

Their Death-Marked Love

by *_Levicorpus_*

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Chapter 1: An Unidentifiable Aroma

Chapter 1 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Chapter 1: An Unidentifiable Aroma

"And the steam rising in characteristic spirals," I said enthusiastically, "and it's supposed to smell differently to each of according to what attracts us, and I can smell freshly mown grass and new parchment and," I stopped and didn't complete the sentence. I knew I was turning pink, and I put my hand over my mouth so to hide my quivering lips.

I inhaled the air once more and got a strong whiff of a musky, somewhat foreboding scent which I associated with the dungeons. My eyes darted about the room, as the scent made me alert, intrigued and somehow aroused. Goosebumps erupted across my arms as I inhaled deeper, my hands flat on the desk. I resurfaced as Professor Slughorn began to interrogate me about my ancestry. I rather enjoyed the rest of the lesson, as the professor proceeded to ask us ridiculously simple questions. But when Harry miraculously produced a better potion than me, I was rather miffed.

After class I left the room with huge, frizzy hair and crushed pride. I tried with all my might to prove Harry's potion-making method wrong... all he had was a graffiti infested textbook. I returned to my common room briefly to charm my hair once more, and I was off like a flash...intent on reading my books for Defense against the Dark Arts. I walked out of the room intently reading my textbook for defense against the dark arts. When I had almost reached my favorite reading spot on the fourth floor, I was hit by something rather large, at a fast pace.

My books went flying and I fell onto the ground. Before I could register any of this, however, a musky, seductive scent filled my nostrils, and I closed my eyes to inhale.

"Are you going to move, Miss Granger? Or are you going to wait until I apologize?"

I opened my eyes and was shocked to see Professor Snape glaring down at me. He had a somewhat amused expression on his face as he extended his hand. I took it and he pulled me to my feet with more strength than he seemed to possess. He leaned in to my ear, still holding my hand and muttered,

"Be careful next time,"

I stood bewildered as he withdrew. I watched him retreat, flexing his hand which had held mine repeatedly. I pushed my books into my bag and walked the few steps to the alcove and sat down to read once more, recalling that familiar scent that had radiated from him.

"Hermione," a voice called through my consciousness and I looked up to see Ronald spraying scrambled eggs out of his mouth as he asked me something unintelligible.

"Sorry?" I inquired as I resumed watching the staff table.

"What're you looking at?" he repeated as he swallowed with great difficulty.

"Good Lord, Ronald, perhaps if you didn't insist on eating like a cretin I would clue you in on my behavior." I looked down at my breakfast once more and began cutting my sausage into orderly discs.

I left the Great Hall to go to Charms and then to Potions. I arrived fifteen minutes early to Defense against the Dark Arts and sat at my regular seat. I was alone in the classroom, so I took out my wand and began to attempt to organize my desk with a spell I had read in the library two days beforehand. When it didn't work I became somewhat frazzled, but then a voice directly behind me muttered,

"Too much emphasis on the prefix,"

I set my concentration and attempted to do it once more. When my books scrambled into perfect order and my quill was sitting in the inkwell, Professor Snape stalked past me with a self-satisfied smirk on his face.

"Thank..."

"No need to thank me, Hermione." I looked up at him when he used my first name. He sighed and turned to face me, rubbing his temples. "So, have you run into anyone else in the hallway as of late?"

"No, Professor," I was shocked to hear him *chatting* with me.

"Miss Granger," I silently was dismayed when he reverted to his student-teacher tone, "I have a rather demanding job I have to have done. I have some rather complex lesson materials that I do not have the time to prepare."

"Yes," I encouraged him to continue,

"I previously enlisted Mister Malfoy, which ended in the catastrophe of the misprinted study guides last week," he sighed and turned to face her, rubbing his temples, "I only need you twice a week."

"Of course I'll help, Professor," I didn't particularly like Snape, but I couldn't deny that he had a lot to teach. He probably didn't realize what I was planning to glean from this internship.

"Good. I'll see you after class then."

I took my seat and watched him out of the corner of my eye as I set up a piece of parchment to take notes on for the lecture. Ron and Harry came in, escorted by Neville, Seamus, Dean, Parvati, and Lavender. Ron sat next to me and Harry sat in front of us with Neville. Professor Snape stalked past our table and opened the windows, as though coaxing in a bit of sunlight.

He began his admiring lecture about nonverbal spell work and in the process asked Ron about seven unanswerable questions, docking points every time he didn't respond satisfactorily.

"Mister Weasley," Snape barked from the front of the classroom, "If you must constantly be touching Miss Granger, I suggest that you ask for a clipping of her hair, but please do not disrupt my class. Five points from Gryffindor."

I whipped to face Ron as the droning lecture continued. To see his ears a bright shade of red with his quill entwined in a lock of my hair. I glared at him and shook the feather out, gathering my hair into a bun as the rest of the class snickered for a moment. I incredulously resumed my notes, wondering how on Earth *Snape* could have noticed Ron's quill in my hair if I hadn't myself.

"I expect a foot of parchment on silent curses versus defensive spells on my desk tomorrow," called Snape over the din when the bell rang and students went rushing out as fast as possible, Ron and Harry talking animatedly about Snape's unfairness. I walked slowly to the front of the classroom after packing up my books at a glacial pace; I naturally didn't want any of my classmates to see me.

"So, Professor," I began after clearing my throat to alert my presence when I walked into the back room, "what do you need me for today?"

"A variety of things, Miss Granger, but only one on the list shall be performed now," he smirked to himself as he loaded my hands up with various vials of liquid.

"What are these, Sir?" I asked, but when he thrust the final one into my hand I recognized it immediately. It was a fuchsia liquid with purple bubbles clinging to its edges. It was an extremely hard-to-brew potion that caused its drinker to age ten years for ten hours precisely and then would reduce them to their prior age. Regular aging potions were never as precise as that one, and I was captivated by my Professor's skill.

"You shall name them each and write their purposes on the blackboard for tomorrow's lesson." He called over his shoulder as he stormed across the classroom.

I set to work with the simplest potion first and worked my way up to the most complicated. When I was almost done, The Professor leaned over me and erased something with his hand,

"I do believe that the third bottle would be described as 'cerulean' rather than 'cyan' according to *The Common Potion-maker*, but I doubt sixth years will know the difference."

"Well my judgment originated from the skills given me by *A Modern Potion-Maker's Guide to Color and Naming*, which was published thirty years later than Nickleburn's works, so I assumed it was the more modernly accepted version." I retorted quickly, looking over at him sitting at his desk.

"I am surprised that you have read Spindle, I always thought he was a bit obscure."

"So I am told, Professor, but the man does have quite a hand at potions, having invented the vaccine for Dragon Pox."

"A point well taken," he smiled genuinely for a moment then returned to his papers. I turned back to the chalkboard and resumed furious scribbling.

When I finished my work, it was dark outside. I stepped back to admire the board. Professor Snape read over my writing with a severe look on his face, which lightened occasionally, especially after he passed over my color references. I waited expectantly, watching his shadow dance in the candlelight.

"Fantastic work, Miss Granger, if it had been Mister Malfoy writing this, I probably would have been up half the night fixing it. But this is...not surprisingly...perfect."

"Thank you, Professor." I was shocked at his complement. What had happened to me being a know-it-all?

"Don't think I only have nice things to say, Miss Granger. I must also express my concern that your school skirt is far too small for you."

I looked at him incredulously.

"You *are* dismissed."

I stalked out, not realizing I left my book bag.

Chapter 2: Insufferable Know-it-All

Chapter 2 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Author's Note: I apologize sincerely for the shortness of this chapter. I hope the next will make up for it ;)

Chapter 2: Insufferable Know-it-All

I watched her retreat, her hair bouncing in its characteristic spirals. I regretted being kind to her, but I needed to have her under my watchful eye, lest she become a loose cannon in my class. I couldn't have her undermining my every sentence. Nor could I have her trailing Malfoy and deducing what he was up to— that would come in its own time.

I retreated to my chamber behind the store room, changing quickly into a night shirt. I slid into the bed and contemplated the black hangings. Insomnia crept upon me once more, but my thoughts reverted to the irritating girl who had debated with me minutes prior. Her irritating hair which had softened into orderly coils, her irritating curvature, her irritating slender waist, her irritating innocent eyes all swam through my mental screen. God, she was irritating.

Over the course of the week, Hermione came in to help once more. She bounced in right after Charms on Thursday and was thoroughly distracted.

"Miss Granger, I need you to dye these pieces of parchment black for our next practical lesson on nonverbal spells."

"Why black?" she paused and looked slightly frightened and quickly added, "Professor."

"Must I explain my every choice to you Miss Granger?" I sighed and continued, "Black to white is considerably more difficult than orange to red."

"Then why not leave them white?"

"Because—" I paused, realizing I had no good reason. She smirked slightly, and I angrily went to the back room to retrieve some textbooks.

"Make these automatically flip to page one thousand and twenty-seven when touched, the grey ones must turn to page four hundred thirty-six and the black ones must turn to page three hundred and ninety-four."

She nodded and sat at one of the student desks. I took my seat at my desk and began grading sixth year essays. I came across hers when I sat down and read it over as I heard her softly saying the incantation for her job over and over again.

"...Potion-making—a beautiful and intriguing science—is also made more efficient with the use of non-verbal spells. But the trusting of a nonverbal spell can be difficult and highly risky due to the lack of an auditory medium in which to perfectly enunciate the spell one is operating with..."

I was engrossed by the point she was making. I was amused that a simple response to textbook reading was made into a comparison and contrast paper on sciences and human nature, but I was admiring of her prowess in the subject. As I gave her an 'O', I noticed her look up at me.

"Yes, Miss Granger?"

"I don't want you to give me good grades because I am doing this; I want good grades because I have earned them."

"Well your paper earned its grade, Miss Granger."

A worried look came across her face, a look I must have worn half my time at Hogwarts. I smirked at her confusion and returned to my grading and her to her spell work. Thirty minutes passed and I was finished. She had enchanted two third of the books when I told her that the remaining books were for the first years and didn't really need to be enchanted. She stood, and I was transfixed by her skirt once more. My eyes slid out of focus and sensations came to me, such as feeling sweat-drenched skin against mine, heavy feminine breathing in my ear... and I snapped back to reality quickly to find Hermione standing where she had been before, looking at me questioningly.

"You *are* dismissed." I emphasized the middle word, being irritated at her lack of movement. She gave me an odd look and walked past me. Having a potion-maker's nose I immediately identified the scent of jasmine wafting from her. She did know how to tantalize.

"Severus," greeted Horace as I stepped into my previous classroom, "how lovely to see you!"

"Horace," I inclined my head.

"I want to thank you for giving up your classroom," he said as he extricated himself from his chair.

"It was no trouble at all," I said, my eyes traveling about the classroom.

"I wanted to thank you with some of this."

"Really, there's no—" I paused when I saw him extract a vial of Felix Felicis. Its golden contents glimmered even in the darkness of the dungeon, "My, Horace, I'm at a loss for words."

"I insist you have it, dear man!" He chuckled, thumbing his suspenders pompously after I took the vial in my hand.

I strode to another cauldron and noticed a mother-of-pearl potion. I was entranced by a scent emanating from it that immediately brought my memory back to the images that played in my mind when I saw Hermione Granger in *that* skirt. I inhaled deeply, closing my eyes. I swear, I could almost taste its scent on my tongue...

"I always smell pineapple when I brew Amortentia," professed Slughorn at the sight of me. "What is it you smell?"

"Jasmine," I replied automatically.

"Ah, a great natural aphrodisiac."

"Of course," I said, abashed at my moment of weakness. "I really need to prepare my lesson for tomorrow, Professor."

"Alright, Severus," he paused as I strode away, and then called to my retreating back, "Be sure to use that potion soon!"

I paced my chamber, panicked at the thought of my smelling of The Girl's scent in the Amortentia potion.

What the hell is wrong with me?! I thought, *I hate the little twerp and her tendency to be a know-it-all. I abhor everything she has ever said, and ever will say.*

Then an irritating voice of truth spoke,

Just see how things play out. Give it time...

Chapter 3: With a Bit of Luck...

Chapter 3 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Chapter 3: With a Bit of Luck...

I faced myself in the mirror, pushing my curly brown hair out of my face. I had a habit of staring myself down in the mirror for minutes at a time, just so I might get used to how my eye contact must look. A strange habit, I knew, but through my eyes I was convinced I could see my mind. At this particular moment, all I could see was Snape; with his dark complexion and calculating gaze. I remembered distinctly the look on his face just before I left the classroom the second time I had helped him. His eyes were

glazed over but his jaw was clenched. I wore a similar expression in the mirror as I ran through the first night I helped him and our conversation about the color blue.

That day I had double Potions just before I would help Snape for the eighth time. I finished my brew early, so Professor Slughorn asked me to ladle the Felix Felicis potion into a bottle. I gladly complied and set to work. The gorgeous, golden concoction glittered gloriously as it sloshed into the bottle. I became transfixed with its lightness and ladled more and more slowly so to see it slip into the bottle. When I was on my last spoonful I contemplated how much I would love to try some. But then I heard a loud crash and was startled even more as the rest of the contents of my ladle sloshed all over my hands.

No one noticed and Professor Slughorn had his back to me, helping Neville restore his exploded potion. I was unwilling to have anyone notice me, so I promptly licked my fingers, knowing having not done so would be even worse in regards to the value of the potion. The bell rang as I quickly ran my tongue over my palm and corked the bottle. I handed it to Slughorn, and he beamed at me, saying, "Ten extra credit points, Miss Granger, and twelve points to Gryffindor."

I smiled as I left the classroom. Ron and Harry were already heading towards the grounds, so there was no one to see me as I ascended the fourth floor staircase. I arrived in Snape's classroom directly on time. I felt elated and challenged him mentally to give me a difficult task.

"Miss Granger," he said without looking up from his papers, "I have a rather difficult task for you today."

I listened eagerly as he assigned me a job similar to the job I had had on the first night. I was to identify sixteen different curses and their corresponding situations of legal use. I began immediately, writing so furiously I could feel my hips shaking. When I felt eyes on my back, I whipped around to find the professor staring at me, jaw slightly slackened.

"Professor," I began, feeling as if I should, "how many hours would a half ounce of Felix Felicis last?"

"Oh," he said, looking up at me, "about five hours, Miss Granger, why?"

"Well, I have to admit to accidentally drinking some in Professor Slughorn's class today."

"My, my, then you have three hours left." He kept looking at me with interest, and the urge struck me to continue, "Professor, may I ask you a question?"

"You may."

"What exactly did you mean when you told me my skirt was too tight?"

"Whatever the meaning, you obviously did not take my advisory to heart."

"Did you want me to?" This slipped out of my mouth before I had given it any thought. Snape looked up at me like a dog smelling meat on the wind and briskly walked right up to me so that the top of my head was almost directly under his chin. He placed his hand on my back, causing me to gasp; with this sharp intake of breath I caught a whiff of that familiar musky scent that I had smelled in the Amortentia potion.

"Whatever would give you that impression, Hermione?" He seemed shocked at what he had done, but he was no man to back down.

Is this what I want? I asked myself, What are the consequences of this? How many rules am I breaking? Why in the world must he smell so good?

"The way—" I paused, then whispered, "The way you look at me, Professor, would suggest that I shouldn't trade in my skirt."

"Is that what you want?" He paused, his grip on my back tightening. "The affection of an older man?"

"Desperately."

He leaned in, his looming stubble scratching my mouth. I closed my eyes and his tongue ran across my lips. I met his advances with passion, sharing a kiss far more mature than anything I had had with Viktor Krum. He pulled me in closer and closer, his other hand raking through my hair. I placed my own hands around him in a hug, clutching his back. The rising elation of the Felix Felicis met my nervousness at this moment. This skilled mouth on mine had assigned my homework for six years and had taught me nearly everything I knew about potions. I longed to drown in this man before me, no longer a professor.

"Severus," I breathed as he pulled away for a moment, his eyes still closed. His adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed.

"Yes?" he mumbled. His eyes had yet to open.

"Is this the result of the potion?"

"I hope not."

"Miss Granger!" I looked up to find myself in the potions classroom, next to the potion I had finished before everyone else. "I appreciate the fact that you have finished, but *please* try not to sleep in my class!"

I rubbed my eyes and looked over at Professor Slughorn at his desk, mumbling my apologies. I looked about the room, bewildered, to see Draco Malfoy sitting at an abandoned desk, ladling the Felix Felicis into a glass bottle. The bell rang and I was excused. I stumbled into the hallway and realized I was late to my appointment with Professor Snape.

Chapter 4: A Cocky Keeper and A Dizzy Drunkard

Chapter 4 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Author's Note: At the beginning of Chapter 11 in the American Edition of HBP (pg 217), I imagine all the time being described as about two to three weeks. This chapter and the next take place during that time period. The second half is in the "few weeks" described on page 237. By the way, *Wandless in Love* belongs solely to fawkes_07, author of "Fair Exchanges", one of my favorite HG/SS stories. Many thanks to the fantastic Soul Bound for all her help on this chapter.

Chapter 4: A Cocky Keeper and A Dizzy Drunkard

I returned to the common room grumpy and frazzled; Snape had assigned me a wickedly boring task and would have little to do with me throughout the night. I had come in to the room, and he assigned my task...de-worming moldy textbooks...without looking at me. But when he caught a glimpse of my eye, his silence was broken by a look of terror. I looked away, and when my gaze returned to his sharply molded features, they were rearranged to give the appearance of collectedness. But I could still hear his quickened heartbeat.

I threw my books down next to the sofa where Harry was sitting. He was fiercely scribbling an essay for Snape, and I glared at him as he scratched his messy hair in a feral manner. When he finally sat up to look at me, I merely sighed and rubbed my temples.

"Where's Ron?" I ventured.

"He went looking for you," Harry responded, "in the library."

"When did he leave?" I hoped I could blame my absence on time.

"A half hour ago," Harry said, looking at me as though where I had been could be read across my cheekbones. "He said if he didn't see you in the library, then he would go to that place on the fourth floor where you read."

"Don't look at me like that, Harry." I sighed; this conversation seemed to have no end in sight.

"Like what?" He tried to defend himself, but he knew he was scrutinizing me for answers.

"I just got back from..." I paused, formulating a story, "...from prefect duties. I was patrolling the halls, and some ridiculous fourth-year Ravenclaws gave me a really hard time for sending them back to their common room. Almost too quick-witted, those Ravenclaws."

"Yeah," he muttered. We sat in silence for a moment while Harry put his essay into his bag.

"There you are!" shouted a voice behind them. I turned to see Ron clambering through the portrait hole; he was panting as though he had been running.

"Here I am," I said, intent to convey that I wished I wasn't.

"I...looked...everywhere." He placed his hand on the back of the sofa directly behind me, and I could feel his breath washing down my back. I sat up straighter, and Harry smirked.

"I'll be going to bed now," he said. "I'll be seeing you, mate." He clapped Ron on the back, and I heard him chuckle as he walked up the stairs.

Ron flopped down on the sofa directly next to me so that we were sharing a section of it. His limp hand was dangerously close to mine. I shifted, a rising nervousness compelling me to edge closer to him. I did so, and my whole rib cage rose in anticipation. But then I made the dire error of inhaling, expecting an entrancing scent, something I recognized from a dream. But instead, I caught a whiff of leather that I often associated with Quidditch, and the moment died right then.

He obviously felt the electricity turn to silly putty, and his face fell slightly as he turned to face me. "'Night, 'Mione."

"Goodnight."

The next morning, the three of us headed down to the Quidditch pitch for tryouts. I watched my feet as we walked, trying desperately to remember what that scent was that I had expected to smell the night before. I looked up when Ron began to strut rather ridiculously, receiving giggles from Lavender Brown. I was disgusted by the exchange and brooded about it and why I felt any sort of jealousy towards Lavender, who stayed up at night reading books like *Wandless in Love* whilst gossiping about the exact shape of a certain boy's behind...a habit which was most unbecoming in my opinion.

I sat in the stands without speaking to Ronald; he did not deserve my attention. The git, I thought to myself. He'll probably not make the team, and then he'll have a horrible attitude. And while Lavender is determining if his arse is more heart-shaped or square, I'll have to cheer the big baby up. I buried my nose in my Defense textbook as the tryouts commenced. I came to a page about the Confundus curse, and an idea popped into mind.

I went to Professor Snape's room on Saturday evening mostly because I had nothing to do, having finished all of my homework. I wasn't surprised to find the heavy, wooden door shut, so I knocked and awaited a reply. The door swung open, and I saw Snape's retreating back. I stepped cautiously in, half-wishing I had something to grip protectively over my torso.

"Sit," he commanded as he sat at his desk to face me. I sat.

"Do you need any help today, Professor?" I asked tediously. My voice was shaking with a strange nervousness that had just come over me.

He rested his elbows on the table and began to massage his face with his hands. "I wonder if you have ever heard of the potion properties of jasmine, Miss Granger." His voice came much more quietly than usual, and words blended together.

I accepted the tangent. "Well, I wear jasmine oil on my neck..."

"I am well aware of the fact," he mumbled as he continued to rub his face.

"Oh." I could only mutter a single syllable due to shock.

"Do you make life harder on me on purpose, Miss Granger?"

"I don't believe I know what you're talking about, Professor."

"Oh, stop with the Professor bullshit." I gasped at his informality. "My head hurts."

I caught a sour scent wafting from him, and I immediately assumed he had been drinking. He leaned forward onto his desk and let his head rest there. He moaned slightly,

and I took that as a sign that he needed my help.

"Upsie daisies, sir," I said as I hoisted him up from his chair, slinging his arm about my shoulders as I dragged him to the door I assumed led to his quarters. Anyone observing this would have had a hearty laugh at seeing my five-foot-five frame supporting a six-foot-tall man. I allowed myself a smile at his vulnerability.

I opened the door to see a dark room with stone walls. A four-poster bed stood in the middle of the room. It was adorned with black velvet curtains and grey, woolen blankets. I sat him down on the bed, and he laid back without protest. I observed the bleak room and observed that it led to another closet-sized room, which contained a washbasin and a bath. I drew him a cold bath and returned to the bed. I sat next to him to find that the usually severe professor was humming to himself. I smirked.

"Let's get you into the bath, Professor."

"I said no more Professor bullshit," he reprimanded.

"Sorry, er...Severus,"

"Help me into this bath."

I instructed him to take off his clothes and climb into the bath and that I would be waiting in his office should he need me. I retreated from the room and returned to his office to find the place strewn with bottles of some sort of beer made out of an Australian fungus, which explained the horrific stench. I placed them all in the trash with my wand.

I sat at his desk and allowed myself to grade some second year papers until I heard the bath start to drain. I returned to the dreary bedroom to find Severus clothed in a nightshirt and some soft pants. He was still quite tipsy, and his speech was slurred as I placed him on his bed, but at least he no longer reeked like a dead animal. I patted his chest in what I thought to be a motherly fashion as I turned to go. I was eager to leave the uncomfortable scene, but the drunkard wouldn't have it.

He caught me by the hand and spun me to face him. With astounding force, he pulled me down to his level, and before I could think, his lips were on mine, easing me into a kiss. Something within me melted, and all logic halted. My knees gave way, and I was locked by the mouth with Severus Snape. He pulled me down to lie upon him on the bed, and the archaic mattress creaked. He wrapped his strong arms around me, and I was intoxicated as well, but he was my beer, perhaps a bit less pungent however.

His tongue intertwined with mine, and a rush of emotions built within me. I reciprocated the kiss passionately; we were both on fire. But when his hand slid up my school shirt, my flaming passion induced cold feet, and I withdrew.

"Severus," I said, sitting up. I was still straddling him, and my heartbeat was throbbing as though a lightning storm was taking place within me. "We have to stop. You're drunk."

"I won't deny it," he said, his hands clasped tightly over my hips, holding me there.

He sat up and stared to trail kisses over where I applied my Jasmine perfume each day. I immediately remembered that Jasmine was an aphrodisiac and I cursed myself for that choice of scent; it was obviously not helping the situation.

"I have to go," I said, but my body screamed that I should stay. I knew that I couldn't live with myself if anything happened, and so I attempted once more to pull away, but he had a firm grip on my hips. I leaned forward to kiss him again to try to loosen his hold on me, and he removed one hand to start unbuttoning my shirt. I moaned deep in my throat and forgot my motivation not to kiss him, but when my Gryffindor tie was lying on the floor with my shirt and my red, lacy bra was exposed, I remembered quite quickly. I jumped up, and the clasp on my skirt broke because he had been working on undoing it.

I ran out of the room and grabbed my jacket off of his chair. I slung it over me and ran to Gryffindor Tower because I knew if I went at any slower a pace, I might just turn back.

Author's Note: Please review! Comments are very much appreciated.

Chapter 5: Vertigo

Chapter 5 of 25

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Chapter 5: Vertigo

I woke up the following morning reeking of Australian fungus and some sort of floral stench. I stood, and my head reeled as I faced a split second of vertigo. My skull felt as though a chisel was being driven through it, and I caught the wall just before I went down. I slid into the bathroom and splashed cold water on my face and then realized I had no towel with which to wipe my cheeks.

I therefore stumbled backwards and decided to wipe my sodden face on my nightshirt. I eyed the clock and realized I had missed breakfast *Damn it all to hell*, I thought as I buttoned my shirt after slamming out the door. I could expect Potter's class in moments. The bell chimed, and I felt ready to die. I clutched my neck, and there I found a slick jelly. I smelled it and found it to be a woman's *lip gloss*. I rubbed my middle and fore finger together again and again as my headache came back. All thought was

driven from my mind, and my intense bewilderment faded to a nag at the back of my mind.

I sat at my desk and watched the sixth-years over my steepled fingers as they filed in. Only when Hermione Granger walked in did I ponder the lip gloss again. The way she gave me a half smile before charging to her desk made me recall that something was amiss. Before I could ponder any further, Potter strutted in shortly after, followed by a handful of giggling girls from my own house who were unwaveringly eyeing his rump. I made a mental note to give them all detentions.

I stood, and the action was greeted by another outstanding round of vertigo. I placed my hand on my desk to steady myself and looked up to see Hermione looking up at me with something of an air of compassion. I cleared my throat awkwardly and assigned them an in-class essay so that I could think. They set to work, and Hermione eyed me as I paced the rows of students, noting that Longbottom's paper, as well as Draco's, was absolute shite.

I had paced the entire classroom, but hadn't dared go near Hermione; something about her furrowed brow and set jaw were extremely foreboding. What if she had witnessed me in my drunken state? Though my locked emotional vault, I felt a twinge of embarrassment at my lapse of memory. But I ventured a stroll past her desk nevertheless. I leaned over her shoulder to get a glimpse of her essay.

... *Potions, an admirable science that is far too precise to be appreciated...*

My words precisely on the matter were written on her paper. I smirked satisfactorily, and that was when I smelled it. An entrancing, vibrant smell came dancing through the air around her. A strange shiver went up my spine as some primal urge rose forth in me. Or perhaps something *else* was rising. I tried my best not to show it in my face, so I stormed back to my desk, attempting to make as much of a billowing effect as possible with my robes. I stayed behind the desk and graded insipid first-year essays until I was collected once more. With a mystery such as the current one at hand, that was not a time to have the blood drain from my brain.

The bell rang, and the students, most having already finished their essays, were off like a shot, leaving Hermione in the back, writing furiously.

"I'm almost done, Professor!" she called from the back of the room.

"You'll be late to your next class," I responded coldly.

"I have a free period after this," she said, her left hand hovering in the air as she made a final mark with her quill. She smiled at it, and I felt my stomach lurch *What in the name of Hecate is happening to me?*

She handed me the essay, and when her warm, brown eyes met mine, I knew I had to speak.

"Hermio—Miss Granger," I corrected myself, "may I have a word?"

"Yes, sir," she responded breathlessly as she turned to face me.

"Did you," I paused, reaching into the deep fathoms of my mind for a plan, "do you mind staying here for a bit?"

"No, sir," she responded with a mischievous twinkle in her eye. "Do you have a task for me?"

"Of a sort, Miss Granger," I responded, realizing I had no reason not to ask her what she knew. I sighed before continuing, "I seem to have drank more than my fair share of beer yesterday. Did you happen to have been around my office to help me—with school matters?"

"Well," a battle seemed to be taking place behind those honey-flecked eyes, "yes, sir, I was." An irritating grin played at her mouth every time she said the word 'sir'.

"Are you aware of the art of Legilimency, Miss Granger?" I heaved a sigh; this was the only way.

"I daresay I am, Professor Snape." She paused. "Do you wish to see what happened yesterday in my mind?"

The girl was too damn smart for her own good.

"Yes."

"Then I give you permission." She inclined her head, blushing slightly.

I nodded back and muttered the incantation. I dove into her thoughts, leaving my earthly body stationary behind me. My mind swam through colors and sound that were entirely feminine, nothing like the dark recesses of my own brain. I smelled powder, parchment, freshly mown grass, and a scent I believed I had smelled in my own chambers. I traced cerebral pathways that were far more orderly than those of the arrogant, jumbled Potter. I found my own face looming before me, and the memory began to play.

I was in Hermione's body as I watched myself sitting at my desk, slurring my speech. I cringed internally at the feelings of shock Hermione associated with the memory. My drunken dependences really wore on my nerves as I felt the sensation of carrying my own body into my chamber from Hermione's frame. I ran myself a bath and smirked at my own drunkenness. *Good lord*, Hermione's voice echoed through my mind, *he's humming*. The memory fast-forwarded, and I was straddling myself, feeling my own tongue in Hermione's mouth, feeling my own terse body beneath me. I was disgusted and chose to delve farther into the memory, and I found myself running through the corridor, slightly cold due to lack of clothes.

I extricated myself from her mind quickly to find Hermione blushing before me profusely. I was silent for once, and we avoided each other's gaze. I reached my hand to my neck once more and felt remnants of her lip gloss were still there. I smirked, fighting back thoughts of, *Severus, you old dog*, with a mental stick. I looked up to see the girl before me, and I realized that I had almost *had* her. Her lip quivered with embarrassment. I actually felt somewhat guilty.

"I believe apologies are in order," I began, bemoaning my obligation to end it there.

"Oh, no," she practically wailed at me. "You know you want this, Severus."

I could hardly deny it; growing electricity filled the air of deeds not yet completed. She had a wild ferocity in her eyes that I stood to look into. Despite the vertigo, I was spinning, and I placed my mouth on hers. It all rushed back to me as I was intoxicated once more by her scent. It filled me with an urge to forget the third-years that would be arriving in four minutes time.

My hands were clutching her blouse in bunches, and hers had undone a few buttons on my shirt, and she was exploring my shoulder blades. She broke away, licking her lips slowly in a manner that sent my temperature through the roof. She carefully re-fastened the buttons on my coat and stood on tiptoes to kiss me on the cheek. I watched her backside as she retreated, noting my hypocrisy on the issue.

Author's Note: Reviews are greatly appreciated! Check my author's page for updates and snippets of the next chapter...

Chapter 6: Feminine Dominance

Chapter 6 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Chapter 6: Feminine Dominance

I returned to my dormitory and sat on my bed, an amazed smile behind my hand.

"What have I done?" I wondered aloud. "What in fuck's name have I—"

"Hermione!"

I turned around to see Lavender Brown walking towards me. She sat cross-legged on the bed to face me. I looked at her with a furrowed brow—who was she to sit on my bed so informally?

"So," she began in an undeniable 'let's have girl-talk' voice, "you're friends with Ron, right?"

"Weasley?" I said, attempting to stave off the topic for as long as possible. I knew of her infatuation with my brother-like friend. Unfortunately, she shoved out a forced laugh that bit into my eardrums. I winced every time she snorted with newly-conjured mirth.

"You're so funny, Hermione." She placed a hand on my knee, and her sweaty palm on my bare skin made me more than uncomfortable. "Listen, I know you're friends with Ron, and, well"—she lowered her voice and leaned in so that her 'Flaming Hottie Cinnamon' scented breath fell over my face in waves—"I fancy Ron."

"Oh, really," I said, trying to make my lack of interest apparent as I breathed shallow breaths out the side of my mouth in order to avoid her stench.

"I know, right?" she exclaimed. "Like, nobody knows, okay?"

I pondered why that was phrased as a question before asking, "Do you want me to put in a good word or something?"

"Oh, my god, would you?" She sat up on her knees, and in a single glance, I got more than my fair share of her cupcake-patterned knickers.

"Oh, sure, I'll work it in somehow." I groaned, massaging my temples as though attempting to rip the memory of those cupcakes straight out of my head.

"Oh splendid!" she said brightly. "You're such a dear, Hermione."

I let out an uncomfortable, half-hearted giggle as Lavender pecked me on the cheek before she swished out of the room. I awkwardly acknowledged that she had far too much sex-drive to be healthy. I carefully pulled up my grey knee-socks and straightened my skirt. The clasp was still broken from where the drunken Severus had been too eager. I took the skirt off to leave it for the house-elves, though it killed me to do so. I then gathered my things, pulled on a spare skirt from prior years that was a bit too small, and headed down to Charms.

As I hurried to class, a voice called out my surname. "Granger!" I turned around to see Malfoy smirking at me. "Nice skirt, Granger." Crabbe and Goyle laughed stupidly, and I scowled.

"Shove off, Malfoy," I said. I knew I was going to be late for class.

"Oi, Granger, how much do you charge?"

I was indignant at this and turned around with a right mind to curse him. To this, he stage-whispered to Goyle, "Filthy Mudblood isn't worth a silver Sickle. I'll tell you that much."

I was livid. Just as a curse was halfway out of my mouth, Professor Snape came whirling around a corridor and caught sight of the situation *Great*, I thought. *This will be sufficiently awkward.*

"Malfoy," he sneered without a glance at me, "where should you be right now?"

"Transfiguration." He smirked defiantly as though Snape had no right to be asking him the question at all.

"Then I suggest you get there before I am forced to dock points." He paused and looked at his watch. "Three, two, ah." He turned to look at me once they had left as though he had just noticed me.

"Miss Granger," he said cordially, "what class should you be in right now?"

"Charms, *sir*," I said, stressing the 'sir', relishing the look of dismay on his face at the term.

"Oh, well, you best be along," he said before leaning in to whisper. "I need your help tonight."

Before I had a chance to reply, he was off like a shot. His robes billowed behind him, and it gave me a bout of laughs on the way to Charms to think of the implausibility of my relationship with the overgrown bat. I took my seat between Ron and Harry and noticed Ron blatantly ogling my short skirt.

"What are you so happy about?" Harry asked me, causing Ron's gaze to snap up to my face momentarily.

"Oh, nothing," I said. "I just think today's class will be interesting."

Each time I pulled down my skirt throughout the period, a sigh erupted from Ron. I, however, was not the only one to notice that Ron was staring at me; Lavender Brown seemed quite aware of the fact, and she was fuming like her cinnamon flavored breath. It gave me great pleasure to observe my dominance over the situation, and I internally thanked Severus for fueling my revenge against the bitch who shared a bedroom with me.

Author's Note: Thanks to the wonderful Soul Bound, chapters seven and eight are ready to post! You should have those soon!

Darque Hart pointed out that Malfoy should not be going to Potions in this chapter, which makes sense. (I have changed it now) *headdesk* It was also kindly pointed out that Snape would know where he was due, being his Head of House. I knew that, I just thought it would be more Snape-like to elicit an answer from the boy. :D Thanks Darque Hart!

Reviews are appreciated! I would love to know what you think.

Chapter 7: No Pansies Tolerated

Chapter 7 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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*Note from the Author-ess: I'd like to take this chance to thank all my readers and reviewers, especially those who list my stories as favorite. At this point it feels like there are two forms of validation on TPP, one that lies with the wonderful, hard-working mods and one that lies with my reviewers. Thank you for your encouragement and support! I am confident that you will continue to be rewarded by this plot. *happy dance**

Chapter Seven: No Pansies Tolerated

I sighed heavily as I reclined in my chair. The ancient gramophone crackled as it reached the end of an ancient record. I closed my eyes and inhaled the essence of the scotch in front of me. Relaxing into the alcohol was a habit I had learned from my Muggle father, Tobias Snape, who escaped far too often during my childhood.

That day had been a rough one, what with a Gryffindor girl having been given a necklace from a dark wizard store, which I had frequented in the prime of my youth. Wandering down these dark passages of my own mind brought me to a more current impeding bloodbath. I had no idea what exactly the Dark Lord meant by using Draco to accomplish what he needed done. I recalled my Unbreakable Vow to Narcissa to protect Draco and complete his task. But quite frankly I had no idea what the task was. The Dark Lord did not see it fit to have the information stewing in the forefront of the mind of someone at Hogwarts. Bah. I downed another sip of the vile liquid before me.

A knock came at the door, and I murmured an invitation to enter. I was surprised to see Draco storm in, his hair sticking up in all directions and his face red. I regarded him under lazy eyelids.

"Sit, Draco," I drawled. He sat grudgingly.

"Look," he said, drawing up the sleeve of his left arm. An ever-writhing snake stood there to glare at me. It wasn't hot. The Dark Lord wasn't summoning him; therefore, I was not intrigued by what I saw.

"What do you mean to show me, boy? I don't have time for your shenanigans tonight." I sipped my scotch once more.

"I am his servant as are you." He was livid. "Why isn't the plan going fast enough?"

"Draco," I said quietly, staring into the depths of my glass, "sometimes our Lord has things in his mind other than speed."

"Why do you always talk to me like I'm a child?" he screamed, standing.

"BECAUSE YOU ARE ONE!" I responded, throwing my chair back and spilling my scotch. The glass broke on the floor, and the gramophone continued to crackle. We both panted, eyeing each other, both too headstrong to back down. This was the Dark Side; no pansies would be tolerated.

"Angry drunk, aren't you, Sev?" He addressed me as though I was his inferior, as was the Malfoy way. He smirked at the shards on the floor. I felt myself about to crack.

"How dare you?" I uttered each syllable dangerously, relishing the flicker of fear that crossed his face.

He opened his mouth to respond, but before he could, a soft knock came at the door. I stalked over to the door and flung it open, only to find Hermione standing there, looking at me expectantly. She peeked around the corner and saw Draco at my desk, and a look of alarm crossed her face.

"I'll just—"

"No, Miss Granger," I said without missing a beat, "your detention will be served tonight. Mister Malfoy was just leaving."

Draco stalked out and muttered something about the cleanliness of Hermione's ancestry as he passed her. I had to restrain myself from killing the little tosser on the spot. I

stepped aside to allow her in and was thankful that I was not intoxicated. As soon as the door was bolted, I crossed the room and gathered her into my arms, smelling her hair in bunches to calm myself. She sighed and rested her head on my chest. We were at peace for a few moments before she withdrew to set the record to its other side. I groaned with embarrassment as an American jazz song came on. She raised an eyebrow at me as a voice began to sing one of my favorite songs.

I sat on my desk and rubbed my eyes in time to the music. Hermione's weight suddenly rested against me, and she hummed along to the rising and falling notes.

"I'll be seeing you..." she crooned, patting my shoulder. I opened my eyes and allowed a smile to cross my face for a moment. She knew I had been drinking, but I didn't care. There was a woman in the world who wanted me, and in that moment, that was all that mattered.

"Sir?" she murmured.

"Oh, for fuck's sake, Hermione, call me by my first name." I realized that I cussed a good deal more when alcohol was coursing through my veins.

She stepped back to sit in the chair next to me. "What is this really?"

"American jazz," I responded as I sat on the other side of the desk.

"I mean what are we?"

Oh, no. The dreaded question. Where do you *see* us going? When are *we* going to take the next step? What do you think about *us* and *our* relationship? I groaned and fell back to rubbing my temples. The answer was that I had no idea what was going on between the girl before me and myself.

"What do you want me to say, Hermione?" I sighed, feigning irritation.

"I want to know what you think!" she wailed, tears welling in her eyes. "I've suffered quite a bit of guilt about this, and I'll have you know—"

"Have me know what, Hermione?" I interrupted. "That I'm not good enough for you? I have already faced that, and it won't come as a surprise when you leave!"

"Who said I was leaving?" she cried. I was shocked; I had never seen her this way. She was usually so rational, so grounded.

"Look," I responded, "I don't have time," *Ugh*, I thought, *the dreaded excuse once more*, "for the games of a silly little girl. If you have your sights set on bumbling, blundering Ron Weasley, then be my guest. I look forward to meeting your freckled, bushy-haired children."

"That was harsh." Ah, yes, some of the fight I required at last.

"Yes, my dear, I am a bitter old man who happens to say bitter things."

"Especially when drunk," she muttered under her breath. She had a point.

I panicked; I wasn't scaring her off. "Listen, what happened between us was a mistake, a bloody mistake. If you thought there was any type of affection involved, you were wrong. I am sorry if you feel that I have taken advantage of you, and you may hold me to the full penalty of the law if you desire."

She looked murderous. She looked up at the ceiling so to prevent tears from tumbling down her cheeks. I felt a pang of guilt, but not much more.

"I think you're going to regret this, Severus," she whispered

"You are a student; you may not address me so informally."

She laughed bitterly at this.

"Please get out of my office."

"Gladly."

And with that, she stalked to the door, unbolted it, and slammed it behind her. I didn't catch a trace of a sob from the other side, as I had expected to. The girl was a mystery.

Chapter 8: Knowledge of Self-femininity

Chapter 8 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Chapter Eight: Knowledge of Self-femininity

I didn't cry until I reached my dormitory, where I fell upon my bed in a heap of tears. I buried my head in my pillow and recounted my idiocy with each hitched breath. I

stayed up half the night feeling unclean, damaged, and unworthy. I contemplated every last incriminating word I had said while my tears ran hot into my ears. When the morning dawned, I looked out my window and thought I saw someone in black stalking across the grass, but it was only my imagination.

"Today is Gryffindor's Quidditch match against Slytherin!" called a shrill voice as Lavender leapt out of her bed, stretching languidly. I eyed her angrily as I pulled on my weekend clothes. She wore a pink tank top and a miniskirt. I donned a red turtleneck and Muggle jeans.

We made our way down to the pitch, and I was fuming over the fact that Harry had spiked Ron's drink with Felix Felicis. Such flagrant rule breaking perturbed me to the breaking point. I walked alone with my arms wrapped around my middle. When I made my way into the stands, Severus stormed past me, wearing a brooding expression. I rolled my eyes, sat down by myself, and began to etch shapes into the wood with my fingernail.

When I came back into the castle, I decided to take the long route back to the common room so to avoid the ridiculous celebrators. My traitorous feet led me past Severus' office, and that was where I sat down to let my tears spill alone. He wasn't inside, but I could hear the gramophone crackling. I rested my head against the stone wall as I stared up at the ceiling. The tears streamed down their familiar passageway to my ears.

When I picked myself up finally, I strolled back to the common room. But instead of finding comfort in the celebration, I saw Lavender Brown achieving her year-long wish. She was lip-locked with Ron, and tears welled at my eyes once more. Why did such an objectionable girl get to be happy? I stormed out to find an empty classroom.

I conjured some golden songbirds, and they merrily swarmed about my head as I sobbed. I waited for the little fellows to cheer me up, but was interrupted when Harry came in to talk to me. He complemented my spell work, and his awkward attempt to cheer me up hardly permeated my grief. I brought up the subject of Ron, surprising even myself by the fact that I was mad at him. I didn't even feel that way about him anymore, but just as I attempted to pursue the subject further, we were interrupted by none other than the cheery couple themselves.

Lavender slipped out immediately, but Ron stuck around. I loathed him and all the awkward energy in the room. I stood to leave, but realized I couldn't go without a fight. I turned and set the birds upon Ron. I did not stay to see the result.

The next week passed in a tidal wave of tears. I spoke to Harry in the evenings after my homework and avoided Ron entirely so as to not have to witness him all over Lavender. I never raised my hand in Defense Against the Dark Arts and never helped Snape after class. But one Friday, I made the mistake of being the last to leave the classroom. As I walked down the aisle though the double desks, a hand caught mine.

I whipped around as my blood ran cold. Severus' warm, dry hand encircled mine. I looked into his fathomless, black eyes and willed tears not to spring into mine.

"It looks like you've been crying, Hermione," he said softly, avoiding my gaze.

"Oh," I responded, matching his soft tone.

"Listen," he sighed and continued reluctantly, "maybe I was wrong; maybe we should give this a try."

I looked up. Was the cold, distant Potions master being romantic and hopeful?

"Now, don't get me wrong," he started, still holding my hand. "I just think that the whole idea was too young to induce heartbreak," he paused and inclined his head, "on both your part and mine."

"I understand," I said solemnly.

"That's my girl," he said with a small grin.

I smiled lightly. I could feel myself rising out of my anguish. Oh, what that man could do when he tried....

"Would you mind staying for a bit? I have some lesson materials—" Before he could finish, I had smothered him with a kiss that he returned with gusto. He carried me to the store room and bolted the door behind us, showering me with heated kisses. I closed my eyes, and the feeling of rising out of the depths met with the rising feeling of the moment. I was flying.

He let out muffled groans every time I moved. He clutched me to him and rocked me back and forth as the kisses subsided. I was at peace simply listening to his heartbeat. But I realized my fear this time; I realized that this affection sprung forth from physical contact, as opposed to a mental bond. I withdrew and led him into his chamber. We sat on the bed, and I laid my head on his chest as he stroked my hair. Snow swirled outside his solitary window. We sat in silence until he broke it.

"Why me?" His voice was genuine and had a ring to it as though it had emanated from a small child.

"Maturity," I began, allowing instinct to guide me for once. "Separation. Those are things I see in myself. It's you because I realized how much you intrigued me."

"What about Weasley and Potter?" he sneered. "Surely they hate me."

"There is a fine line between—"

"Love and hate, yes. So you hated me?"

"Never hated, Severus." I paused to collect my thoughts. "I always knew that if Dumbledore trusted you, then he must know something Harry and Ron couldn't understand."

"Dumbledore saw me for the filth I was and nourished me back to life from someone who had lost all reason to go on. He saw me begin to loathe the Dark Lord, so he knew he could trust me. I had to repay him for giving me a job and for entrusting me with a job no one else has today. I am a spy, a bleeding spy. So weak I can't choose a side. Either way, I would choose death."

"If you chose You-Know-Who—"

"Then I would die with guilt."

His words resounded for a bit. I noticed that he was pouring out more than he seemed to want to. Something about my solitary presence seemed to uncork him. I recognized this with a bit of guilt, but unlocking the vaults of Severus' heart was appealing beyond the comprehension of anyone whose head wasn't resting on his chest.

"So I've seen Weasley around with his latest accomplishment," he started conversationally.

"How in the hell that bitch made it in here, I'll never know..." he stirred at the obscenity but did not condemn it.

"Never liked that girl much myself," he continued. "Speaks the language of the cleavage a bit too often."

I laughed and turned on to my side and drew circles with my finger on his stomach. We laid in silence a bit longer, and the sun sank lower in the sky. I sighed and broke the silence again.

"Why *me*?"

"Intelligence," he said, pausing and clicking his tongue. "You're unlike anyone I know, old or young. There's something invaluable about intelligence accompanied by the knowledge of self-femininity. The fact that you know you are a woman—not to the extent of Lavender Brown, mind you—is undeniably tantalizing to a man like me."

"Like you?" I questioned, sitting up on my elbows.

"A man who is deeply buried in his own mind and in his own failures."

"Oh, Severus." My brows knitted together as I watched him admit his character to me. "You don't understand the good side of yourself."

Now he sat up with interest. "Good side." He laughed. "My so-called 'good side' lies with Albus Dumbledore."

"And me," I said determinedly.

"Yes," he said with a bemused smile crossing his face, "and with you."

Author's Note: Reviews and comments are appreciated! I love to know what y'all think.

Chapter 9: A Walk in the Snow

Chapter 9 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Chapter Nine: A Walk in the Snow

We made a staggered departure for dinner. He allowed me to go first, and I sat at the end of the Gryffindor table with Parvati Patil. She made quiet, dull conversation. The gaping hole in both of our friendship situations acted as a sucking bellows for all sound between us. So I ate my dinner slowly and carefully, peeking glances and half smiles at Severus as often as I dared. I didn't have to eat as much as I had expected. I waited for the throngs of Ravenclaws on their way to study to leave the hall, and I left myself, going to stand by the Entrance Hall doors. I'd brought a roll with me, so I finished it while I waited for Severus to appear.

"Miss Granger," I heard his stern voice behind me, "what are you doing at this time of night?"

"I was going to go to my dormitory to get a jacket," I responded with a coy smile. "I fancied a walk, Professor."

"Did you now?" he inquired, cocking an eyebrow.

"I was going to return to the Entrance Hall in twenty minutes or so," I said offhandedly.

"Now why would I want to know that?" he asked, looking over his shoulder at an empty room.

"In case you want to take disciplinary action..." I looked demurely up at him, and he smiled.

"Maybe in twenty minutes, Miss Granger."

With that, I began to walk up the stairs. I hadn't gone far, however, when I heard another male voice call my name.

"Hermione!"

I spun around to see Harry. I smiled, and he caught up to me. We walked back to the dormitory together. After the first strenuous staircase was scaled, he struck up a conversation.

"What was Snape talking to you about?" he inquired in a disdainful tone.

"Asked me what I was doing lurking in the Entrance Hall," I responded, not looking up.

"Oh." We continued in silence for a bit and parted when we reached the common room.

I pulled a turtleneck over my camisole and pulled a sweater over that. I was ready to go downstairs after I put my hair up into a bun on the crown of my head. I jogged to Severus' office and found him just leaving.

"Hello, Professor," I said, smiling.

"Hello," he said. He explained that I should walk thirty seconds behind him, and I agreed. I walked quickly to keep up as he whipped around corners. Often I only had the indication of a triangle of his robe as to which way I should go. When I went out the front door, I was seen by no one. I saw Snape standing under a tree by the lake. When he saw me approaching, he wended his way to a more secluded grove of trees, and I followed.

The area was almost curtained. The snow fell through in small bits onto the sheltered ground. He sat rigidly against a tree as I lay on my back. He awkwardly scooted forward to lie next to me. The snow fell on my eyelashes and melted when it touched my cheeks. I turned to face him, and he softly cupped my cheek. He then wrapped a hand around my waist and pulled me close to him. I listened to his breathing quicken, trying with some difficulty to keep my own heartbeat calm. I nuzzled his prominent

nose with mine and let out a youthful giggle. When my laugh was merely echoing though the space between us, he sat up on his elbow and began to kiss me.

What began as soft and gentle soon became demanding and heated, as did everything between us. Our ankles were entwined; our torsos were pressed together; our hands were roaming. The snow fell thicker.

"Take out this bloody elastic," he murmured, pulling my hair gently out of its captivity. His hands raked through it, and I saw the snow gathering on it reflected in his eyes. His cheeks flushed red, and so did mine. The cold ground became uncomfortable, and so our kiss broke.

"I can't leave you," he said with a trace of a whine in his voice.

"Nor can I," I responded. We stood together, and he asked me to return with him. I hesitated for a moment and then agreed.

It was late enough for us to return together, and so we took every secret passageway imaginable in order to return to his chamber to ensure safety when holding hands. We arrived in his office, and he led me by the hand to his room. We sat on the bed, and he pulled back the blankets. When he noticed fear in my face, he said, "Oh, no, Hermione, just sleeping," and I was reassured.

I pulled off my jeans once I was under the covers and proceeded to remove my turtleneck and sweater. He shut off the lights to change into his nightshirt. When he slipped into the bed beside me, he stoked my hair until I fell asleep.

I woke up the following morning alone in his bed. I panicked for a moment, but sat up to find a hot cup of tea next to me. I set my pillow against the headboard and began to sip the tender chamomile slowly. He strolled in when I was halfway done with the mug. He smiled to see my bed head and told me he loved it. I asked him how long he had been up, and he responded that he had been up long enough to do some potion brewing in his private lab.

"What kind of potion?" I inquired

"Well," he began with a trace of reluctance in his voice, "things... you know..."

"No, I don't, actually," I said with a smile.

"It's..." he paused – "Now don't get mad at me."

"I won't!" I promised.

"I'm brewing... a contraceptive potion." He flung his hands up in front of him. "Just in case!"

"Oh," I responded, wide eyed. I placed my mug on the table and stepped out of the covers, clothed only by a camisole and small, cotton underwear. It was his turn to go wide eyed when I began to feverishly kiss him. He laughed as he realized I wasn't angry with him. I stepped back and got dressed in my sopping wet clothes. I dried them with a warming spell and finished my tea.

Before I left, I got to see the bubbling blue potion at his work bench. His hand wrapped around my waist as we observed the potion for a moment. I kissed his cheek, as was my custom, and left the Potions master to his own devices for the rest of the day.

Chapter 10: The Christmas Party

Chapter 10 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Chapter Ten: The Christmas Party

I laid back and felt the weight of Hermione's head on my chest with delight. She was humming softly, and I stroked her head lovingly. Christmas was fast approaching, and snow swirled gently outside the window to my bedroom. She had been coming here to do her homework most nights, and I warmly accepted her presence. But on this night in particular, she was worried.

"Severus," she began, "I have to go to that blasted Christmas party over the weekend."

"You sound as if you don't want to," I said warily.

"Of course I don't!" she cried, sitting up. Some of her hair ripped out of my hand, but she didn't notice. "I'd rather spend the night with you or Harry."

"Oh, so now I'm equal with Potter?" I sneered. Talk of that egotistical, little prat always got my blood boiling.

"Don't go there," she said angrily, pointing a finger at me.

"Why not," I cried, throwing my hands in the air. "You just associated me with the enemy!"

"Harry is not your enemy!" she retorted, her eyes fearful.

"I would say so, considering this." I leapt off the bed, showing her my Dark Mark. I wanted fear; I wanted a reaction, but instead, she sprang off the bed and grabbed my arm, pressing her thumb into the tattoo without a trace of fear.

"Don't you whip that fucking thing out at me, Severus Snape."

"I'll do what I like!" I yelled. My eye was twitching involuntarily.

"Not with the woman you love!" she shouted up at me.

"Who said anything about love?" I screamed without thinking. Oh, damn, I thought. I've crossed the line. I'm such an idiot. Why did I have to say that?

There was a moment of silence before she stepped back from me.

"I'm leaving," she said.

She was walking through my work room when I caught up to her.

"Fine! Go!" I shouted.

She turned around to look at me, her nostrils flared. She picked up one of my best glass beakers and hurled it at me. I ducked, and it shattered against the wall.

"I HATE YOU!" she screeched. She was gone before I could respond.

I wound my way unpleasantly through the crowd, clutching a poorly stirred drink. I avoided conversation and eye-contact. I hated parties. The only thing that lightened my dour mood was seeing Potter entertain Luna Lovegood. The mere sight of seeing him so unseated pleased me a small amount. But when Horace pulled me into the conversation, enough was enough.

As the robust man rambled on and on about Potter's talent for Potions, I bit back a sour laugh. I searched the kid's arrogant face, but found nothing to satisfy my questions. I made a few snide comments before I was released to another uncomfortable situation. It was brought to my attention that Argus Filch had found Malfoy lurking in the corridor. Great, I thought, I'll have to deal with that little tosser tonight. Bloody fantastic... as if being at a party wasn't enough... Once the kid began brown-nosing Slughorn, I knew I had to take him away from the group to have a word.

I told him to wait in my office as I downed a gulp of my drink. As I left the party, I saw Hermione running from Cormac McLaggen—one of my least favorite students. I hardly had the time to fight another battle, so I strode down to my office. The contemptible arsehole, namely Malfoy, and I exchanged the usual charade. I rattled off my programmed responses and got him angry enough to leave. I then returned to the party to find Hermione and give McLaggen a detention. Oh, the power of being a teacher.

I found Hermione storming up to Gryffindor tower. I decided to scare her just a bit more before reverting to our newly-discovered companionship.

"Miss Granger," I sneered, "what are you doing wandering the halls so late?"

"Sod off." Apparently she wouldn't have it.

"Look," I began, attempting a new approach, "I'm sorry." I abhorred the word, and it was only for use on rare occasion, but I was willing to do it just to see a smile cross her face. I was a desperate man.

"You were a jerk." Her voice dripped with disdain.

"I open the floor to any other insults you may want to sling." I bowed to her.

"And you could do with washing your hair every once in a while," she said as though proclaiming that she expected a sunny day for meadow-frolicking.

"Anything else?" I inquired.

"That just about covers it," she said happily.

"Fantastic, I have a peculiar job for you in my office, Miss Granger; I hope you wouldn't mind..." I trailed off, leaving her room to respond in a much more welcomed charade.

"Not at all, Professor, I'd be happy to," a mischievous twinkle appeared in her eye, "assist you."

I was alone at the castle for the holidays. Harry and Ron had left for the Burrow without extending an invitation to me. I explained to them that I was going skiing with my parents, but I was going to stay around the castle to spend time nurturing my relationship with Severus.

He and I spent the first weekend of the break reading to each other and taking walks in the snow. We enjoyed the surroundings of the castle for our nightly walks. On Monday evening, he and I strolled the ninth floor corridor together, and we happened upon a bundle of mistletoe.

"Hark!" he said, recovering from a joke I had told. We were both somewhat tipsy with laughter.

"Mistletoe ahoy," I responded, snorting like Lavender Brown.

He straightened his smile and pulled me to him, enveloping me in a warm kiss. When I felt something come between us, I looked down to see Mrs. Norris wedging her way between us, as if reprimanding us for our behavior.

"Quick," Severus hissed, "back to your dormitory!"

"I'll just go to your room—"

"No!" he hissed again. "Filch will want a drink in my office; trust me—you don't want to see that man intoxicated."

I nodded soberly and began the sprint back to Gryffindor Tower.

Author's Note: I abhor this chapter. Abhor. I only post it because it is essential to the plot. *groan* Forgive the OoC-ness; it makes me queasy.

Chapter 11: A New Day Dawns on Christmas Eve

Chapter 11 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Author's Note: I'm sorry for the shortness of this chapter, I'll update soon.

Chapter Eleven: A New Day Dawns on Christmas Eve

I sauntered into Severus' chamber to find him sitting on the bed wearing a black turtleneck. I adjusted my red Muggle dress on my shoulders. It was a cocktail dress, but I saw it fit for the occasion, as it was the only thing I had. He looked desperately up at me and rushed to me, swooping me into a surprisingly gentle kiss. I was breathless, but pushed him away for the sake of propriety.

"Merry Christmas. I brought you a gift," I told him.

"I have one for you." He plucked a small parcel off of the bed and put it in my hand. I set a box in his. We sat on the bed, and he placed his hand in mine. I urged him to open his parcel, and he agreed.

I waited expectantly as he carefully un-creased the parchment I had used to wrap it with. When his eyes lit upon the gold-lettered, leather-bound book, he smiled.

"Spindle's Autobiography." He chuckled. "He was the root of that first argument."

I smiled. He urged me to open my gift, and I took a tender look at the mathematically-precise wrapping. It was green parchment, and I undid the Spellotape with care. I saw a wooden box, and I paused to look up at him.

"Go on then," he said impatiently.

I opened it, and I saw an emerald the size of the fingernail on my littlest finger. It was cut like an oval, and it glittered ominously in the torch light.

"Severus, it's beautiful." I sighed. He took it from me and stood behind me to wrap its golden chain about my neck.

"It was my grandmother's," he said, but before I could respond, his arms wended their way down to my chest, and he began to kiss me tenderly across my neck. I let out an involuntary whimper. He lovingly held me, and my breaths came lightly and quickly. My ribs prickled with passion, and I became dizzy with desire. An aching feeling began erupting across my shoulders. I turned around and cupped his face. I pulled him to me without preamble, and I slipped his shirt off. I then pulled down his slacks, shirking Gentle Hermione in the process. The movement of bodies subsided for a moment, and he pulled my dress up over my head, splitting the zipper. The scratchy woolen blanket irritated my tender skin. He noticed my discomfort, and we shifted.

"Are you sure?" he panted when I was too far gone to resurface. I could only kiss him in response. When we moved away from each other, his lack of presence was more profound than anything else before that point.

He ran his soft fingers through the sweat gathered on my forehead and breathlessly told me over and over again that he loved me. I smiled warmly at the proclamation and said the same. I closed my eyes and fell into a smooth and gentle slumber cradled in his arms.

I woke up to see Severus quickly walking towards me with a beaker full of blue liquid. He poured its contents into my mouth, and all I could do was swallow the vile substance. I nearly gagged. I forced down the rest of it and wiped my mouth. I looked at him with comprehension. It was the potion he had brewed weeks prior. Once that task was completed, he lay back on the bed and invited me into his arms. I went back to sleep despite the sharp pains in my stomach from the potion.

When I awoke again, he was slumbering lightly. I covered him with the woolen blanket and went to the window to observe the frost that had gathered. I drew a heart with my finger on the crude glass pane. Through it I saw the virginal snow and felt a sinking feeling; it was no longer kin to me. I looked down at my naked body and cursed my foolishness over and over.

Shocked tears brimmed in my eyes as I realized that I could never, ever regain what I had just given to the first man who had asked. And that was when I faced that Severus and I could never be together. He was a Death Eater, and I was the treasured daughter of the Order of the Phoenix.

I was unclean. I was impure. I had rubbed flesh with a Dark Mark. I had tasted of a mouth that gave frequent reports to Voldemort. The scent of my perfume had been smelled by the same nostrils that were never disgusted by the scent of blood. My cries of ecstasy had been heard by ears that had heard information that led to the downfall of Harry's parents. I had been looked upon with desire by the very eyes that had seen Tom Riddle gradually transform into a monster.

I sank to the stone floor and let my tears roll down my face. What had I been thinking? The answer was that I hadn't thought. I was sure he hadn't either. We'd been caught up by our bodies. But now every word I spoke, everything I looked upon, was being contacted by a woman who was missing a piece of her heart. I noted that when Severus would inevitably leave me, I could never elect to give my purity to a man who could freely give me his. I closed my eyes, but tears rolled forth regardless. I fell into a fitful slumber. My dreams spoke only of missing pieces, cracked window panes, and doves flying away.

Chapter 12: Two Steps Away From Cruciatu

Chapter 12 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Chapter Twelve: Two Steps Away From Cruciatu

I awoke to find Hermione gone. I did find a letter next to me, however, written on my own stationary. I opened the heavy parchment with a yawn and sat up to give it my fullest attention.

Severus,

I don't know how much longer we can go on. Last night was unbelievable; I don't know if I can trust our volatile relationship, however. I can't keep running back into your arms. There is a war about to erupt, and we will have to choose sides soon. If, after the smoke clears, we are together, then it shall be. But if we are on opposite sides of the battlefield and my heart is still in your pocket, I don't know if I would be able to live with myself.

These past months I have escaped from a normal life to live in a world of lies. I can't go on that way. I can't actively be in a fling when the whole Wizarding world is about to take a plunge; I need my story to be concise and orderly should anything happen.

Severus, don't take this to mean that I don't love you. I merely need some time. I think we should talk about this at some point, but not soon, especially not now.

—H

My heart sank further and further as I read the shaky font and scanned the tear-stained page. The bed seemed to sink under the weight of my heavy heart. I stood and dressed myself in my teaching attire and placed the letter in my pocket. I strode out of the castle and stood at the edge of the lake. I let myself brood under a furrowed brow.

The next month passed with no contact from Hermione at all. She did not speak to me, she did not look at me, and it seemed to me that she did not think about me either. I was not sure what my feelings exactly were towards this recent absence in my life. But as was my custom, I tucked away every loose end and emotion into my chasm of self-loathing. I blamed myself for everything.

At the end of the month, my Dark Mark seared white-hot as I was locking up my classroom for bed. I left the room and strode down the corridors to get to a place where I could Apparate unnoticed. But my plans were thwarted when I ran into Hermione in the Great Hall, quite literally. She stumbled backwards, and I saw that she was wearing the necklace I had given her. I knew that I couldn't have her touch on my mind when I was about to face my Master, so I went past her without a second glance.

I climbed the final hill in Hogsmeade and Disapparated into the night. I found myself in Tom Riddle Senior's mansion. The dark, foreboding place was used when the Master had some grand scheme in mind. I stood in the entrance hall until Nagini slithered in and brushed against my bare ankle to signify that I could come in to the former sitting room.

"Severus," regarded the Dark Lord, inclining his head as I stepped into the room.

"My Lord," I responded, bending on one knee to kiss the hem of his robes.

"Rise," he said. He sat himself at a chaise lounge that would have been lavish and comfortable one hundred years prior. He gestured for me to sit, and I chose the stiff-backed wooden chair facing him.

"Severus," he began. I attentively looked him in the eye as he spoke. "There is a plan in action involving the younger Malfoy. I trust you are somewhat aware of this."

"Yes, Master," I replied.

"You obviously do not know my intent for the boy at Hogwarts because I desire it as such. But you will be needed soon. At my next call, you must be ready."

"To fight?" I inquired.

"Yes, inside the walls of the school itself." He reclined against the back of the chaise, looking out the window. "Great things will happen at Hogwarts." He gave a smile at this.

"Yes, Master," I rattled off. "If you will it so."

"Is that sarcasm I hear, Snape?" I cringed internally. If he was on a surname basis with me, I was two steps away from Cruciatu.

"No, Master," I responded. He was standing over me, breathing raggedly into my face.

"Good," he sneered. "Be ready for your next call."

"Of course, My Lord. I am always ready—"

"—And willing to do what needs to be done, say what needs to be said and serve you as best as I can serve," he finished mockingly. "Where you all get off parroting Bellatrix, I will never..." he trailed off.

"Of course, Master," I responded, giving a slight bow as I stood.

"You may go," he announced, waving his hand at me. I left.

When I reached the entrance hall, I recognized Fenrir Greyback soiling the tasteful area rug. He was snarling and smelled putrid. I tried to step past him, but I wasn't so lucky.

"Snape," he growled, "what's your rush?"

"I have none," I said, stepping back to look him in the eye.

"Good then," he said, but was escorted into the Dark Lord's room before I was forced to respond. I was truly frightened. If Greyback was involved, then it had to mean there was something extremely dangerous about to happen; Voldemort was pulling out all the stops.

I returned to my office in great need of a stiff drink. But when I opened my liquor cabinet, I found it devoid of every bottle. It was entirely empty save for a torn scrap of parchment. I looked at it and saw a heart drawn upon it—and a letter H. I shook my head; the girl always thought she knew what was best for me.

The next few months passed without a sign from Voldemort or Hermione. I therefore reverted to my old habits. I spoke to no one at meals, brewed potions on weekends and gave out more than my fair share of detentions during the week to keep myself occupied. I didn't dare look at Hermione save for one time when I caught a glimpse of emerald around her neck.

The Dark Mark burned more frequently as time wore on. I was constantly alert. If a window slammed shut unexpectedly, I would whip out my wand. Fear lurked around every corner as I imagined what the Dark Lord could possibly be plotting. So it was no surprise that I nearly killed an owl that flew onto my shoulder one night as I paced the grounds.

Hog's Head. Eleven. Do not be seen.

The parchment in my hand was in a script I did not recognize. I did not know what to expect. I obviously would not be meeting with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named in a pub. Perhaps a lesser-known Death Eater was bringing a message. Whatever would happen, I strode up to my office and pulled on a traveling cloak, slipping out of the castle without a trace.

I climbed the gently sloping hill through the dark to see that the dodgy inn was alight. I shook my head and was about to open the door when I was grabbed by a hand and pulled back to the dumpsters. I whipped about, seeing no one. But that was when a stretch of fabric fell to the ground, and I saw Hermione standing before me.

"It was you," I began.

"Who sent the note, yes," she said, flustered somewhat. "Listen, Professor, I need to talk to you about something."

"Anything," I responded, eyeing her suspiciously.

"The potion you gave me, well, I read about it in a book, and I found out that I had to keep taking it."

"What are you saying?"

"If I didn't take three of them per day for three days, it would merely delay—"

"What are you trying to say to me?"

"I'm—" she stammered. "Severus, I'm pregnant."

Chapter 13: Shrouded in Darkness

Chapter 13 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Chapter Thirteen: Shrouded in Darkness

I watched a series of expressions pass over his face as he leaned against the rubbish bin looking very much like he might be sick. I was sure I heard the words 'innocence', 'impregnate', and 'sixteen' cross his lips as he leaned farther and farther on his hand. I wasn't about to feel guilty for telling him. It was not my fault that the potion interacted differently with the magic of an under-age witch. I held my head high.

I did, however, recall that my future would be lost to one decision. And that was what I wanted him to feel guilty for. I wanted him to suffer in the knowledge of what he had done to me. But still I cursed myself frequently and orderly on my idiocy. I was a nitwit through and through when it came to emotions—much like Ronald in many respects.

I looked at him, waiting for him to speak, but when he continued to alternate his gaze from the ground to my stomach, I gave up and turned around, ready to leave him alone in that alleyway.

"How far along..." I heard him mutter, to which I responded, "Two and a half months," without turning around. I stood with my back to him for a moment, and for one sweet moment, I thought he would rush to me and tell me all would be fine. But he didn't, and that was the moment that my life changed forever.

The next night at the castle, while I was doing my homework with Ron in the common room, Harry came sprinting in. He told us he was leaving on a mission with Dumbledore, and he gave us the Marauder's Map and his Felix Felicis, insisting that in case his theory about Malfoy proved to be correct, we would need to be prepared. I was shocked and opened my mouth to protest, but he stopped me before I could say anything. He had a determined look in his eye, and I knew I could not let him down. In his haste to convey his point, he even dragged in Snape, and I placed my hand worriedly over my stomach. If anything was to happen to me, two lives would be lost.

I stood when Dumbledore's funeral had come to an end. Layers of tears were glazed onto my cheeks. The bright sun pierced my care-worn eyes. I cried for Dumbledore, but also I cried for my future and the lack of a father for my child. Ron comforted me, and he obviously had no idea of the turmoil occurring inside me. I was frightened and confused. But still, through the pain and the tears, I felt a determination. I would not become a single mother who lost it all. I would never, ever saddle my child with my mistakes. My baby would have a beautiful future.

I listened to the conversation around me like a ghost. I stayed deep in my own thoughts, plotting what I would—could—possibly do next. I wandered over to the lake and watched the water ripple with the tails of the mermaids. I looked down at my feet and saw a pair of shoe-prints next to where I had been standing, where someone had obviously made a habit of observing the lake. I sighed and realized how many demons lurked in everyone's past. The person that observed the lake there obviously was weighed down by a heavy heart.

I realized I had to tell Ron and Harry. I knew it would be hard—I knew it could end horribly—but I had to do it. I had already told Snape about the child, so telling Ron couldn't be so hard, or at least that was what I thought. I decided that I would speak to him after he and I vowed to accompany Harry over the summer. But I knew I had to tell Harry too. So I took them to our designated tree away from the crowd and explained that I had to speak with them.

"Harry, Ron," I said, wringing my hands and staring at the ground, "I haven't been a very good friend this year."

"Hermione, you know I don't hold the birds against you—" Ron began.

"No, Ron," I interrupted, "I'm not talking about the birds."

"What is it, Hermione?" Harry asked carefully, his hand tight around the locket in his palm.

"I had a relationship this year," I said carefully, just then realizing the weight of the topic.

"Like a boyfriend?" Ron asked, but he was nudged by Harry.

"Yes, Ron, it was sort of like a boyfriend."

"Well, then," he responded, a somewhat pained expression on his face, "are you still together?"

"I said 'had' a relationship, Ronald," I said, slightly exasperated, "but that isn't the point. Something happened between us."

Ron's eyes widened, but he said nothing.

"I'm—" I paused, it was still difficult to say. "I'm pregnant."

"WHAT?" Ron and Harry shouted in unison, and Ron got to his feet.

"I'm going to kill the bastard," he said, looking around. "I'll kill him with my bare hands."

I stood and placed my hands gently on his chest and then sat down, indicating that he follow suit. He did.

"Who was it?" Harry whispered, still recovering from the shock.

"Well, that's not important, Harry. I mean, I'm mad enough at him. I don't need you two—"

"Who was it?" he asked much more loudly, turning his gaze to my eyes.

I mumbled an unintelligible response.

"Who?" Ron asked.

"Professor Snape."

And that was when Ron passed out.

"Hermione! What were you *thinking*?" Harry stood over me. He was livid and looked at my stomach with contempt.

"I guess I wasn't," I replied quietly.

"You were always the thinker, Hermione!" he said loudly. I shushed him when I stood again.

"Harry, don't you think that I'm a bit more upset about this than you?" I asked him, looking up into his eyes. "You can hold a grudge against Snape if you want, but I'm the one who's going to give birth to his child!" My voice quivered. These words frightened me.

"You're right, Hermione," he responded, bowing his head. "I really have no idea..." He trailed off.

"It's okay, Harry," I replied. I knew that the upcoming months would be hectic—frightening at best—but at least there was still one more golden afternoon of peace left to enjoy with Ron and Harry.

Author's Note: That last sentence was a variation on the last sentence of HBP (and so we delve into a world full of events that are almost entirely of the realm of my own imagination!).

Chapter 14: Rewarded Above All

Chapter 14 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Chapter Fourteen: Rewarded Above All

Author's Note: Chapter title is derived from Narcissa's line on page 34 of American HBP. This also happens to be my favorite chapter so far. I apologize for not responding to the most recent reviews, I have been (and still am) very sick so I got very far behind with them. Sorry!

My anger had calmed slightly as Draco and I came in sight of the Dark Lord's clearing in the woods. A bright fire blazed in the center of a perfectly circular clearing. When I stepped into the light, the entire gathering quieted. The Dark Lord caught sight of Draco and I, and he stepped quickly over to us. The blond-haired teen showed a great deal of fear in his eyes at the sight of the bald, red-eyed figure towering over him.

"Malfoy," hissed The Dark Lord at the sight of the boy, "move away."

He was on thin ice. I recalled that this meant I was as well, considering my Unbreakable Vow to his mother. My Lord turned his scarlet eyes towards me.

"Severus," he said, a smile crossing his features for a moment as he looked into my eyes. I stood erect, knowing if I showed weakness he would be most dismayed.

"Yes, My Lord?"

"You have proven yourself above all others tonight."

I merely inclined my head. I kept my face configured into what I knew to be a stoic, unreadable mask.

"You have therefore received my highest praise." He looked at me, and in an instant, I knew to kneel and draw up the sleeve of my left arm.

He took his wand and touched it to his right forefinger. I was astounded to see blood ooze forth. I faced my Dark Mark up to him and focused my eyes intently on the tattoo. He ran his blood over the length of the Mark. My skin hissed, and a searing pain hit me. I bit the inside of my cheek in an attempt to stifle a scream.

My eyes widened as I looked down at my arm. The tattoo was gone. The skull, the snake, the burned ink—it all was gone. All that remained was a long, thin scar where The Dark Lord's blood still remained. I stood on his cue. Before the significance of the act could sink in, a disbelieving shriek came from the darkness. Bellatrix Lestrange ran forward with livid eyes.

Sweet Merlin, I rolled my eyes, the woman has to interfere every god-damned time...

"My Lord," she whimpered hysterically, "he should be proud to wear your Mark! He should be proud to follow you!"

"Bella," the Dark Lord said dangerously, "nothing has indicated to me that Severus is unfaithful. Do you claim to know better than your master?"

She fell to the ground before him, sobbing. She kissed his feet, and he kicked her away with disdain. She lay in a heap on the ground, dangerously close to the fire. Sobs racked her body, and I heard a disapproving grumble resonate from where she had been standing. Her family was ashamed.

"He made an Unbreakable Vow!" she cried. A gasp resonated through the crowd; the Death Eaters were not fond of leaving their lives (and service of the Dark Lord) in such a vulnerable state.

"Bella, no!" cried Narcissa, pushing her way into the clearing.

"He made an Unbreakable Vow!" Bellatrix cried again, crawling forward to grab the hem of the Dark Lord's robes.

"What is this foolishness, Narcissa?" he said, turning his attention to the saner sister.

"I have done something horrible, My Lord," she said, hanging her head.

"What is it you have done, Narcissa?" he asked her, his patience growing short. He was not one to be swayed by female antics.

"I was so scared, what with Lucius in Azkaban, that I made Severus promise to carry out Draco's assignment should he fail." She paused and looked into her master's eyes. "And I made him promise to protect Draco from harm."

The Dark Lord looked down at her coldly. But before acting, he turned back to me. I was still holding my arm stupidly.

"So you were not acting of your own accord when you killed Dumbledore?" White-hot fury flared in his eyes.

"You know I value your respect above all else, My Lord," I responded. He swept over to me and looked directly into my eyes. When we were both at our full height, he

looked down at me still.

“Do I?”

“My Lord, I knew we were running out of time. I had to kill him lest I lose my own life.”

“I suppose so, Snape. It would not do to have my most faithful servant dead.” He turned to the shadows where Draco was lurking. There was silence in which Bellatrix’s whimpers could be heard plainly. The Dark Lord barked Draco’s surname, and the boy stepped out of the shadows.

“Yes, My Lord?” he asked as he bowed on one knee before his master.

“Under any other circumstances, you would be dead right now, boy. But I know that by harming you, I would force Severus to break his vow. I will not have two men fall from my ranks tonight. And so you shall live. I expect you to make up for your father’s shortcomings in the future, Draco.

“Do not get me wrong—you have served me well tonight. Were not for you, Dumbledore would not have died.” Our Lord turned to the crowd watching and spread his arms wide with a smile on his face. “Welcome to the winning side, Gentlemen.”

A hearty “Huzzah!” erupted through the ranks, and a series of pops met our ears as all the men Disappeared, leaving me in the clearing with Narcissa, Bellatrix, Draco and the Dark Lord. He turned to face the four of us, and he conjured three pieces of parchment as he did so.

“These are the coordinates for where you all will be hiding.”

“But—” began Bellatrix.

“You shall come with me, Bella. In light of your performance tonight, I will not have you marring the privacy of my chosen few.”

She immediately became submissive and shut her mouth. He Disappeared, and she followed eagerly without a word to her nephew and sister. The three of us looked at each other and all disappeared at once.

I felt an unexpected torrent of rain on my few inches of exposed skin. I stood on a cliff, looking out over a verdant, pine-carpeted valley. Behind me was a cave with ominous stalagmites along the edges. I looked at my comrades for a moment before stepping into the shelter. Draco immediately set to work building a fire, and Narcissa busied herself with conjuring sleeping bags. I, however, ran my hands along the walls slowly. When I saw a single rune carved into the wall, I whipped around. A strange sensation crept over me. My palms were sweaty, and my heart was pounding like a stampede of stallions. Feelings I hadn’t felt since I was a teenager were sinking into my body like poison.

“We can’t Disapparate,” I said frantically, running my hands over the stone again and again. “We can’t Disapparate.”

“Calm down, Severus—” Narcissa began, but I cut her off, threading my fingers through my sweat-drenched hair.

“We’re trapped. We can’t leave until the Dark Lord lifts the magic!” My voice traveled up nearly an octave. I realized that this sudden poison was fear.

“Surely this isn’t the first time you’ve—” Draco began.

“TRAPPED!” I yelled. They both withdrew.

I sank to the ground, my face into my hands. Long-held tears slipped down my face. The sensation of my own hot fluid against my face broke me. I had killed him, the only man who had ever trusted me. I had killed him, thus diminishing my chances of ever returning from the Dark Side. My hands had killed the closest thing to a father I had ever had. I had murdered one of Hermione’s few sources of protection, thus taking the life of one of the few sources of protection for my unborn child. I had *killed* him.

Chapter 15: A Most Curious Parcel

Chapter 15 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Chapter 15: A Most Curious Parcel

Author’s note: Alas, Shakespeare’s work is not mine. If it were, I would feel more comfortable in tights, would have no problem with eating fly-infested roast mutton, and would be long dead by now.

“Severus, would you please eat something?”

“No.”

“C’mon, Snape. Just—”

"No."

The blond pair turned their gaze back to the mouth of the cave. It was still pouring rain outside. It had been a whole day alone in the shallow cave, and I was going mad. With each passing moment, I recognized more and more the weight of being away from society. Hermione was pregnant and in the care of Potter and Weasley, captains of the Incompetent Arseholes Association. And I, Severus Snape, the father of her child, was stuck in a bloody cave in the middle of Germany.

"Is that an owl?" Draco asked suddenly, pointing to a snowy white figure that was advancing towards us.

In moments, the whole floor of the cave was covered with rain, and the bird was lying in my lap. I was immediately soaked and pushed the wretched thing off. It laid on its back in exhaustion, and I took the opportunity to ease the parcel off of its leg. A precisely wrapped package sat in my lap with my initials written on it in all capitals. I unwrapped it to find a red and blue book underneath with a pair of blond-haired Muggles on the cover.

"Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet," I read aloud. "The new Folger Library."

I saw a hastily ripped piece of parchment sticking out as a bookmark at the top of the book. I flipped to the page and saw a line at the bottom was underlined.

Love's heralds should be thoughts, which ten times faster glide than the sun's beams.

The bird stood and flew out the mouth of the cave before I could write a return letter. I flipped through the pages and saw no other writing save for another underline in the prologue. The line, "The fearful passage of their death-marked love," was underlined so that the ink from the line bled to obscure the next passage. I wondered truthfully if it was a threat on my life, but then realized I was merely being paranoid.

I raked through the book over and over for the scribbled 'H' that I held so dear, but I found nothing—not a trace of the sender but for the two underlined messages they wished to convey to me. And so, having nothing else to do, I accepted a sausage from Narcissa and began to read. I reached the end of Act One and found that I needed to rest my eyes.

I often found that romance stories were insipid and dull, but this Shakespeare fellow really knew how to weave a tale. I did not relate at all to Romeo, what with his pretty-boy attitude and his nearly bipolar outlook on life. But Juliet, on the other hand, reminded me greatly of Hermione. She was clear-headed but was often swept away by her emotions. And she was so controlled by her family that she had to learn to love her enemy for herself. That aspect of the relationship appealed to me greatly.

I reached inside my cloak to search for a pen, but instead found a glass vial. I extracted it and held it up to the firelight. I immediately recognized it to be the Felix Felicis that Horace had given me. My mind, as it had been well trained to do, jumped to Hermione's image. What if I could use this potion to get to her? What if I could be with her and protect her this very day? I cursed any magic that would alter my actions ever since my unspeakable deeds done under the enslavement of the Unbreakable Vow. But nevertheless, the potion was there, and I was at a near perfect liberty to use it.

A pop startled all of us, and we looked up to see a surly Death Eater had appeared in the cave with an owl on his arm. Draco got to his feet, determined to look good for a liaison of his master. Narcissa remained seated and stared coldly up at the man. I joined Draco, but not with the same motivation.

"Jugson."

"Snape, Malfoy," he leered.

"What do you want, Jugson?" I asked, quickly getting to the point. He had a tendency to wander if not directed. He swayed a bit on the spot and put the owl on the floor before speaking. The creature immediately snuggled into Narcissa's lap. She permitted its presence but did not stroke it, as any female who wasn't in Voldemort's inner circle would have. What that man could do to people was beyond words.

"The Dark Lord sent this for you." He had an accent in which all R's were lost in the indulgence of each syllable.

"Did he now?" Malfoy sneered. He apparently was uncomfortable with the creature showing affection towards his mother.

"Oh, Severus," the man said, perhaps a bit too excitedly, "the Dark Lord is in such a wonderful temperament since your triumph. We are ever so grateful."

"That's very nice, I'm sure—"

"It's been almost like a party at headquarters! No talk of Potter, no talk of the Order of the Phoenix, just languid relaxation and happy tales of the good old days." I nearly snorted at this; I could hardly imagine anything taking place at headquarters being described as 'happy'.

"What of my sister?" asked Narcissa from the stony floor. The bird was nuzzling into her leg and was cooing.

"Oh, Missus Malfoy! My deepest condolences to you—your sister is not in a good place with the Dark Lord, not a good place 'tall."

"What exactly do you mean by that, Jugson?" I snapped, not out of consideration for Bellatrix, but rather out of a long-accepted irritation with this lesser servant of my Lord.

"The Dark Lord has sent her to live in the settlement in the woods," he replied glumly, shaking his head.

"The woods?" shrieked Narcissa, standing up. The poor owl went flying and burrowed into my sleeping bag indignantly.

"Yes, ma'am, the woods," he replied, still shaking his head.

"She could be raped," Narcissa said frantically. "She could be molested. She could be attacked!"

"No, ma'am, not since everyone knows she has been the Dark Lord's favorite for many years. You have heard the rumors, Missus Malfoy..."

"Don't be ridiculous," she began, sticking her nose in the air. "My sister is a married woman with no shame to her name!"

"Cept being a Death Eater and on Voldemort's inner circle..."

"How dare you say service of the Dark Lord is shameful?" cried Malfoy.

"I didn't, sir. I only meant—"

"Would you have said that to the face of the Dark Lord himself?"

"Draco, are you likening yourself to our Lord? Dare you insinuate that you of all people—"

"No, I am not, Jugson," said Malfoy with an underlying fury in his voice, "and I won't have you spreading that about..."

"Well you're not in a position to make bargains are you? You were almost killed the other night! Saw it with my own eyes!"

"You best be going, Jugson," I said quickly so to stop the exchange from escalating. He nodded and Disapparated. I looked about, suddenly alert. The fact that he had violated the magic of the rune was beyond my comprehension. I had an owl.

Chapter 16:Page One-Hundred and Forty-Three

Chapter 16 of 25

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Chapter 16: Page One-Hundred and Forty-Three

"All right, dear, stand on this stool." Molly Weasley bustled about the kitchen as I stepped up onto the rickety, three-legged, wooden stool.

Ginny giggled as I stumbled for a moment, and I giggled with her. But nothing could stop my nervousness at having these last minute measurements for my bridesmaid's dress. I was three and a half months pregnant, and I was beginning to show. They would notice the difference when I took off my loose garments to be measured—I knew they would—and the idea frightened me greatly. I stood sheepishly on the stool as Mrs. Weasley approached me with a measuring tape.

"Well, come on then! No time to be modest!" She stood with her hands on her hips as I sullenly pulled off my shirt. I stood—grey, cotton bra and all—directly in view of anyone who should walk past the window. I groaned with shyness and exasperation with my current form. Molly mumbled under her breath as she took note of everywhere the tape measured. When it came to my stomach, I cringed.

"You seem to have grown a bit since we last measured you, dear," she said as lightly as possible. Ginny's eyes widened, but she said nothing.

"Well, yes, I can't imagine why," I replied lamely.

"Look!" Ginny squealed suddenly. "It's an owl!"

Sure enough, gliding towards the open garden window was a soft, brown owl. It glided in and settled itself in Ginny's lap. It cooed softly as she detached the letter on its leg. The bird seemed like it had had a long flight. Ginny read the label on the package.

"H.' Just the letter by itself." She looked up at me. "Well, that's not very helpful. We have two 'H's in this house. But since it didn't fly up to the boys, I guess it's for you."

I snatched the letter from her and opened the envelope to find a small leaf of parchment inside. On the top, it read 'page number 143' and the title of the book *Romeo and Juliet*. I read Romeo's monologue aloud to myself.

"'Tis torture and not mercy. Heaven is here

Where Juliet lives, and every cat and dog

And little mouse, every unworthy thing,

Live here in heaven and may look on her,

But Romeo may not. More validity,

More honorable state, more courtship lives

In carrion flies than Romeo. They may seize

On the white wonder of dear Juliet's hand

And steal immortal blessings from her lips,

Who even in pure and vestal modesty

Still blush, as thinking their own kisses sin;

But Romeo may not; he is banished.

And sayest thou yet that exile is not death?

Hadst thou no poison mixed, no sharp-ground

knife,

No sudden mean of death, though ne'er so mean,

But "banished" to kill me? "Banished"?

O Friar, the damned use that word in hell.

Howling attends it. How hast the heart,

Being a divine, a ghostly confessor,

A sin absolver, and my friend professed,

To mangle me with that word “banished”?”

Tears formed in my eyes as I immediately understood. Severus was in hiding. I flipped the page over and saw that another message was scrawled in blue ink.

“Explanation awaits you.”

“It had better,” I said aloud without realizing it.

“What did the letter say?” called Ginny from across the kitchen.

“Oh,” I responded, hastily folding the letter and placing it in my pocket, “it was nothing.”

“No, really, Hermione,” she said as she set a loaf of bread on the counter to be sliced, “what’s going on?”

“Nothing, Ginny!” I cried, throwing my hands in the air. Molly did not look up from her copy of the *Prophet* spread out on the table.

“Listen, I wasn’t going to say anything, but first you have this lump on your stomach, and now you’re hiding letters from me? How would you react in a situation like this?”

“Mum, can we have some lemon—oh, bugger.” Ron burst into the room and stopped dead at the sight of my indecency. I quickly pulled on a shirt, but my face was still red with anger and embarrassment.

“You can look now, Ronald,” I said as he blindly fumbled about the kitchen to find his bearings.

“Hermione!” Ginny cried once more, “Just tell me what’s going on!”

“Oh,” said Ron as he conjured some ice for his lemonade. “Are you talking about Snape?”

Ginny’s jaw dropped, and she wheeled about to face Ron. “What are you talking about?” she whispered disbelievingly.

I made wild slashing gestures in the air behind Ginny’s back, but to no avail. “Did Hermione get a letter from him or something?”

“Why would she get a letter from Snape?” Ginny addressed Ron through clenched teeth as she turned about to face me.

Ron finally saw my gestures and nodded his head. “Er—nothing. I meant nothing.”

“As usual, Ronald, you have the tact of a blunt axe,” I interrupted huffily, crossing my arms over my chest.

“There you go talking like him!” he cried, throwing his arms in the air.

“WHAT IS GOING ON?” Ginny screamed over my retort. Mrs. Weasley was still at the table, and she was listening closely.

“Yes, Hermione,” Mrs. Weasley said in earnest, “please just tell us.”

“I-am-pregnant-with-Professor-Snape’s-baby,” I muttered in one breath.

“Sorry, didn’t catch that,” Ginny said.

“I’m pregnant with Professor Snape’s baby,” I replied slowly and carefully. This was met by varied responses. Ron sighed impatiently while Mrs. Weasley stood, knocking over the flowers on the table.

“WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?” shouted Molly.

“WHAT THE FUCK DID HE DO TO YOU?” Ginny screeched.

“GINNY,” Mrs. Weasley yelled, “WHAT HAVE I SAID ABOUT CUSSING?”

“MUM!” Ginny retorted. “THE SLIMY GIT COULD HAVE RAPED HER, AND YOU’RE WORRYING ABOUT MANNERS!”

“GINNY!” Mrs. Weasley began, but I cut her off, rubbing my temples in exasperation.

“I didn’t plan to tell you all until after the wedding.”

“What happened, Hermione?” Ginny asked. She sat down at the dining table despite the water and flowers spilled all over it.

“You best call everyone in here because I’m only saying this once,” I said, much more courageous now that I had the floor.

Ron ran out the door to call the rest of the boys in from the makeshift Quidditch pitch. In minutes, Fred, George, Harry, Charlie, and Bill walked in, red-faced and sweaty. Mr. Weasley and Fleur followed since they had been watching. They gathered around me at the table. The room was suddenly filled with a great, bellowing silence as eighteen eyes were fixed on me.

Chapter 17: In Retrospect...

Chapter 17 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When

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Chapter 17: In Retrospect...

"Um," I began cautiously, my voice shaking with nervousness, "I thought it would be best to talk to all of you about this at once."

"Just get on with it, Hermione," Ron groaned from his slumped position in his chair.

"I had a relationship this year that I didn't tell any of you about." I paused, expecting questions, but when there were none, I cleared my throat and continued. "I guess it all started when I accepted an after-class internship with Professor Snape." Assorted gasps and cringes met the utterance of his name.

"I naturally didn't want to tell my friends about it because, well, you all know Ron and Harry's attitude towards him. So I helped him prepare lesson materials for weeks. I was actually coming to learn that he wasn't as bad as I had believed him to be. Over the course of those weeks, I stripped away the façade he put on while teaching and found out about the man underneath—" I paused, knowing the impact of my next words. "The man that Dumbledore trusted.

"One Saturday, I went in to help him because I had finished my homework. I have to admit that it was what I had come to regard as fun. So I went into his office to find him roaring drunk. I did my best to take care of him, but in his drunken state, he—well, he kissed me."

Ron looked like he might throw up as the men at the table and Ginny yelled in protest to the information. Mrs. Weasley wearily quieted her children and urged me to continue.

"The next day he asked to talk to me after class. He told me he remembered nothing of the night before except that I was there, and I offered to let him use Legilimency on me to see what happened. I was in no mood to explain it."

"Hermione!" cried Harry. "You let him just invade your mind?"

"Yes, Harry, I did. It was easier that way. Anyway, the two of us realized our attraction to each other, and so we decided to try out the relationship.

"And so we were on again off again up until Christmas—"

"What about McLaggen? And the birds? And all that crying?" Ron nearly shrieked in disbelief.

"It was all about Snape. McLaggen was to make him jealous—I knew Snape hated him. Besides, he was an easy cover-up because you lot hate him too. I actually did like you for a bit, Ron, but I really hated how you were so happy with Lavender, hence the birds," I replied somewhat dismissively before continuing.

"Then I lied to the both of you, saying I'd be skiing with my parents, and I told my parents that I'd be at the Burrow over the winter holidays. But instead, I stayed at the castle with Sever—Snape." Ron made a disgusted sound deep in his throat, and I ignored him. "And we—we—"

"Yes?" Urged Charlie.

"We had sex," I mumbled, staring at my folded hands. There was an uproarious response to this. Charlie, Bill, Fred and George stood up in anger, not for my sake but for how much they detested Snape. All the rest were angry on my behalf. Mrs. Weasley quieted them once more.

"Let the girl continue," she muttered. They all obeyed and sat obsequiously.

"Well, I was really scared by what I had done—consensually, mind you—so I wrote him a letter telling him that for the time being, we should separate. A few months passed, and I discovered that we had overlooked something." Everyone leaned forward in suspense. "I met him at the Hog's Head a few days before the battle at Hogwarts and told him that I was pregnant, which I am." I finished in as much of a matter-of-fact voice that I could.

There was a stunned silence. Every listener was in various states of shock. There were a few throat clearings before Mr. Weasley spoke quietly.

"Do you know anything about his loyalty, Hermione?"

"Unfortunately, no. We never spoke about that. Except for once—when he told me that he would die from guilt if he ever joined the Dark Side for good—because of everything Dumbledore has done for him."

"Lies are so easy spoken to the eyes of a lover," Ginny recited, staring fixedly at a shard of the broken flower vase.

"It wasn't a lie," I said dangerously, injecting as much fury as possible into the few syllables I had to work with.

"How do you know, Hermione?" Harry asked with conviction. "I mean, he was probably only using you!"

"Harry, I think I would be able to determine that for myself, having actually been there."

"There you go defending the man who killed Dumbledore," Harry said, staring at me frankly with his piercing, green eyes.

"Listen," I ventured quietly, "I think it's safe to say that I know Snape better than any of you. And I'm convinced that there must be some other explanation—"

"You just say that because Snape banged you," Ron interrupted. His ears were turning red. Mrs. Weasley cringed at his vulgarity but said nothing.

"Ronald!" Ginny admonished.

"Anyway," continued Mrs. Weasley, "was that letter from him?"

"There are many parts of this story that I've chosen to keep to myself. That is one of those aspects," I replied gently, standing. "If you all don't mind, I need some time to think. I'll be in my room." I began to walk out the door, but I did not get far before the soft, brown owl fluttered over to sit delicately on my shoulder.

I placed the gentle creature in my room to rest, and then I snuck back downstairs to eavesdrop for a bit.

"Nevertheless," I heard Bill's voice, "Dumbledore remains dead."

"Yes," said Mrs. Weasley, "but I think that if Hermione trusts him—"

"Oh, Mum," scoffed Charlie, "she's just a silly, young girl. She doesn't know anything about the dark, inner workings of someone like that."

"She did spend months getting to know him," stated Ginny.

"A man like that takes more than a lifetime to unravel! He's a spy, Ginny, a bleeding spy!" Bill cried.

At that point, I had had enough. I returned to my room with tears streaming down my face. I collapsed onto my bed and sobbed into my down pillow that was hot from the summer day. I fell deeply asleep to the rhythmic coos of the owl.

Chapter 18: A Gentle Interruption

Chapter 18 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Chapter 18: A Gentle Interruption

The month wore on without another sign from Snape. I was so scrambled; I was in love with him and furious with him all at once. At Bill and Fleur's wedding, I was four months pregnant. None of the Order members, save for Lupin, would have anything to do with me. He understood being ostracized for a physical state beyond personal control, and therefore he kept me company through the weeks when I sat at the dining room table in the Burrow and observed everyone else's lives pass by me.

On one such afternoon, Ginny, Ron and Harry were playing with a Fanged Frisbee in the garden. It was hot out, and the warm air drifted in the open windows and doors, carrying with it a soft scent that reminded me of summers that had passed without this great, encumbering obstruction on my body.

"So, Hermione," began Remus quietly, drawing circles with his finger on the rim of his mug of tea, "have you thought about names?"

The question shocked me for a moment. The simple idea that the baby name choosing process remained to be accomplished in a world so bleak was astounding. I smiled and turned to face him.

"No, actually. I have considered the name Juliet for a girl, though," I replied, gazing wistfully out to the garden.

"Oh, really? I knew a girl back in school named Juliet. She was very quiet, though, and two years younger than me."

"What house was she in?" I asked, still gazing out at the giggling trio on the lawn.

"Ravenclaw," he responded, taking a sip of his tea.

"Everything all right?" asked Mrs. Weasley as she came through the kitchen. This was her salutation saved for me. I saw her looking at me worriedly. I knew that she thought that I had set my sights on Remus as my next target. I sighed wearily at the idea. I was everything that symbolized everything I didn't want to be: a pregnant teenager. This symbolized being too stupid to reject my boyfriend, being promiscuous and dirty, and being pitiable. I didn't want anyone's pity, and I didn't want anyone's help. I just wanted him back.

"I'm fine, Mrs. Weasley," I responded, deliberately thrusting every note of irritation away from my sentence.

"That's good, dear." She gazed down at me with sad eyes as though I had "TRAGEDY" written across my forehead.

"Mrs. Weasley," I called firmly to her retreating back, "I'm fine."

She paused and rested her hand on the counter. She sighed and looked back at me with those sad eyes for a moment before returning to the garden.

"I hate this," I said to my former professor after she was gone.

"What?" he inquired steadily.

"I hate everyone feeling sorry for me and making it Snape's fault! I did this because I love him! I could easily have said no, but I DIDN'T! It's not his fault, and it's not a problem!" My hoarse voice cut sharply through the nearly Zen silence in the room.

"Still, Hermione, the law once saw it as rape..." he replied carefully.

"Oh, sod the law! I'm pregnant with the child of the man I love. Is that so horrible?" I responded. A dam had been broken; I was going to get this all out.

"Well, no..." he responded.

"I just don't get it!" I shrieked. "Where does Mrs. Weasley come off assuming that I'm sad? I'm not sad!"

That was when I couldn't take it. My words welled up within me, and I realized I was going to lose it. I rested my face in my hands and began to sob. Lupin patted me gently on the back.

"There, there," he said softly.

"I—just—want—him—back," I coughed out through hitched breaths.

"I know, dear," he said quietly, changing his pats to gentle circles. I wished that they had changed something. In the moment of silence that his comforting words resounded, the sound of laughter could be heard floating in through the window. I envied all three of my friends who could laugh and play without judgment. I had become an adult, and from the very moment that I had joined as one with Severus Snape, I was treated like one.

I eagerly gulped down some lavender-essence tea that Lupin conjured before me. My great, salty tears ran into the brew, and it made it even harder to force down. My hand rested on my stomach, and that was when I felt it: a soft bump against my hand made me look down in surprise. I looked down and felt a gentle *thump*.

Thump, thump.

Thump, thump, thump.

And then it subsided as gently as it had come. I looked up and told Remus through a stuffy nose that the baby was kicking.

"Yes, they do that." He chuckled at my look of surprise.

"Well, yes, I suppose so," I responded, my eyes still wide with mild shock. I finished my tea and retired to my room for some time to think.

Author's Note: Here's wishing everyone a wonderful Deathly-Hallows Eve filled with excitement, ships come true, and not very pronounced under-eye circles.

Stay tuned for a new HG/SS fic of mine soon to hit the archives entitled "Finding Rhythm" It takes a look at HG/SS (as well as fan fic) from a fresh perspective and is, if nothing else, very thought provoking.

<http://www.thepetulantpoetess.com/viewstory.php?sid=6626>

Interlude: This Empty Bedroom Won't make Anything Right

Chapter 19 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Interlude: This Empty Bedroom Won't make Anything Right

Hermione sat with her knees up to her chest with her eyes shut. Her chest was heaving with furious sobs. Being alone in the world was impossible, especially in the Burrow, but she had never felt so solitary in her whole life. Tears slipped out from under her lidded eyes, and she rubbed her swollen belly semi-subconsciously. Her lip quivered, and her chin dimpled as she, recalling every word she wished she could speak.

If I am lost for a day, try and find me

But if I don't come back, then I won't look behind me

She let her rib cage fold back as the sobs wracked her body once more. She couldn't find him, even if she tried. All she had to remember him by was this strange fragment of parchment she had held next to her heart for a month. She let out a soft ghost of a laugh, recalling her former determination to be strong.

All of the things that I thought were so easy

Just got harder and harder each day

She waited, alone in that room, knowing full well he couldn't come to her to awkwardly comfort her and kiss away each tear. She let the silence consume her. She knew talking would ease her pain; normality and the hustle and bustle of the real world could pull her from her grieving. But yet... she wanted to suffer and drown in her pain, but this was always followed by her idea of having two lives hanging in the balance.

December is the darkest and June is the light

But this empty bedroom won't make anything right.

A knock came at the door, followed by a soft voice. "Hermione? Are you ready for dinner?"

While out on the landing, a friend I forgot to send home

Who waits up for me all through the night

"No, Ginny," she replied coldly. "I don't want dinner just now."

The redhead worried for her friend; she just wanted to tell her all would be okay, but Ginny had a hard time believing that for herself.

Calendar Girl who is lost to the world, stay alive.

Calendar Girl who is lost to the world, stay alive...

When she no longer sensed a presence lurking behind the door, Hermione strode to the window to tempt in a breeze that could carry news of her beloved. The roses that climbed the back of the house seemed almost tragic enough for her to contemplate. She recalled over and over that he was lost to her; forever lost. He would never lay eyes upon his child, and would never hold Hermione again. She felt the cold hands of fate closing over her heart.

I dreamed I was dying as I so often do

And when I awoke I was sure it was true

She let her scream escape her into the sunset. Fate clutched her, and if she wasn't hadn't been weighed down with child, she would have jumped. She turned her head to the sky, pleading, "Keep me from hurting my baby."

I ran to the window, threw my head to the sky

And said whoever is up there, please don't let me die

She sighed again. Looking down at the garden, she felt humbled by the fact that things like photosynthesis could continue in a world with so much pain.

But I can't live forever; I can't always breathe.

One day I'll be sand on a beach by a sea.

She entertained the idea of his homecoming for a moment, drawing parallels to *The Odyssey*. She placed her hand on her stomach, imagining for that sweet, indulgent moment that all would be fine for her baby.

The pages keep turning; I'll mark off each day with a cross

And I'll laugh about all that we've lost.

Some of her old strength flooded her. A radiant smile crossed her face as the sun sank into its daily journey about her planet.

Calendar girl who's in love with the world, stay alive.

Calendar Girl who's in love with the world, stay alive...

All the world had an amazing appeal as that well-missed smile crossed her features. Her tears still ran, oh, yes, but that smile dawned a new day.

January, February, March, April, May, I'm alive...

She saw every moment of her child's life pass before her eyes as she staggered to sit on her bed.

June, July, August, September, October, I'm alive...

She rubbed her stomach, singing a lullaby to her sweet baby Juliet.

November, December, yeah, all through the winter, I'm alive...

She appeared in the dining room and smiled broadly, wiping her tears and apologizing for being so late. Everyone made room for her at the table.

I'm alive.

Author's Note: The song is Calendar Girl by Stars. I took the liberty of switching the two choruses, since they made more sense that way.

And that's right everybody, I'm back!!! So sorry for the wait; real life got a bit insane for everybody involved in this story. But we're back on track! I hope there are some of you left!

Chapter 20: Old magic

Chapter 20 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Chapter 20: Old magic

I always knew of a magic that would draw a man to the birth of his child; it was something to do with the introduction of wizarding blood to the world. But such facts go unremembered in such frantic circumstances as giving birth to a child. That day, I was puzzling over my take-home work from Hogwarts' newest program for those too concerned with their children's safety to allow them to go to school. I had almost finished my seventh year. The soft April air danced through the window, reminding me slightly of what had occurred almost a year past.

I hadn't thought of Severus that much in the previous four months—only before bed when my mind was susceptible and weakened to unwelcome thoughts. The check-ups at St. Mungo's had revealed that my baby was healthy and fine. I asked not to know the gender of the baby.

Ron and Harry had also been doing their coursework abroad due to the seemingly never-ending Horcrux hunt. We saw them every other week; the rest of the time they would stay at the Leaky Cauldron, on the Knight Bus or sometimes even Hogwarts. They would often come to Grimmauld Place exhausted and dirty and would go to sleep without speaking to anyone. Ginny would wash Harry's wounds, and it seemed to me that they were in love again.

And so there I stood in the dining room, asking Remus for help with my Defense Against the Dark Arts homework. I had a question about werewolves. He and I had become great friends over the course of those few months, and I could chart the progression of the month by the hue of his skin. It was not near the full moon; therefore, his hair was orderly, and he looked healthier than ever. We laughed about a simple question on my worksheet.

The laughter died out for a moment, and I stood from my leaning position on the counter. He did as well.

"You look lovely tonight, Hermione," he said quietly. I could expect such comments from him, as he was an entirely platonic friend. But he had a strange and un-called for sincerity in his eyes as I thanked him. I attempted to step past him, but he continued to look me in the eye.

"I have to tell you something."

"Yes, anything, Remus," I said as I crossed the kitchen to retrieve some milk from the frozen pantry.

"These past months with you have been wonderful. I have come to think of you as a very dear friend. You are a very mature witch for your age."

"Oh, really?" I responded. What was he playing at?

"Yes, and I really feel that I must—" He paused and stood. He seemed to be having trouble phrasing what he was saying. He walked to me, and when he was mere inches away, I understood immediately. He was going to kiss me.

He bent down and delivered a soft kiss that spoke of nothing but pure, sweet love. I, having been forsaken for eight and a half odd months, indulged him. I wrapped my arms around his neck, and the kiss grew deeper. I leaned against the counter as an old feeling came back to me; I had forgotten what it was like to be loved.

He leaned in as much as he could with my pregnant stomach, and a great, swooping sensation came over me. I thought it was attraction to him, but I knew I was wrong when he leapt backward with soaking pant legs.

My water had broken.

I looked up to see Remus with a wand to his throat. And when I turned my head, I nearly passed out. Standing there, looming stubble, filthy robes and all, was Severus Snape.

"How dare you lay your hands on her, Lupin?" He asked. His voice was velvety and low, just as I remembered it. I was in such a state of shock that I had trouble keeping consciousness.

"What—" Lupin began, almost as bewildered as I was.

"I don't know what I'm doing here, Lupin. It must be an old magic." He looked down to see me sitting on the floor; my robes were steadily soaking through. He picked me up to sit me on the bench, and at his touch, I experienced a rather painful contraction. I was panting heavily, but I still heard his slightly uncomfortable coos that were intended to sedate me. No such thing would happen.

"GET MOLLY, YOU IMBECILE!" Snape shrieked at Lupin who was standing dumbstruck in the kitchen. He nodded and ran out of the room, shrieking to high heaven for help. Men did not handle labor well.

As the first contraction ended, Snape realized that he had five minutes to get me to a bed. And so, with an amazing amount of strength, he picked me up and carried me up the stairs.

"Hermione, I know you want to know why I haven't seen you," he said hurriedly. "It would not have been safe. But things are winding down now; I can see you more often."

"OH, MY GOD!" Ginny screamed as she emerged out of the bathroom in only a towel. "MURDERER! MURDERER IN THE HOUSE!"

Severus did not skip a beat. He strode quickly past her and gently laid me on my bed. I could hear thundering footsteps all around the house. Soon the room was full of everyone staying at the home. As Molly Weasley stepped through the door, she began to bark orders, sending every man except for Lupin and Snape out of the room. Severus sat by my side and held my hand protectively as another painful contraction washed over me. Molly slipped my undergarments off and ordered Ginny to retrieve a towel and some cold water.

"She's fully dilated!" cried Molly after numerous contractions had passed. Severus allowed me to grip his hand for dear life as I slid in and out of consciousness. The searing pain hit me, and I screamed with all my might to drive it away.

Lupin paced the room, mumbling and fretting until Molly told him to sit on my other side and mop the sweat off of my forehead. I was officially in labor as Severus haughtily snatched the washcloth from Lupin and began to lovingly and tenderly wipe my face.

Dawn broke, and I was called back to my earthly body as I gave a final shove and a newly-pitched scream bit the air. Molly quickly placed the wrinkly, red baby on my chest so that I would be the first to touch my child. An olive-skinned face looked skeptically back at me. Adorable, blue eyes quizzically stared me down as I lovingly stroked the baby's soft, black hair.

"It's a girl," said Lupin unnecessarily with a sigh.

Severus leaned in and kissed her forehead gently. He said to her in the most gentle voice I had ever heard escape his mouth, "And we'll name you Juliet, little one."

The baby let out a soft hum as Molly pushed Ginny and Lupin out of the room, leaving Severus and I to wrap our child in a blanket.

"All that work, and she looks just like you," I panted as he wrapped her soft, rubbery skin in a lilac blanket.

"Oh, tosh," he responded, handing her over. "She has your nose."

I smiled at him, and he kissed my forehead as the baby began to nurse. Her long, black eyelashes were stuck into triangles. I looked up at Severus once more; his gaze was alternating between me and the baby. I had never felt so much love radiating off of a person as at that moment.

Author's Note: I would like to thank <http://www.geocities.com/Wellesley/1483/contractions.html> for the helpful information about contractions.

This was my favorite chapter to write so far, well except for the last chapter, but I'll say nothing of that!!

And for everyone leaving me comments about sticking with Snape post DH, I want to let you know that this story was completed far before DH was released. And I did enjoy it, especially after all we learned about our hero in bat-like robes. ;)

And now that I'm back I also just want to say thanks for all the support I've gotten from this community. And I have a lot of respect for those of you who have stuck with this story! I almost didn't, to be honest. I hope the upcoming chapters will be pleasing to you all.

Chapter 21: Their Death-Marked Love

Chapter 21 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Chapter 21: Their Death-Marked Love

"Severus?" said Hermione with a sigh as the morning sun melted the dew on the flowers planted just behind her window.

"Yes, love?" I replied softly. Juliet Granger Snape lay between us, dozing gently in her blanket. We, being the quintessential overjoyed parents, sleepily inhaled her sweet, new scent.

"What's going to happen now?" She turned her doe-like eyes up to me.

"I—" I took a shaky breath. It was now or never. "I'm going to tell you what happened that night in June."

She gave a soft, exhausted smile. She began to pat my chest, and I started to speak as quietly as I could so as to not wake the sleeping babe.

"Before the school year started, Narcissa Malfoy and her sister, Bellatrix, came to my house and demanded that I help Draco. I offered to make an Unbreakable Vow to ease the mind of my former best friend's wife. I knew nothing of the Dark Lord's plan for the boy, and the women had strict instructions to not tell me a word of it. Voldemort was well aware of Dumbledore's powers of Legilimency and did not want his plans to be overseen. Narcissa made me promise to protect Draco and carry out his task should he fail."

I paused for a shaky breath. "I knew something would be taking place at Hogwarts in the year, but I did not know what. I was merely informed to fight when called. And so I went through the year, fearful about everything. I told Albus, rest his soul, that I knew there was a plot against Hogwarts. We spent hours into the night puzzling over what could happen." I stopped and let out a sour laugh. "If only we had really known."

"So that night rolled around when Flitwick ran into my office. I knew the summons was coming, so I stunned him and left. I apologize most deeply for not acknowledging your presence; I thought it most unwise considering present company. I ran to find out what was happening, and a Death Eater by the name of Jugson—a real imbecile of a man—told me Draco was about to complete his deed. I ran outside to find Dumbledore, Draco, and a few assorted Death Eaters, and I also felt an invisible presence leaning against the wall, which I soon found to be Potter.

"I heard Dumbledore calling my name. I pushed Malfoy out of the way. I looked down at him, and he nodded. I silently preformed Legilimency on him to find out what I was to do. I remember his words as clearly as if it were moments ago. 'Severus, you have to kill me, lest you blow your cover.' I know that a strange hatred rose up in me, a revulsion at the very idea that I couldn't save him. I told him that I would save him, but he firmly explained to me that I had to kill him for the good of the cause. His sentence was hardly finished when the magic of the Unbreakable Vow raised my wand..."

Hermione gasped. "Oh, my god," she whispered, rocking Juliet in her arms.

"So over the past few months, I have been living alternately in a cave and in random inns in the countryside. Since I can neither safely choose Voldemort or be accepted

by the Order for what I've done, I live with no side."

She gently drew up my left sleeve. She leaned down to reassuringly kiss my Dark Mark. But when it wasn't there, she assumed she had the wrong arm. But when she drew up my other sleeve, she was equally shocked.

"What happened to it?" She whispered a squeal.

"He removed it; he has come to think of me as his most faithful servant." My voice dripped with disdain.

"My!" she cried, and Juliet stirred slightly in her slumber.

I conjured a wicker bassinette for the child and took her from Hermione's arms. When the baby was tucked into her lavender blanket once more, I kissed her delicate forehead. I then returned to Hermione and kissed her softly as well. The kiss never heated—it was slow and patient much like our returning trust for each other. When it subsided, I got up from my kneeling position by her bed and sat back in my chair. Our hands were interlocked, and I stroked her smooth skin tenderly with my thumb.

"I enjoyed Romeo and Juliet," I said after a few moments' silence.

"Did you?" She smiled.

"I read it three times," I professed. She smiled still and turned onto her side to face me.

"I wanted to show it to you because it reminded me of us. Two warring families, fate-destined to love..." She trailed off, glancing wistfully over at the bassinette.

"It is true, though, that we have a 'Death-Marked Love'," I said, gazing out the window.

"What makes you say that?" she asked earnestly. Her sweet, brown eyes held an inquisitive, intellectual edge that used to scare me so much.

"All the odds are against us, dear." I kissed her hand. I felt myself transform under her eyes. I knew that what we had was permanent. Star-crossed lovers didn't just go their separate ways. I wouldn't let our relationship end as Romeo and Juliet's had. It was probably because I wasn't a pretty-boy prat and Hermione wasn't a clueless lamb. We were both seasoned by the world, and we had the tools to prevent such a catastrophic end. Besides, I loved her so much I would gladly fight Death itself away from her.

"I love you, Severus," she murmured as she drifted into a much needed sleep. I kissed her softly on the cheek.

"I love you too, dear." I stood and strode to the door. "Perhaps a bit too much."

Author's Note: Well my hypothesis about why Snape killed Dumbledore was fairly close! (this was written months before DH was released)

Chapter 22: Acceptance

Chapter 22 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Chapter 22: Acceptance

"I don't have time for your games, Weasley. Now take this money, or the only thing they will find left is your womanish underpants—are we clear?" I threatened.

"Why don't you do it yourself, eh, Snape?" he inquired, nudging me.

"Your games are tiring me. Besides, can you imagine the most hated warlock in our world save for Voldemort just waltzing into Diagon Alley unnoticed?"

"Which store is it at?" he asked.

"Andromeda's, the one that's almost—"

"In Knockturn Alley," Potter finished. "Why are you sending Charlie to Knockturn Alley?"

"None of your business, Potter," I hissed. I turned back to the man standing before me. "Can I trust you?"

"I think I'd ask you the same question." Charlie laughed. He had been instructed, as all the Weasleys had, by Molly to accept me as a member of their "side". My Order membership had been reinstated. But he, like his brothers Fred and George, had remained skeptical.

"Get on with it." I shoved the Galleons into his hand, and he walked swiftly out the door. Hermione wandered sleepily in with Juliet resting on her chest. I kissed them both and bade Hermione good morning. She looked at me with an over-perceptive twinkle in her eye.

"Where did Charlie go?" she asked.

"I have no idea. He probably went to sniff some of that powdered dragon—"

"Okay, okay!" she cried. "That's quite enough." She attempted to sound stern through her laugh. She so far had been quick-witted enough to not ask me how long I could stay. I didn't want to think about it myself.

I looked at Potter watching us with disgust from his armchair. He looked weary, and his appearance reminded me of his father in his last years. I didn't scowl for the sake of Hermione's presence.

I knew he must be tired since I had carefully tracked his progress on the Horcrux hunt. He only had one remaining. I had watched the Dark Lord's paranoia rise as the Horcruxes dwindled. He did not know what was happening—at least he did not let on that he did; he was not a man to discuss the status of his soul over coffee.

"Breakfast!" called the youngest Weasley merrily as she skipped into the living room. Potter glared at me before shoving himself out of his chair. What a little prat.

I placed my hand instinctively on Hermione's back as we filed into the dingy kitchen. Hermione slid onto the bench right next to Remus. I stiffened as he amicably kissed her cheek and patted her back to bid her good day. He apologized for how much he had fretted the night before, and she giggled at his blush.

Molly came by the table to grab Juliet from Hermione. She placed her on a thick quilt on the floor and levitated a mobile over her, which fascinated the girl's eyes. I smiled in spite of myself and looked back to the table to find everyone laughing at a joke Remus had told. I felt like I would be sick. My grip on Hermione's back tightened.

The rest of the meal wore on at an obscenely slow rate. What with Lupin drooling over my woman and Potter growling at me between feral bites of pancake, it was all I could do to keep myself from hexing everyone present—except for Hermione, of course—into oblivion. Juliet began to cry, and so Hermione excused herself to feed her. The Disgusting Bastard, formerly known as Remus Lupin, helped her out of her chair, smiling sweetly up at her. I almost blew chunks all over everyone's meals. I left the room with Hermione, glowering at The Disgusting Bastard the whole way out.

We reached the library, and Hermione took off her Muggle blouse. She then asked for my assistance with her bra. My fingers shook as I undid the clasp. I stared at her well-toned back disbelievingly; it seemed she hadn't gained a single unnecessary pound during pregnancy. I sat in an armchair across from her and looked decidedly at my lap as she began to feed the child.

"You can look, you know," she said, irritated.

I ventured a glance at her supple, young breasts and decided it would be best to avoid looking at her, lest something happen. I stood to close the door to the room again.

"It was already locked, Severus," she pointed out.

"Just checking..." I muttered.

I sat down and struck up a new topic. My leg was bouncing as I looked all about the room. "So, I have to go visit my mother and my brother this weekend. I thought you and Juliet might like to come."

She placed Juliet in her blanket once more and pulled on her shirt, saying, "That would be very nice, I'm sure. Does your mother know about... us?" She gestured to the baby.

"I see my mother every five years," I responded heavily, rubbing my temples and slumping into the soft couch next to her.

"Well, don't you think she'll be a bit shocked to find out that not only are you dating an eighteen-year-old, but you have a child?"

"Perhaps we should leave Juliet behind," I said lightly.

"And of my age?"

I had already thought of that. I withdrew an aging potion that I had had her label on our first night working together. She let out a small gasp and took the pink-hued vial from me.

"Ten years for ten hours..." she whispered.

"Dating a twenty-eight year old would be much more pleasing to my mother," I remarked slyly. "Her name is Eileen Snape. My brother is a squib whose name is Perseus Snape."

"I look forward to meeting them," she called over her shoulder as she opened the door to the library.

Autor's Note: Things are getting exciting... and the reviews are great!! **fan love**

Chapter 23: Meet the Snapes

Chapter 23 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Chapter 23: Meet the Snapes

Author's Note: According to <http://www.hp-lexicon.org/wizards/snape.html>, Snape was born in 1958 or '59 [JKR says 1959 or 1960—I go by 1960] (On January 9th) Making him 39 or 40 at the present time in this story. Hermione is 18.

"Go on," he said, wringing his hands and glancing at the time. "We have to go!"

I uncorked the vial and knocked it back, closing my eyes as the tingling sensation swept down my esophagus. I looked at him, and his eyes widened. I turned to look in the mirror and gasped. The vial hit the ground and shattered.

"Oh, my God," I said under my breath as I examined my face. My cheekbones were better defined, my lips had slight creases at the edges and my body felt slightly less springy as before.

"You look," Severus cleared his throat, "beautiful."

I sighed and tucked a stray bit of hair behind my ear and attempted to stuff it into my messy bun. After a moment, I dubbed my efforts as futile and straightened my yellow cocktail robes. He grasped my hand, and we Apparated.

We stood before a two-story, wooden-paneled home with a black, wrought-iron fence surrounding it. A single tombstone stood in the yard, which was nothing more than leveled dirt. Severus's brow had furrowed, and I reached up to smooth it.

"It's... charming." I grinned.

This received a deep chuckle from Severus. I laughed along with him, and we approached the door. He knocked thrice slowly and deliberately. A broad-chested man with carefully combed hair flung the door open. His hair was shorter than Severus's, and he had glittering, sapphire-blue eyes. He beamed at me and stuck out his hand.

"Perseus Snape." He was still grinning broadly.

"Hermione Granger," I responded, attempting to keep my arm from shaking as he wrung my hand. He then turned to Severus and pulled him into a bear hug. Severus patted him on the back and withdrew quickly.

From the shadows of the candle-lit sitting room came a gaunt woman whose neck was craning forward. She was tall and lanky and had salt and pepper hair drawn into a tight French braid. She wore black robes with Indian embroidery on the hem. She had a hooked nose, more so than Severus, whose nose was simply large. Her lips were pursed as though trying to conceal a distasteful sneer.

"Welcome, dear." Her hoarse, empty voice was just barely a whisper. "I am Eileen Snape. You may call me Madam Snape."

"Mother," said Severus with a sigh. I was greatly amused to see him reverting to childish habits.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Madam Snape. I am Hermione Granger." I curtsied. She seemed as though she wasn't interested in touch. My curtsy seemed to appease her icy demeanor slightly, but it was only my intuition, as her face revealed nothing.

"Let's go into the sitting room, shall we?" Perseus boomed though the quiet house. Madam Snape nodded slightly, and we all went into the room. Severus sat stiffly on a love seat, and I seated myself beside him. Madam Snape left for the kitchen to retrieve a tea service for the four of us.

"So, Hermione, what do you do for a living?" asked Perseus. He broke through the silence, which had previously only been disturbed by the heavy ticks and tocks of the grave clock on the wall.

I was mortified. I had absolutely no idea what to say. "I'm sure you wouldn't be interested..." I said hastily.

"Oh, Hermione," cut in Severus without missing a beat, "you are always so bashful. She is a rather adept Mistress of Potions."

A faint hint of a smile crossed his features as he squeezed my hand reassuringly.

"That's what you do, isn't it, Sev?" Perseus asked, leaning forward onto his widespread knees.

"Yes, it is, Perseus. But I would consider myself a Master rather than a Mistress," Severus said with an amused gleam in his eyes.

"And what is it you do, Perseus?" I asked him gently.

"I'm in government actually. I'm working my way up the ranks, but as of now I'm working relaying messages from our world to yours."

"Well, I know what you mean, but there's no need to call it 'my world'. My parents are Muggles."

"Oh ho!" he cried, slapping his knee. "Well done, Sev. Well done!"

"I think so," he said with a tender glance towards me.

"Here is the tea," Madam Snape whispered as she entered the sitting room.

I raised a brittle china cup to my lips, and a bitter, black-as-night taste hit my tongue. I almost shrieked in revulsion. I carefully placed it on the coffee table.

"Lovely tea, Mother," Severus said with a trace of irritation as he placed his cup on its saucer, "but I wonder if you have anything stronger?"

"I have some elf-made wine in the pantry." She enunciated every breathy word.

"Excellent!" I said a bit too quickly. Severus smiled as his mother retreated once more.

When I raised the crystal glass to my lips, I knew this too would be the strongest I had ever tasted. Six hundred years of fermentation obviously was not for show. The stuff had a kick to it.

"Then I told the house-elf that I would have no more of his antics, and I sent him on his way!" cried Madam Snape, who, within the hour, had been renamed Eileen. She was wiping tears from her eyes, and Perseus and I roared with laughter. Severus was smiling broadly as well.

I then felt something vibrating in my pocket. The baby alarm went off over and over, and I quickly pressed my leg to Severus's. He understood when I told everyone that I

was going to go powder my nose. As soon as I stepped into the dingy bathroom, I Apparated back to Grimmauld Place.

I found myself in my own bedroom. Remus was tenderly bouncing Juliet on his shoulder. She, however, was screaming bloody murder, and her adorable face was red with need. I wordlessly took her from him, and at my touch, she instantly stopped fretting.

"Wow," said Lupin as he sat on the bed beside me, "If you hadn't come..."

"It's all right, Remus," I whispered through my hummed lullaby to the baby. "I'm here now."

Chapter 24: A Soft, Romantic Glow

Chapter 24 of 25

Sixteen-year-old Hermione Granger has come back to school for her sixth year, having acquired a few curves and a few more worries over the summer. But in Potions class, the *Amortentia* potion makes her realize an unusual desire. When the scent continues to crop up in her daily life, especially when she is helping Professor Snape after class, life takes a turn for confusion...

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Chapter 24: A Soft, Romantic Glow

I returned to the Snape household to find Severus bidding good evening to his mother and brother. Perseus hugged me goodbye, and Eileen draped her arms about my shoulders as she giggled uncontrollably, snorting occasionally. I patted her back, and Perseus pulled her gently off of me.

"Are you sure you have her handled, Perseus?" Severus inquired as the door opened.

"I'm sure, Severus," he said with sparkling eyes. "You two have a nice night."

Severus led me into the warm evening air. The stars and the scimitar moon cast a soft, romantic glow on everything in sight. He leaned in and placed his hand on my back.

"Care to take a walk?" His low, velvety voice seemed to massage my eardrums.

"I'd love to." I closed my eyes and leaned into him, allowing him to guide me down the dirt road. We walked to the east, and the laughter of a bubbling brook running alongside the path hit my ears. We walked for a while. I heard the trace of a hum in Severus's breathing.

He led me to a willow bent low over the water so that beyond its curtained leaves was something of a room. Soft, spongy grass was on the ground. He helped me to sit on it. He leaned against the tree trunk and closed his eyes. I put my head in his lap, and he stroked my hair.

"It's so amazing, isn't it?" His voice could hardly be heard over the rushing of the brook.

"What?" I asked, sitting up to give him my attention.

"Juliet, you, me, everything." He sighed. "A few years ago, I lived in such fear that I would die...I never had time for dreams. But if I had had an idea about my future, I would have wanted you."

He got to his feet and pulled me to mine. I looked into his eyes, and they were glittering. He then sank to one knee and fumbled with something in his pocket. Tears readily sprang to my eyes as though he had conferred with them beforehand about their job. His warm, dry hand encircled mine. I was quivering as I placed my other hand to my face. Thick sobs came from my throat as I gazed down at him.

"Hermione Jane Granger, I love you. I love you more than I ever expected to realize. You have changed me. It started when you were that bold little girl in class. I always knew you had a different kind of magic, Hermione." He paused and opened the small, wooden box in his hand. Emotion and sentiment weren't easy for him; he seemed to be trying to make the moment perfect. "Will you do me the honor of becoming my wife?"

"Severus Snape," I said, and I smiled as I looked down at the great, glittering diamond he was slipping onto my finger, "I will most surely do you the honor of becoming your wife." I laughed as I mocked him. He liked it best that way.

He stood and pulled me into a kiss worthy of the sappy, black and white movies my mother liked to watch with me when I was home. We both were laughing, and a tear drizzled down his cheek. I brushed it with my lips and savored the salty scent of the rare gem. I nuzzled his neck, and he kissed the top of my head. I was content.

A mere week later we prepared ourselves for a secret wedding in the sitting room of Grimmauld Place. Severus had sought out an old, indebted friend to officiate our marriage. The elderly magical pastor went by the title of Pastor Crippen. He had short, white and grey hair that looked as though it would curl if it were a bit longer. He sat in the kitchen with Severus as I prepared myself in my bedroom.

"Is this good?" Ginny asked as she finished lacing up the corset on my traditional wedding robes. The sleeves were made of ballooning, see-through white fabric and had lace at my wrists. The corset was an antiquated white one with silk ribbon that Madam Snape had given me for the ceremony. The skirt was ballooning and white due to the layers of undergarments that went with it.

"A bit tighter." I wanted everything perfect. I had told my parents earlier in the week of my engagement. I didn't introduce them to Juliet, but they did have the pleasure of

meeting Severus. He enjoyed their company and they his. They were going to watch the wedding.

I observed myself in the mirror. My hair was swept into a beautiful mound on the crown of my head. I pulled my elbow-length veil over my eyes and smiled.

"Are you sure about this, Hermione?" Harry spat. His leg was bouncing uncontrollably.

"I'm sure, Harry," I replied, rolling my eyes and fixing my bouquet of red roses from the garden.

"People often do rash things during times of war," Remus said as he paced the room.

"I know, Remus, but Severus and I..." I trailed off, how could I explain the concept of star-crossed lovers and Romeo and Juliet to a room full of jealous and protective wizards?

"May I point out that it's for the good of the child?" Ginny said as she fixed my hair.

"Yes, yes," Remus began, slapping the back of his hand repeatedly into his palm, "but the baby will be taken care of no matter what."

I lifted my veil. My cheeks were red with frustration as I walked right up to Remus and pointed my finger at him.

"I will marry whom I wish to marry, and you will not confuse me on my wedding day!" He looked sincerely humbled as he fell to helping Ginny with bouquets. Harry merely shook his head.

"But what about Ron?" Harry ventured after a formidable silence.

"What about him?" I asked with narrowed eyes. "The idea that I could love Ron as anything more than a brother is positively asinine. Severus and I have a connection that goes beyond what any of you can see. He loves me and cares about my safety...so much so that he would not marry me if he thought I was better off with Ron. I'd like to think that the idea of entrusting me to Ron would be..."

"Did someone say my name?" A weary voice preceded Ron's entrance to the room. "This must be why you owled me, Ginny." His eyebrows were raised as his wide eyes traveled over my traditional garments.

"Yep."

"You look nice, Hermione." He paused and noticed Lupin was in the corner. "WAIT A SECOND!" he shouted.

"What?"

"I THOUGHT YOU WERE MARRYING REMUS!" he bellowed.

"Ron, why would I do something like..."

"He's not back, is he?" he asked. The contrast of screaming to a disdainful, hoarse whisper shocked me.

"Who are you talking about, Ron?" I asked, pulling up a chair for him.

"Hermione?" called a deep voice from downstairs. Ron stared daggers at me.

Lupin recovered first. "She'll be down in a moment!"

I stepped into the sitting room, and my breath was taken away. All the furniture had been cleared, and the room was adorned with white and red roses. A single cello had been charmed to play as it stood on its own in a corner. There were a few rows of seats, which were already occupied by all of the Weasleys, the Snapes, my parents, and Harry. I cast my eyes to the front of the room. A traditional wizarding bondage arch stood over Severus and the pastor.

It was a wooden structure built out of the type of wood our wands were made of. Mine was made of vine, and his was constructed of alder. A sort of double helix of our wand interiors was stretched across the top like a beam; my dragon heartstring intertwined with his unicorn hair interior. On the sides of the arch stood Ginny...my maid of honor...and Remus...Severus's best man...chosen only out of necessity. Pastor Crippen and Severus stood under the beam.

I smiled to see Severus dressed in his formal robes. A trace of a smile passed over his features as I stood to face him. Pastor Crippen began his speech.

"Friends, Loved Ones, we are gathered here to witness a most unusual unity." There was a tense chuckle from everyone at the gathering. "A Gryffindor and a Slytherin are breaking the barriers of their houses and uniting in an eternal bond. I am sure you are all most pleased to see this display of inter-house unity." A slightly less constrained chuckle resounded.

"Now, Severus and Hermione, please hold each other's hands. Do you, Severus Silas Snape, take Hermione as your magically-bound wife...to have and to hold, to cherish and to respect, to adore and stay faithful to...in sickness and in health, in times of war and times of peace until death do you part?"

"I do," Severus uttered solemnly. A purple rope of magic wrapped itself around our arms. It was cold against my skin.

"And do you, Hermione Jane Granger, take Severus, before all these witnesses, as your magically-bound husband...to have and to hold, to cherish and respect, to adore and stay faithful to in sickness and in health...in times of war and times of peace until death do you part?"

"Absolutely," I responded solemnly. A smile crossed my lips regardless. A cord of blue magic wrapped around us and wound through our arms. Then it formed a double helix with Severus's cord, and the new cord traveled through the lattice of the arc and plunged through our hands. When we let go, silver and gold wedding bands were in place.

"You may now kiss the bride." Severus looked around at the company, but when his eyes met mine, he drew me into the most loving kiss he had ever given me.

Author's Note: JKR assigned Ron and Hermione's wand woods based on their month of birth in relation to the corresponding birth month tree on the Celtic calendar. Severus was born in January (the Celtic month of 'Fearn'); therefore, I assume his wand would be made of alder.

I find this information positively fascinating:

Severus's Moon Name: Alder Moon

Polarity: Masculine

Nicknames: Moon of Utility; Moon of Efficacy; Moon of Self-Guidance

Magical Properties: spirituality, teaching, weather magic, duty, mental prowess

<http://www.joellessacredgrove.com/Celtic/tree.html>

I chose Unicorn Hair as Snape's interior because of how he lost his innocence at such an early age.

Additional Note: Silas (the middle name I gave Sev) means "Man of the Forest" in Latin.

Epilogue

Chapter 25 of 25

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Epilogue:

When I look back on it all, the only thing I can really do is laugh. To think that I could come in the way of lovers who are simply destined to be together is absurd. Do not be mistaken; Juliet—Severus and Hermione's child, that is—has come to call me 'Uncle Remus,' as though I am Snape's brother or something. I have not been forgotten. But at this point it is reward enough for me to look back on the time that I did have with Hermione before I turned her over to her husband.

My happiest memory of the wedded couple was the first time that I really gave up on Hermione. It was the summer after Juliet's first year at Hogwarts. Hermione, Severus and I waited silently in the kitchen for her arrival. She was taking a special Portkey from the school itself because Snape Manor was too far from the train—out in the countryside—to fetch her in time.

At that point in his career, Severus worked from home as an experimenter for 'Potions Weekly' while Hermione had made a nice living working three seasons a year as a Charms Consultant for large wizarding companies. Papers for finishing up her season were spread all over the table. Severus's elbow rested on one of the stacks, and his hand was nestled in his newest hair style: closely cropped, grey and black locks. He made it known that he intended to keep it that way. It was mostly grey even though he was fifty-one, young for a wizard. He also had started to grow a salt and pepper goatee, which he thought made him look distinguished.

His back suddenly went rigid as he became alert to a presence walking up the drive. He strode quickly to the door and flung it open. A broad smile crossed his face as he ran to sweep his giggling daughter into a hug. He held her off of the ground and swung her around three times before placing her back on her feet and giving her a firm kiss on her forehead. I shook my head; the bat of the dungeon really had softened.

I stood in the doorway, and my stomach gave a half-hearted lurch as Hermione ran into the sunlight. I sighed and waited for her to be done. Juliet then stomped up the stairs. She threw off her knee socks on the porch and laboriously loosened her navy blue tie with her index finger. She slung her arms about me and looked up to give me a great, gap-toothed grin.

"Hello, Uncle Remus!"

I patted her back fervently. "How many more freckles did you get this year, Julie?"

"Five," she responded as she stepped away. "I've also decided that I'll be a Healer when I graduate."

Hermione loosened her long hair from its braid lovingly. The curly, ebony locks fell down to the bottom of her ribcage. Juliet sat in an armchair in the sitting room, leaving a trail of clothing behind her. I sat in the other single armchair and watched Hermione bend to pick up the trail of clothes and books Juliet had somehow conjured.

"We're having everyone over tonight to celebrate your homecoming!" said Hermione as she fell into the loveseat. Severus dropped Juliet's trunk, and her owl, Vox, hooted indignantly.

"Who's coming?" Juliet asked as she grabbed one of her books from her mother.

"Well, let me see," Hermione began, ticking names off on her fingers. "There's Ron and Luna and their son, Magnus, and there's Tonks, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Bill, Charlie, Fred and his wife, Angelina. George and Amalie and their daughter, Emilia, Harry and Ginny and their children, Lyra, Marin, Sabina and Caden. That makes just over twenty people including us."

"What about Neville?"

"Oh, yes, Neville and Lavender are coming with their twins, Elijah and Simone." Hermione said. "Are you alright, Severus?"

He had just collapsed onto the couch, panting heavily. The owl was still hooting. We all laughed as he gave a slow, steady nod. Hermione smiled and bit her lip, running her hand through his grey-streaked hair.

The sitting room was crowded, and the doorbell was ringing almost in time to the quick swing music playing on the gramophone. Once all the guests had arrived and Neville's twin three-year-olds were running in circles through the crowd, I poured myself a firewhiskey. I contemplated its steaming insides and wondered why my love for Hermione had burned so brightly for eleven years. But when I glanced up, I saw that Severus had a giggling Hermione enveloped in a hug. They were swaying to their favorite jazz song. And it was at that moment that I realized that every day I wished I were Severus. I wished that I were the man who had overcome every obstacle to hold that brilliant brunette in his arms.

I watched her arch her back in laughter. He placed a finger on her nose and was shaking his head as he spoke to her through a smile. She laughed even harder and placed her mouth over his. There was a collective sigh from all the females at the gathering. I sighed as well, and with that sigh, my fierce love left me and kindled Hermione's fire for Severus.

Juliet wiggled her way between her parents, and the three rocked to the music. A single tear drizzled out from under my glasses. My battle against fate had come to an end. Star-crossed lovers didn't just walk away from each other. Their love might have been death-marked at the beginning, but they were living proof that with enough love, even death could be overcome.

Author's Note: Yes, it's over. I'd like to thank my readers for their undying perseverance. This all started out as just a challenge for myself that I thought I could never accomplish, but as I have reached the end of the road, I have realized so much about the meaning of not only love and companionship, but the true meaning of a happy ending. I am so proud to have made it to the finish of what was originally planned to be a four-shot story. Ha, ha, so much for that! I hoped you all enjoyed reading the tale of Severus and Hermione's Death-Marked Love as much as I enjoyed writing it. —Alexis/ _Levicorpus_

Also, I have a new story on the way. So please check that out when you all get a chance!