

Meant to Be?

by Mandela

A response to LOTM's YLC challenge. Hermione is an overworked Ministry employee, whose social life has all but disappeared. Snape is still teaching at Hogwarts, but the defeat of Voldemort has finally left him able to start the family he never had. However, it is not until prying friends take charge that they find something they've both been missing all along.

A Compatibility What?

Chapter 1 of 8

A response to LOTM's YLC challenge. Hermione is an overworked Ministry employee, whose social life has all but disappeared. Snape is still teaching at Hogwarts, but the defeat of Voldemort has finally left him able to start the family he never had. However, it is not until prying friends take charge that they find something they've both been missing all along.

Author's Note: This is in response to LOTM's Yenta Livery Company Challenge. Truly a fun and fabulous prompt for a story.

I am still lacking a beta, so again, if anyone is interested please contact me at spearbritney193 (at) yahoo (dot) com.

A crowd of reporters eagerly clustered around the newly elected Minister of Magic Bones while her new assistant was shunted off to the side. Hermione Granger sighed, righting her skewed glasses and gently probing her hair to ascertain that it remained in a tight, professional bun. Madam Bones had been elected in a surprise move by the Wizengamot only hours after Fudge had announced his retirement. It had been two days since Bones had publically been declared Minister, but the press attention had not subsided; in fact, as each day continued more and more attention was drawn to the Minister's office. The feeling of suddenly having so much to do although she was quite glad to be of use was stifling, and she'd even had to request the services of one of the many interns hanging around to ward off the enchanted memos that were shooting into the Minister's office at all times. In all the excitement, Hermione had even forgotten the arrival of her own twenty-fifth birthday.

Ginny, however, had not forgotten. The youngest Weasley had graduated Hogwarts and gone off on a two-year long jaunt around the world. Hermione smiled slightly, remembering the countless hours she had spent reassuring Mrs. Weasley that Ginny would be fine, and it would be only a matter of time before she settled down. Two months later Ginny had found herself a flat in London and was interviewing for a position at the Ministry, ready to settle down just as Hermione had predicted.

"Mione!" The redhead yelled, scampering down the hallway as the last of the reporters turned a corner. Hermione grinned; if anyone could take her mind off the mountains of paperwork she had waiting for her, it was Ginny. Glancing at her friend, the younger woman wrinkled her nose. "You really should lose the glasses, Mione. They make you look too old."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "That's the point, Gin. Now that Bones has been elected, the opportunity to be around her and influence her decisions is extremely desired. I don't care to have speculation as to how I got this position at my age ruining my career." Ginny nodded sympathetically, though she still thought that Hermione ought to lose the glasses. They made her look standoffish and cold, quite the opposite of her warm personality.

"Remember, five o'clock, alright?" Ginny reminded a confused looking Hermione. Rolling her eyes she said, "Don't tell me you forgot. Birthday dinner, for you! Five o'clock

down at the Leaky Cauldron. Don't you dare forget!" Hermione nodded mutely, glancing at her watch to see how much time she had left before she would be socially obligated to make an appearance at the pub. Mimicking Hermione, Ginny glanced at her own watch, looking up with a start. "I have to go!" She squeaked, taking off down the hall. "But I'll see you at five!"

A hint of a smile on her face, Hermione shook her head as she watched Ginny's retreating back. It was ten of two, she noted, casting another look at her watch. Perhaps she'd be able to make a dent in the mound of paperwork before meeting Ginny. It was nice having Ginny around, Hermione decided. It was good to have a friend at work, someone who reminded her that there was more to life than endless enchanted memos. She paused, glancing down the hallway. Seeing no one she carefully removed the glasses that Ginny had so accurately assessed, and even went as far as the undo her neat bun, securing her hair in a simple ponytail at the nape of her neck. Ducking into the women's washroom she surveyed her appearance in one of the small, distorted mirrors, and smiled. Ginny was right. The glasses did make her look older but too old. Old, prissy and untouchable. Almost like an old maid she realized in horror, immediately taking the offending item and tossing it into the nearest trash receptacle, making a note to recheck her wardrobe for anymore unattractive (matronly, as Ginny called them) outfits when she got home. The hopeless romantic in her, the same one that had her reading sappy romance novels on those lonely evenings, had convinced her that she did not want to grow up to be the asocial workaholic she was swiftly becoming.

Stepping out of the washroom Hermione glanced down the hall in the direction she had been going. Hoping she wasn't reading too deeply into one of Ginny's many insignificant comments, Hermione did an about-face and began striding purposefully down the hall in the other direction, towards the exit. After all, like Ginny and so many others had told her, wasn't she allowed to have a little fun on occasion?

Back at Hogwarts, Severus Snape reclined in a large, imposing black chair. Before him lay a stack of sixth year essays waiting to be graded. He'd begun the first essay, but not even halfway through he had corrected so many errors that it was almost impossible to see the original words written. Idiots, all of them. Not a redeeming quality among the whole lot.

Snape's grouching was interrupted by a delicate knocking at his door. "Come in!" He barked, eager for any excuse to not look at those horrendous essays for a few more minutes. The door creaked open and none other than Albus Dumbledore stood there, a twinkle in his eye. Snape groaned that amused look Dumbledore wore never meant something pleasant for him.

"Ah, Severus," he said pleasantly, "I was hoping to find you here. May I have a seat?" Snape nodded mutely and Dumbledore seated himself comfortably at one of the student desks. It was an absurd sight, to say the least. Dumbledore seemed in no hurry to get to the point of his visit, choosing instead to look around the classroom, examine the desks and otherwise waste Snape's time. "It's a bit cold down here," the Headmaster noted, speaking finally.

"Excuse me, Albus, but is this going anywhere?" I have papers to grade before my next class arrives," Snape said sourly. He was in no mood to discuss the conditions of his dungeon rooms. Chuckling, Dumbledore withdrew a small packet of papers from his robes and handed it to Snape.

"An early present from the staff, Severus," he said jovially, waiting for Snape's reaction like a small child waits for Christmas morning to find what Santa left them. Snape looked at the paper, rubbed his eyes and reread the heading.

"A compatibility test, Albus," Snape read dully. "Is this some form of a joke?" Dumbledore shook his head. "Yenta Livery Company," Snape read, spying the company's logo. "Albus, I sincerely hope you are not serious."

But Dumbledore shook his head, saying gently, "But I am. Severus, it has been seven years since Voldemort's defeat. It is safe for you to finally begin a new life. Time to settle down and"

"I am settled down," Snape interrupted irritably. "I have a comfortable position teaching Potions here. Unless something has happened that I am unaware of."

Dumbledore sighed, adjusting his glasses to get the clearest view of Snape's face. "Don't you think it is time to start a family, Severus?" Snape didn't reply. In truth, he had no answer.

Dumbledore rose, and nodded his head towards Snape. "I'm afraid I must be getting back to my office. But please reconsider taking the test. After all, you have no obligation to follow through with anything." Snape watched Dumbledore leave, eyes following the old man until he was out the door.

Curiosity getting the better of him, Snape glanced downwards at the test. Against his better judgement, he found himself picking up a quill and checking off the first box: *Keep my name anonymous.* Hesitantly he continued.

Age? 46. He winced writing the number. By no means was he old, but he was certainly not young anymore. Perhaps, he thought both hopefully and despairingly, his age would dissuade any of his compatible candidates and he wouldn't have to make a decision about going through with it or not.

Check which qualities are important to you in a mate. Snape placed check marks next to virtually all the categories, pausing and eventually skipping over 'Good looking'. He had no delusions about his own looks, and knew enough that he was not even remotely handsome. It seemed quite a double standard to choose someone based on beauty when he himself was so unattractive.

Pureblood? Half-blood? Muggle born? Doesn't matter? Snape paused for a minute, holding his quill over the Pureblood category, his Pureblood upbringing almost getting the better of him. However, he quickly switched to Doesn't Matter, scratching a thin check mark there.

Children? Yes, Snape scrawled on the line, hesitating before adding *definitely* after it. Perhaps Dumbledore was right. Maybe it was time to start a family. Snape glanced sideways at the essays he had put off grading. They'd have to wait, he decided, continuing down the pages and pages of questions.

By the time the next period started, he'd finished the test. As his students filed in he took a deep breath, and signed his name at the bottom. In a cloud of smoke the paper disappeared, on its way to the Geneamorphological Agency. It was done.

A cloud of cigar smoke enveloped Hermione as she entered the Leaky Cauldron; the young woman coughed as the putrid stuff entered her lungs. Ginny, already seated at a corner table, waved her over. In front of her was a thin folder, a large, gaudy ribbon pasted onto it. Ginny grinned, pushing it over to Hermione as the older woman slid into the seat opposite her.

"What is it?" Hermione asked, eyeing the folder with interest. She reached forward to unfasten the closings, but Ginny lightly slapped her hand away before she could get it open.

"First," Ginny began, "This is from all of us. Harry, Ron, Neville, Susan and I. Fred and George even chipped in a bit, and they would like to wish you a happy birthday. And," she rolled her eyes, "they said if you're still single by now, you should drop them an owl." Hermione rolled her eyes too, but giggled. Her interest in the folder was renewed. What was in there that everyone had to chip in for?

"You don't *have* to do this, if you don't want," Ginny added, indicating that Hermione should open the package. "But we think it would be good for you." Hopefully their insistence would be enough to convince Hermione that, or the ludicrous amount of money they spent on it.

Hermione withdrew the contents of the package and looked completely flabbergasted. "A compatibility test?" She read, scanning the front page. "What is this?"

"Well," Ginny said awkwardly (she didn't think she'd have to spell it out for Hermione), "we figured that it would be good for you to take a bit more time for yourself. You know, go on a date or two." Ginny lowered her voice, leaning in to Hermione. "After all, you are twenty-five, and you're still a virgin!"

The whole thing sounded so absurd, and Hermione almost burst out laughing at the last sentence. She blushed, quickly turning her laughter into a cough. Truth be told, she *wasn't* a virgin. She and Ron had gone a bit farther than they'd intended to while they were dating. It had been embarrassing later on when they realized what they were doing, and neither had admitted it to anyone. Especially not Ron's baby sister (though she certainly wasn't a baby anymore).

While Hermione had been 'coughing' up a storm, Ginny had stealthily turned to the first question on the test and was holding a quill out to Hermione. "Come on, 'Mione," she begged. "No harm, right? Maybe you'll meet Mr. Right." Hermione looked doubtful, but she still picked up the quill.

Keep name anonymous? Yes.

Age? 25

Check which qualities are important to you in a mate. Hermione blinked, looking at the question. She'd never really thought about it in depth before. Chewing her lower lip, she placed checks next to intelligence, generosity and kindness. Mentally she chided herself for not thinking this through. How could she not know the kind of person she wanted to spend her life with?

Pureblood? Half-blood? Muggle born? Doesn't matter? For a minute Hermione toyed with the idea of putting only Pureblood as her choice, wondering how many Purebloods would be willing to be matched with a muggle born. Not many, she decided, checking Doesn't Matter.

Children? At this question, Hermione practically spit out her tea, looking up sharply at Ginny. "Children?" She repeated incredulously. "What kind of compatibility test is this?" Ginny didn't answer right away, again being caught in an awkward moment she was not prepared for.

"Well," she began, "These types of tests are quite common in the wizarding world. Oftentimes we are so secluded from one another that it is hard to find someone that we are compatible with. The YLC test is considered the most accurate out there. In fact," Ginny added, but stopped before she could finish her sentence.

"In fact what?" Hermione asked, eyes narrowing. Ginny hesitated, but the look Hermione was giving her was enough to make her finish.

"In fact, 99% of compatible couples end up marrying," she finished quietly. She didn't want to dissuade Hermione before she even finished the test.

"Marrying?" Hermione erupted, dropping the quill. "I'm going to marry some stranger who happens to get the same test results I do? That's insane! Like those kinds of marriages would ever work anyway," she scoffed.

This time it was Ginny who took offense. "It's a practice that has been going on in the wizarding world for centuries," she argued. "My parents met through this! They had an 87% compatibility rating, and look how happy they are!"

Hermione became quiet, realizing how much she had offended Ginny. Maybe, just maybe this test wasn't such a bad thing after all. The Weasley's were perfectly happy together, weren't they?

Children? Hermione hesitated, but finally wrote that one word. *Yes.*

Heaving a sigh, Hermione held the quill just over the signature line. "Here goes nothing," she said to no one in particular, scrawling her name on the line. With a snap the paper disappeared in a cloud of smoke.

Ginny gave Hermione a reassuring smile. "Trust me, this will be fine. In fact," she took the cup of tea that Hermione had nervously emptied while filling out the test. Squinting her eyes like Professor Trelawney, she studied the dregs. "I predict the results of this test will give you a very happy future indeed!"

You?!

Chapter 2 of 8

Hermione and Snape decide to go through with the compatibility test results and meet at an arranged time. This, of course, is all done anonymously, and both are in for a shock when they finally discover who their ideal match is!

"It's here!" Ginny sing-songed, sidling up behind Hermione's desk and waving an envelope in front of her face. Hermione impatiently brushed the younger woman aside, trying to concentrate on the speech she was proofreading for Minister Bones. But Ginny persisted, finally snatching away the speech Hermione had been so intently studying.

"Hey!" Hermione exclaimed, a large blot of ink forming on the page as it was rapidly pulled away from under her quill. "Listen Ginny, I appreciate what you're doing for me, but I simply *must* get that speech read."

The redhead rolled her eyes. "You've been working at this desk for seven hours straight," she said accusingly. "Isn't it time you took a break? You haven't stopped for tea or a trip to the loo since you got here at precisely 7:13 am."

Hermione looked up suspiciously at Ginny. "And how exactly do you know my every movement, or lack thereof?"

Ginny wagged her eyebrows, nodding in the direction of the intern Hermione had put to work stuffing envelopes. "He's taken quite a fancy to you, you know. If it doesn't work out with this compatibility test, you can always date him." Ginny laughed as Hermione rolled her eyes, looking repulsed at the very thought of being near the clumsy, pimply teenager on an occasion that was not strictly work-related.

Ginny, spotting an opportunity, took advantage of Hermione's silence, grasping the older woman's arms and physically hauling her out of the chair. Hermione was so surprised she didn't resist. "We're leaving," Ginny informed the stunned intern. "Come on, Hermione." Protesting faintly, Hermione was cajoled, pushed and finally, literally dragged across the threshold and out the door.

"I can't believe I just did that," Hermione said, looking ruefully at the entrance of the Ministry building that she and Ginny had just exited only moments before. "I've never just up and walked out of work before."

"Precisely why you simply must do it now," Ginny stated, nudging Hermione along at a more rapid pace. "Anyway, we've got to get you ready. You have a date in less than two hours."

"WHAT?" Hermione exploded, stopping suddenly. She grabbed Ginny's arm, pulling the younger woman so that they stood face to face. A number of passing Muggles turned to look at them oddly. "What do you mean I have a date tonight?" Hermione hissed, gritting her teeth.

"You, er, got a letter from the Yenta Livery Company." Ginny fished around in her pocket, pulling out a neat letter and handing it to Hermione. Hermione snatched the letter, reading it half-aloud to herself.

"Dear Ms. Granger....a match located....96% compatibility...please respond..." Hermione waved the letter in Ginny's face. "Let me guess, you responded for me."

Ginny nodded sheepishly, having sense enough to look ashamed. "I figured that you might not want to go through with it," she reasoned. Hermione's nod of agreement at that statement, rather than dissuade Ginny, gave her a surge of confidence. "See! You wouldn't have made anything of this. Maybe you aren't too familiar with this system, but a 96% is a very good score."

More exasperate than angry now, Hermione sighed. "Couldn't you have at least told me in advance? I have a lot of work tonight, I won't be able to make it to this meeting."

"No," Ginny declared. "You *are* going tonight. You're going to go home, and we're going to get you dressed and ready. No ifs, ands or buts."

"I don't have a dress," Hermione pointed out dryly, knowing it was a lame excuse as soon as she said it. But she really didn't have any other logical reason to not go.

"That's fine," Ginny said, shrugging it off as she steered Hermione down the sidewalk. "I've got plenty, and we are just about the same size. Mum will help with any tailoring if we need it." She glanced down at her watch. "Now lets go we've only got an hour and forty five minutes before you need to be there!"

Yenta Livery Company

"Your Best Match For Your Best Money, Guaranteed"

Dear Mr. Severus Snape,

It is our pleasure here at Yenta Livery Company to inform you that a compatible match who meets the requirements you previously listed has been found. Our geneamorphological testing has found a 96% compatibility rating between yourself and your aforementioned match. She is a citizen of Great Britain and resides permanently in London.

Yenta Livery Company would be honored to arrange a meeting between yourself and your match for a small fee of 10 galleons. If interested, please check the 'Yes' box at the bottom of the page.

If you are not satisfied with your results or would like to expand your search radius, please return the affixed form and 50 galleons. A new survey will be delivered shortly.

Sincerely,

Wilfreda Hopkins-Atticks

Yenta Livery Company, London Office

Snape blinked at the letter in his hands. This was unexpected, to say the least. An uncharacteristic bubble of hope burgeoned in his chest. Who would have thought that anyone would have a 96% compatibility rating with him? And to think that they were so close by!

Snape scratched a large checkmark into the 'Yes' box, quite curious to see who this mystery match was. Perhaps he was loath to say it but perhaps Dumbledore still did have a few functioning brain cells left after all.

Hermione, though she wouldn't admit it to Ginny, was actually looking forward to meeting this mystery man now that she'd thought about it. After all, who was it that she had so much in common with? Vaguely she toyed with the disconcerting thought that her match would be another rule-obsessed workaholic much like herself before banishing the thought from her head.

"Ready?" Ginny chirped cheerfully, sticking her head into the bathroom where Hermione stood, criticizing her appearance in the mirror. Hermione shook her head, struggling to pin her charmed curls into place. Ginny knew all sorts of spells for this type of thing hair, make-up, even clothing could be altered with a tap of her wand. But in truth, Hermione felt nervous with all the preparation going on. She couldn't help worrying that she was working herself up for nothing, and that it was all going to be a disappointment.

"I'm ready," Hermione said finally, stepping out of the bathroom. Ginny nodded her approval, secretly glad she had forbidden Fred and George from accompanying them to the meeting place. Their wolf whistles might have scared Hermione off.

Ginny tossed a handful of Floo powder into the fire grate, bowing slightly to Hermione. "You may go first." She was not about to let Hermione sneak off and miss her appointment.

"Yenta Livery Company, London office," Hermione declared loudly as the flames seemingly swallowed her up. Ginny followed a moment later, and both girls emerged in a pleasant, posh sitting room. The walls were painted a pale lavender, and an almost sickeningly sweet smell filled their air.

"Ms. Granger?" A plump, smiling witch enquired, eyeing Hermione. The young woman nodded, and the YLC witch smiled. "Right this way, please." With one last fearful look at Ginny, Hermione allowed herself to be led into a small sitting room.

It was sparsely furnished, having only a small loveseat and a table with a simple tea service on it. Trying to distract herself, Hermione focused on the pleasant view depicted in the enchanted windows. "Lovely, isn't it?" The plump witch sighed. Hermione nodded distractedly.

A small popping sound was heard, and the witch promptly glanced down at the clipboard in her hands. "Oh! It looks as if your match is here already!" She smiled; Hermione gulped. "Why don't you take a moment to get settled, and I'll send him in a minute." Snapping out of her semi-lethargic state, Hermione nodded. Nothing to be worried about, she reminded herself. This was simply a meeting. How bad could it be? After all, they were extremely compatible.

"Good luck, dearie," the plump witch said, exiting the small room. Hermione nodded, occupying her trembling fingers by smoothing the folds of her skirt. Again she gazed out the enchanted window, using all her powers of self-control to not whip around and see who her match was as the door creaked open.

A young, shapely witch stood with her back to him as Snape entered the room. She looked promising, he thought, clearing his throat to get her attention. Slowly she turned around, offering him a polite smile. Snape was on the verge of smiling back when oh Gods! It couldn't be. The smile fell off the woman's face immediately, and her eyes widened in both shock and horror.

"*Professor?*" Hermione squeaked, staring incredulously at the dreaded Potion's professor she had thought she'd left behind at Hogwarts. "What are you doing here?"

"I could ask you the same thing," Snape replied sourly, his stunned expression replaced swiftly by his usual sneer. No way. There was no possible way in hell that Hermione Granger, the little know-it-all that had constantly tortured him all throughout her years at Hogwarts, was his ideal match. "However, I don't think I shall be staying long, if that is alright by you, Miss Granger." Pivoting on his heel, he swept back out the door. Or, at least he tried. His efforts were in vain. The door had been locked. From the outside.

Anyone But You

Chapter 3 of 8

An unwilling couple plus an overenthusiastic civil servant are just the recipe for disaster as Hermione and Snape find themselves quickly falling into an irreversible trap.

Snape stood for a moment, staring at the door. Out of habit, his wand was within reach. Pointing it at the door, he muttered, "Alohomora!" The doorknob clicked, and Snape smirked. See? That wasn't too hard to get out of. He turned the handle, and tried to yank the door open. It would not budge.

"Unlockable Charm," Hermione said suddenly from the other side of the room. "It will keep whoever is in, in; and whoever is out, out."

"I know what an Unlockable Charm is, Miss Granger," Snape snapped irritably. "We'll have to get those meddling witches to open up the door immediately."

"They won't," Hermione commented. "YLC policy. Couples," she blushed, saying that word, "are to meet for a minimum of one hour. They won't open the door for another—" Hermione glanced down at her antique wristwatch, "another fifty-seven minutes."

Snape scowled, stalking over to the loveseat and plunking himself down just as Hermione was seating herself. Both squirmed uncomfortably as their arms touched. Hermione self-consciously drew her arms across her chest, suddenly realizing just how low cut her dress was. A very, very pregnant pause filled the air.

All of a sudden the door swung open, and in entered a jolly, rotund man follow by a harried young clerk. Hermione and Snape both jumped up, ready to make a break for the door when the younger man slammed it shut. A crestfallen look appeared on both of their faces.

"Hermione Granger and Severus Snape?" The older man asked, smiling heartily. The pair nodded. "Good! I am Justice Armando Higgins" He said, clasping his hands. Retrieving a handkerchief from his pocket, he blew noisily into it then wiped a tear from his eye. "Forgive me, but these are always so beautiful that I can't help cry just a bit!"

He's crazy, Hermione and Snape both decided, instinctively shrinking together as the man approached them. Justice Higgins, rather than looking offended, beamed.

"I do enjoy seeing all you little lovebirds!" At the world lovebirds, Hermione got a very strange look on her face while Snape looked as if he had been stunned. Both simultaneously stepped away from the other.

"Now, I believe I am here to perform a marriage ceremony. So, let us continue." Hermione gaped, and Snape attempted a snide dismissal, but he was cut off by Higgins. The Justice had a record of the fastest marriage ceremonies in the company, and he wasn't about to let some bloke get cold feet and ruin it form him. "Hermione Granger, do you take Severus Snape as your lawfully wedded husband?" he intoned, the solemn words belied by his jovial grin.

"I most certainly do n—" Hermione declared hotly, but was cut off by Higgins, who smiled broadly. Hermione gasped, realizing what she had just said.

"And you," Higgins said, turning to Snape. "Please repeat after me. I, Severus Snape, do hereby take Hermione Granger as my lawfully wedded wife."

Snape shot a disdainful look at Hermione. "What is this nonsense? 'I, Severus Snape, do hereby take Hermione Granger as my lawfully wedded wife?'" he sneered. "You are aware that does not constitute a proper, legal and binding wedding vow. Which hardly matters as we aren't here to be married anyway." Higgins did not seem to hear the tail end of Snape's comment.

The clerk, who had thus far been silent, finally spoke up. "A-a-actually, Mr. Snape sir, it is legal." He held up a certificate, where the names Hermione Granger and Severus Snape had magically appeared. Hermione gulped. "A-a-according to the Articles of Wizardy, Section 265, Article 14C, line 12: Verbal consent of matrimony, in the presence of two sound minded witnesses, is hereby considered legally binding," the clerk recited.

"You see?" Justice Higgins said, beaming as he enveloped the unwilling newlyweds in a bear hug. "Congratulations!" The clerk snapped a picture of the stunned couple. Justice Higgins turned and promptly marched out the door, the clerk in tow. In and out in under five minutes. The door was finally left open (though it was a bit too late now), swinging slowly in the two men's wake.

Hermione blinked, turning to look at Snape. "They— they were serious, weren't they?" She asked, looking desperate. Snape nodded grimly. "We can get a divorce, right?" She continued, her voice rising, almost in panic.

Snape shook his head, heaving a resigned sigh. "Wizarding marriages are for life," he said, blanching at the strangled look of horror that crossed Hermione's face. "No divorces, no annulments."

Hermione paled, hurrying out of the room. "Ginny!" She cried, looking distressed. The pureblood woman sprung up out of a lounge chair, sensing that there was trouble. "Wizarding marriages," Hermione said slowly, "are they," she gulped, "forever?"

Ginny nodded, not fully grasping the situation. That is, until she saw a rather shell-shocked Snape come walking dazed out of the room Hermione had just exited. Her eyes widened as she finally cottoned on.

"You two—you guys didn't get *married*, did you?" She squeaked, looking horrified at the thought. Hermione nodded glumly. Snape rolled his eyes; Hermione's and now Ginny's expressions were quite a blow to his esteem. Hermione had just married him, but by the expression on her face one would have thought she had just received a death sentence.

"Ah, here is the happy couple!" Justice Higgins announced, looking up from the conversation he had been having with the plump, dimpled YLC witch. He winked at the witch, and she smiled in return.

"You two don't look too pleased," the witch noted, a teasing tone in her voice. Snape looked like he wanted to strangle the woman. He'd come here to meet his compatible match, *not* to marry Hermione Granger! The young clerk coughed into his hands, looking pointedly at Higgins and the couple.

"It's because the groom hasn't kissed the bride!" Higgins declared broadly, catching a look from his clerk. "I completely forget. Ah, well. Here it goes: You may now kiss your bride." He beamed.

Neither Snape nor Hermione moved. Higgins grabbed a hold of his wand and waved it in a large arc. Both Snape and Hermione felt a gentle push behind them, propelling them towards one another. The more they tried to resist it, the stronger it became until there were forced together in one long, awkward kiss. After a minute had passed Higgins seemed to feel that the kiss was sufficient. He waved his wand and the charm abated, allowing Hermione and Snape to break free from their clumsy kiss. Both looked faintly disturbed, and Hermione was blushing furiously.

Snape and Hermione exchanged one single, desperate look. This was going to be a long...life.

Author's Note: Well, now that they're married maybe they'll get around to having an actual romance! (Finally!)

Welcome to My, er, Our House.

Chapter 4 of 8

Meddling seems to have become a full-time occupation for Dumbledore and Ginny as they strive to convince the accidental couple that maybe things aren't so bad after all.

"I can't believe I married him," Hermione said, repeating the sentence to herself over a cup of tea. "I *can't*." She glanced into the tea cup, a fond daydream of hers coming to mind, and souring immediately. She'd been imagining this scene ever since her mother had taken her to see her first muggle romance movie when she was a little girl.

Since that day, Hermione had dreamed of one day owning a small cottage where she would live once she got married. At night the entire family would gather in the sitting room, she and her husband discussing literature at the table while the children played on the floor. Now she winced, recalling that picture. The loving husband turned to a cold, brooding Snape, and the adorable children she had pictured all grew large, beaked noses and long, greasy hair.

Ginny, meanwhile, had been watching Hermione. "What's wrong?" She asked, noticing the expression on Hermione's face go from despair to complete horror.

"My children," Hermione said softly, and Ginny too immediately got a mental image of mini Snapes running around the house. She shuddered. "I think I'm going to just go to bed," Hermione added, rising. "I can't take thinking about this any longer."

Hermione trudged up to bed, leaving a guilty Ginny to contemplate a solution to the problem she had unwittingly caused with that bloody test.

Hermione Granger. *Hermione bloody Granger*. Snape started into his glass of firewhiskey, trying to ignore the voice in the back of his mind that kept repeating "Don't you mean Hermione *Snape* now?" Snape took a long swig from the glass, trying to drown out the voice.

"How did it go?" A pleased looking Dumbledore asked, stepping over the threshold into Snape's office. The Potions master had arrived back in the castle in a huff, but rather than snap at the rest of the staff during dinner, he had retired to his quarters. Dumbledore took this to be a sign that things were going well.

"I got married," Snape scowled, glaring at Dumbledore. It was all his fault! That meddling son-of-a

"Excellent!" Dumbledore beamed, clasping his hands together. "Perhaps there is still enough time to arrange a little post-nuptial banquet, hmm?"

"I think not," Snape replied, darkening at the idea. What would they do? Toast to a marriage that nobody wanted in the first place? Snape cringed at the idea of having to meet his in-laws, and actually speak with the Prat-Who-Lived and the Weasley boy just after he'd married their best friend against her will. They'd hex him to next Tuesday. Or, he sneered, at least they'd try.

"Who is the lucky girl?" Dumbledore asked, a twinkle in his eye. "And when, pray tell, do I get to meet her?"

"You know her already," Snape growled, clenching his glass of firewhiskey so tightly that his knuckles were turning white. "It's Hermione Granger."

Dumbledore raised a brow, though in all honesty he couldn't say that they weren't good for one another. "A wonderful girl, Miss Granger," Dumbledore said finally. "Or," he smiled, "should I say Mrs. Snape?"

Snape slammed his glass down on his desk. "My marriage to Miss Granger was, Albus, a mistake," he snarled. "An unfortunate mistake that cannot be remedied until the Wizarding laws are amended."

"It is not so unfortunate, is it Severus?" Dumbledore asked quietly. "It may be difficult at first, but it will get easier. Especially once the children come and"

Snape nearly choked on his firewhiskey, cutting Dumbledore off. "Children? You don't expect us to actually have children or any semblance of a real marriage, do you?" Images of miniature Grangers running amok in his dungeon chambers popped up in his head, and simply would not leave.

Dumbledore sighed. This scene was all too reminiscent of the last time he had spoken with Snape. "Very well then. I urge you and Miss Granger to have a go at this marriage, but in the end it is your decision."

Snape didn't even bother to respond, watching as Dumbledore slowly exited his room. Snape wasn't about to take his advice, not this time. *Take the test, there are no obligations*. Just look where Dumbledore's advice had gotten him already.

Ginny had spent the night at Hermione's apartment, playing the role of the soothing best friend. She'd awoken during the very early hours of the morning, spying a large,

tawny owl at the window. Uncomfortably rolling off her poorly transfigured bed, she'd opened the window and found, with some surprise, that the letter was addressed to her. In Albus Dumbledore's handwriting no less. As she read the letter, a plan hatched in her mind.

By the time Hermione had woken up, Ginny had perfected her plan. Timing everything so she and Hermione were both squeezed into the tiny kitchenette together, she casually said, "Hermione, I think it might be time to find you a new apartment."

Hermione glanced up from the toast she had been buttering, arching a brow.

"The thing is," Ginny continued, "It's a bit small" Hermione snorted (or maybe grunted, Ginny's elbow was poking her in the ribs), "and I think you might have an infestation of termites. You forget what Muggles call them termy-ites."

Hermione looked indifferent. "Termites. So we'll call the exterminator. They can spray, and the bugs will be gone in no time."

Ginny frowned, she hadn't thought of that! Of course Hermione would be well versed in Muggle bug treatments. "I heard that the stuff they use to get rid of the termy-ites is dangerous to humans," she said vaguely, improvising.

The older woman frowned. There was something extremely suspicious about the way Ginny was acting, but Hermione couldn't figure out what the girl was up to. Ginny wanted her out of the house, that was for sure. And the exterminator did need at least twenty-four hours to spray (although Hermione had never once seen a termite in the apartment, and she doubted Ginny even knew what a termite was).

Still, curiosity got the better of her and sighing, she said, "Fine, I guess I'll have to leave for a bit. But where should I go? Your apartment is even smaller than mine."

Ginny smiled inwardly, relieved. "My, uh, cousin's got a really lovely house in the country. She's going out of town for a few weeks, and uh," Ginny sputtered. This wasn't going as well as she had planned. Hermione was getting suspicious. "She needs someone to house-sit for a week or two," Ginny finally spat out. "I was going to see if you were interested, but then I saw the termy-ites and yeah," Ginny finished lamely.

"Why doesn't she ask one of your brothers to do it? Fred or George could stay there for a bit, or even Ron"

Ginny snorted, cutting Hermione off. "Fred and George would probably blow up the house accidentally. And Ron, well, you know how Ron can't be left alone in a house with all the priceless antiques my cousin has." Hermione nodded, seeing Ginny's point.

"All right," Hermione said finally, "I suppose I can go for a few days." Ginny beamed. "It will be nice to have a quiet environment to get my work done in."

Ginny scribbled down an address on a piece of paper, shoving it in Hermione's hands. "I've got to run I've got a meeting. This is the address. Flooing to it will be just fine. Don't forget to owl me when you get there, alright?" A confused Hermione watched as Ginny dashed out of the kitchenette, and out of the apartment.

Something was definitely going on, and she did not like not being privy to it.

When Hermione stepped out of the fireplace at Ginny's cousin's house, she knew something was wrong immediately. The room was dark, dusty, and hadn't been lived in in years. The furniture was antique, Ginny had been right about that. But this certainly wasn't the home of some maiden cousin living out in the countryside.

The room must have been some sort of sitting room, but it looked as if it was larger than Hermione's whole apartment. Her footsteps echoed in the empty room, sending shivers up her back. Looking at the wall opposite the fireplace, Hermione came face to face with a huge coat of arms. On its right, a portrait of an old-fashioned wizard scowled down at her.

"What the?" Hermione began, recognizing the beaked nose and pale, peaked look.

"A joke of Dumbledore's," a voice said behind her. Hermione jumped. Speak of the devil. Snape, despite his billowing robes and the creaking floorboards, had managed to enter the room silently. "Welcome to my home," he added dryly.

"Your home?" Hermione repeated, staring wide-eyed at Snape. "But Ginny said this was her cousin's house," she said lamely.

"If you want to get technical, yes, we are distantly related. All Pureblood families are intertwined. But I suspect what she told you is similar to what Dumbledore told me." Hermione nodded mutely, still somewhat confused. "Dumbledore informed me that my living quarters were inhabitable, due to something or other they were planning on doing in the dungeons. He all but demanded that I vacate them, and live somewhere else during the summer break. And here I am."

Hermione nodded sympathetically. "Ginny told me I was going to house-sit for her cousin while she's away, because my apartment is infested with termites or some nonsense." Hermione rolled her eyes.

A flash of lightning briefly lit up the room, followed by the deafening crash of thunder. "I suppose now would be as good a time as any to inform you that you will be staying the night," Snape commented, glancing at the array of blankets he had already set out on one of the moth-eaten couches.

"What?"

"Dumbledore must have cast a similar charm on this building as there is on Hogwarts," Snape explained angrily. "We can't apparate out I've tried it already. No floo powder, and we're miles from anyone. Unless you'd like to walk in that," he indicated the pouring rain, "we will have to stay here for the night."

Hermione eyed the couches distastefully. "Don't you have any bedrooms in this house?"

"Quite honestly, Miss Granger or rather, Madam Snape," he corrected, smirking as she bristled, "I am not sure if the rest of the house is even habitable right now, and I am not inclined to check. The library, however, is in good condition. If you wish you may select a book to amuse yourself for the time being."

Silently adding 'Kill Ginny' to her mental list of things to do, Hermione wandered into the library, looking for anything that would distract her from the fact that she was stuck with Snape for the next few hours.

Oddly enough, however, hours later as Hermione drifted off to sleep, the last thing she noticed was how peaceful Snape looked quietly reading by the light of a solitary candle.

The next morning, Snape awoke to the sound of pots and pans being rattled around the kitchen. Groggily he groped for his wand before remembering that Hermione stayed the night, and it wasn't an intruder. Yawning, he rolled off the couch, following the sound of the noise.

Hermione was in the kitchen, dutifully supervising the various chores that were being completed magically. A kettle on the stove whistled as the water boiled, pots that hadn't been used since his mother had finally died were being washed in the sink. A tantalizing aroma drifted his way, and he realized that Hermione had pancakes cooking as well.

"What are you doing?" he asked, spying Hermione carefully cleaning and organizing the cabinets. She glanced up, her hair in disarray and her face smudged with the dust that had accumulated over the years.

"Cleaning," she answered shortly. "This place is filthy."

"I can see that," Snape replied dryly. "But *why* are you cleaning?"

"Well," Hermione said matter-of-factly. "If we're going to live here, this place needs to be fixed up a bit. Especially for when the children come."

Snape, who'd been in the process of pouring himself a cup of tea, dropped the kettle on the counter with a BANG!

"The WHAT?!"

Author's Note: I hope everybody enjoys reading this chapter as much as I enjoyed writing it. They are finally showing the faintest signs of being interested in each other hopefully it will turn into something more soon enough. ;)

Logic is the Key

Chapter 5 of 8

Hermione and Snape use the one tool they have to determine whether or not their marriage can possibly last: logic.

"You aren't— you weren't serious just now, were you?" Snape asked, slowly righting the tea kettle he had dropped just seconds before.

Hermione's icy calm exterior shattered the moment her decision was questioned. It was stupid to decide something like that so early, she realized. Just as it was stupid to try and imagine that her married life was going to end up with a happily ever after like the cheesy romance novel she'd read before bed. That's probably what had put the idea in her head in the first place. Now that Snape was standing in front of her, Hermione was coming to grips with the disappointing truth that Snape was not—nor would he ever be—some type of Romeo character.

"I-I don't know," Hermione finally said, uttering the words she hadn't used in years. "I thought I was but, I'm really not sure." She could feel herself under the Potions master's scrutiny, and she immediately reddened, focusing her eyes on the pancakes cooking before of her. Without looking up, she piled a few pancakes on two plates, bringing them over to the table.

"I've always wanted a family," Hermione added, still staring at her breakfast. "A nice little home in the country, and two or three children. Of course, I'd probably have to quit my job in order to raise the children." Snape looked up from his pancakes, but was unable to meet Hermione's eyes. She was a rarity, he decided. Most young career witches, especially ones with such promising futures as Hermione, did not often fantasize about giving up a job to take care of a few brats. His appreciation of her went up a notch.

"I've always wanted at least two children," Snape admitted, now that Hermione had finally shared her little dream. He saw the look on her face, and added, "I can't stand most children, but my own would be raised in such a way that they would be tolerable."

Hermione had an image of a black-robed Snape chasing a small toddler around the mansion, trying to get the little boy into his diapers. Unable to help herself, she snorted into her glass of water.

"And just what is so funny?" Snape asked crossly, setting down his utensils and glaring at his wife.

"You haven't been around children much, have you?" Hermione commented, trying to rein in her giggles, but only succeeding in gagging on her pancake.

"Hermione," he replied, using her given name to the surprise of both, "I am around children every waking moment. I am a *teacher*."

"Not school-age kids, little children. Toddlers, babies." Snape probably wouldn't know what to do with them, Hermione realized, the thought of him utterly helpless and clueless endearing him to her. "I used to babysit," she added, "The little ones were so adorable. I used to wish I'd have a baby brother or sister so I could take care of them."

"I absolutely loathed being an only child," Snape confessed, glancing around the kitchen he'd spent so little of his childhood in. "There were no other children in the house. My father forbade the help from keeping any young children with them. I devoted all my time to my studies, because it was the only thing I could do."

"My parents made me feel as if I was their last hope," Hermione said, picking at her pancakes. "I was the only child, so everything I did had to be exceptional. I wasn't very good friends with the other children in my neighborhood, and because I didn't have a brother or sister, I spent a lot of my time alone." She shrugged, finishing the last bit of food from her plate.

Rising, Hermione cleared the empty plates off the table, just as she had watched her mum do for years. She realized that she'd never really talked to Snape before, and now that she was, she was finding it to be quite pleasant. She was suddenly struck with an idea.

"How about," she began slowly, "we weigh our options. We're both logical people, it shouldn't be too difficult to figure out the pros and cons of actually living together as a married couple."

Snape suddenly, surprised. But he nodded. It sounded look a good idea. Weighing the pros and cons probably wasn't the best way to decide whether a couple wanted to marry, but hell, they were married already, so it couldn't really make a difference.

Snape summoned a piece of paper and a quill, while Hermione started dictating.

"Pros," she began, the quill immediately writing down what she said. "Companionship. Support. A family. Not coming home to an empty apartment late a night. Someone to sit with and discuss important issues with in front of the fire," Hermione added, sighing wistfully. Snape raised a brow at the last comment, but managed to contain any rude remarks he might have made.

"Cons. Having to share living space. Not being able to do whatever we want, whenever we so care to do it."

"Housing," Snape interjected, interrupting Hermione's endless listing. "Hogwarts teachers live on campus, which means you would have to come live in my quarters. It might be a bit cramped. Especially," he hesitated, "especially if there are children later on." Both fell silent.

"I know this isn't a full list, but," Hermione nervously bit her lip, glancing at Snape. "I think I would like to try it. Just one week, and we'll see how it goes. Is that alright, Severus?" She purposely used his given name, and was relieved that he did not seem to be bothered by it. Of course, she realized, he had called her Hermione first.

"Shall we be telling your family?" Snape asked suddenly, an awkward silence filling the air after his question.

Hermione shook her head. "If it doesn't work out, well, I don't think I could stand having them—or Ron and Harry for that matter—talking about it. They'd go on for hours about it. I'd never hear the end of it, and come to think of it, neither would you. They'd probably think you forced me into it." Snape looked ready to reply indignantly, but Hermione cut him off with a tired wave. "They do it because they care, I know. But their chivalry is a bit misguided."

"So we shan't be telling anyone," Snape confirmed, looking rather relieved. The less people who knew about it, the better. If they were lucky, only themselves, Dumbledore and the Weasley girl knew. If they were unlucky and Dumbledore insisted on broadcasting their happy news to the staff, well, the entire wizarding world would know by Sunday.

"And so starts day one," Hermione muttered, under her breath, placing the dirty dishes in the sink and running the tap. "Good morning, Severus."

"Good morning, Hermione."

Later that night, Hermione watched Snape from her position on the couch. He must have assumed she was asleep, but she was wide awake, and she'd been watching him for the last hour. Finally he set down his book, extinguishing the candle. Hermione took that as her cue to move. Scrambling out of bed, she tiptoed across the floor and hesitating for a moment, climbed into the makeshift bed next to Snape.

"What are you doing?" He asked, quite unsure of how to react to both the sudden physical contact and Hermione's bold move.

Hermione took a deep, calming breath, fully aware of what she was about to do. "Well, we are married now..."

Author's Note: Tune in tomorrow for the next challenge requirement...the smut scene.

Many thanks to my wonderful Muse-Goddess Chelsea, despite the fact that she kinda sorta wanted to beta these chapters, but kinda sorta never got around to it.

Wanting

Chapter 6 of 8

Hermione and Snape finally give in to their desires. Or rather, they give in to Hermione's.

Author's Note: I apologize in advance. Smut is not my forte, as you will soon find out. But practice makes perfect, I suppose.

I would like to thank my Muse Goddess, Chelsea, for putting up with me while I repeated endlessly that I had no idea what I was doing.

"Hermione, I don't understand," Snape said, tensing as Hermione laid a hand on his chest. "Do you want us to" he paused, fishing around for the right word, "consummate our marriage?"

Hermione blushed furiously, but nodded resolutely. "If we're going to live a normal, married life, we will have to do it eventually." She bit her lip, lowering her eyes. "Especially if we want children."

"How long has it been since you've been with a man?" Snape demanded, bluntly. Her attitude and actions led him to believe that it had been a while since the last time, if it had even happened at all.

"In the beginning of my seventh year at Hogwarts," Hermione said softly, now flushing a bright crimson. "Ron and I were still dating and..." She broke off, embarrassed.

Of course, Snape sneered inwardly, Ronald Weasley. He was probably just as clumsy in bed as he was doing everything else. No wonder Hermione was anxious to try it again, especially since so many years had passed since then.

"I don't think this is a good idea," Snape said finally. "You're just going to be disappointed. I'm nothing like Ron was. I'm nearly fifty, and I assure you there is nothing beneath my robes that is particularly worthy of notice. Trust me, you *don't* want to do this."

"Yes, I do!" Hermione declared insistently, perhaps a little too suddenly.

Snape arched a brow. "Do you?" He whispered, in the same eerie tone that had haunted her as a student. She shivered. "At best, you will be disappointed. At worst, disgusted. I doubt you want that."

Suddenly, Hermione scowled. "Why don't you let me make up my own mind, hmm?" Snape was taken aback but this sudden outburst. "I never claimed to want another Ron, and for your information, I don't. Just stop being so bloody insecure, and stop making excuses!"

"Fine!" Snape snarled, sitting up in the makeshift bed. "If you really want to see this, here it is!" He flung off the black nightshirt, and Hermione's eyes widened immediately. He was pale and gaunt, and Hermione could swear his ribs were all but protruding from his sickly colored skin. But what horrified her were the scars, the long lashes and small, angry red welts. Snape could feel her staring at them, and felt a wave of revulsion wash over him.

"Some of the delightful results of the Cruciatus Curse," he informed her, breathing heavily as he fought to ignore the memories. "You see? I am nothing but a broken, old man."

But Hermione wasn't listening to him. She was gently running her fingers over his chest, wincing every time she touched the scarred tissue as if it had been her own body

that was wounded. A pitying look came into her eyes, and Snape immediately grew self-conscious and wary.

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

"Don't be," Snape growled harshly, roughly pushing her hand away. "I did my part, and I do not deserve nor desire your pity."

Although she recoiled as he pushed her away, Hermione did the one thing that instinct was telling her to do: she threw her arms around him, hugging him close. Snape seemed at a loss for both words and action, but he did not try to pry himself out of her embrace. Gently Hermione leaned forward, planting a kiss on Snape's lips. To Hermione's embarrassment, Snape pulled back immediately. But then he leaned forward, returning the kiss with a surprising amount of passion.

Hermione ran her fingers through Snape's hair, pulling his head closer to her own. His own self-control disintegrated. Snape wrapped his arm around her back pulling her onto his lap. A side of Snape that Hermione had never known existed that he himself had not known existed emerged, planting a row of kisses down Hermione's neck. Hermione purred, returning his kisses.

Slowly Snape lay back against the pillow, gently pulling Hermione down until she was lying next to him. She instinctively snuggled up against him. This action, this seemingly innocent action coming from none other than Hermione Granger, seemed to awaken whatever passion Snape had left in him. His fingers flew to the buttons of her blouse, suddenly eager to get the damned thing off her. However, as soon as the first hint of cleavage caught his eye, he stopped abruptly.

"What's wrong?" Hermione murmured, worried that she'd unknowingly hurt or offended Snape. "Did I do something wrong?"

"No," Snape replied, raising his gaze to meet hers. "But I can't go through with this unless I'm absolutely certain it's what you want."

"It is what I want," she responded, slowly undoing the last buttons where he had left off. "Please, don't deny me this." Snape helped her slip the blouse off, and it fell unceremoniously to the floor. Hermione's slacks and his trousers met the same fate. Snape shifted his weight so that Hermione lay under him, while he supported himself on either side of her. Then slowly, hesitantly, he clumsily unclasped her bra and slipped it off.

It was then that he had his first real misgivings. It wasn't that he didn't want to do this, his arousal was quite apparent. But it had been so long. He must have been about Hermione's age, the last time he had made love to a woman. The wars and the years of spying in between had left no room for any extra relationships; and even if he had found the right woman, he could not bring himself to commit, fearing that the Dark Lord or his minions would take their anger out on her.

Snape could not have known, but Hermione was having the same thoughts. It had been over eight years since she and Ron had last slept together (she couldn't even call it making love), and she feared that she'd be even worse at it now than she had been then. This was not something one could learn from a book, and her experience in it was woefully inadequate. Any thought of insufficiency, however, was banished when Hermione happened to glance downward, spying Snape's obvious arousal. The sight of his tented undergarments caused her to gasp, not because of the implications of what she was doing, but because she, herself, had caused such a reaction in a man.

Before Snape could react, thinking that her gasp was a sign of dismissal, Hermione arched forward and kissed him roughly. This time it was his turn to gasp, seeing the sudden, determined light in Hermione's eyes. He knew her well enough that there was no arguing with her when she got that look, and thus when she hooked her fingers under the elastic of his undergarments and tugged, he reciprocated until both were as naked as the day they were born.

Snape looked questioningly at Hermione, and she nodded vigorously. "Just do it," she whispered, her voice husky. It was now or never. Snape took a breath, lowered himself, and thrust into her.

Hermione shrieked, a mixture of both pain and pleasure. Hermione was now panting heavily, rocking her hips back and forth as she pulled Snape closer. Moaning, Snape pulled out then rapidly thrust back into her. As he continued, his thrusts grew more and more frantic. Hermione's nails dug into his back as she cried out, losing all self-control and then coming, screaming his name.

Severus. His given name had never sounded so good to him before. At that moment, everything from the past few days came flooding back to him. His marriage to Hermione. Their decision to live together, to try to make it work. Their making love. The fact that he could please the likes of her. It was too much to handle, he could feel himself rapidly spinning out of control, and finally the waves of pleasure as he came. With a grunt, he collapsed into Hermione's arms.

"Mmm," Hermione murmured with a tired, content smile, curling up in Snape's arms, "I love you." Her eyes flickered shut, and within a few moments she was breathing deeply, asleep. Snape, however, could not sleep so easily.

Love? Had she really said love? The rational part of his brain told him that he had misunderstood her, but that nagging little voice in the back of his head was arguing quite persuasively that she *had* said it. A wave of guilt washed over him as he glanced down at the sleeping Hermione.

Despite his arguments against it, he had enjoyed himself. He could only hope that Hermione would feel the same upon waking.

Author's Note: I would also like to apologize for the excessive amount of wangsting in the last two chapters. This is not an angst drama. The humor should be back in place (hopefully!) by next chapter.

As for the smut, well, I'll have to work on that.

The Morning After

Chapter 7 of 8

Snape and Hermione wake up to an...interesting morning after. And if they aren't already bogged down enough as it is, Ginny surprises them by showing up unexpectedly at a most awkward time.

Author's Note: As Gardengrrl13 said, never trust what someone says while intoxicated or directly after sex. Hermione, it appears, isn't exactly too confident in herself at the moment.

I enjoyed writing this chapter after spending a few days writing semi-angsty stuff (here and elsewhere). My Angst-O-Meter is officially broken.

And thank you to everybody who has reviewed, or even read the story. The positive feedback is really helpful, and knowing that people are reading this gets me to update

even faster. :)

Light streamed through the shredded curtains as dawn broke, flooding the room and waking Snape from his sleep. Groggily he lifted his arm to rub his eyes, but found he could not. There was a sleeping body on top of it. A *naked* sleeping body on top of it. Remembering that night's activities, Snape almost smiled. Hermione was still there hopelessly that was a good sign. Deciding that there was nothing he could do without waking the sleeping woman next to him, Snape curled his arm around her and drifted back to sleep.

The sudden movement in the makeshift bed, however, had woken Hermione. Her vision was still somewhat fuzzy, and the first thing she noticed was the uncomfortable itching of the flannel blanket against her skin. *Odd*, she thought, tiredly rubbing her chafed calf, *I could have sworn I had longer pajama bottoms on* Running her fingers up her leg, she stopped once she was an inch or two past her knee. There was nothing there. Shaking her head, she glanced down at herself and gasped. She was completely, utterly, stark naked. And there was an arm draped across her midsection.

With a yelp she tumbled out of the bed, clutching the blanket over her. A now uncovered and still naked Snape glanced down at her curiously before realization set in.

"W-we didn't do what I think we did, did we?" Hermione stuttered, looking down at herself, then at Snape. She was remembering it more clearly now, but it seemed more like a dream than reality. Snape nodded mutely. "I can't believe it," Hermione said, causing Snape to wince. He knew she'd regret it. "I just bloody shagged my Potions professor." Snape looked up sharply, arching a brow.

"You're not regretting it, are you?" Snape asked, his voice indifferent, but inwardly he felt sick. She'd probably hate him, now. She'd pressured him into doing it, but he could have stopped them.

Hermione shook her head. "I'm not. At least, I don't think I am. We *are* married, so technically there is nothing wrong in doing it. And" Hermione fell silent, for once at a loss for words.

The couple stared at each other for a minute, neither knowing what to say to break the awkward silence. *Awkward goodbyes in the morning*, Snape mused, *That was definitely something I didn't miss*. Just then a crash downstairs snapped both of their minds back to reality.

"What was that?" Hermione asked, drawing the blanket around herself. "You don't have a house elf working here, do you?" Snape shook his head, snatching his wand up from the bedside table. But there was no need to, for a voice called out, announcing the intruder's identity.

"HELLO?" The voice shouted; Hermione recognized it instantly. Ginny! "Anyone home? Hermione? Prof, er Snape? Anyone?"

Snape scowled, setting his wand down. That meddling little wench. How had she found out where they were? How had she gotten past his wards? Of course, Snape answered his own question, Dumbledore. The old man had probably sent Ginny along to make sure he and Hermione hadn't killed each other. Dumbledore would probably be shocked that both of them had walked away unscathed. *Well*, Snape thought, grinning inwardly and thinking of the array of small crescent-shaped cuts on his back from Hermione's razor sharp nails, *almost*.

"HELLOOOOO?"

"What the bloody hell do you think you are doing, Ms. Weasley?" Snape called back, reaching into the pile of the foot of the bed and withdrawing his trousers from the day before. Tucking his wand into his pocket just in case, he swiftly headed out the parlor door, hoping to head off Ginny before she could come in and find Hermione still sitting naked on the floor.

She really didn't have to feel ashamed about prancing around naked, after what had happened last night, but Hermione couldn't help it. Waiting until Snape was out of the room she threw off the blanket, rummaging through the pile of clothes that had haphazardly been thrown off hours earlier. She'd managed to get her panties and slacks on, before she heard the unmistakable sound of footsteps coming her way. Ginny's footsteps. Her bra was nowhere to be found, and she'd never get her blouse buttoned on time. Quickly she jumped into Snape's nightshirt, seating herself nonchalantly on the couch just as Ginny strode in.

"You see?" Snape demanded angrily, pointing to Hermione, masking his surprise at her choice of clothing. "She is alive and healthy. I have not harmed you, have I, Hermione?"

"No, Severus, you have not," Hermione responded, earning both her and Snape odd looks from Ginny.

"Since when were we on a first name basis, hmm?" She accused, hands on her hips. "Hermione, he must have done something to you. Look at you! You're not wearing a bra and that shirt!" Ginny's eyes widened. "Is that *his* shirt?"

Snape rolled his eyes, clearing his throat loudly to remind Ginny that he was still present. "I'll leave you two to talk. I suppose you'll have a lot to catch up on, after all, it's been almost two days since you last saw each other," he added sarcastically. "I'll be in the kitchen if you need me."

Ginny watched Snape's retreating back suspiciously before plunking herself down on the couch/bed next to Hermione. "Are you *positive* he didn't do anything? I don't trust him."

"Ginny, it's fine," Hermione insisted, thanking the gods that Ginny had not come an hour earlier. "We've...talked. Worked some things out. We can handle this, we're both adults."

Ginny did not look convinced. "Something is different about you. You're hair is all frazzled, more so than usual." Hermione uttered an angry exclamation at that comment, but was cut off by Ginny. "You're not wearing a bra, that definitely is not your shirt. And you just seem, different."

Hermione was quite aware of what was different about her, despite the fact that she had paid no attention whatsoever to Ginny's little speech. A sight had caught her eye, and again she felt butterflies in her stomach. Lodged halfway under the bed was Snape's underwear, and on the armrest above it lay Hermione's bra. Hermione forced herself to look away from the incriminating evidence, but not quickly enough. Ginny's eyes darted to where Hermione had been staring moments before, and she gasped audibly, putting two and two together quickly enough.

"You...SLEPT with him, didn't you!" She exclaimed, looking both surprised and horrified. Try as she might, Hermione could not stop herself from blushing a bright crimson color. Ginny took this to be an affirmation of Hermione's guilt and almost gagged.

"Well, are you in love with him?"

"I don't know," Hermione admitted. Yes, she'd told him that she loved him last night. But post-coital admonitions of love didn't count, did they?

Ginny shook her head. "So you *shagged* bloody Snape, and you don't even know if you love him? Boy. Imagine what'll happen if Harry and Ron ever find out."

Hermione's eyes widened, and she almost jumped out of her seat. "Do not, I repeat, *do not* tell them about this."

Ginny however, didn't look convinced. In her mind, Snape had done something to Hermione. Hermione wouldn't willingly sleep with him, no one in their right mind would.

"I'll tell Ron about the Muggle, Michael, or whatever his name was," Hermione threatened, and Ginny scowled.

"That is a completely different scenario."

"Is not!"

"Yes, it is too!"

Ginny stubbornly shook her head. Hermione sighed. She'd never been one for gambling, but she decided to throw all her cards in and just see what happened.

"Fine," she said. "tell Ron and Harry and whoever you want about it." Ginny looked smug. "But while you're at it, tell Ron that he wasn't nearly half as good in the sack of Severus was." Ginny blanched.

There, Hermione thought, looking pleased. *That shut her up.*

Oops, Our Mistake.

Chapter 8 of 8

Hermione and Severus receive word that their marriage was performed unintentionally, and that they are eligible for an annulment. Or, at least they were eligible.

Author's Note: I apologize for the delay in updating. I've been rather busy lately, not to mention that I've had a plot bunny gnawing on my ankle to get me to finish the first few chapters of my new story.

And just as a warning, I will be leaving for Israel on the 29th and will be gone a month, with no access to computers so there won't be any updates for a few weeks.

"You *slept* with Ron too?" Ginny asked incredulously.

Hermione's self-confidence after being able to render Ginny silent was quickly deteriorating. "Er, well..."

The hook nosed, bushy haired Granger-Snape children that Ginny had mentally pictured all suddenly developed flaming red hair. It wasn't possible physically, Ginny knew. Still, the image was disconcerting. The very fact that Hermione and Snape could now possibly have children was almost enough to send Ginny running for the nearest anti-nausea potion.

"Please tell me that at least you use protection, right?" Ginny begged.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Of course I did! I've been taking a monthly potion ever since—" she paused, blushing, "—ever since Ron and I...you know..."

Now Ginny really looked like she was about to be sick after that tidbit of information. Still, she took a deep breath and asked, "And how long ago was that?"

Hermione blushed, for a much different reason this time. It was one thing admitting that you'd slept with your best friend's brother (they had been dating). It was a completely different thing confiding in a friend that you'd been damn near celibate for the past eight years. "Seventh year."

"Merlin, Hermione! You've been taking anti-pregnancy potions for *eight bloody years* even though you haven't had sex all this time?"

Hermione frowned, just as she used to when she was defending the amount of studying she'd done to Ron and Harry. "I'm just being careful."

"Careful?" Ginny snorted. "But whatever. As long as it keeps you from having *his* kids, it's fine."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Oh, come on Ginny. He isn't that bad!"

Ginny arched a brow, unconvinced.

"He's extremely intelligent, and very deep, if you get to know him. Of course, he is still a bit of a bastard—"

"—A bastard who happens to be standing in this doorway," Snape cut in, effectively stopping Hermione mid-sentence. Both girls flinched. "Please," he growled, "don't let my presence stop your malicious gossip. I find it very enlightening what my wife and her best friend seem to think of me." Again, he scowled. It wouldn't do to have either girl know how painful it was to hear that kind of talk outside the halls of Hogwarts. And to think that, although she had praised his intellect, it was his *wife* who was saying the worst of it. The wife to whom he'd finally opened up a bit of himself and shared an intimate occasion with.

"You received a letter with the morning post," he continued, pushing those pesky things like emotions aside. He'd deal with them later. He thrust the letter into Hermione's hands. Recognizing the Yenta Livery Company's seal, she tore the parchment open, quickly scanning the few lines.

Yenta Livery Company

"Your Best Match For Your Best Money, Guaranteed"

Dear Ms. Granger,

It has come to our attention that a Marriage Ceremony was accidentally performed upon yourself and one Severus Snape approximately two days ago. We at Yenta Livery Company are sorry for any confusion this might have caused. Provided the marriage has not yet been consummated, you are eligible to apply for a Wizarding annulment. A form has been enclosed if you wish to do so.

Also enclosed is a refund of your 10 galleon dating service fee. Should you opt not to have your marriage annulled, the bill for the Marriage Ceremony will be sent shortly.

May you lead a long and happy life together, if you so choose.

Sincerely,

Wilfreda Hopkins-Atticks

Yenta Livery Company, London Office

A smile broke out on Hermione's face. "We can get the marriage annulled!" She exclaimed, looking to Snape for confirmation. "Right?"

"That is incorrect, Ms. Granger. Or should I say, Madam Snape," her still-husband replied sourly. "And most unlike you. Perhaps you did not read clearly enough." Withdrawing his own copy of the letter from a pocket, he read, "And I quote- 'Provided the marriage has not yet been *consummated*, you are eligible to apply for a Wizarding annulment.'"

"So we're stuck like this?" Hermione asked, the smile disappearing in an instant. Snape nodded. "That-- no! Last night doesn't count!" She mumbled, looking distressed. "That consummated the marriage?"

Snape nodded. "And to think that if you hadn't been so intent on hopping into my bed last night, we could have had this marriage annulled by lunchtime."

Hermione blushed, not too happy to be reminded that *she* had pressured Snape into doing...it. "You could have resisted a bit more!" She argued, her face beet red.

"I am not to blame simply because you are some sort of sex-starved--"

"AHEM!" Ginny interrupted, clearing her throat loudly enough to drown out the rest of Snape's sentence. She stood, positioning herself so that she was physically separating the enraged couple. "Not to get in the way of your little squabble here, but Hermione and I have got to go to work." Hermione and Snape turned to look at Ginny, both looking as if they couldn't decide whether or not to strangle her or hug her (though Snape probably would have preferred the first option regardless).

"I'll see you later," Hermione said tersely, taking a few steps away from Snape. He rolled his eyes. With his wand he picked up her bra that had been left on the couch armrest, holding it as far away from himself as he could as if it was somehow toxic.

"Don't forget this," he added, tossing it at her. "If we must stay married, I will not be made a laughingstock while my wife parades herself around like that in front of the entire Ministry."

Hermione scowled, but put the bra on, struggling as she attempted to do it while still wearing her shirt. Finally attired properly, she and Ginny apparated with barely a glance back at her husband.

Hermione arrived her office, quite thankful to have some time alone before the workday officially started. However, it did not seem like her office. Her desk was covered in bouquets of flowers, each one apparently from her coworkers. All bore the same message: "Congratulations!" Hermione frowned after reading the fifth note. Why were they congratulating her? Then it dawned on her.

She snatched up the previous day's *Daily Prophet*, she skipped to the back pages, the personal announcements. To her horror, under 'Marriages' her name was listed alongside Snape's, and the date of their nuptials. She groaned, sinking into her chair. The news was out. Somebody at the Weasley home must read the ads, she thought despondently. They'd find out soon enough.

Ron's sudden appearance in her office told her that they already had. Looking absolutely gobsmacked, he held the paper aloft. "Hermione..." was all he could squeak out.

With a sharp CRACK! Harry appeared beside him. "Hermione," he began, as if he wasn't exactly sure he wanted to hear the truth, "Tell us this was a mistake. Please tell us that you and that greasy git aren't married!"

Her secret was out.

Author's Note:

"Dear Ms. Granger. Whoops. We meant to marry a different couple. Our bad. Here is your refund of ten galleons. We'd let you guys get a divorce, but there has already been some Snape!Sex so, we can't. Have a nice life! YLC."