Severus had fallen in love with. That would be a likely last act of revenge.

The first thought that came to mind then was to ask Hermione, but he wouldn't dare let her see him in such a state. If he had become weak, there was no reason for her to know about it. Stealing himself for whatever repercussions may come of his actions, he walked to the door once more. As his hand touched the knob, he wondered if he was doing the right thing. He'd just come to the realization that he loved his wife. He'd just found out that she would bear him a son to carry on his family name. If something sinister lay in wait for him, would he die a content man? Would his folly of needing her in his life be his ruin? Would it be worth it?

"Yes, it would," he muttered. "She'll understand." With that, he opened the door and sputtered as stale air rushed out to grope at his lungs. Once the dusty air settled, he pointed his wand into the darkened room. "*Lumos*," he said loudly. At once, four different lanterns lit to reveal a medium-sized room. He cautiously stepped into the room. The walls, the ceiling, and the desk seemed to be littered with odd bits of parchment. It was his father's handwriting on every single piece. He strode towards the desk and read from one.

I'm sorry. Forgive me. I need you. Come back.

"What the fuck is this?" he asked. Who had his father been writing to? The right drawer on the desk was partially opened. He hesitantly opened the drawer. To his relief, no creature was within. There was only one device inside. A Pensieve. "What do you want me to see?" he asked quietly, reaching to place the Pensieve atop the desk.

"Hello, Severus," a feminine voice said from behind him. It was not the voice of his wife. It had been decades, but he'd never forget her voice.

"Mother?" He turned around and stepped back in shock. There was a large portrait on the wall, and his mother was the occupant.

"Don't look so surprised, son. I've been wondering when you'd get around to visiting me. I'm not sure how long it has been, but it seems that much time has gone by since your father last came to me." She smiled and laughed lightly. "Are you uncomfortable?"

"Yes," he breathed. As hard as it was, he tore his eyes away from hers and truly looked around the room. Aside from hundreds of used parchment bits, there was her portrait, a shelf with candles lining its top beneath her, the desk, a chair, and empty liquor bottles. "Did he make a shrine to you?" She nodded, smiling sadly. "How did I not know?"

"School," she said. "I'm afraid that I am instructed to not talk to you until you've had a look into his Pensieve and read through his letters. I know you must have questions."

"I do," he said. He panicked as she began to walk away. "Mother!" She looked back. "Why did you leave us? Why did you not choose me?"

She shook her head sadly. "I'm afraid, son, that I was created before any of that took place. As far as I remembered, I had only you. You've grown into a fine man, Severus. I am happy to know that you've married a most lovely witch. Am I correct in understanding that a child is on the way?"

"Yes," he admitted. "How do you know?"

"Near the stairway to the left, I am part of that mirror. In the study to your right, I am part of that mirror as well. You can see only your reflection while I can see you and all that goes on. It was a request that your father granted for me. I'm not allowed to visit other portraits or to have them visit me. Please, I can say no more. Look into the Pensieve. May those questions you asked yourself earlier be answered."

He walked to the portrait to touch her, but she walked out of the frame before he got there. Severus Snape was gobsmacked. He never knew that a portrait of his mother had been created. Why would his father have a room with such things? Did he *love* her? He decided to look at some of the messages that his father had left. "Unlimited time is all I have left, but I would trade all of it for a only minute with you." He smirked. "What an idiot! Who would write such things? This has to be a joke." He looked around the room suspiciously. "Is this your idea of a game?" he called out loudly. Another snippet caught his attention. "I am willing myself to join you, but as punishment, it isn't working."

Severus sat down on the dusty chair and simply looked around. It would take time to take each parchment down, read through them, and make any sense of them. But, he could have a look at the Pensieve. The suspicious part of him wondered if there were any enchantments on it. Would he be sucked in never to return? The sensible part of him believed that his father had honorable intentions when leaving these things behind. "Honorable?" he queried aloud. He shook his head in disgust, reached for the Pensieve, and headed for the door. When he neared the door, a note caught his attention. He read, "Our son helped to defeat Lord Voldemort. You would be proud." He scoffed sourly. "Proud indeed."

Proud of the bitter, selfish man that he'd become? A man that would likely never tell his wife that he loves her? A man that couldn't understand the ways of relationships or ways that a family could truly be happy? A man that enjoyed being sarcastic? A man that liked to see others fail at things simply because he found it amusing? "Yes, my mother would be so proud," he muttered sardonically. He made his way back to their chambers to check on Hermione. His hardened expression softened momentarily. She still lay there sleeping contentedly. The warm feeling that he felt previously had come back in full force. He stepped back and closed the door quickly. Now was not the time to explore untrained feelings. He wondered if his mother was watching him from the mirror as he descended the stairway and entered the study. Closing the door behind him, he went to his desk. It was now or never. He had to find out what his father wanted him to know.

Deep down he had a feeling that all the lecturing that his father had done had been for naught. Had his father succumbed to the weakness after all? Was it not worth it? Is that why he tried to warn him about it? From the looks of that room, it appeared the man had lowered himself greatly from the strong man that he once was. He'd become a puling, old fool that scribbled for his lost love at every spare moment. He warily looked at the lightly swirling mists nearing the surface of the Pensieve before him.

Would things change in his marriage after he witnessed the memories? Would things be better or worse? He'd only just realized that he loved his wife, but would those feelings change if he witnessed a broken man that had been his father? He didn't know if he could handle seeing the arrogant bastard reduced to a grieving fool. If that was the case, he knew that he would quell his budding feelings for his wife, as he would not want to become what he feared most. He craved respect, dominance, and selfishly insisted on things going his way. He *liked* who he was. He didn't want to change. He couldn't change. This was who he was, and this was what he'd always be.

Hermione loves me as I am. "But, what if I change without meaning to, good or bad? Will she still want me?"

Southern's Notes: You will likely notice that Harry didn't come for a visit. I decided to change some things around. I needed for Severus and Hermione to become closer here without interruptions from outsiders. The things he will witness are going to truly confuse and bother him.

Up Next: We'll see the Pensieve memories, some of the notes, and how Hermione tries to help him cope with his findings. I promised that I would never have a Soft!Severus in this story. I hope that you agree that he's not changed all that much. He's nicer, yes, but he only tried to be nice (or his excuse for it) was because of Poppy's advice. I think the relationship is developing at a nice, leisurely pace. More up soon. And, Harry will come for a visit.

Verisimilitude

Chapter 12 of 15

Severus ventures into his father's Pensieve while Hermione finds a secret room. Truths will be revealed.

Disclaimer: J.K.R.'s characters. I'm just having a bit of fun with them.

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Hermione stretched and ground the sleep away from her eyes. She was partially covered and lying the wrong way in the bed. She wondered why Severus had left. Had he gone to find something to eat? They'd missed lunch. Her growling stomach urged her to get up, get dressed, and to find something to eat. As quickly as she could, she readied herself and made her way downstairs. The first thing she noticed was that the study door had been closed. Was he communicating with someone via Floo? She crept to the door and listened for a few moments. There was no sound from within. It was possible that he'd cast a Silencing Charm. She used her wand to check for any wards and found none. Sheathing her wand, she opened the door, peeked in, and gasped.

"Severus! What's wrong?" she asked, running towards him immediately. She fell to her knees next to him. She'd never seen him looking so distraught. He was slumped over in the chair, face held up by one hand while staring into a...Pensieve! "Severus? What are you about?" He sat back and looked at her, causing her heart to drop. He looked lost. "Talk to me."

"I would very much like to be alone," he said evenly, nodding towards the door.

"Why do you have this Pensieve?"

He raised an eyebrow. "Get out, Hermione." His voice was a simple whisper, void of emotion. "I've some things to deal with."

"Severus, I am your wife. I would like to know. What can I do? You seem distr..."

"Enough," he said loudly. "Out."

"Fine. Shut me out, as usual. I'm getting so sick of *you* making decisions for the both of us. I just want to help!" she yelled, getting up to leave him to wallow in whatever he was engrossed in.

"Stop," he barked, standing and pulling her to him. "I know you mean well, Hermione, but you can't help me in this. There are no words or actions that can fix this. If you don't leave it at that, I am afraid I will be forced to say hurtful things."

"Why do you have to resort to hurting me?" Her eyes filled with tears. Each time she thought something had changed for the better, he reminded her that she was everything he never wanted. "...forget it." She pulled away from his hold only to be pulled back and crushed against him tightly. *What the hell? Something must really be wrong. Why can't he just tell me?*

"My mother," he said quietly. "I saw her earlier."

"What?" she asked, trying to pull back to look at him. Averting her questioning eyes, he tucked her head back to his chest and placed his atop hers, as if to keep her still. "She's gone, Severus. What's this about?"

"My father, he has a portrait of her. I found a secret room. She was there," he said, voice cracking.

Hermione realized that he didn't want her to see him upset. It was why he was keeping her head buried against his chest. She hugged him tightly and no longer tried to force him to look at her. "That must have been a shock."

"Yes," he hissed. "It was a surprise for a few moments, but her voice is the same. It was almost as if no time had passed. She's been here all of this time, and I've only just found her."

She could sense the regret in his voice and wished that she knew the entire story behind his life with his parents. She could only guess that his father had hidden his mother away for spite. "It's not your fault. He enchanted the house to hide her. There was nothing you could have done to find her since you didn't know she was there."

In the softest of replies, he said, "There was something I could have done before now." His hold on her tightened. "I asked her why she left, why she willed herself to death. I wanted to know why she chose to follow my unborn sister to the grave instead of fighting to live for me." He chuckled regretfully. "The portrait was painted before her second pregnancy. She has no recollection of it, though I am sure that my father has filled her in. His instructions are that she cannot talk to me until I've viewed his Pensieve and read his letters."

"Have you?"

"I'm not sure that I want to," he admitted. "From the letters that he has written, I am not certain that I will like what I see. I fear that I may find out that my life has been a lie."

"Severus, you'll still have me," she said quickly. "No matter what you see in there, we'll be here for you when you come out. I'll not pressure you to tell me anything, but I'll listen if you'd like."

"Your support is appreciated, but this is something that I need to deal with alone. Can you now see why I would like for you to leave?" He finally pulled back to look at her, pain evident in his eyes. "Go."

"If you aren't out by nightfall, I'll come back again," she warned, reaching up to caress his face. "I love you. I know that you don't like to hear that, but when someone loves someone, they want to share all things, good and bad." She smiled. "Let me get us something to eat first. Please?"

He shook his head, squeezed her once more before pushing her away slightly. *You need to eat. Leave me be, Hermione.*"

She nodded and left the study, closing the door behind her. She concentrated on the secret room, lifted her wand, saying, "Point me." The wand pointed to the second floor hallway that led towards Severus' parents old chambers. "Of course," she said, shaking her head slightly. "He'd have hidden the entrance in his personal room." As quickly as possible, she made her way towards the room. The moment she entered, she saw the open doorway. "Clever." She paused near the doorway, reading a note from Severus' father.

Son,

If you can see this, then you've gone against my advice and have fallen in love with someone. It's something that I've always warned you against. I've also warned you about succumbing to weakness. Falling in love will bring about weakness if you don't handle it properly. Everything that you've ever known about me will likely change in the next few minutes. Do not enter this door if you don't want to know the whole truth. It appears that you are more like your mother than I thought possible.

An old fool

"Oh my," she whispered. *I was right. He does love me. No wonder he seemed so lost. Loving me is apparently against the beliefs instilled in him by his father.* What type of horrible person would tell their son such rubbish? Hermione couldn't believe the state of the room. The walls and a desk were littered with assorted sizes of parchment. Upon closer inspection, she could see the same spidery flow on each, indicating the same person wrote them. She took in the portrait on the wall, wondering where his mother was. "Good Lord! A shrine!"

It was apparent that the man had spent a great deal of time in the room, no doubt trying to talk to his deceased wife. Was he trying to make amends for things? Living in the past? She'd always thought that Severus had an unhappy childhood. The small amounts of information that he'd given her over the past few months had led to her opinion. When he'd mention his father, his eyes would darken, and his voice would deepen. When he'd mention his mother, his eyes would look momentarily regretful, and his voice would soften slightly. Of course that was only for a few seconds before his mask of indifference would slide back into place.

Hermione used her wand to summon all of the parchments to the desk. In no time, she had them stacked neatly. She looked at the still empty portrait. "Hello?" she called. "Mrs. Snape?" There was no reply, and the portrait remained empty. She shrugged, thinking that maybe she was off visiting another portrait. In the midst of debating on reading the parchments or leaving them for Severus to peruse through, she heard a woman speak behind her.

"My son's wife," the woman said. The portrait's occupant had returned. "I'm surprised that you've found this room."

"He told me about it," she said defensively.

The woman smirked, reminding her of Severus. "He told you that he'd found a room, not where it was."

"How can you know that?"

"Have a seat," his mother said, nodding to the chair. "My name is Elladora."

"I thought you couldn't talk until Severus views the Pensieve and reads these letters," Hermione said uncertainly.

"Too right, you are," she said with a half smile. "However, that pertains only to Severus. Tal'fryn never said that I was restricted from talking to anyone else."

"Right then." Hermione sat down and faced the woman attentively. "Er...do you want to talk?"

"I do," came the amused reply.

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Severus wasted no more time. He leant forward to examine the white wisps of cloud-like lights swirling within. Allowing his face to touch the windy beams, he was pulled inside the Pensieve. He immediately recognized the Great Hall. It hadn't changed all that much. He found himself next to the Slytherin table and its occupants. His father's voice pulled his attention away from two flirting students.

"Well, mates, I'll shove off for now. See you in the common room," he said, quickly exiting the hall.

He had to walk quickly to keep up with his father. Before they reached the bottom corridor in the dungeons, they came upon a young witch. "Hi there," she said with a smile. Severus gasped. It was his mother.

"Hi," his father replied, kissing her lightly. "Are you ready?"

"Yes," she whispered, taking his hand.

Severus felt uncomfortable as they made their way into a small storage room. There was a comfortable divan against the back wall that his father quickly cleaned with his wand and led his mother to. He didn't want to witness something such as that! He closed his eyes for a moment and heard his mother whisper words of love. His father merely grunted. He felt the room change around his body and cracked open an eye to be sure.

They were sitting in a secluded section of the library. "What is it?" his father asked, sounding annoyed.

"I got a Howler from my father this morning," she said sadly. "He says I am to break things off, or I will have to transfer schools."

"Ridiculous."

"What will we do?"

"Hogsmeade tomorrow, right? We'll slip away and be married. We're of age. There is nothing he can do. My parents will support us," he said confidently.

"All right," she agreed eagerly.

The room changed again suddenly. Severus found himself standing in the study of his family home. His mother was in tears whilst sitting next to his father on the davenport. His paternal grandmother was also in tears, but she was standing with her back turned to them. His paternal grandfather was in the middle of the floor pacing. He'd never met either of them, their deaths having been a casualty of the war with Grindelwald.

His father rose, "Father, I thought you would understand," he began, "that I want..."

"SILENCE!" he bellowed. "SIT!" Severus bit back the urge to sit as well, momentarily forgetting that nobody in the memory could see him. In a deadly voice, the man said,

"I did not join Grindelwald to fight for what is right only to have you married off to the *enemy's* daughter! Her family supports Dumbledore!

Severus had never known this tidbit of information. He watched as his mother wailed even louder, and his father tried to comfort her. "But, sir," his father began, "we are not in the midst of a war here. We're only students still. I chose her as my wife."

It appeared that his grandfather was nearing his father to take action against his cheek, but the grate came to life as an imposing, tall, dark-haired wizard flooded in. Severus could only imagine that this man was his mother's father. Both grandfathers drew wands. "Get away from her," the newcomer yelled.

"How dare you come into my home and give orders?" his paternal grandfather hissed. "Leave, or I shall not be responsible for what I must do to you!"

"Not without my daughter," the man said determinedly. "Come."

"Hold on! She has married my son. She is now a *Snape* and proud of it. I'm afraid that you are too late," he said snidely, apparently trying to goad the man. "Clearly the girl has better sense than the rest of your lot. Grindelwald will be most pleased to have another daughter join in to fight for the cause."

Severus was surprised to see hexes flying from both grandfathers' wands as well as his grandmother's wand. His father was simply covering his mother to ensure no hexes found their way to her. It was over in minutes, his grandmother had been Stunned, and his paternal grandfather had been disarmed. "Name your price," the bitter man spat angrily, shamed at being bested.

"I have no price, save that my daughter leaves with me."

It was then that Severus' father spoke. "Please, sir. I love her. We've nothing to do with the war."

"Hold your tongue, Talfryn, you weak boy!" his grandfather yelled.

The dark wizard cast a Silencing Charm on the man, and he looked at Severus' father closely. "I wish that things were different, son, but I'll not leave her here with your father to poison. Come, Elladora."

"Papa, I can't. I love Talfryn. My place is with him, but I would like your blessing," his mother said.

"You cannot have it," the man said, eyes glistening. Without another word, he disappeared with a loud *Crack!*

Talfryn quickly cast the necessary charms to end the spells on his mother and father. Severus' grandmother was the first to speak. "You are a disappointment to us, Talfryn. We will accept your bride nonetheless. I suppose it could be worse. You could have come home with a filthy Mudblood!"

His grandfather began cackling. "Grindelwald will love this. If you'd thought of this as a way to help the cause, I would be pleased. However, it's disgustingly apparent that you've grown close to this...witch. The moment term ends you will both come back here. Elladora will spend one year with your mother learning the ways of the family and the ways of Grindelwald from a woman's perspective. You will spend one year training with me." The man lowered his voice threateningly. "Any objections?"

The room changed around Severus again. This time it was in his parents' bedchambers. His mother walked to his father. "Talfryn! It's been so long," she said, wrapping her arms around him in show of affection. "I've missed you."

"Unhand me and get undressed, wife," he said, moving away from her embrace.

"What?" she asked incredulously.

"Did you not learn anything from my mother?" his father asked dangerously, grabbing her wrist tightly.

"Y-yes, but we're alone. I thought...I thought it was okay," she said, trying to pull her wrist away. "D-don't you love me any longer?"

"I'm not sure if it ever was love," he said hatefully, pushing her off towards the bed.

"Talfryn! How can you say that to me? I turned away from my family to be with you," she said, completely hurt.

Severus could see his father warring with the need to hold his wife as he once did and the need to uphold all that his own father had instilled in him. Finally, he relented. "Only in the privacy of our bedchambers can we be as we once were. I'll not be disowned for a woman." His father touched his mother's cheek. "Undress."

The room suddenly transformed into the family graveyard. Severus noted that his mother was weeping whilst his father stood straight and listened to the words being spoke over the two immaculate coffins that found a home in the family crypt. After the service was completed, guests came to bid farewell to his parents.

Once alone, his mother spoke, "I'm sorry." She placed her hand upon his shoulder. "They died for what they believed in."

He shrugged her hand away. "Not what you believe in though, is it?" he asked angrily. "How could you put me in that position, Elladora?" His voice had raised considerably.

"I didn't ask you to change sides, Talfryn. That was your choice," she said.

His father slapped her soundly on the face, causing her to stumble. "Never again will I allow my wife to influence me at the reward of a few bedroom favors! I will see my other women for that. You will have your own chambers as of now."

"You don't mean that!"

"I do. Get out of my sight," he yelled. The witch fled back towards the house. A single tear fell from one of his father's eyes. "I love you," he whispered to her retreating back. "But, *this* is entirely your fault." He cast one last look at the final resting-place of his parents and made his way out of the cemetery.

Severus couldn't believe what he'd heard! His father must have changed sides at the last minute to help Dumbledore somehow. All he'd ever known of his paternal grandparents was that they had died during the war. He'd never known the specifics of which side they were on, how they died, or even the role that his own father had played. It was no wonder that he'd never met his mother's family. His father must have forbid it, even after his parents were killed.

"Why hasn't the scenery changed?" Severus asked aloud, realizing that he should have followed his father. He followed the snowy footsteps quickly, finding his father at the rear of the house fondling one of the serving wenches.

"My wife will start staying in her own chambers. I will double your pay if you'll warm my bed on nights that I choose," he told her.

"Yes, sir," she said slyly. "Any time."

The outside scenery changed into his father's bedchambers. It seemed that a great deal of time had passed, as his father looked a little older. The same serving wench was pulling on the last of her clothes whilst his father lazed about in the bed. She left immediately after, pocketing a few Galleons that had been placed on the wardrobe. Once alone, Talfryn walked to the wall, tapped it with his wand, and the door appeared. He went in, lit the lamps, and scribbled a hurried apology onto a piece of parchment, shoving it into a drawer. The man whispered, "I'm sorry, Ella. I'm sorry."

Severus noted the absence of the portrait and the thousands of notes sticking to the walls. He supposed that the room had always been his father's private haven. A creak



from the next room had them scrambling to exit the room. Just as the door was closed behind them, his mother looked into the room.

"I'm leaving," she announced defiantly.

"What?" his father asked incredulously.

"I saw her leave your rooms again. She doesn't respect me any longer either! She simply laughs as if she owns the house! I've had enough," she said firmly. "My family will accept me, should I return to them."

Rage visibly shook his father; he ran forward, grabbed her to him, and threw her onto his bed. "You will not leave."

"I cannot stay like this."

"Name your price," he spat angrily, giving her a shake.

"A child," she said immediately.

"Why would you want *my* child?" he asked suspiciously.

"To make my life complete," she replied. "I used to love you...the man you used to be. Maybe part of him will be born into my son or daughter."

His father slapped her. "I am the same man."

"No, he would never have hurt me nor would he have bedded other women in front of me," she said angrily, struggling to get up. "Forget it. I'm leaving."

"Done," he relented. "Anything else?"

"Fire her. I do not want her here any longer."

"Done."

"It's been over fourteen years since we've shared chambers, so I'll not ask that of you. However, I would like for you to spend some nights with me each week," she said, not meeting his eyes.

"Done," his father said, bending his head down to nuzzle her neck. He looked up at her after she whimpered slightly. "I have but a small request."

"What?" she asked uneasily.

"A portrait. Will you sit for one?"

"All right," she said, her demeanor softening.

The next few memories passed in quick succession. One was of his father holding his mother as she slept. His hand cupped her swollen belly, and he placed gentle kisses on her bare arm. The next was of his father carving a small male fairy, etching the name Severus onto the bottom.

Severus shook his head. It was one of the two fairies in his child's nursery. He'd thought that the name Samara had been on the bottom of one *Yes, it was beneath the female fairy.*

The next memory was of a small toddler sleeping in his crib. Severus realized that it was he. His father was leaning over the side, smiling at the child. "My son," he said aloud. "I'm going to make sure that you are stronger than me. You'll be a better Snape. I swear it."

Many quick memories of his father and mother came next. They were seemingly happy when alone, but near others, things changed. Talfryn began to take an active role in spending time with young Severus to teach him the ways of the Snape family. That was when the problems began. The memories became dark. His mother and father argued more frequently. It seemed that she wanted her parents to know their child, and he refused. She didn't want their child to learn the things that the Snape family bestowed upon their children, as she disagreed with the formality of everything, missing the loving atmosphere that most families had.

The biggest argument came when his mother announced that she was pregnant with another child, a daughter. His father accused her of sleeping around, claiming that he'd been using a charm to ensure that she didn't get pregnant. She said she'd not taken her potion in months and always did Fertility Charms, purposely hoping to impregnate herself. Many arguments came after that, but in one in particular, after the adolescent Severus had been sent to bed, his parents argued violently. It didn't end until his father pushed her down the stairs. The child, of course, was lost, even though his frantic father had Flooed for a Healer immediately. The sister that had never breathed was barely two months shy of her true due date.

Possibly the most horrible memory came next. His father was clutching something to his chest and walking through the grounds towards the cemetery. Severus saw the tears falling and heard the soft whispering. "Samara would have been your name. It means guarded by God, you know." To his horror, he watched as his father placed the little bundle in a small coffin and pulled away the small blanket to gaze upon the face. The tiny, perfectly formed face had an angelic appearance. It was as if the baby had been sleeping. Severus watched the sad scene for as long as he could before he pulled out of the Pensieve all together.

His first thoughts were of Hermione and his unborn child. He couldn't help but to imagine that it was his child that he'd seen in the memory. "I am no better than he," Severus said. "We've lost one child in the same manner. Even though the pregnancy was not so far along, it was still the same." For the first time in many years, he allowed numerous tears to slide down his face at once. They were for his mother, for his sister, for his lost child, for his child to be, and for his wife. Maybe they were even for his father and himself.

As quickly as the tears started, they stopped. As he willed them away, realization settled in. "I have become him," he said when the raging grief subsided. It was then that he realized that he'd never mourned his mother properly, nor his sister. He should have wept for his mother when she died, but his father began twisting things. "Why? Why would you want me to become something that you obviously despised?"

The answer would not come, not yet anyway. He decided to have a few drinks before he went back into the Pensieve. He needed to muster the courage to enter it again. If seeing the little baby had affected him so deeply, he could only imagine what the death of his mother would do to him. *I'm glad that my Hermione didn't stay to witness this bout of weakness! I wouldn't want her to see me cry like some softhearted fool, some Arthur Weasley!* One thing was for certain. It was too late. Some people were too set in their ways and would never change.

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Hermione stopped pacing. "I can't believe it. That just seems so...horrible. I am so sorry, Ella, that you had to live in such a way." She silently vowed to herself that if things ever got that bad in her marriage, she would leave. Her parents would always welcome her home.

"Of course, that is what he told me," Severus' mother said. "I was painted before I became pregnant with the girl. The story of her death is Talfryn's words to me. I do believe them, however, as he would not have told such a horrid tale."

Nodding, Hermione said, "I think so as well. I imagine that Severus is seeing all of this. I hope that he's all right and handling it."

"I shall check," Elladora said, exiting her portrait suddenly.

She'd told Hermione that she could see through two mirrors in the house. One was near the stairway, explaining why Hermione usually felt someone watching her, and the other was in the study. *Poor Severus. This must be so hard on him.* A movement in the portrait drew her attention. "Well?" she asked anxiously.

"He is distraught, but he seems to be accepting things. I am not certain how much he has seen, but he is just going back in now. We shall have to wait."

After a few minutes of silence, Hermione asked, "Was it worth staying with a man who acted as if he didn't love you most of the time?" She shook her head. "I'm sorry. You don't have to answer that."

Ella simply shrugged. "I used to have such hopes. Sometimes he was so loving, when no one was around of course, but things changed once Severus got older. He wanted to instill the Snape ways in him. I wanted my family to be involved, but he wouldn't have it."

"Why? He ended up helping the right side win the war!" Hermione said incredulously.

"Right side to whom?" she asked slyly. "Those that sided with Grindelwald believed themselves to be right as well. My father saved Talfryn from being captured, you see. When he asked my father what the price would be to repay his debt, my father said that he wanted a respectable life for me, a family name of honor for me. He pointed out that Grindelwald was simply running in circles to avoid Dumbledore. Talfryn had long since believed he was fighting a lost cause. He never truly wanted to be a part of it anyway, so he brought information to my father."

"Oh, no. His parents..." Hermione gasped.

"They were to be given immunity as part of his deal, but Talfryn never had the chance to warn them away. Went to the end with old Grindelwald, they did. That's why he blamed me for their deaths. Even when my father tried to make contact after the war was over, Talfryn refused on grounds that he'd fulfilled his promise, but he'd never agreed to extending an olive branch."

"I'm sorry."

"I would have liked to see my mum and dad again before I died, but you asked if it was worth it. When Severus was younger, yes, it was, but when he began nearing school age, things changed. It felt as if I'd lost him anyway, and from what Talfryn told me, I simply lost all hope and the will to live once my daughter died. He said I simply gave up and left them to face the world alone." Elladora smiled. "Sad, isn't it?"

"Terribly," Hermione agreed. "I would never have left my son to fend for himself against such a horrible father. A father that lied and bullied!"

"Yes, I agree. I don't know how I did such a thing either, but I know that history will not repeat itself. You seem so much stronger than I ever was. I've been witnessing everything since you've been here, and no matter what my son has done, you've stood your ground." The witch sighed. "I was so disappointed at how Severus led his life. He became everything that his father tried to be. Cold, bitter, uncaring...many things. You've done a world of good for him."

"Sometimes it feels like he loves me, but there is still some doubt about it. I mean, he's found this room, so that should prove that he does. I still wish that he'd say it."

"Hermione Snape," the woman said softly. "Did you notice the last name? That should be enough for you."

"Was it enough for you?"

"Yes."

"But, you told me tha..."

"Silence," Elladora chided. "I think that with Severus finding out the truth about things will help this family thrive, but you cannot push him. Let him come to you even if it takes a long time. For all of his coldness, he is already a better man than his father. Remember that. I must go."

"Wait," Hermione said, but the woman had left her portrait already. *I suppose I might have annoyed her a little. She's right though. I can't press Severus about what he's found out. I will have to let him come to me.*

She took the parchments and went below towards the study. She could hear nothing from within and knew that Severus was probably back within the Pensieve. Opening the door, she made her way to his desk to carefully place his parchments there. His face seemed distraught, and it appeared that tears had recently made their way down his cheeks, tracks still visible. Sighing, she left the room. If he weren't out in a couple of hours, she would go in after him as she'd told him earlier.

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Severus walked uneasily through the scene before him. It seemed oddly familiar. A strangled cry urged him forward to his father's chambers. Just inside, his father was kneeling next to his bed, weeping openly. His mother lay in the bed, dead. He felt his blasted emotions building once again as he neared the bed. As he stood near his father, the younger version of himself came into the room.

His father said, "Do you see what she's done?" The man's voice was broken, and he quickly wiped away his tears, masking his face with indifference. "She didn't care for us. She left us. She wanted to die all because of the brat that she lost."

Seeing things from his new perspective, he could see how his father had manipulated him, the hypocrite! Why was it all right for him to love and grieve but his son was not allowed to do so? Severus watched the scene before him.

"Yes, father. I see."

The younger Severus lacked conviction, still remembering his promise to his mother. Sadly though, that determination wouldn't last. The words bespoke by his father had begun shaping him and making him forget the way of things. The boy reached out to hold his mother's hand only to have it snatched away by his father.

"She doesn't deserve our mourning, son. She chose this. Come. We've arrangements to make," he said, standing and pulling his son behind him.

Severus watched the horrified expression of his younger self as he tried fruitlessly to will his mother to wake up. He suddenly remembered those feelings all too well. The unanswered praying that it was all a bad dream, that she hadn't died. The bitterness that dwelled within as he slowly began to believe all the words his father spewed had never quite left. He bent down to place his hand upon his mother's cold one at the same moment the room shifted around him. He found himself standing outside near his mother's crypt, once again witnessing one of the most horrible days of his life.

This time though, he allowed himself to grieve. He moved to sit on the stone bench away from the small crowd and wept for his mother, for his past mistakes, for falling into the pattern that his father had woven for him. "Sorry, mum," he whispered once the tears stopped. It seemed as though some burden had been lifted. It seemed as though part of him had been restored, a part that had lost vigor many years before when his mother died. Even after he'd finally stood up to his father, turning his back on the tyranny, he'd never wept or allowed himself to truly feel the loss of his mother. Instead, he opted to bury it and any feelings of loss or regret that harbored within.

A slight noise drew him out of his reverie. He noticed that everyone had gone, but his father came back. It was the only reason that the memory hadn't lapsed into another. He listened attentively as his father spoke, feeling as he had as a young child. His father would sometimes strike his mother, shove her around, forcing her to cry out in pain and tears. Severus had taken to crying for her and trying to help her, but it had only made his father angrier. His mother had instructed him to remain silent whilst the rants occurred. He'd later wondered why she never simply quieted when his father finally lost control? She wouldn't cower until it was too late.

"Ella, I don't know how I can go on without you. This guilt is nearly unbearable. You've no idea how I feel. I cannot believe it myself. I've been wrong in so many things, haven't I?" The man sighed. "I blamed you for my decision to betray my parents in the war because I had done it for you. When my plan backfired with them meeting their deaths, I felt it was your fault. If your father hadn't made me feel guilty about not giving you a respectful family name, I would never have done it."

He sat down on the ground and leant back against the stone of the crypt. "Do you know how many years it took before I realized that I would have likely continued to follow them blindly and been killed as well?" Talfryn kicked a nearby rock. "I let my father's teachings get in the way of things. I should have told you that I loved you more than I did. I should have showed you. I should never have lain with all of those women whilst knowing you were right down the hall. I should have been true to my own heart instead of the Snape name." The man's voice trailed off. "I blame myself for this. I blame myself for all of it...for our daughter's death, for you losing the will to live. I never meant what I said about our daughter. I knew she was mine. You would never have betrayed me with another man. I was simply angered because you'd done it behind my back. I said it because you didn't want to be alone with me once Severus was ensconced firmly at Hogwarts."

Severus watched helplessly as the harsh man that he'd always known poured out his deepest secrets, regrets, and emotions. The confessions that he'd been hearing had done nothing but confuse him farther. A bitter remark brought his attention back to his father.

"Women are weak! They lack endurance! You should have lived!" he yelled loudly, pointing an accusing finger at the tomb. "You influenced me to be weak. I betrayed my way of life by truly loving you above my family duties. No matter what I said or did, it was always there. My love for you tainted everything. Severus will never know of this. Severus will never experience this. I shall see to it that he never lands himself with a woman that he could love. His duty shall be to his family name first and to himself second."

The next scene shifted in easily. Severus found himself listening to his father's confession to his mother's portrait. The man had started sticking parchments all along the walls at this point, indicating that some time had passed. "Severus will be completing his studies soon," the man was saying. "Top of his class, I'd say. I'm proud of him. You would be proud of him."

It was apparent that the man hadn't held true to his litany by her graveside, not if he'd taken to returning to his room and trying to worship her. Severus started slightly when his mother's portrait spoke.

"He always was a smart boy, just a little lacking in confidence. I think that was your doing, always hovering about, trying to criticize him."

"Only to strengthen him."

"We still see things differently," she said softly.

"I need to have you," the man said, voice full of longing. Severus furrowed his brow. What the hell did he mean to do?

"Talfryn, no!"

"I must. It's the only way to stay sane." The man kissed the portrait on the lips, blew out the candles, and walked towards the exit. "I still have what I need from the last time I reopened your crypt."

The last thing Severus heard before the scene faded away was the portrait's stifled crying. The next scene was in the darkened cellar where he currently had his laboratory. He heard a female's whimpering and heard his father's harsh words.

"Drink this. NOW!"

"All right. I'll be good," the woman said through sobs. "Will you let me go after?"

"Of course not," the man replied, cackling wickedly.

Severus stopped as he rounded the corner to see them there. The woman, whom he recognized as the serving wench, was lying on a dirty mattress on the floor. Long chains held her prisoner yet gave her enough room to move about the room freely. She drank from a goblet and began to moan. A few moments later, the woman's body began changing into that of his mother's. Suddenly realizing his father's intentions, he leant over to retch fruitlessly. His father had taken this once willing partner and imprisoned her to force her to use Polyjuice to change into his mother.

"Why, Talfryn? Why?" the woman cried.

"Because your temptation caused me to hurt her. You deserve this. Now, you can be her. It's your only redemption," he said coldly. That was the voice that Severus recognized most. The cold manipulative voice of his youth had embedded itself into his mind. Not wanting to hear the woman's crying and his father's grunting, Severus exited the room. Minutes later, the scenery changed around him again.

This time he was looking upon his father as he lay on his deathbed. His young-adult counterpart was also in the room. It was the last time he'd seen his father alive. "Oh, do drink up," he heard himself say coldly. "And, spare me any dramatics. I've need to be back at Hogwarts soon."

"I think I shall drink this after you've gone. I want to die alone," his father retorted.

"Indeed?"

"Indeed."

"Well, I suppose I should leave and let you get on with it."

"You're so like your mother, turning your back on our ways. You're no Snape. I am glad that the name of Snape will die with you," Talfryn said, eyeing him oddly. "Maybe it was good for Elladora to have been a failure at raising children since the line will die. You'll never marry nor will you love. I've taught you that if nothing else."

"Yes, I'll no doubt die alone just as you are doing now. The only thing, father, is that it will not bother me half as much as it seems to be bothering you." The younger Severus nodded. "Good luck, *sir*. May your death be all that I've hoped for." Without a backward glance, he strode from the room, leaving the man on the bed staring after him.

What happened next, though, shocked Severus. The man got up and laughed whilst making his way to the secret room. Once inside, he bid farewell to his mother's portrait, explained that he would be meeting her soul across the veil, and set about writing a couple of last letters. The man suddenly began talking to himself, but he was addressing Severus, looking at the floor as he spoke.

"If you are witnessing this, my son, then you have seen all of my misdeeds and those of my family before me. It also means that you have found yourself in love. When I began to teach you the ways of life, I warned you away from falling in love. I thought that it had made me a weaker man. I later realized that it didn't make me a weaker man. What I consider weak is not recognizing it for what it was and embracing it. It would have made me a stronger man, would have made our family stronger. Things would have been different."

His father sat in the chair, still looking at the floor. "By the time I realized this, it was too late to take back all that I'd taught you, so I continued on. I knew that either you would never experience love and lose it as I had if you'd kept yourself away from it, which may have been for the best, or a woman would come into your life, showing you that things didn't have to be that way. Since you are witnessing this, the latter must be the case, though I can't imagine the type of woman it would take to break through the bitter and cold man you've become. My only hope is that you are treating the woman you love with much more respect than I have treated your mother. If you ever have children, remember what you've learnt here, Severus. The ways of the Snape family aren't all my father thought them to be."

Talfryn looked up and seemed to know right where Severus happened to be standing, as their eyes nearly met. "Seek out your mother's family, son. Know them, as I never allowed. That is how a true family should be. When I told you that you were like your mother for turning against my tyranny, I didn't mean those words in disappointment. I said them with pride. If the name of Snape does not die with you, as I'd hoped, thinking you'd remain the monster that I've created, be sure to do things better than I ever did. You've already restored honor to our name by aligning us once again with Dumbledore to help defeat the latest Dark Lord. For that, I am also proud. I shall leave you now. I do love you, as I loved your mother and would have loved your sister. My ways just haven't always been the best. Live in peace and feel no guilt. If you are as much like your mother as I believe you to be, I know that you feel guilty about giving me the poison that killed me, despite the words you just spoke. I asked it of you, Severus. Worry not. It's what I wanted."

Severus watched as his father took out the stone Pensieve from the drawer and lifted his wand to his temple. The room faded away to darkness before shifting back into the first memory that he'd visited. He had no desire to witness anything again, not yet. Pulling himself out of the device, he sat at his desk uncertain about what he should do next. Should he tell Hermione about the findings? Really tell her about everything? She would be curious. He prayed that she would allow him some peace until he was ready to talk on it.

No matter how coldly he'd treated his father the last time they'd spoken, he'd left the room with regrets that day. He'd hoped that his father would have some kind words on his deathbed, and he'd found that hadn't been the case. He could see now that his father had meant those words in a different way than he'd heard them. He'd believed that his father died feeling loathing and disappointment in him. On the contrary, the man had died loving him and feeling pride in him.

What would he have told his father if he'd known? How did he feel about it all? Could things have been salvaged? His father had claimed to be dying from an old unbreakable curse that had befallen him as he traveled in another country. After supposedly battling with the pain for a long period of time, he'd requested that Severus give him something to ease and hurry his passing. Out of some stray sense of honor and the sick need to have some part in the man's passing, he'd gone to him with a poison.

The sound of his door being opened drew his attention. Hermione was entering. "Hi," she said softly. "It's really late. I've asked Dilly to bring something light up to our chambers for our dinner."

It was then that Severus noticed the parchments upon his desk. "Have you...? Where did you get these?" he asked, feeling anger build within.

"I found the room. I summoned them all to stack up neatly and brought them here," she stated. "I've not read them, Severus, if that's what you wanted to know."

Relief flowed through his body. "Very well. Did you see...?"

"I did, and I spoke with her," she admitted. "Anyway, let's have a bath, then we'll eat. After that, I would like to give you a massage and hold you." She held up her hand to halt his protests. "Let's not talk about anything right now, all right? Just allow me to take care of you. You've been sitting here nearly the entire day, and you've not eaten. It's my duty as a wife to you."

"Very well," he said curtly, following her out of the room. He appreciated that she was giving him time to think things over before bombarding him with questions. He wondered what the portrait of his mother had told her. She must know enough to not give in to her curiosity. Shrugging the thoughts away, he allowed her to help him undress and slide into the tub with him. She settled herself behind him and pulled him back to where his head rested on her chest. Hermione simply ran her fingers through his hair and hugged him to her, showing that she supported him.

He loved her. He knew that it was true. There was no use denying it even though he didn't exactly like it. How else could he have seen his father's enchanted room otherwise? He'd not tell her, of course, as it wasn't in his nature to do so. All the same, he could still show her on some level. < |>Damn! I almost sound like my father at times. He pushed that thought away. *No, I'll never be like him. He was truly the weak one.* The words that his father had spoken about finding true strength echoed through his mind.

*When I began to teach you the ways of life, I warned you away from falling in love. I thought that it had made me a weaker man. I later realized that it didn't make me a weaker man. What I consider weak is not recognizing it for what it was and embracing it. It would have made me a stronger man, would have made our family stronger. Things would have been different.*

Could the family that he'd already started, albeit unwillingly, with Hermione be different? Could they be happy? Would he love his children? His thoughts drifted to the memory of the tiny, angelic face of his lifeless baby sister. How could one not love something so small and innocent? Yes. He could and would love his children. However, how did one convey love to a child?

Severus turned around suddenly and looked into Hermione's eyes. "I thank you for this," he said. When she shrugged and smiled, he placed the softest of kisses upon her lips. His stomach took that opportunity to growl loudly, causing them to both laugh. "Perhaps we should eat first and then continue our conversation in bed."

"What conversation?" she asked.

"This one." He pulled her closely and kissed her once again. This time, he held nothing back as he parted her lips with his tongue and invaded her mouth. She was his wife. She loved him. She belonged to him. She would be the mother to his children. And...he did love her. Who needed words? Actions were much more meaningful.

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**Southern's Notes:** I've been listening to a German song while writing this chapter. It's titled "Ohne Dich," and it's by Rammstein. Wow, I say! The melody and tone just seemed to go with this chapter. Well, I've been given a link to the translated lyrics, and the chorus is as follows:

Without you I cannot be

Without you

With you I am alone too

Without you

Without you I count the hours without you

With you the seconds stand still

They aren't worth it without you

Isn't that interesting? It really did go with this chapter.

About Grindelwald and his parents, I hope you didn't mind that I included so much. I thought it would help us understand his father and the way he influenced Severus. There were other things that I could have added to this chapter, but I figured it was long enough. I will include the letters in the next chapter.

I can only hope that he'll keep thinking on his father's words about his weakness had not been loving but not embracing his love. I would also like Hermione to remain patient with him. Pressuring him would be a disaster. I also wonder if he'll look up his mother's family.

# Serendipity

Chapter 13 of 15

Severus has several epiphanies, and Hermione understands exactly what he wants to say. The last of his father's secrets will be revealed via parchments.

**Disclaimer:** J.K.R.'s characters. I'm just having a bit of fun with them.

**Thanks go to my beta, Charmed\_Nay, and to all of my friends at the Yahoo!Group, Potter\_Place.**

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Hermione felt the arm around her waist flex and tighten, and his hand slowly moved from its position on her breast to her only slightly rounded stomach. She wondered if he noticed that the pregnancy was starting to show. Keeping her body completely still, save for her rhythmic breathing, she allowed him to think that she was fast asleep. They'd taken a bath together, eaten, and made love twice before succumbing to sleep. His predawn movements had awoken her. She dared not ask what was on his mind. She knew. He was still thinking of what he'd seen in his father's Pensieve.

His mother had horrified her with many tales from her marriage to his father. Hermione would never believe that Severus could be as cold as that man had been to his wife. Memories from their months together came back to her, and she realized that she was wrong. Severus had been cold. He would have never married her, not if things had continued as they were. *That's not right. He was changing. It was a slow change, but things were getting better all the while. He would have grown to love me, just as he does now.*

Severus' voice broke into her thoughts. "I wonder if you're a male heir," he said in a low voice, obviously not wanting to wake her. His pondering made her realize that his hand was still circling her stomach, as if searching for the child. She nearly gasped as he said, "I hate you."

*Why would he hate our child?* Her mind screamed, and she felt tears beginning to prickle behind her closed eyelids. *He hates the baby. How could I have ever hoped or believed otherwise?* His lips pressing against her shoulder failed to soothe her. The sinking feelings of despair and regret were clouding her thoughts.

"I hate what you did to my mum," he whispered, kissing her shoulder again. "I hate what you did to me."

Relief swept through Hermione. Severus didn't hate their child. He was thinking of his father and the loathing he felt for him. Accidentally, a sound of appeasement slipped from her lips.

"Are you awake?" His silky voice glided over her shoulder.

"Mmmhmmm," she mumbled. She noted that the hand on her belly had stilled, and he was backing away from her. She deftly pulled the hand to her lips to kiss it and snuggled into his body. "Love you."

"I know," he replied after a lengthy pause.

She found the courage to ask what had been on her mind since she'd gone to his study the previous evening. "Would you like to talk about anything?"

"No," came the clipped reply.

"I'm not trying to pry. I simply want you to know that I'm here for you if you need me," she said softly, reaching for her wand. *Lumos!* Several lamps lit at once. She scooted away from him.

"Where are you going at this early hour?"

"Just to the loo." She washed her body, tamed her hair, and brushed her teeth as quickly as she could. She didn't want him to leave the bed just yet. There had been a moment of disappointment after she'd told him that she loved him. When he began to speak again after such a long pause, she'd thought briefly that he was finally going to let her know that he did love her as well. The love might not be as strong as what she felt for him, but it was a start. She wanted to thank the Lord that it was his father he'd been thinking of when he'd talked of his loathing.

Hermione didn't know if she'd be able to live with him if he hated their child. She'd not allow him to bully any children the way his father had. For a brief moment, she wished that she had read through each parchment that she'd collected for him from the secret room. Those were his father's words. Maybe there was more to the story than what his mother had told. Severus seemed so quiet and reserved. Even in their lovemaking, he'd not been as fervent as normal. She supposed that he'd needed understanding and tenderness after all he'd witnessed.

When she entered the room again, she smiled, seeing his form still upon the bed, snugly burrowed under the duvet. "Severus?" she called softly. There was no reply. She wondered if he was truly asleep or feigning, worried that she'd pester him with questions. No matter how much she longed to discuss what he'd seen or what he was feeling, she'd have to quell the temptation to ask. He would come to her when he was ready.

She slid one hand beneath the duvet and fondled his slight erection. The more firmly her hand prodded, the harder he became. Without thinking, she moved beneath the duvet to bring her mouth to meet her hand. The slight intake of breath when her mouth closed around the head signaled that he was awake. He didn't move, as if wanting to see what she'd do next if left unrestricted. The fingers of one hand caressed his scrotum as the others pumped him in time with her mouth's movements. She took care not to take too much of him into her mouth, as she tended to gag if she went down too far. Nevertheless, her tongue laved along what it came in contact with, her teeth softly nipped at him, and her lips suckled forcefully. She began moving up and down his shaft frantically, hoping that he'd climax quickly, as her mouth was beginning to ache. Just as she thought she'd lose the rhythm and have to stop, one of his hands came up to tangle in her hair, giving her new determination to see it through. After another minute, however, she couldn't handle it any longer, despite the grunts of approval from her lover. She moved her mouth away and both hands pumped him for only a few brief moments before she heard his barely audible gasp and felt the hot liquid drops of semen hitting her skin.

Slowly, she continued to squeeze and stroke him until she was sure that he was completely finished. A few moments later, after some maneuvering, Severus pulled the duvet back and cast a few charms to clean himself and her hands and forearms. Without a word, he pulled her into a tight embrace. She couldn't resist asking a cheeky question. "Did you like that?"

"So it would seem," he said crisply. "Dare I retaliate?"

"You don't have to," she said softly, tracing his jaw with her thumb.

"All right then," he said, closing his eyes.

*Damn! I should have said yes.* She sighed slightly and tried to cuddle closer only to find herself turned over onto her back in one smooth move.

His mouth closed over one nipple briefly and nipped its way down to her center. Moving between her legs, he said, "But, I want to."

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Severus closed and locked the study door before moving to his desk. Hermione knew to not disturb him, but her curiosity sometimes got the better of her. He was glad that she'd restrained herself from asking pesky questions. He wasn't ready to disclose all that he'd witnessed. Uneasily, he glanced to the mirror. Was his mother's likeness watching him? The expression on his face caught his attention. "Bloody hell," he whispered. He looked paler than normal, lines of worry creased his brow, and his usual impassive expression was gone. One that showed how troubled he truly was had replaced it.

Part of him wished that he hadn't found the bloody room, that he didn't care...no...love his wife. He was weak. Not weak! Human. He'd fallen for her. He'd become comfortable with her, fond of her, and grown accustomed to having her with him. What trickery had she...no! There was no trickery. "I've been through this a dozen times before," he grumbled to himself. She hadn't wanted to be pregnant any more than he'd wanted her to be. It was an accident. They'd taken precautions, albeit not the best. Things had just evolved between them. He would accept his life with her and any children they'd create together. Could he accept her love? Could he give it to her? He could show her how he felt, but if he gave her the words, it would give her something to use against him. As long as she used them, he had something over her.

"I will not be my father," he bellowed suddenly, slamming his fist against his desk. "My love for her will not destroy me!" He directed his words towards the mirror, as if to make a point. He wondered what his mother's portrait had actually disclosed to Hermione. He knew that he should speak with the portrait again, but hearing his mother's voice and seeing her was too much. He could only cope with one thing at a time. First, he would deal with his father's memories, and next, he would deal with the parchments that the man had left. After that was done, he would go to her...his mother's portrait...and listen to anything else she could add to the new insight on his life.

If Hermione did know most of what he'd seen in the Pensieve, how did she feel about that? "Fuck!" he exclaimed suddenly. "She knows." Those two words were spoken in a nearly inaudible whisper. He hadn't taken his father's note from the door. Therefore, she knew the truth as to why he'd finally found the room. She knew that he loved her.

If you can see this, then you've gone against my advice and have fallen in love with someone.

Severus narrowed his eyes and glanced to the study door suspiciously. Why hadn't she flouted her knowledge? Why had she not mentioned it? Didn't she want to hold it over him? Had she already suspected his supposed well-hidden feelings?

Falling in love will bring about weakness if you don't handle it properly.

When he hadn't returned her words of love after she'd awakened, had she thought any snide things about his cowardice for not telling her. "Cowardice?" He was no coward. He was simply cautious. If his mother had known the true extent of his father's love, what would she have done? Would she have tried to make the rules, take over his affairs, or demand things? *But, she did know...deep down. She simply couldn't handle the way he treated her even though he loved her.* Could Hermione live that way? Would the years take their toll on her? "She's stronger than you," he said, nodding as he looked at the mirror. "She'll fight me. She stopped taking orders from me weeks ago. She even tried to marry someone else to prove a point."

Sudden feelings of resent poured through him. Why couldn't his mother have been like Hermione? She would *not* have let his father break her! She would have not threatened to leave, she would have simply done so. Hermione. She always gave plenty and was satisfied with the little she received in return. He'd never be disrespectful to her again. There would be no other woman...ever. There would be no roughhousing...ever. Though he could not bring himself to voice the words that so easily slid from her lips, he could show her that things would work out for them through his actions. His father's words had confirmed what she needed to know. That would have to be enough.

Pushing those thoughts away, he sat down in his chair and pulled the parchment stack to him. It seemed that his father commented on everything at some point. He'd taken to doing so long before his mother died. He glanced at the top parchment and read silently.

I've slept with another woman, again. She was acceptable, but her perfume tortured me. Not because it reeked, mind, but because it wasn't yours.

Severus' mind went back to his wedding night when he couldn't get an erection...due to the stress that he'd gone through at getting her to agree and the fact that she wouldn't help. He'd left her to seek out pleasures from a paid woman. When the woman had beckoned to him, he'd excused himself, realizing that he wanted no other woman. How could his father have gone to others while he knew they couldn't compare to his wife? For Severus, that would be the time that flaccidity would make itself known. No matter how good the woman would feel, it wouldn't be Hermione's tight, wet, heat that he'd be buried within. He couldn't deal with that. Is that why his father had the wench Polyjuiced? Appalled, Severus knew that he couldn't do that either. He would still *know* that it wasn't Hermione. He looked at the next parchment.

Ella, I'm so lonely without you. I need you. Why could I have not told you before when you were alive?

The berk! He'd realized his mistake too late. Severus smirked. "You should have told her that you needed her." His smirk faded immediately. What right did he have to voice his opinion on the matter? It wasn't as if he told Hermione. He mollified himself with the realization that she knew. How could she not? What were words anyway? A simple look said so much more.

I've killed her. I gave her the last of the Polyjuice tonight. When I told her that I needed to get more hair to make more, she began saying things. She said that I was worthless and horrid. It was your face and voice saying those things to me. I couldn't bear it. I strangled her.

An admitted murderer! His own father! How could he have used and abused that woman that way? The man must have gone mad after Severus finally stood up to him and told him he'd not be the dutiful son any longer. He'd gathered that his father had broken into his mother's coffin on at least one occasion, but this simply confirmed it. What would he find if he looked inside his mother's coffin? Surely time would have destroyed her. Wizards had only recently started placing the Mummifying Enchantment on their dead to help preserve them for many years to come.

Severus has walked away from me, from our life. He won't be back. I am disappointed in some aspects. He's become exactly what I taught him to be. That is disappointing. However, there is hope that he's still got some part of you alive in him, a part I did not force away. If he could walk away from me and recount many wrongs that he witnessed me doing to you, then I'd say all might not be lost. I am disappointed in myself for not having the courage to tell him that I did love you. Still love you.

The bastard had spewed so many lies. His mother had warned him to not seemingly disobey the man, but in the years of pretending to go along with him, he'd forgotten his promise to leave as soon as he could and not truly follow his teachings. It wasn't until he was a young adult that he'd been able to stand up to his father. The man had always seemed so strong, but Severus knew that if he could stand up to the Dark Lord, he could stand up to Talfryn Snape.

Severus will be bringing the poison I requested shortly. It is nearly time to be with you, my love. I swear to make amends for all the wrongs I have done you, done our boy.

"Ha!" he barked. "Is this his way of seeking redemption? He was a coward! He couldn't face me! He couldn't bring himself to hear what I would have said to him." What would he have said? He would have likely been cold and not heard the man out. It was his father's fault though. The arse had wanted to raise a monster. Hadn't he? *Well, you've succeeded father. I am an uncaring...* His thoughts faded away. Even in the safety of his mind, the thoughts didn't hold true. He couldn't lie to himself. He did care. Things did matter.

The next hour was spent going through different parchments, and he learnt a great deal more about these *secret* life that his father had led. How was it that nobody knew? No wonder he'd dismissed all of their workers, aside from the house-elves. He didn't want anyone to know what he was about. The last strip of parchment horrified him more than those he'd read or the things he'd witnessed as memories the day before.

The Mummifying Enchantment that I've created is working well. You still look as lovely as ever, though you're as cold and as stiff as an icicle to the touch. No matter, I have a new warming lube that handles that. Lucky I thought to position you in a most welcoming way before casting the charm. The money that I received as the anonymous creator of the enchantment has been split between Severus' trust and your brother's family. I've donated in the name of his two children. They'll likely realize that I did it, as I donated it in your name. Perhaps, though, they might think it to be Severus that did it. Maybe they will contact him. That's one way to get him to know your family. After I talk to your portrait, I shall venture back down to see you.

Severus backed away from the desk after he dropped the parchment. Was his father implying that he'd practiced necrophilia? "Disgusting," he breathed. How could he have lived with himself? How could he have desecrated the woman he loved? What would force a man to be so low? As horrible as the other things were, the knowledge that he'd likely... He couldn't think of it. Nothing could propel Severus to do such a thing to Hermione.

A sudden vision came to him. It was of Hermione screaming in childbirth and fading into death...some complication taking her from him. He could see himself holding her and even feel the loss that would overwhelm him, the regret of not doing things differently, the anger at the irony of things. He imagined kissing her lifeless lips and looking into her dull eyes. Knowing that he'd never make love to her again or have anyone else, could he be enticed to visit her as his father had visited his mother? No. He shook the horrific vision away. He would accept the loss and learn to deal with it, but he'd never take another lover. He would not violate his wife's body. No, he would keep her memory alive in other ways. He would use a Pensieve to see and hear her. Hell, he could envision talking to her portrait. "Good Lord. Is that how he started?" He fled from the parchments, the swirling mists of the Pensieve, and the solitude of his study.

Severus wasn't exactly sure of what he was looking for until he found it. "Hermione," he choked, feeling the emotion overtake him. "He was horrible! An abomination as a man, he was. It's all too much."

She put her opened book aside, stood up, and opened her arms to him. He went to her quickly, dropping to his knees before wrapping his arms about her waist and placing his head on her slightly rounding belly. "He's gone now, Severus. I'm sure he's had his penance during those years he lived here alone."

He nodded, but he didn't look up at her. What was he doing? Why was he kneeling before her like a weak fool? Thoughts of moving away fled as her arms tightened around him once before she slid down to kneel with him. His eyes met hers, and he saw understanding in them. "Do I parallel him so much?"

"Not that I can see, Severus," she said honestly. "I think his words and teachings have influenced you greatly, but you are not anything like him. Your mother's portrait said things that..." She swallowed deeply. "You'd never be like him. Don't fear it."

"I would like to take some time to speak to my mother's portrait. I've been closed up in the study for so long today already. Would you like to visit your parents?" he asked. "I've need for time alone."

"But, I want to be here for you. I really think th..."

He placed a finger on her lips. "I am asking this as a favor. If you'd rather stay, go on, but I'll not be disturbed for a few hours. There is too much to think of."

"I'll go to Harry," she said.

He abruptly released her. "What do you mean?"

"I've not had a proper talk with him about things since the baby was lost. I think if I'm being forced from my home that I can go where I'd like. I don't want to deal with my parents' questions."

"But, you can deal with Potter's? Is that it? Can't wait to tell him what a bastard I had for a father? Can't wait to tell him that you knew all along that it was only a matter of time before you could entice your former Potions master to fall in love with you? Want to have a laugh on my account?" he asked angrily, getting to his feet.

She remained on her knees, looking up at him with tears in her eyes. "I would never tell Harry about your father, Severus. That's personal. You should know better than that. I love you. Why would I laugh at you?" She swiped at her eyes.

He looked away from her, but he did hold out a hand for her to grasp. Once she stood within reach, he turned to face her. "What if he tries to get you to stay away from me? Will your loyalty to him reign over what you have accumulated for me?"

"Not even death could keep me from you."

Severus blinked at the ferocity of her words. She meant them. What the hell had made her say that? Had she read the parchments? Did she know the extent of what his father had done? "Hermione, have a care with the words you use," he chided.

Hermione mistook his meaning. "I'm not calling on death, love. I'm simply letting you know that nothing Harry could say would keep me from returning to you. I think a visit with a peer will do me some good. Poppy said that I can go about my normal business again."

He nodded. "I shall see you tonight." He would trust in her. There was no reason to believe that Potter could come between them. Severus turned away and stopped. "You do understand?"

"Yes."

The disappointment in her voice made him turn around. "When I am ready, if ever, we shall talk," he said firmly.

"When you are ready, if ever, I shall listen," she rebutted firmly. "I'll be back later." She watched him walk up the stairway and turn towards his father's old room where he'd find his mother's portrait.

Hermione hated feeling as if she'd been dismissed, but she understood that he wanted to deal with things in his own way and at his own pace. Her eyes drifted towards his desk the moment she entered the study. What had shaken her unshakable husband? She dared not venture over, or she might be inclined to have a read. Before her fingers could extract the Floo powder from its holder, she noticed a parchment on the floor near his desk. Giving in to temptation, she quickly made her way over and picked it up.

"Oh, my God," she said after she read the words.

The Mummifying Enchantment that I've created is working well. You still look as lovely as ever, though you're as cold and as stiff as an icicle to the touch. No matter, I have a new warming lube that handles that. Lucky I thought to position you in a most welcoming way before casting the charm. The money that I received as the anonymous creator of the enchantment has been split between Severus' trust and your brother's family. I've donated in the name of his two children. They'll likely realize that I did it, as I donated it in your name. Perhaps, though, they might think it to be Severus that did it. Maybe they will contact him. That's one way to get him to know your family. After I talk to your portrait, I shall venture back down to see you.

"No wonder Severus was so disturbed." Should she worry that her husband might do something to himself in his current state of mind? No, of course not. He was stronger than that. "His father was the creator of the enchantment widely used to preserve loved ones? Why didn't Severus' family ever try to meet him?" There were so many questions and so many things that she didn't understand. Her family thought of her powers as being strange, but they didn't try to oust her or make her feel badly about herself. Families should all be loving and supportive. "Our children will be loved and supported. Severus and I will see to it. This isn't how a true family lives."

Placing the parchment back where she'd found it, she went to the grate again and Flooed to Harry's home. She stumbled into his kitchen and giggled. Both he and Ron were at the table, spoons suspended in mid air, mouths agape.

"I suppose I could have let you know that I was coming."

"Hermione!" Harry said, coming to her side immediately.

Ron took his bite of food and made his way to her. "Just glad to see you," he said thickly, still chewing. "Want some stew?"

"No, thanks," she said, hugging each of them.

"What's he done?" Harry asked, after she sat down.

"Nothing. He's doing some...research. I told him that I would come here to see you." It was true. He was researching things from the past, and she had told him where she'd be. Her mind kept going back to the horrible note his father had written.

"How is it...being married to *Snape*?" Ron asked curiously. "I mean, is he still a right arse? Is he different in private than he is in public?"

"Yes. It's not the same when we're alone, especially now that we're home and expecting," she said, hand absently rubbing her stomach.

"You look like you've put on a stone," Ron said.

"Thanks," she said sarcastically, glaring at him.

"I'm only joking," he said, breaking into raucous laughter. "You should see your face! Don't worry. The weight is coming."

"Great. I come here for a visit, and I get ridiculed by my friends," she said lightly, not able to keep the smile from her face. She eyed Harry and noted that he wasn't smiling. "Harry? What is it?"

He shrugged. "You seem happy."

"You say that as if it's a bad thing."

"It's unexpected," he said, looking sheepish. "I would have thought that he wouldn't have changed. Last time I sent an owl to ask if I could Floo in, he turned me down straightaway."

"Well, I suppose he..." She looked away. "Harry, about the baby, I know it's not your fault, but it wasn't Severus' fault either. Poppy said that it would have likely happened anyway. Well, you know what happened. You helped him get the experimental potion that I needed. I just don't want this to cloud our friendship."

Harry pulled her to him into a tight embrace. "I love you, Hermione. I would never want anything to ruin that. I was afraid that you'd never forgive me for having a go at him that morning. Sometimes I wish that we'd never tricked him into playing the part of the gigolo."

"I don't regret it, Harry. I'm married now. I'm going to have a baby." She pulled away. "I do love him, you know."

A cough from across the table drew their attention to their mate. "I'm going to go have a shower and leave you two to talk."

"All right, but hurry back." She smiled as Ron left. "He never changes."

"Speaking of change," Harry began, "has his feelings towards you changed any?"

Hermione shrugged. "We grow closer each day. He took great care of me when I was bed-ridden. My parents came to stay for awhile."

"Does he love you?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"Isn't it enough that I do know?" she asked cheekily. "I don't feel comfortable talking about these things. In fact, Severus wouldn't like it. I'm sure he feels that what he says or does in the privacy of his home is just that...private."

"Understood," Harry said. "Rolanda asked about you last night."

"Did she?"

"Yeah, she came round with some bloke she's been visiting with," he said, wriggling his eyebrows.

"What of that witch she was to spend part of the summer with?"

"She's been to her place as well. You know how Rolanda is. Does what she pleases, that one."

"Too right. I almost thought that the witch was Vector for some reason," Hermione said with a giggle.

"I think you may be right," Harry agreed.

"Have you been seeing anyone?" Hermione asked slyly, noticing a passion mark on his throat. Who could have caught his attention?

"Well, now that you mention it, I've been friendly with someone. Er...that reminds me, Mione," he said, cheeks reddening, "that I promised she could interview you."

"Me? Interview? Harry Bloody Potter, if you tell me that you've a fling going with that cow Rita Skeeter..."

"WHAT? Good Lord! It's Healer Margaret Richardson. She's the one that created that potion that helped with the baby. She's from Greater Hangleton."

"I'm afraid I don't know of her. Severus said very little to me about that," she admitted.

"Well, I went visiting that day, and when some phials of her potion came up missing, she became suspicious. She remembered that I happened to say that I was there on behalf of someone that miscarried." He shrugged. "I suppose she did a little snooping. Someone from St. Mungo's told her that Poppy had reported a miscarriage here of one twin, but the other survived."

"She questioned you until you told her the truth," Hermione summarized.

"I did. Don't be angry," he said quickly. "She's great. Sort of reminds me of you, what with all of her cleverness, research, and reading. I think you'd like her."

"I'm not angry, Harry. Something was stolen from her, though it was for good reason. I would like to thank her. Without the potion, my baby might not have survived."

"As soon as you are better, I'll invite you over."

"Don't forget Severus."

"What of him?"

"Well, he'll need an invite as well, being my husband and all that," she said cheekily.

"Oh, right. I suppose I can put up with his scowl for one evening. Oof!" Hermione elbowed him soundly. "Sorry," he wheezed.

"Things will change even though we don't want them to, won't they?" she asked sadly. "No matter what happens now, I'll be married with a baby. No more going round with the gang as I did before. I wonder if you or Ron will ever truly warm up to Severus?"

"That's unfair," Harry said hotly. "What about him warming up to us? If you'll remember, I tried at first. The only reason I got nasty was because he was treating you like dirt. Have you forgotten about the way he used to cast you aside after he'd spent the night with you? The way he ignored you in front of all of us as if you hadn't been in bed with him the night before?" He stood up and angrily paced before her. "It just makes me angry that you can just pretend that it didn't happen. A few nice words make it all right, eh? Well, I remember the look on your face, the tears that you cried, and the things you told me! Don't ever ask me to forget about those things and just smile as if nothing ever happened. I'm not the one that tried to bed a whore on my wedding night."

"Just shut up!" she yelled. Hermione had heard enough. She backed away from him, needing to get away from his words. Before she could reach the grate, a strong pair of arms wrapped around her and pulled her back.

"Harry, what the fuck are you on about? You can't stress a pregnant woman!" Ron said angrily.

Hermione allowed him to hold her for a few moments while she collected herself. Harry's words were true. She knew that. It was just hard to hear them so bluntly. She tried to push away those particular memories and months with Severus to another part of her mind while only dwelling on things over the past month.

"Hermione," Harry began, "I'm sorry. I don't know why I said that. It was wrong of me. I should keep those thoughts to myself. Ron's right."

She pulled away from Ron and beckoned for Harry to come to her. Once near, she pulled both of them to her for a group hug. It would likely be the last one that they'd ever share. "You speak the truth, Harry. Things were bad, but they've changed. You'll see that. I don't expect any of you to truly like one another, but I'll have you acting cordially if nothing else. At least while I'm around." She smiled and moved away. "I love you both. I have to get back though." She giggled. Ron's shirt was gone. He must have been undressing when he'd heard Harry's yelling.

"We're always here for you," Ron said. "The arse threatened my life, but he did it for a good reason. I'm willing to let that go and start anew. I'll do that for you, Mione."

Harry nodded. "Right. Past is in the past." He smiled. "But, if he ever so much as..."

"That'll do, mate," Ron said.

"Bye," Hermione said. "I'll talk to him." She Flooed back to their home, knowing that she hadn't been gone long enough to give him time to himself. She'd just bathe, lay down, and read a book. She wouldn't disturb him. She glanced longingly at the Pensieve and parchments upon his desk but left the room quickly. She would not pry any more than she already had. Once under the stream of the shower, she began to mull over what Harry had said. Things had come a long way since those early months in the relationship. He loved her. He'd never said it to her while she was awake, but it felt good to know that he did.

As she manually dried her body, a sudden realization came to her. *He had* told her he loved her! It was just before she'd gone to Harry's. Why hadn't she realized it then? His words came back to her.

Can't wait to tell him that you knew all along that it was only a matter of time before you could entice your former Potions master to fall in love with you?

"Bloody hell!" she said excitedly. "He said it! He told me!" Tears of joy lit her eyes, and she giggled madly. If she ever needed a verbal proclamation to ensure her happiness, that was it. That one slip and the many things that he'd said while he thought her to be asleep would content her. She doubted that he realized what he'd said to her or what he'd admitted. All the same, his words would be cherished.

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Severus hadn't ventured into the room yet. He was still lying on his father's bed, thinking of all that had transpired. He'd realized that he loved his wife. He'd found a secret room. All that he'd once believed to be true had turned out to be false. His father was far more horrible than he'd ever believed him to be. Severus could be more confused than he was, but he had the sense to distinguish between things. His father had loved his mother, yes, but he'd been too much of a coward to treat her better. When the man realized that it was too late, he'd gone mental with trying for it anyway. He talked to her portrait, he wrote notes, he Polyjuiced a woman to take on the appearance of his wife, and he had even done the unthinkable.

What could he tell his wife about his father? Did he really want her to know everything? If she did know everything, how would she look upon him? Upon their child? It likely wouldn't change her feelings, but he couldn't bear to have her think him like his father. He would just have to sit her down and explain things to her. "What the hell?" It sounded as if Hermione was laughing. What would she be doing back?

He left the room and made his way down the corridor to their room. He opened the door just as she plopped down onto the bed to read. She was on her back and had lifted the book above her to read, not noticing him in the doorway. She was completely naked. His lips curved upward slightly as his eyes were drawn to her stomach. She was rounding. Their child was growing. Would he be able to truly feel the child when it moved? As a moth drawn to flame, he made his way to the bedside.

"Why are you home?" he asked.

Startled, she sat up quickly. "Did the shower disturb you? I didn't feel like visiting. I thought that reading would keep me occupied. I'm sorry."

His hand moved of its own volition to the top of her head where she'd tied her hair up to keep it out of the way in the shower. A few tugs had it released and tumbling down upon her face. The same hand moved to stroke her cheek and move a straying lock out of the way. Slowly, he bent down to place his lips against hers for a brief, chaste kiss. "I shall occupy you."

"But...your mother's portrait. Have you been in to talk to her?"

"Not yet. That can wait."

She was unsure if he was looking for an excuse to prolong things or if he truly wanted to be with her. She didn't question it. She sat up and helped him undress. As he moved over her and placed small kisses along her jaw, she sighed in contentment. *Sod Harry and his words. This is all that matters.*

"Hermione," he murmured between kisses around her earlobe.

"Hmmm?"

"Did you read the parchment on the door to the secret room?"

She could feel the tension in his body suddenly. He seemed to be holding his breath, not moving, as he awaited her answer. "I did."

"For me to see the door and enter the room, it meant that I had to...meet a requirement set forth by my father." He traced her ear with his tongue for a moment. "You understand then. You know what it means?"

"I know," she said, giving his chosen words back to him, the meaning clear. He moved to look into her eyes questioningly. She would not force him to say it. "It is enough." She pulled him to her for a crushing kiss. She felt his gratitude as he poured his feelings into his actions.

Her legs parted to accommodate him completely, and he slid in. "We've much to talk about." She nodded, and he closed his eyes. Shamelessly, she watched him as he thrust in and out of her body. He was bracing himself with his forearms, and his head was thrown back, face twisted with pleasure. This was the man that she loved. The man that could bring her to the cusp of reality and back, the man that gave all of himself to her when they became one. The road ahead was a long one, but they would travel it together.

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**Southern's Notes:** Hi, mates. Sorry it's taken so long to update. Some things in real life happened, and I hadn't the heart to write.

The tone of this chapter might feel a bit different to you. Maybe it's the change in me, thanks to the ruddy things that have been going on. I'll be back to good soon. I do have a bit of a dilemma. As I finished this chapter, I realized that this would be a lovely place to end this story. What say you? I know there are loose ends, (mum's portrait, and mum's family) but it almost seems right to stop here.

Of course, I will go on with whatever majority says. I could do an epilogue, leave it, or take them through the complete recovery period, showing his mum's family and their child. I'm just unsure. I hate to see it end, but I just think it's right somehow. Of course, it could be my melancholy mood.

What song have I listened to all day while writing this? Rammstein's (love that a great deal of you know this band) song *Klavier*. It's another haunting song. Sigh. I adore it. Okay, mates, let me know what you think. As always, you can find me at the Yahoo!Group Potter\_Place between postings. Look us up.

## Progression

*Chapter 14 of 15*

Time moves forward for our couple. We see how they mingle with others and spend the remainder of their holiday together.

**Disclaimer:** J.K.R.'s characters. I'm just having a bit of fun with them.

**Thanks go to my beta, Charmed\_Nay, and to all of my friends at the Yahoo!Group, Potter\_Place.**

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Severus sat in the chair and watched his mother's portrait. Its occupant was sleeping or pretending to be. It was strange to see her after so many years. Everything about her, from her hair to her shoes, was an exact replication of the memory he held of his mother. Part of him wanted to be happy about having her around again, but another part of him wanted to not look upon her, wanted to close the room up again. It seemed only just that he would walk away from her as she had done to him. It would feel as though he'd gained vengeance on her for allowing herself to die. One thing he'd been taught was that vengeance was always sweet.

His thoughts drifted to his wife. Sometimes seeking vengeance isn't always the answer. Oh, he'd sought it on Hooch and Potter for their part in the trickery that had him posing as a gigolo, and he'd even made Hermione suffer. Was it worth it? He snorted suddenly, remembering Potter trying to get out of Hooch's clutches and Potter whinging when he thought Draco was going to have his way with him. "Entertaining to say the least," he mumbled to himself. He was glad that he'd had retribution. There was a niggling feeling, however, that he shouldn't have been so callous with his wife. She'd always loved him, and her only crime was that she wanted to be with him. She didn't force him to be a gigolo, did she? Of course, they had set it up too perfectly. Had he not offered, Hooch would have probably pretended to have the idea come to her and asked him to do so. Would he have accepted? Of course. Why wouldn't he have? Sex? Willing partner? Only a pillock would refuse.

Hermione was still fast asleep in their bed. He'd told her that he loved her the previous night. Well, that wasn't entirely true. He'd made sure that she understood that he loved her by pointing out the only way he could find the room was to be in love. She'd known though. She'd always been clever and able to think logically. That was one thing he found attractive about her. What's more, is that she accepted his words without pressuring him to say it. *I love you*. As he heard his voice speak it in his mind, he cringed. It sounded false, weak. He shook his head. No matter how hard he tried to change, the past would always be there. He never would change, would he? Did he truly want to? Perhaps he was simply too set in his ways.

What would it hurt to whisper those three words to Hermione? She would appreciate them, and he'd only be uncomfortable momentarily. It was hard to not think about things the way he used to. Before he'd truly trusted her completely and believed that she truly wanted him, he would have not said the words because he wouldn't want them thrown back at him or used against him. Now, he wouldn't say the words simply because they sounded weak to him, although the words would portray his strongest emotion. He simply didn't want her to think them false or cause her to wonder if he was lying. *She'll know you aren't lying. You were able to see the room only because you love her.* "Damn it," he grumbled. At this moment, he realized his mother's eyes had opened in the portrait, and she was studying him.

Severus stood up. "I'm not ready for this yet." Paying no attention to the understanding nod and the reassuring smile, he simply walked out of the room and closed the door. He made his way down to the living area and summoned his elves. There were other things...more important things...that he could be doing with his time. He instructed the elves to make breakfast and told them that they'd be away for most of the day. Whilst out, he wanted the elves to make some changes to the cellar where he spent some of his time researching. He hoped his wife would be pleased. After he did that, he went to the fireplace and Flooded the last person that he wanted to speak with, but he had to do it.

"Potter," he growled. "Let's talk." He certainly hoped she would appreciate what he was about to do. It was mostly for her that he was doing *That's not entirely true*. Well, at any rate, it was partly the reason. If she were occupied, she wouldn't press him about talking to his mother's portrait. Some things were just better left unsaid. He'd have his talk when *he* was ready and would not be pushed into it.

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Shocked was the only word that could have described how Hermione felt. Severus had told her that they were going out for lunch and a bit of shopping after they had a light breakfast. They went to Diagon Alley where she was able to shop at will. They'd visited the bookshop first, of course, and they were currently entering Gefjon's Gravity Garments. It was a shop for expectant mothers. When he'd directed her to follow him inside, she realized that he had noticed her growing body, and whatever books he

read must have indicated that normal robes and clothing were improper for the growth of the fetus to remain unrestricted, not to mention hell on the mother's comfort.

The owner, Madame Gefjon swooped down upon them immediately. "May I be of some assistance?"

Severus nodded. "My wife will be needing some new clothes soon..."

"Yes," the wizened woman interrupted. She whirled Hermione around, taking in her appearance. "You are about three and a half months along." She smiled warmly. "We've some lovely things here. In fact...do I know you?" Her eyes narrowed as she tried to place Hermione. She looked to Severus. "Your wife?"

"Yes, my wife," he said, smirking slightly. "It was in the *Prophet*."

"I do not read that rubbish," she said, waving a hand impatiently. "They have more lies than truths." She turned her gaze back to Hermione. "Harry Potter's friend, aren't you?"

"I am," Hermione said defensively. She didn't like the woman's tone. Nor did she like the fact that the woman seemed a bit friendly with Severus. How did he and a maternity shop owner come to be on such friendly terms?

"You must tell him that Madame Gefjon thinks highly of him." The woman flashed a broad smile again and tsked at Severus' scoff. "Come with me, dear. We'll go to the back and measure you." When Severus followed, her eyebrows rose, and she whispered to Hermione conspiratorially, "Ever let you out of his sight?"

"Not often," she admitted. Then, she added, "Just as I like it."

"Georgette?" the woman called. A willowy young witch with bright green hair crossed over to meet them. "Get a cuppa and biscuits for our patrons."

"None for me, thanks," Severus said immediately, taking a seat in the middle of the room.

"I'll only have tea," Hermione said.

"Very well." The woman summoned a charmed tape measure that took her measurements. "Tell me the styles and colors that you like."

After two cups of tea and the passing of nearly two hours, Hermione had her new items picked out. She'd warmed to Madame Gefjon once she noticed that she never looked at Severus. Neither did she try to converse with him. The small jealousy left her feeling foolish. There were many things in his past; most were things she'd probably never know about. She would just have to learn to accept some things, but their acquaintance was something that interested her. She would ask him when she got a moment.

"Remember, you can expand them all up to five sizes if need be."

Severus snorted, and Hermione threw a dark gaze his way. "*Idoubt* I will get that big!"

"Some do," an amused Madame Gefjon said. The woman surprised her by hugging her. "Congratulations. We are only an owl away should you need anything else. Your items will be delivered this evening."

"That was nice of her," Hermione ventured after they'd left the shop.

"Yes."

"You seemed to know her already."

"Yes."

"Tell me. Was she a...friend? Girlfriend?"

"She was Rabastan Lestrangle's ladyfriend at one point." He smirked at her shocked expression. "Before you ask, no, she does not miss him, not now that she's married. She never did follow the Dark Lord, only Rabastan."

"Oh," Hermione said, not knowing what else to say.

"Your jealousy is endearing, wife," he said with an amused tone.

She elbowed him playfully. "I was not! I was merely wondering," she said indignantly. "Wouldn't you wonder if I came in contact with some man you didn't know while we were on an outing? Wouldn't you wonder how I know him?"

He raised an eyebrow. "I suppose I would ask questions." He smiled wickedly before adding, "After I hexed him." He looked around warily. "There are so many people here today. I intended to allow you to buy things for our son, but we have time to come back. I'd rather get on with lunch."

It was the first time he'd spoken so openly with her about their child. He'd even said *bur son* in a way that warmed her soul. She pulled his hand into hers. "Severus, what would you like to name him?"

"I have not thought of it." He seemed uncomfortable. "Have you?"

"Yes, only just." She bit her lip, wondering if she should admit what she'd been thinking.

"Go on."

"I was thinking that Darach would be a lovely name. That one name is what got us together in the first place, though it was through trickery." She doubted he would want their child to be named after a fake gigolo's name. She couldn't meet his eyes. She feared she would see regret there. When he made a humming sound, as if in thought, however, she chanced a glance at him. There was no regret in his gaze, no repulsion, only acceptance. Things truly were moving forward for them. He obviously no longer cared how they'd come to be together, only that they were.

"Darach Nicholas Snape. I like the sound of that." He nodded in acceptance. "We'll talk more about it later, but I think that is a worthy name."

"I wonder what Nicholas means," Hermione said.

"Does it truly matter?"

She smiled, tilted her head up, and kissed his cheek. "I suppose not." She giggled as he looked around to see if anyone had witnessed her public display of affection. "You look positively scandalized!"

Surprising her, he pulled her into his arms. She thought he meant to kiss her, so she closed her eyes and leant forward. The loud *Crack!* was unexpected. She opened her eyes to see that they'd Apparated to number twelve, Grimmauld Place. "Severus? Why are we outside of Harry's home?"

"Potter has graciously invited us to lunch. I felt that you would have wanted to come, so I accepted the invitation."

She could tell by the tone of his voice that he was anything but pleased to be there. It made her appreciate the gesture all the more. Hermione smiled. "Thank you," she said, following him to the door. She hadn't mentioned the cruel words that Harry had said to her. She certainly hoped that her friend would keep quiet. It would definitely not sit well with Severus if he found out what Harry had said about their relationship.

Before they could knock, Ron opened the door. "Bout time you got here. Harry wouldn't let me have anything to eat until you came." Her friend's eyes traveled to her husband, and he nodded slightly. "Snape."

"Weasley."

"Everyone is in the kitchen," he said, gesturing for them to enter.

"*Everyone?*" Severus asked suspiciously.

"Er...yes?" Ron seemed uncertain.

Hermione nudged Severus forward slightly, as she feared that he'd balk. "I'm hungry as well, pregnant woman and all that." This moved him forward, but he remained silent, sweeping into the room before her as if he owned it even though she knew he was uncomfortable. "Oh! Hi!" Hermione greeted happily. Rolanda was sitting at the table. The witch smiled and met her for a hug.

"Bet you didn't think you'd be seeing me, eh? Severus went and locked you up... owls come back, Floo unanswered. No telling what he might do," Rolanda said to Hermione. She turned her gaze on Severus. "Sev, old boy! Good to see you. I see things are working well. Married, eh?"

Severus nodded. "Rolanda."

Harry made his way over. "Hope you don't mind. Figured you'd want to see Ro."

"Not at all," Hermione said, waving away his concerns. It was then that she noticed the dark-haired witch sitting quietly at the table.

Harry noticed her gaze and said, "This is my...friend, Margaret Richardson. She's the Healer at that place where Snape and I..." His cheeks reddened with embarrassment. "It's where we lifted the potion from."

Severus strode forward and offered her a hand. "Healer Richardson. I am pleased to make your acquaintance. I do apologize for my underhandedness."

She smiled. "Please call me, Margaret. No apology is necessary. I am pleased that it worked. When you have time," she looked to Hermione, "the both of you, I would like to question you about any effect it may have had."

"Very well," he said, moving back so that Hermione could greet the woman.

"I am so glad that you did. We'll always be grateful." From there, a light conversation ensued. Ron talked about his plans to visit his brother, Charlie. Rolanda said her mystery witch made plans for them to travel down to Cardiff, but she wouldn't disclose who the woman was to any of them. Though she did leave hints, which left everyone wondering if the woman wasn't Vector. Harry and his *friend* seemed quite cozy. Margaret said that after she received a full account of things from Hermione that she would officially mark her as the first test patient, and since it was successful, she could move on to testing others without question from the Ministry of Magic.

Severus was quiet, making polite inquiries now and again, speaking when spoken to, but he remained aloof and seemingly uninterested in their conversation. The only time he participated with interest was when Margaret asked the questions needed for her research. Hermione simply left him alone and didn't force him to join in on their normal chatter, knowing how he truly felt about her friends. She loved that he was at least trying to get along with them. He hadn't cursed any of them. A moment of worry came when they were ready to leave.

Harry said, "Er...Snape? Care to join me in the library for a moment?"

Severus' eyes narrowed. "I suppose I have a spare moment." *What the bloody hell does the brat want?* He wasn't surprised when Weasley followed them into the room. Once the door was closed, he dropped his feigned politeness. "What is it?" he asked impatiently.

Both boys exchanged looks. Potter spoke first. "I was surprised to get your Floo today."

"And?"

"And," Potter continued, "I just wanted to say this lunch idea of yours wasn't as bad as I imagined it could be. I don't like you much. *still* think that she shouldn't have married you, but it's not my decision to make." He shrugged. "As long as she's happy, I'm fine. The past..."

"Will always be there," Severus said, interrupting the obviously rehearsed speech. "Good day," he said curtly, turning to leave.

"That's not fucking fair," Weasley exploded suddenly. "You never did like us...even on the first day of our first term! We aren't asking you to be our mate, Snape. We are just asking if it can always be like it was today. No snide remarks. No hexes flying. No fights."

"If we can be men about this, you can, too," Potter chimed in.

Severus chuckled. *Men? How dare they even...* Hermione's excited face and broad smile came to mind. She had been happy that they were all together. He would do this for her, as she would no doubt ask it of him. "I see no reason as to why we can not tolerate one another's presence. I shall never call on you alone, seeking companionship, but I will be present when my wife chooses to do so. It would be prudent for us to never argue in front of her." He sneered at both boys. "And, do not ever show up at my house without having made prior arrangements."

"Fair enough," Weasley said, holding out his hand for a shake. He retracted it when Severus arched an amused eyebrow. Puffing out his chest, the redhead said, "Er...and don't think you can get away with picking a fight with me again. You...er...took me by surprise last time."

"Never speak ill of my wife, *boy*, and I'll have no reason to attack you," Severus warned. A gulp and a shaky reply, sounding like an agreement, were Severus' answers. He looked to Potter to see if he had anything to add. The boy's eyes were boring into his threateningly. *Is he trying to intimidate me? What an unbelievable turn of events this is.* "Yes, Potter? You've something to add?"

"The only reason we might have said things about your *relationship* is because you treated Hermione horribly, and she allowed it. That's not the Hermione we know." He wagged a finger between him and Weasley. "We're always going to be her friends. Nothing you can say or do will change that. Just don't hurt her."

"I think that I can handle my own affairs," he said snidely. "Is there anything else you *boys* wish to speak about?"

"Nothing at all," Potter said, nodding towards the door. "Let's go."

Severus smirked and left the room. It was admirable that they would try to give him a talking to about things and that they would try to be on friendly terms even though it was clear they didn't care to. He would never be a friend to either of them. He'd meant what he said about the past always being there. To keep the peace with Hermione,

however, he would be cordial to them when associating. "Ready?" he asked when he found her waiting near the doorway having a conversation with Rolanda.

"Yes. All right?"

"Certainly."

"Oh, Sev," Rolanda called.

He grimaced. "Yes?"

"Congratulations."

He nodded and ushered Hermione out the door. Rolanda was the only one there that he fraternized with upon occasion, and he was glad that she seemed to accept his sudden marriage to Hermione. A betraying part of him was glad that the trick had been played on him. He couldn't imagine his life without his wife in it. However, the vengeful part of him constantly wondered what else he could do to avenge the trickery. It was nearly dark when they finally made their way home. It was then that he noticed her swaying slightly.

"What's wrong?" he asked in alarm.

"Just a dizzy spell. Maybe I should lie down."

"I think you might need to eat. It's been hours." He led her to the living area. "All that talking allowed time to slip away from us. Sit here. I'll be back." He hadn't thought to summon a house-elf; he simply wanted to care for her himself. It amazed him how much her presence had grown on him, how much he did feel for her, how much he wanted to know his son. Deciding that soup would be the best choice for a light meal, he quickly got things together, placing it all on a tray, and took it to the living area.

After they ate, he noticed the color had returned to Hermione's cheeks. "If you are up to it, I have something that I'd like to show you."

"Of course."

He hoped the elves had done exactly what he'd wanted. Sure enough, everything was perfect when they descended into the cellar. "I took the liberty of making some changes here. I thought you might like to help in some of my research or simply keep company with me."

"It's...great," she said, looking around appreciatively. "You couldn't know what this means to me." She took one of his hands in hers and pulled him forward so that she could inspect the changes. "My own station! Desk!" Suddenly, she was in his arms and nearly knocking him over as she placed numerous kisses over his face. "Thank you, Severus."

"It's nothing," he said modestly. Inwardly, he was feeling quite pleased that she had appreciated both of her surprises. "Would you care to see what I have been working on?"

"Yes."

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Weeks flew by quickly, and Hermione dreaded the return to Hogwarts. She'd gotten used to being home alone with Severus. Back at the castle, she'd have to share him with everyone else...students, Dumbledore, and the rest of the staff. Things had been great between them. The research on birth control for pets had been successful in all the subjects they'd been keeping records on. She thought it was honorable of Severus to try to get something longer lasting and more affordable on the market. Once he got approved, people would have a new potion that would temporarily sterilize their male familiars. They would only need two doses per year, instead of the current three. Any improvement on the quality, price, and quantity would be well received. She remembered his words months before.

*Some places that I've been to are overrun with animals. I just think that unwanted offspring should never see the light of day. This would prevent the problem before it started. Mind, these are usually alleys or poor villages. I think I can make something that even they can afford and still make a few Galleons.*

Whether he'd ever admit it, he was a good man underneath his apathetic exterior. Yes, he was intent on making money, but the reasoning behind his plans gave away his good intentions. What would his creepy father think now? Would he congratulate his son or pretend indifference? What would he think of her as a daughter-in-law? Of his grandson? She placed a hand on her swollen belly. She'd had to start wearing her maternity items right down to her knickers with the changes taking place in her body.

Severus still hadn't gone in to talk with his mother's portrait, but since their research was nearly completed, they'd had more time to talk to each other in the evenings. He'd begun to share some of the visions he'd seen and sat with her as she read through the many parchments that his father had left. He'd even brought her down to the family cemetery to show her around and explain which crypts and tombs held certain family members. He'd paused as he pointed out his little sister's final resting-place. His saddened voice and eyes still haunted her thoughts.

*"This...is Samara. She would have been a lovely child had she lived. Her face..." His voice trailed away. "Well, this is where she is. Come along."*

It was the second time that Hermione had ever heard his voice crack. The first time had been when he'd admitted that he'd seen his mother's portrait. He'd told her about the scene with his father as he brought his sister to her tiny coffin, but she could only imagine how it made him feel. Sometimes she felt sorry for his father. He was as manipulated as Severus had been. Had even his father, Severus' grandfather, been manipulated into what he was? Had he started everything? What did Grindelwald have to do with the way the man had treated Severus' father and his new bride? She would never be able to form a proper opinion until Severus allowed her to view the Pensieve. Dumbledore had stopped by for an afternoon the week before to discuss preparations for the upcoming start of the school year. Sensing that Severus would like a word with the headmaster alone, she'd left the room. She'd only heard a few things before one of them remembered to put up the Silencing Charm. Severus had fired off questions as to why Dumbledore kept quiet about things concerning his parents and grandparents. He had yet to disclose any part of the conversation to her, but she felt that he would in time.

"What are you thinking of?" Severus asked, interrupting her thoughts.

"I would like to have a look into your father's Pensieve today." She met his gaze evenly. "We'll have to go back to Hogwarts next week. You said that by the holiday's end I could see what you saw if I still desired to do so."

He nodded grimly. "I know what I said." The words were sharp. "Why would you want to see such tragedy, Hermione?"

"Because it's part of my family history now! This is the family/my son is being born into. I want to know," she demanded gently. "Severus, I'll be fine."

"In your state, you shouldn't see such..."

"I'm pregnant, not weak. I can handle it," she pleaded.

Sighing, he said, "I'll not accompany you. I do not care to see any of that again, and I resent the fact that you seem to want to bring it up every few days. Haven't I told you enough?"

"You're right. I'm sorry." She stood. "I'm going to go up and put away the baby's things that Minerva and I found yesterday at the baby shop. If you need me, you can find me in the nursery."

"Hermione," he said, trying to halt her.

She continued as if she'd not heard him. If he wanted her to see it, he would have to come to her. She'd never ask him again. She wished that he'd understand her reasoning behind wanting to see it. *It's because I love you. I want to share your pain.* They'd had a slight row the day before after she'd returned from her outing with Minerva. While leaving the shop, an older wizard had approached her. The man had been a little intimidating at first, as he'd towered over her during their brief conversation, but after they had begun to talk, he smiled kindly, reminding her of Dumbledore. He'd simply commented on the weather, asked about her pregnancy, and disappeared into the crowd once Minerva exited the shop.

When she'd told Severus, he'd been extremely upset, cursing that he'd allowed her to go off alone without him. She'd argued that nothing inappropriate had happened, but he'd been adamant that she should have waited for Minerva before leaving the shop. She knew that he was only worried about her, but she'd been doing things on her own up until they'd become lovers. She didn't want him to start treating her any differently. She supposed he did have the right to make some demands, seeing as she was carrying his child. Being her husband also gave him that right. She just didn't appreciate being treated like a child.

A creak in the floor caught her attention. She looked up and met her husband's gaze. "Do you truly wish to witness the scenes in the Pensieve?" She nodded. "Come." He held out a hand to her.

She placed her hand in his and followed him down to their study. He led her over to his desk where he nodded for her to have a seat. While she sat patiently, he went to a locked cabinet, uttered the correct spells to take down his wards, and retrieved the Pensieve. He placed it before her on the desk.

Anxiously, Hermione looked between the swirling mist and her husband. "Are you certain?"

"I am." He looked over at the wall to the hanging timepiece. "You have enough time for this. If at any point you feel the need, please come out, Hermione. Don't stress yourself over things that cannot be changed."

She smiled briefly and leant forward. Severus knew that she was sucked into the opening scene of his father leaving the Great Hall. He sat down and watched quietly. What would she think of him? Of his family? Would she regret that her son was born into such a family? *Never. It's what she wants. She knows nearly everything about the Pensieve anyway.* Knowing about something and actually witnessing it were two different things.

When she'd stormed out earlier, after he'd refused to allow her to view it, he'd quickly rethought things. If she never witnessed it firsthand, part of him would always wonder if she'd care for him as deeply after actually viewing the disturbing past he and his parents had shared. She'd not badgered him about the parchments after she read through them, listening as he explained them, not questioning anything too uncomfortable for him. Had she not displayed that tact, he might not have allowed her to view the Pensieve. Such memories were private...mostly embarrassing if he thought of it honestly.

However, if she came through the Pensieve and still looked upon him with adoration, he would never regret allowing her to view it. *After all you've done to her, things that your father did won't matter to her.* What it came down to was that she was right...again. *Fucking know-it-all*, he thought. It was odd how things had changed. The voice in his head used to be snide when he thought of her as such, but just then, he'd swear that it was a voice laced with pride.

He looked towards the mirror and wondered if his mother's likeness was beyond it, watching them and hoping for company. "It's time to talk to her," he said aloud. With one last look at his wife, he made his way for the door. There were many things he needed to say to her. If he never said them, he'd never be able to move on and fully accept things.

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**Southern's Notes** This chapter is a bit short, but I simply wanted to put a few things in...mainly how he'd act towards her friends and show how their relationship is progressing. I decided to carry on for just a few more chapters. It wasn't fair to leave so many loose ends though it was very tempting to let people make their own decisions about things.

I will have at least three more chapters. The next one will detail more about Hermione's viewing of the Pensieve, things always look different from someone else's perspective, eh? I will also have the long awaited talk between Severus and his mother's portrait. I have special plans for the portrait. She'll find a new home soon.

The maternity shop, Gefjon's Gravity Garments, was snatched from GinnyW's story, To Beget an Heir. I beta for that story and asked if I could use it. I was trying to think of a name for a maternity shop when I remembered our brainstorming for that.

## Full Circle

Chapter 15 of 15

We find out what Severus thinks for the portrait and what Hermione thinks of the Pensieve. We jump forward in time and see how our couple is getting on.

**Disclaimer** Not my stuff (unfortunately). Thanks to JKR for creating the world of HP.

**Huge thanks go to my lovely & brilliant beta, Charmed\_Nay. She always takes the time to check over my work even when she has a full schedule. Without her, I am uncertain that my stories would not have been posted.**

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"I'm surprised it's taken you this long to have this chat with me, Severus. The son I remember was always inquisitive and willing to listen to what I had to say. Aren't there things you want to know?" his mother's portrait asked the moment he sat down.

He smirked slightly. "Maybe there are things I do not care to have confirmed, dear mother."

"You have witnessed all that your father has left to you, and I see your young bride is witnessing scenes from his Pensieve at this moment. Do you think that wise?" Her raised, questioning eyebrow brought back many emotions.

Despite the thick feeling in his throat, he said, "I think my wife is a strong woman, pregnant or no. She will be able to handle what she sees and form her own opinions."

His mother nodded in approval. "I gathered as much when I spoke to her. She defended your actions no matter what I said. I've been seeing all that's been going on. I must say that I was disappointed in you. I know that you haven't always treated her as she deserved. I am sorry that your father influenced you so."

"Sometimes," he began slowly, "the things he taught me have helped to save my life. You know that I turned away from him when I was old enough and confident enough to do so. I do not regret that."

"You don't? Don't you wonder how it could have been if your father hadn't been so stern? So set in his ways?"

Severus nodded. "I have...once. There is really no point, is there?"

The woman shook her head in exasperation. "Your wife and child deserve a good life and a stable, happy home. Are you going to provide that?"

Sneering, Severus said, "I see no reason for you to be concerned about my wife and child, *mother*, as I recall you willed yourself to die and left me to learn the ways of being a Snape. You could have lived for me." The bitterness he'd been feeling was evident and embedded into his words. "You didn't care enough to stay for me. What right have you to pretend to worry now?"

"That is something I cannot answer. I can only go by what your father told me, his ideas on what I was thinking. Honestly, I couldn't imagine leaving you, but I had an entire pregnancy that I have no recollection of." Out of habit, Severus crossed one arm over his chest, propping the other elbow atop it while tracing his lips with his index finger as he watched the portrait. "What are you thinking?"

"I am pondering what to do with you."

"Sorry?"

"All of these years have gone by, and I have moved on. I think that it would be harder to know you are here." He strode forward until he was right in front of her. "Do you understand that?"

"But, surely there are questions..."

"The Pensieve scenes told me much of what I wanted to know and some I didn't." He looked away. "How could you have stayed with him? What do you think of him now?"

"I loved him for a long time. I always believed that the hatred, the resentment, and the abuse would stop...especially after his parents were killed." She sighed. "He blamed that on me, too, of course. I dreamt of leaving him, but when I would finally get the courage, I would see a secret glance or hear words not meant to be spoken." She grinned in memory for a moment. "I *knew* he loved me, and I stayed. There was always hope."

He swallowed slightly. "Mother, didn't you rather having a strong husband, knowing that you'd always be protected? It seems that would be more important than hearing words. Actions speak lou..."

"Yes, they do, don't they? However, sometimes actions are misunderstood. If I had gone by your father's actions, I would have left early on, not daring to hope. It was the looks and the words that kept me here." She crossed her arms. "You would do well, son, to speak to your wife on this matter. No matter how strong you think you are, you are never a real man until you learn to not shy away from using words."

"Perhaps some women view things differently," he said, knowing Hermione deserved to hear how he felt. He'd done many things in the past. Some of the things closely mimicked what his father might have done, but he'd not been quite as cold. Had he? *Worse. At least my father committed to my mother. I didn't even want to do that.*

"She needs the words, Severus. Your child will need the words."

"You never answered my second question. What do you think of him now?" Severus watched her expression closely and was surprised to see the sad smile.

"I think he never amounted to the man he believed himself to be. He allowed his weakness to ruin his life, my life, our children's lives, and others' lives." She shook her head in disgust. "He did many things in his last years...dreadful things...that I would never have seen as honorable. He became something I cannot respect. Therefore, I try not to think of the things he did after I was created, and I try to remember the times before."

"Denial."

"Yes," she admitted. "I can only hope that my son will never truly turn out like him."

"Not bloody likely. He...he was horrible," Severus said, thinking of the poor women his father had used so terribly. Silence stretched between them. He had his answers. Part of him was grateful for this chat. It brought things into perspective. He knew what he had to do. He simply needed to have the courage to do it. Depending upon how Hermione reacted to the Pensieve, he'd speak to her on the matter soon. "Is there anything else you think I ought to know?"

"My family is an honorable family, and you should be proud to be part of their legacy. I was never able to tell you anything because your father only cared about Snape traditions."

Severus seated himself. "Very well. Tell me about them."

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Hermione sat back to wipe the tears from her face. Severus' father had been a horrid man. Seeing what was in the Pensieve and hearing about it were two different things. Gazing into the fire, her hands moved down to caress her protruding stomach. *That baby, Severus' sister, has to be one of the most beautiful babies I've ever seen. I wonder if our child will resemble her.*

A loud creak, signaling that the study door was being opened, drew her attention away from the fire. The room had darkened considerably, only the fire in the grate gave off light. *How long have I been in here? Even the ruddy candles have burnt down.*"Severus?"

"I am here," he said, stepping from the shadows. "Are you...?"

"All right? Yes." She extended her hands. He took them and pulled her up. "I could use something to eat, I think."

"Really? Is that all you've to say on what you've just witnessed?" he asked suspiciously.

"Your father was terrible, did terrible things."

"Why do I feel a 'however' coming?"

"However, I think he was dealing with much guilt. If he'd only been a man and loved his family openly, he wouldn't have spent the last years of his life that way. His wife wouldn't have been so miserable that all hope had been sucked out of her. It must have been like living with a demontor...all the taking, never receiving. I feel sorry for her," Hermione said timidly. She looked away from his piercing gaze. "I feel sorry for him, too, and I even feel sorry for the both of you...your sister and you."

He nodded. "I spoke with my mother's likeness. We've talked, and I have finally been able to address some issues I had with her, although I fear some things will never truly be answered."

"What else is there?" she asked, feeling as though there was more.

"I've decided to not keep her portrait."

"But, Severus..."

"No," he said, holding up his hand to stave her comments. "I don't really want it here. Not right now. I'm certainly not ready to take to visiting it on a regular basis. I'd say she would be much more comfortable elsewhere, and there are others who would appreciate her presence more." He looked to the mirror. "I don't like feeling spied upon in my own home."

She nodded. "I can understand that. Where are you going to put her?"

"I believe my maternal grandparents would like to have it. She has consented to going there. I am uncertain if they are still living...one or both...but someone may be interested in..." He noted the intake of air. "What is it?"

"There is something I need to tell you," she said guiltily.

"And?"

"The man that approached me when Minerva and I were shopping was in the Pensieve."

"Indeed?"

"He is your mother's father. I recognized him immediately when he came into the room. I'll bet he knew exactly who I was. That's why he was asking about the pregnancy. I'll bet he's been looking out for you all these years. He likely left when Minerva came out because he knew she'd recognize him!" To her, that revelation had been incredible. She'd planned to talk to Severus about meeting them. The fact that he'd decided, on his own, to make some sort of step in contacting them said it all. "He is still alive. I think your idea is brilliant."

Severus shook his head. "If he's been watching, why hasn't he tried to contact me in all this time?"

"Maybe he thought you were living as your father requested, not caring about anything other than the paternal side of your family. I suppose he is the only person that can answer that."

Severus led her to their dining area and instructed an elf to bring them a meal. After helping Hermione into her chair and taking his seat, he said, "I shall send a letter to him to discuss a meeting."

"That's admirable." She gasped. "Oh, feel this." Hermione took his hand and placed it on her stomach. "Darach is a bit active tonight, isn't he?"

His throat tightened with emotion again, and he knew this would be the moment to tell her of his feelings. "Hermione, about us..." He breathed in deeply. "I shall do what I can to ensure your happiness. In the past, I've been less than honorable, and I feel grateful that you are still here despite the ills that I..."

"You don't have to do this, Severus."

He nodded. "I do." He took both of her hands in his. "I've...I mean to say..." He chuckled *I've never been afraid to speak my mind. I won't start now.* "I am glad that you are my wife, and I am happy that we have created life together. Our son will be loved...as you are."

"Oh!" She pulled her hands away from his and clutched his body to hers for a tight embrace. "I love you so much. You don't know how good it feels to hear you say that to me so openly." She pulled back to gaze upon him with teary eyes. "I promise to love you for always. You and our son *will* be contented and cared for as long as I live."

They shared a languid kiss before he spoke. "I do love you." Although it sounded more like a realization than a proclamation, it would do. The intense kiss and groping that followed was interrupted by the arrival of their meal. "I suppose we should continue this later?"

"Definitely," she agreed.

It was then that Severus realized that a feeling of peace and contentment had come over him. Life could and would be better than he'd ever imagined it to be. He'd had a rough upbringing, but that was no reason to be bitter. It was never too late to change things, even at his age. He looked over to his young wife. Nobody aside from Albus Dumbledore had ever had such faith in him. Admitting to her out loud that he loved her hadn't weakened his character. It strengthened it. It was so obvious. He could see that reflecting back at him in her eyes and smile. He could even taste it in her kiss. Letting go of the normal suspicions and wariness he'd held so close for many years, he allowed himself to completely relax with his wife and his unborn son.

EPILOGUE

Nearly Four Years Later

Hermione smiled as she watched her husband speaking with his grandfather. His posture was straight, his hand gestures emphasizing some point or another, and his face alight with conversation. Their son, Darach, had turned three the past winter and had taken to mimicking all that his father did. He was currently waving his hands around, trying to act like his father. Briefly, Severus looked down, smiled at his son lightly, and placed a hand upon his shoulder affectionately while listening to what his grandfather was saying.

Things had been pleasant for them. After he'd finally learned to trust her by allowing her to view the Pensieve, life had been running smoothly. The rest of her pregnancy had passed without incident. They went from simply being married to having a real family. Severus had never been overly sentimental about things, but he'd never again tried to push her away. Without him realizing it, he had become everything that she'd ever wanted and yet so much more.

His mother's portrait had been eagerly accepted by her parents. From the moment Severus made contact with his family, they'd been corresponding and having gatherings. It was awkward at first, but Severus had soon come to realize that he had more in common with his grandfather than he'd thought. It seemed that the man also did work with potions. When the man had told Severus that he was proud of him for his accomplishments, the look on Severus' face had been priceless. He'd never received such recognition before from a *fatherly* source...aside from the headmaster.

The Pensieve had been stowed into the secret room, and Severus had sealed the room again. Hermione knew that it was unlikely that those memories would ever be seen again. As far as she was concerned, it was all in the past. Their only concern was the present and the future. The bond between Severus and Darach grew with each day. Although he didn't spoil their son, he did indulge him. Their recent project had been to teach him to ride his first toy broomstick. He'd had exceptional balance on his first try. Hermione smirked while she thought of this. Harry had been present and began talking about Quidditch skills. Severus had quickly steered the conversation away from athletics, trying to prove that books would bring their son further. The pair never did agree on much, but Severus did enjoy speaking about potions with Harry's wife, Margaret. She was quite renown as a Healer, making a name for herself with the potion that had saved little Darach's life while still in the womb.

"A Knut for your thoughts," Severus said softly, steering their son towards her.

"Just happy," she said, bending down to give Darach a hug.

"They are leaving in a few moments," he said, nodding to his grandparents. "I'm going to bring Darach up to his room. You can see them out." He grinned wickedly. "After that, we shall take advantage of a little time alone."

She returned his grin. "I believe that is a lovely idea." She kissed her son's cheek, squeezed Severus' hand affectionately, and made her way to bid farewell to her guests. She enjoyed their company, but she had been eagerly waiting for time alone with her husband all week. Her parents had spent time with them for a few days prior, leaving no privacy for them. After their latest visitors had left, she made her way up to their chambers. Before entering the bathroom, she peeked into the adjoining room to check on Darach. He'd already fallen asleep. Unable to help herself, she moved to pull his covering up over him. She made her way to the bathroom and gasped. "Severus!"

He chuckled. "Thought we might try something a little different tonight."

"Good Lord! I don't know if I can," she said incredulously. He'd charmed his appearance to resemble that of the gigolo he'd long before portrayed. "It would be like having another man and feel dishonest."

Arching an eyebrow, he asked, "So, you don't want to charm yourself to look as you did the night," he moved closer, "that I took your virginity?"

She shuddered slightly. His silky baritone voice never failed to seduce her when she allowed it. "Do it," she whispered. He brought his wand up and flicked it quickly a couple of times. "What?" she asked, noticing the look of distaste he was giving her.

He flicked his wand again. "I think I prefer to have you just the way you are."

"Grant me the same courtesy," she purred, moving closer to him as she began pulling off her clothing. He took away his charms, no longer resembling the gigolo. "It's odd that you wanted to do this tonight. Reminisce, I mean."

"How so?" She looked down pointedly to her knickers. When his gaze followed hers, he realized what she was talking about. It had been a long time since he'd seen her wear her *Severus* knickers. "Severus Snape, Potions Master of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry." The words were spoken proudly, and the moment the last word was said, the silver entwined serpents on Hermione's knickers unclasped with a quiet clink and fell to the floor. "Mine," he growled.

"Always."

Finis

Southern's Notes: I apologize for the short chapter, but there is nothing else that I wanted /needed to add here. It's been a long and enjoyable story for me. The changes in the characters moved along slowly. I know I promised a couple more chapters, but anything else I would have added in would have been filler. I think simply knowing what happened is enough. I will miss this tale, but it really needs to be over. I especially feel the need to end this after reading the HBP. Not that I don't want to write or read AU stories, mind. I just feel like I should be writing something more consistent with canon. Cheers, all! As always, I can be found, along with lots of friends, over at the Yahoo!Group, Potter_Place.