Return to Me

by GinnyW

Severus learns that Hermione is to be married to Ronald Weasley. He becomes obsessed with stopping the wedding and attempting to convince her to marry him instead. This emotional journey forces him to face his true motives behind his sudden change of interest.

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Chapter 1 of 5

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Disclaimer: I wish these characters were mine, but alas, all credit goes to the great JK Rowling.

Chapter 1

Severus sat in his usual chair at the Head Table, idly picking at his morning meal. The rest of the teachers sitting in the hall were all chatting away in their usual fervor. *Noisy biddies!* Severus thought. His attention was drawn upwards with the arrival of the Post Owls. He paid the ordinary brown owl, which had landed before him, the usual Knut, withdrew his copy of the *Daily Prophet*, and the owl departed. Unrolling the newspaper, Severus idly scanned the headlines.

Former Minister Fudge, Finally Caught!

"It is about damn well bloody time!" he muttered under his breath.

Lovegoods Prove the Existence of the Crumple-Horned Snorkack!

Severus rolled his eyes in disgust.

War Heroes to Wed This Weekend!

"Bloody piece of rubbish," Severus mumbled, as he folded the paper and stuffed it into the pocket of his teaching robes. He rose from his seat and swept out of the Great Hall, never noticing that several sets of eyes were upon him.

Severus had no interest in the whereabouts or goings on of any of his former fellow Order members. He had been grateful when the Dark Lord had fallen and the last of the Death Eaters had been rounded up so that he could be rid of the meddlesome groups' company. None of them, save Albus, were what he would call a *friend*. He certainly did not care if any of them had foolishly *found love* and decided to marry.

Unless...no! he thought. He decided to firmly push the flickering thought out of his mind.

Severus made his way down to his office in the dungeons and began preparing himself for his first round of dunderheads of the morning, as a dull headache slowly began creeping upon him.

The morning passed in a blur of annoying disruptions, spilt potion ingredients, and one melted cauldron. Severus had spent much of his midday meal cleaning up the messes created by his students. He was now sitting behind his desk, resting his elbows on the hard surface, and massaging his temples. The headache that had started early that morning was refusing to relinquish its tightening grip despite the two vials of Headache Potion he had consumed at separate intervals that morning.

"Good afternoon, Severus," said the grandfatherly voice which broke Snape from his all too brief respite.

"To what do I owe this pleasure, Albus," he responded whilst lifting his head to meet the older wizard's eyes.

"I just came down to inform you that Minerva and I will be leaving for the weekend." Albus paused to discern if there was a flicker of understanding in the younger man's eyes. "We are leaving tonight," he continued, "thus, you will be in charge of the school until we return." "We have an event to attend on Sunday, and we thought that we would like to take a little holiday beforehand." The elder wizard paused with an amused smile. "That is, of course, unless you have plans, Severus."

"No, Albus, I don't have any plans." Severus thought on this for a moment and then spoke again as a small glimmer of understanding crossed his face. "This must be about the wedding announced in the paper this morning...between two war heroes as I understand it?"

The old man smiled. "Yes, it is indeed. You saw the article in the Daily Prophet then? Splendid."

Professor Snape brushed away Dumbledore's comments with the wave of his hand and a scowl. "No, thankfully, I had the foresight to spare myself such drivel. I merely glanced at the headlines and saw nothing worth my time to read."

"Indeed," replied Albus simply. He flashed another bright smile at Severus and said, "Well, Minerva and I will be leaving at around six o'clock this evening." He turned to leave. "Enjoy your weekend, Severus. Oh, and do try to leave some House points for the rest of the school in their hourglasses whilst Minerva and I are away."

The old man had piqued his curiosity. That had been, of course, Dumbledore's intent. Once he was certain that the older man had left the room, he reached into his teaching robes and retrieved his copy of the *Daily Prophet* and found the article.

War Heroes to Wed This Weekend!

This time he glanced at the picture of the happy couple. "What the bloody hell does she think that she is doing?" he fumed. He read the contents of the article as a deepening scowl grew with each passing word.

Mr. Ronald B. Weasley to wed fellow war hero and former Hogwarts classmate, Ms. Hermione J. Granger-Snape, at the groom's parents' estate (Severus could not help but to snort at the word 'estate'. How can they call that hovel an estate?) this coming Sunday. Many long-time Daily Prophet readers will recognize Ms. Granger-Snape from the many articles that this paper has published about this Muggle-born witch from London. Ms. Granger-Snape, formerly married to the Hogwarts Potions Master, Severus Snape, most recently made headlines with her divorce due to the renouncing of the former Muggle-born/Pureblood Marriage Act that was enacted in January 1998.

As a reporter, it's my duty to keep readers aware of the goings on. It was also I that informed the Wizarding public that the young harlot had previously been caught toying with the affections of several different men at the same time during her fourth year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. At the time, the former Ms. Granger had been seeing both Viktor Krum, Seeker for the Bulgarian Quidditch team, and Harry Potter, the Boy Who Lived to defeat You-Know-Who. It would appear that witches do not change their warts, as she has only just left the bed of the aforementioned Hogwarts professor six weeks ago and is now climbing back into bed with one of the key players during the war. One can only hope that the unsuspecting Mr. Weasley realizes the true nature of such a woman before they wed on Sunday.

"Bloody fucking hell!" Severus shouted as he slammed a balled up fist on his desk.

Severus reached into his desk, grabbing fresh parchment and quill. Quickly jotting a note, he sealed it, and he snapped his fingers to summon a house-elf.

"Take this to Headmaster Dumbledore immediately," he snarled.

The house-elf was gone as swiftly as it had arrived with a resounding Crack!

Severus wished there was something that he could do about themess straightaway. However, he still had one more class of idiots to teach for the afternoon. Gritting his teeth and stealing his nerves, the professor readied himself for his sixth year Advanced Potions class scheduled to begin in five minutes.

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At 3:15 that same afternoon, Severus was seated in the headmaster's office in his usual wing backed chair. He was staring at the old man sitting across from him intently.

"Why was I not informed of this, Albus?" he finally asked after several minutes of intense silence.

"Whatever do you mean, Severus?" queried the headmaster with a small smile.

It took every ounce of Professor Snape's will to keep his anger curtailed. Through gritted teeth he hissed, "I mean, why was I not informed of Hermione's upcoming nuptials."

The old man studied his young colleague carefully. "I was not aware that it would concern you, Severus. It is not as if we were keeping secrets from you."

"Not concern me, Albus? What makes you think that having my wife getting married would not concern me?" Snape growled, completely unaware of Dumbledore's amused look

"The last time that I checked, Severus, Hermione was no longer your wife. I seem to remember you being quite adamant that no one remind you...what were your exact words? Oh yes...of that awful bloody charade." Tenting his long fingers and leaning forward across the desk that sat between them, the old wizard asked, "What has changed your mind?"

"I have not changed my mind, Albus!" replied Snape with a growl as he rose from his chair and began pacing the office. "I merely do not like the idea of my sham of a marriage being thrown in my face in such a public manner! The annoying little chit is purposefully embarrassing me!" Severus stopped in front of the headmaster's desk, leant forward, and continued in a low hiss, "This is her petty way of getting back at me for insisting that the divorce be done immediately."

Severus snapped upright and began pacing the room again like a caged predator.

"Oh, surely you do not think that this is some plot to make the public think less of you, my boy?"

"Don't I? What better way for her to demonstrate how much she loathes me than by marrying the Weasley brat before the ink on the divorce decree is dry?" Severus ranted. Severus forced himself to calm down. He stopped in front of the mantle and narrowed his eyes intently at the fire before he spoke again. "You do realize that by wedding the bloody Potter tagalong so quickly that she is practically screaming to the Wizarding world that she was unfaithful during our marriage and that she could not get away from me fast enough?"

Dumbledore could not hold in a chuckle at the younger man's irrational thoughts. "You know very well that because of the Fidelity Charm that had been in place prevented either of you from being unfaithful, Severus. Not to mention that the entire Wizarding community is very aware as to the nature of your marriage to Hermione, and they never thought that it was anything more than a forced marriage for political reasons and obvious protection."

Severus glared at the old headmaster. "There is more to faithfulness than sex, Albus." Dumbledore raised his eyes in curiosity. The younger man continued, "She has obviously been planning to do this for some time."

"I doubt that you even believe that, Severus." Dumbledore sighed and began examining his fingers intently. "I do not know what led to Mr. Weasley and Ms. Snape's decision for marriage. I suggest that if you are concerned, then you speak with one of them."

"Believe me, I shall," muttered Professor Snape. Forming his resolve, he walked back to the headmaster's desk. "I will not be able to cover for you and Minerva this weekend, Headmaster," he stated firmly.

"Ah, I see. Well, I will inform Minerva. She will be disappointed, of course." Dumbledore looked carefully at his young friend. "Is there any way that I can be of help to you?"

"No." Walking towards the exit, Severus paused with his hand on the doorknob and muttered a quick, "thank you" as he left the room.

He did not hear Dumbledore quietly respond, "Good luck, my boy."

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Chapter 2 of 5

Severus learns that Hermione is to be married to Ronald Weasley. He becomes obsessed with stopping the wedding and attempting to convince her to marry him instead. This emotional journey forces him to face his true motives behind his sudden change of interest.

Chapter 2

It was early morning when Severus finally Apparated to the front walk of number twelve, Grimmauld Place. He had spent the majority of the evening thinking about what he would say or do to the chi...woman. Well, in truth, he had spent more time drinking than thinking.

Severus could not decipher the jumbled mess of feelings that were stirring deep beneath his many layers; those layers were the protective barriers that had been there for as long as he could remember. He remembered them forming at such a young age. Each time his father yelled, forcing his mother to cower, the barrier grew. For every taunt he endured throughout school and for every bout of *Crucio* he tolerated from the Dark Lord, another stratum was placed. The layers of protection, like the bricks of a wall, protected him from the one thing that was most likely to destroy him...his emotions.

All Severus Snape knew for certain was that he could not allowhis wife to marry another man. She belonged to him. Pounding on the front door, he impatiently waited for entry to the former Order of the Phoenix headquarters. "Potter," he sneered with venom when the door was opened to reveal a disheveled looking young man with penetrating green eyes.

"Snape, what the bloody hell are you doing here at seven o'clock in the morning?" Harry spat in return.

"I want to speak with my...erm, Hermione," Severus answered. He then added a very firm, "Now."

"She doesn't want to talk to you, Snape," said Harry protectively while attempting to bar the Potions professor from the house.

Severus pushed himself past the berk. "Excuse me if I do not take your word for it, Potter."

Knowing that he could not win against the insistent man, a disgruntled Harry conceded and stepped back while glaring at him. "Stay here. I'll go find her."

Severus watched as the young man darted up the staircase. Several minutes passed. He had a strong urge to *accidentally-on-purpose* kick the troll umbrella stand just to awaken Mrs. Black's portrait to ease his frustrations. Before he could carry through with that plan, he spied back up the stairs to see a tired and pale looking young woman descend towards him, bushy hair limply moving with each step. He heard Potter call protectively to her, "Hermione, call me if you need anything." Then he eyed Snape closely before threatening him. "If you do anything to her, Snape, you won't be able to walk straight for a week."

Severus rolled his eyes at the young wizard's display of chivalry and fixed his gaze on the young woman walking towards him.

"Severus," she greeted simply as she entered the foyer.

"Hermione," he replied whilst nodding curtly to her and gesturing her towards the library.

She led the way to the musty room and turned to face him as he entered the room after her. "Why are you here?" she asked without preamble.

Severus looked at her intently. He had readied himself to yell at her for trying to make a fool of him, but the words would not come forth. "You do not look well, Hermione," he said calmly.

She narrowed her gaze upon him and folded her arms in front of her chest. "That is not what you came here to say," she replied. "I repeat. Why are you here?"

Severus felt as if he was in a trance. The woman before him was not the same woman that left his life less than two months prior. She was sickly looking, gaunt, and pale. She never had much excess weight on her to begin with, but now she looked as if she was several pounds underweight. Her hair appeared brittle, and her skin looked very

dry and loose, almost as if it was hanging off of her. "Are you eating?" he asked.

Hermione was unable to keep her anger and frustration wrangled in. "Damn you! Answer my bloody question, Snape! Why are you here?"

Severus did not know what was happening. Just looking at her and hearing every word that she spoke had his barriers beginning to slip. It unsettled him like he never imagined, leading him to his only defense...anger. All too soon, he found the anger creeping to the surface to strengthen his shield. "Fine," he spat. "I came here to find out why you are getting married, Hermione."

She watched him carefully as she prepared to state her rehearsed answer. She had practiced her little speech, and she wanted to use whatever she could to deliver the deepest cut. Not that she truly expected it to hurt him! The man didn't seem to feel anything. Deep down inside, she hoped that it would make *her* feel better. She began to speak to him as if she were talking to a small child. "I am sure that you are not aware of this, but not everyone gets married because they are forced, Severus. Sometimes people actually get married because they love each other, and they actually *want* to spend the rest of their lives together. Why do you care?"

"I do not *care*," he said as he felt the wall that protected him barely quiver as it began to fortify. "My only concern is that you have somehow managed to showcase this *affair*. making me look like a fool!"

"What?" she yelled. "You look like a fool? Did you even read the article in the *Daily Prophet* yesterday? Rita Skeeter did **nothing** to make you look like a fool! The only thing that came from her poisoned quill was **my** humiliation!"

"I would have thought, my dear, that living with a Slytherin for twelve months would have taught you to ead between the lines." He leant towards her as he emphasized the last four words to her in a near whisper.

Hermione looked at him for several seconds then shook her head as if to clear it. "Your manipulative mind games won't work on me anymore." She stepped back away from him so she could no longer feel his hot breath on her face. "This wedding has *nothing* to do with you. Now, if you don't mind, get out!" she stated, unwavering as she pointed to the door.

Her words reverberated through his mind and caused a rip in his many layers of defense. The fury erupted out of him like a simmering volcano. It was the only thing he could do. It was the only way he knew to fix the tear.

Severus strode forward the three steps that were separating himself from Hermione. He forcefully grabbed her upper arms and lifted her slightly off of the floor as he began to rage at her. "This has everything to do with me!" he yelled. "You are mine! Do you understand that? Mine!" The look of utter terror in her deep brown eyes caused him to jolt. He loosened his grip and attempted to force himself to calm the boiling anger.

He was so stunned by his own actions that he did not feel the hands upon him that shoved him to the floor. Shocked, he looked up to see Potter standing over him as the youngest Weasley draped a comforting arm around Hermione.

"Get the hell out of here, Snape!" the young wizard yelled. "Now!"

Severus did not remember getting to his feet and stumbling out of the house. Nor did he remember Apparating to Diagon Alley. He only remembered somehow floundering into the Leaky Cauldron and attempting to coerce Tom into serving firewhisky before the breakfast hour was over.

Ginny draped her arm over Hermione's shoulders and guided her out of the library, as Hermione allowed the tears to stream down her face. Hermione grabbed the redhead's hand and stopped walking just as they reached the stairs to go downstairs to the kitchen. "No," she said. "I think I'm going to be sick."

Ginny nodded, changed directions, and helped her friend to the bathroom. Assisting her inside the tiny room, she gently slid Hermione to the floor. Ginny quickly conjured two facecloths, applying one to the back of Hermione's neck and began dabbing the woman's face with the other. "Are you going to be all right?"

Hermione took several deep breaths as she willed her stomach to settle itself. She leaned into Ginny's touch and replied, "I don't think I can do this."

"Yes, you can," said Ginny firmly. "Hermione Granger, you are one of the strongest women that I know, and believe me, I know some very strong women. Have you met my mother?" she asked with a smirk.

Hermione could not help but to let out a small laugh at Ginny's remark. She realized this was a mistake as her face began to tingle with beads of cold sweat and large amounts of saliva began to pool in her mouth. "Oh God." she murmured as she moved up onto her knees and leaned over the toilet.

Ginny grabbed the long tresses of bushy, brown hair and pulled them out of Hermione's face, watching her friend vomit to the point of dry heaving. When the episode of emesis ended, Ginny mopped the young woman's face with the cool cloth and summoned a glass of cold water from the kitchen.

"Better now?" asked the redhead tentatively.

Hermione slowly turned to face her friend and nodded as she took several cautious sips of water. She slumped back against the wall. "Thank you."

Ginny brushed a lock of red hair out of her face and asked, "What happened?"

"I threw up," replied Hermione.

The younger witch snorted. "You know what I mean, Hermione. What happened between you and Snape?"

Hermione closed her eyes and rested her head back against the cool wall. "I don't want to talk about it."

Ginny leaned forward and began pulling the sleeves of Hermione's robes up to examine her arms. "Did he hurt you?"

Hermione pulled away hastily as if burned by her friend's touch. "No," she answered a little too quickly. Seeing the disbelieving look in Ginny's hazel eyes, she amended, "Not really. He wasn't trying to hurt me, Gin. He just grabbed my arms."

The young witch shook her head in disgust. "He shouldn't have grabbed you at all, Hermione."

"I know," sighed the bushy-haired brunette. "Rather ironic, if you think about it. I was married to the man for twelve months, and the only time he ever touched me was when he was forced to fuck me." Tears again moistened her brown eyes. "And, even then it was with as little contact as possible," she added with an air of disgust.

Ginny sat back and watched Hermione closely, listening to her every word. Her friend had never talked about her marriage to Severus Snape. Ginny knew, like everyone else, that it was a marriage solely of convenience and safety. The Marriage Act had required copulation twice a week until the confirmed conceiving of a child by a trained nurse or Healer.

Carefully Ginny asked, "Are you sure that you are doing the right thing, Mione?" Ginny paused, then added, "Marrying Ron, I mean."

The sickly looking witch stared at the dull hardwood floor. "I don't know," she whispered.

Less than an hour later, Hermione was up in her room. She had warded the door to prevent any unwanted visitors or well-meaning friends. Was she doing the right thing in marrying Ron? She truly wasn't sure. There were just so many things to think about, so many thoughts swirling through her mind; all of the thoughts revolved around one person...Severus Snape. Their wedding had been nothing but a farce. He hated and resented her for it; she was certain of that.

"I'm only doing this to save your bloody hide!" he had spat at her when he and Dumbledore had informed them of their plan.

"Yes, I'm quite certain that you are gaining nothing from this venture, Professor," she had hissed back at him.

Less than twenty-four hours later, she had been escorted to a small clearing near the edge of the Forbidden Forest. Only Dumbledore, Hagrid, and McGonagall had been present. Well, aside from the endearing Professor Snape, of course. The remainder of the ceremony had been a blur with only a few continual thoughts coming forth.

Why couldn't this have been a few months later so that Ron was eligible? Oh, I don't want to know what happens after this. The Ministry is going to pay for this ruddy law! It had all seemed ridiculous and hopeless.

Hermione hated the Death Eaters that had been stalking her and causing her to do such a thing. She hated the Ministry of Magic and the Wizengamot for passing such a ludicrous law. She'd blamed Professor Dumbledore for his crazy schemes. She'd blamed Professor Snape for allowing himself to be coerced by Dumbledore. Most of all, she'd blamed herself for being selfish in not wanting to leave Great Britain unprotected and for foolishly having the childhood fantasy that 'nothing bad would ever happen to her.'

She grabbed the pillow off of her bed and screamed into it, hoping to purge some of the strain. It didn't help. Why did Snape come to see her? What did he want from her?

His words thundered through her head. You are mine! Do you understand that? Mine!

"Oh, God," she said as she buried her head in her hands. One of Snape's character flaws was his possessiveness. He was a conceited and selfish bastard; although, Hermione had never expected him to be possessive of her. He seldom paid much attention to her.

When they were first married, she continued to stay in the room that she shared with the other seventh year girls. She only had to go down to his rooms to fulfill the twice-weekly conjugal obligations, thanks to the ruddy marriage contract. However, because of the fact that she had to deal with the snickers and curious looks from Lavender and Parvati, she was almost grateful when the war came to a head, and he forced her to move into the dark dungeons permanently. That is until she deduced the obvious...she would have to share a bed with the man continually.

He wasn't abusive; that wasn't the problem. The problem was that most of the time he was so very cold and distant. For the first couple of months, Hermione had made several futile attempts to engage him in conversation. He would either ignore her or tell her that he had no desire to enter into a discussion about worthless teenage drivel and angst. The fact that I was attempting to talk to him about the latest Potions research seemed to go unnoticed thought Hermione bitterly.

Sex had been... What exactly had sex been?

It had been merely functional, for lack of a better description. It was the same nearly every time. The only exception had been with the first time, just following their binding ceremony. The memory surfaced, despite her attempts to stifle it. Not for the first time, she wished that she had a Pensieve.

They entered his quarters via a door in his office. It was the first time that she'd ever been to his rooms. She paid little attention to anything as the butterflies roiling in her stomach were enough to keep her concentration on trying to not vomit all over the floor. Severus walked directly to the liquor cabinet in the far corner to pull out two glasses and a bottle of Ogden's Old Firewhisky. He amply filled each goblet and motioned for her to take one.

"I don't think that I can drink that right now," she said.

Severus glared at her as he spoke firmly, "Drink it. Trust me."

Hermione eyed him suspiciously, but she obliged and walked towards the table. She downed the drink in three horrible swallows, nearly choking. It burned terribly. No wonder they call it firewhisky!

He looked at her with a slightly amused look and finished off the remainder of his glass. He began to pour her more when she put up her hand to stop him. "No," she said. "I couldn't possibly have anymore."

"Very well. That door," he said, pointing to the only other door in the room, "is the door to my bedchambers. Go do whatever you need to do to prepare yourself for bed. I would prefer to get this over with as soon as possible, although I believe that I need another couple of drinks first."

Hermione shuddered slightly, but she attempted to maintain her resolve by walking to the door and entering the room. Again, she cared little about the décor; all she could register was that it was dark. She found her way to the bathroom to complete her nightly ablutions. The alcohol that she had consumed so rapidly was beginning to affect her. She was hot and flushed while feeling a little light-headed. She actually found herself as being grateful to the great black bat for the liquor. It enabled her brain to remain quite unfocused on how much she dreaded what would occur next.

Hermione disrobed and placed her simple gown over a nearby chair and climbed into bed. She didn't know where she was expected to be, but she guessed that Severus, being a spy, would prefer to be closest to the exit. She lay there waiting with the covers pulled up to her chin, trembling as several long agonizing minutes passed. She had to force herself to take several slow deep breaths.

When he finally entered the room, she sucked in her breath and held it, sounding like she was near fright. "Oh, stop it, you silly girl!" he spat at her. "I'm not going to hurt you!"

Hermione slowly exhaled and nodded, though she knew he could barely see her. "Sorry."

Severus bought his fingers up to his face and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Just please tell me that you are not a virgin," he said with near exasperation.

"I'm not a virgin," she lied. Hell, he asked me to say it.

"Thank God for small miracles," he mumbled as he turned his back to her and undressed.

He climbed under the covers knowing that her eyes were watching him closely. He wasted no time. He reached to touch her between her legs, causing her to flinch. It seemed to take him every ounce of control to not lash out at her. He simply gritted his teeth, and Hermione quickly took the hint to unclamp her knees. Really, she had no choice: it was this or someone much worse.

She quietly asked him, "Aren't you even going to kiss me?"

"No," he simply said. "Kissing would imply a level of intimacy that we do not have."

"Fine." She turned her eyes towards him again and noticed that he was avoiding looking at her. Hermione turned her eyes towards the ceiling, recognizing that there was no point in seeking comfort in his eyes.

She was caught off guard as he quickly entered two fingers inside of her. It took all of her resolve to prevent herself from crying out. He pumped his fingers in her dry core and eventually brought his thumb up to her nub and began circling it firmly. Hermione was thankful that her body finally gave in to his crude ministrations as her moisture began to lubricate his long slender fingers. Just get this over with, she thought as a tear slid down her face.

As if he heard her silent plea, he removed his fingers and quickly positioned himself above her. She glanced up to look at his face and noticed that he was staring directly above her. Hermione braced herself for what she knew would be next and bit down on the inside of her cheek while grasping the sheets beneath her to prevent herself from screaming. Severus used one hand to guide his penis to her entrance and slowly enter her. Just as she began to relax and loosen her grip on the sheets, he swiftly thrust the rest of the way into her.

Hermione didn't attempt to hold back the tears as they silently slid across her cheeks. She wanted nothing more than to let out a blood-curdling shriek, but she refused to let him know what he was doing to her. Her mouth was suddenly filled with the coppery taste of her blood from the clamping down of her teeth on the inside of her cheek. The burning and stinging between her legs was more than she had expected. She tried to relax and willed it to be over with as he slid in and out of her.

Just as she was beginning to become used to his girth and the pain began to subside, he made a barely audible grunting sound as he spilled inside of her and immediately rolled away. He lay next to her for a few minutes, and just as quickly as it had begun, it ended when he exited the bed. As he stood up with his back to her, he said, "Next time, see to it that you are fully ready. It will save time." Just as he reached the bathroom door, he stopped again and turned around. "And, do not lie to me again."

Minutes later, she could hear the shower running. She sat up and immediately noticed the sticky mess that was between her thighs. She climbed out of the bed and grabbed her wand, casting several quick Cleansing Charms to clean off herself and the duvet.

She didn't have any other clothes with her, so she rummaged through the dresser until she found where he kept his old gray nightshirts and put one on. She climbed back into bed, moving herself as far away from the center as possible to try to fall asleep. She stiffened when she heard the bathroom door open, but the next sound she heard was the clicking of another door.

Snape did not return to the room.

"I should've had that second glass of firewhisky," she mumbled aloud with sour remembrance. That horrid experience had set the tone for each mandatory encounter thereafter

Was the marriage really all that bad? she wondered.

No, she answered herself in truth.

After she had moved to the dungeons, things had become surprisingly comfortable; there were moments when he actually acted like a genuine person and not just some arrogant egomaniac. Astonishingly enough, he could even be pleasant at times. When her father had died suddenly from health problems, Severus had been kind and comforting, giving her a much needed shoulder to cry on. He had listened to her rants as she fell into her new position as Madame Pince's aid in the library. Much later, during the height of the war, he protected her.

Five days a week they'd cohabited together amicably, but the looming threat of copulation ruined the other two. On those days, he'd avoided her as much as was humanly possible. In the evenings, he would always drink several glasses of liquor while she showered and fully prepared herself. It was always quick, with no satisfaction for her, and he always left the bed to shower immediately following, never returning to the room that night.

He'd never attempted to kiss her, though Hermione had began to wonder if it was because he continued to feel that there was no intimacy between them or if he was still trying to maintain distance and control.

The final confrontation between the Death Eaters and the Order of the Phoenix had taken place at Hogwarts...just as many people had suspected that it would. It happened on 3 January 1999. The students had not yet returned from the Christmas holiday. Thanks to Severus' spying, Harry and the Order had been well prepared for the attack. Her best friend had been aware of the attack, and thus, he was able to be present to defeat Voldemort for the final time.

It was during this battle that the Dark Lord and Lucius Malfoy had discovered Severus' true loyalties. At this revelation, Malfoy had been sent out to kill her husband and nearly succeeded. Malfoy had tortured and cursed him so badly that he could barely move. Hermione had come upon the two of them. Severus was near death while Malfoy stood over him gloating that his intentions were to torture the turncoat to either insanity or death.

Hermione had been lucky; she had caught the senior Malfoy unawares and cast a well-placed Petrificus Totalus, followed by an Incarcerous, for good measure. It had been effective enough to hold the man until an Auror could remand him into custody, and it had allowed Hermione to get to Severus.

Madame Pomfrey had said that his injuries were vast and that Hermione had barely arrived in time. It had been a somewhat lengthy recovery for him. However, because of the insufferable man's stubborn nature, he had first refused to transfer to St. Mungo's, and shortly thereafter, he had refused to remain in the hospital wing. This meant that Severus was placed in Hermione's care.

In the three weeks that it took for Severus to heal, things had truly begun to change between them or so she had thought. In her opinion, they had developed a bond, a mutual understanding, and thankfully, because of his injuries, sex did not interfere with their newfound kinship. In that time, Hermione had realized that she had feelings for him, but she had not had time to decipher exactly what those feelings were. Could she actually be in love with the man? Damn! Just as I was trying to figure it all out, that bloody Ministry Post Owl had arrived! she internally cursed.

It was January 30th, and the damned bird carried a letter informing her and her husband that the Marriage Act had been rescinded. They were finally free to divorce if they so chose to.

Severus instantly became cold again. He ignored her most of that day. The next morning, he came to her with the divorce decree and insisted that she sign it. She tried to talk to him... God, it was so important that I talk to him!...but he had refused to listen to her. After many shed tears, she had reluctantly signed the decree against her better judgment and left without any fuss. In only one year's time, she had been married, fallen into unrequited love, and then divorced. Even more ironic was that the divorce papers were signed on what should have been their first anniversary.

Hermione had three options. She could go home and live with her mum, stay at Hogwarts and have to be near him, or she could inflict herself on Harry and Ron. She chose the last option, and only six weeks later she was marrying Ron.

She began to cry again at the utter mess her life had now become when she felt the ever present churning of her stomach as yet another wave of nausea suddenly overcame her.

3

Chapter 3 of 5

Severus learns that Hermione is to be married to Ronald Weasley. He becomes obsessed with stopping the wedding and attempting to convince her to marry him instead. This emotional journey forces him to face his true motives behind his sudden change of interest.

Chapter 3

Severus gradually lifted his head from the hard table on which it had been resting. He had no idea what time it was or how long he'd been like that, though he was beginning to be able to think somewhat clearly again. We cannot have that now can we?said a little voice inside of his head. He wiped away the line of drool that was hanging out of the side of his mouth and reached for the bottle sitting on the table.

Damn! It's empty! he thought. He brushed the concern away. It was nothing that a few Sickles would not remedy.

He looked around the room and tried to remember where he was. He had been in and out of every bar in Diagon Alley and Knockturn Alley combined. He slowly allowed his eyes to focus on the dimly lit room. He looked towards a window and saw that it was already dark outside. He was in a private backroom; dawning began to come upon him. He was in the Toil & Trouble. How fitting, he thought with disgust.

The only way to remedy his slowly declining state of inebriation was to find more alcohol. He rose from the table and stumbled out of the room in the direction he knew the bar to be. The place was crowded, just as it usually was on Saturday nights. Severus made his way to the bar and slammed down a handful of Sickles. The barkeep did not even bother asking what he wanted. The professor had been there for well over five hours, drinking the same thing. The barkeep placed a bottle of scotch and a clean glass on the counter. Severus left the glass where it was, fumbled with the top of the bottle and took a large swig as he made a staggered trek back to his private corner and considerably fewer people.

He made his way to one of the backrooms and paused briefly outside of the door of the room next to his. There were familiar voices coming from the room. He silently stood to the side of the door and peered inside.

Bloody hell! he thought with disgust as he saw a room full of former Order of the Phoenix members, including the Weasley brat and the ruddy Boy-Who-Lived-to-Spite-Him. He paused only to see if she was there and quickly realized that the room was only full of men.

It sickened Severus' stomach when he realized that the group must be there to celebrate the fall of the youngest male of the Weasleys' bachelorhood. If he would have been more sober, he would have quietly stormed off back to his own dungeons at Hogwarts. If he had been more intoxicated, he would have made his way back to his table and silently finished drinking until he lost consciousness again. He was neither.

So, he cast a quick Disillusionment Charm and remained outside of the door, catching brief snatches of conversation. Most of what he heard were congratulatory remarks mixed with the occasional words of mock-pity from the likes of Neville Longbottom and Seamus Finnegan. He stood silently, uncertain exactly why he was still there. Then, he heard Potter and Weasley talking quietly just on the other side of the wall from where he stood.

"I swear! If I see that greasy old bat anywhere near her, I'll make him wish he'd never been born," came the hiss of the Keeper for the Wasps.

"Ron, relax. Hermione's fine," reassured Potter.

"Harry she was such a wreck by the time I got there this afternoon. I can't believe that you and Ginny just let her sit in her room all day long like that! You know she's not been well. She needs to eat every chance she gets. It's not good for..."

"Hush, Ron! I thought the point was to keep the pregnancy a secret," came the harsh whisper of Harry to silence his friend that had been growing louder with each word.

The anger that boiled up in Severus now was nearly uncontrollable. Before he had wanted to curse the redheaded prat for marrying *his* wife. Now, he wanted nothing more than to place his fingers around that youthful throat and squeeze the last breath out of him. Before he moved to do just that the two spoke again, "Yeah, you're right, Harry. I need something more to drink. What do you want?"

"Nothing. Thanks, mate."

Just then the redhead emerged from the crowded room, and Severus took his advantage of the situation and cornered the ruddy git.

"Weasel King," he drawled as he drew his wand and guided the young man down the hall, away from prying eyes and insufferable well wishers.

"Snape, what the hell are you doing here?" asked the young wizard in surprise.

"Drinking, Weasley. What do you think?" Snape spat.

"Well, don't let me keep you, Professor." Severus grabbed the man's robes and pushed him up against the wall. "Not so fast, Weasel King. I want a word with you first."

Ron tried not to appear as frightened as he was. He jutted his jaw and narrowed his gaze at his old teacher and asked, "What the hell do you want, then?"

"Just a question," he replied, as he let go of the young man and took a step back. The anger that had grown anew at the words he had overheard from this wizard and Potter was violently simmering just below the surface. He brandished his wand and jabbed it in the young man's chest. "Now tell me, why are you marrying my wife?"

The valor that Ron had been sporting previously, faintly slipped at the feel of the hard ebony that was resting just above his heart. He gritted his teeth and stilled himself. The great black bat wouldn't dare hex him in public. "Your wife? Did you say *your* wife?" he asked mockingly as he pushed the offending wood away from his body. "Interesting choice of words, *Professor*, especially seeing how you couldn't sign those divorce papers fast enough! Now, why is that, *sir*?"

"That is none of your concern!" hissed the now incensed wizard.

Ron had been looking for the opportunity to hurt this man since he first set foot into Hogwarts, he decided to hold nothing back. "Really? Hmm, it seems that you are a little

confused about things where my fiancée is concerned. Get this through that greasy head of yours...Hermione wants nothing to do with you!"

Red began to cloud Severus' vision. He wished that he was more intoxicated so that his righteous morals did not interfere with him cursing the ruddy git into oblivion. Pity, he was not *that* drunk anymore. He took another sizeable drink from his scotch. He then leaned to mere inches from the younger wizards face. "Tell me, Weasel. How does it feel to know that I had your precious little friend first? That what you have in your bed has been used by another wizard?" he drawled dangerously.

The anger rose in Ron like he'd never felt it before. His cheeks were aflame, and he could barely contain himself as he attempted to get his words out. "How dare you speak about Hermione like that? You don't deserve her, Snape! You never did!"

The older wizard had heard enough out of the mouthy little prat. He dropped his scotch bottle and grabbed the whelp by the front of his robes again, viciously slamming the man into the wall. Before he could get another word out, he felt the presence of someone behind him.

The grandfatherly tone of Professor Dumbledore was unmistakable. "Why Severus, did you come to join in the festivities?"

Severus, again, released his hold on the redheaded wizard and turned to face his mentor. "No, Headmaster." He looked back at the man he had just relinquished his grasp on and glared. "I was just leaving."

Ron needed no prompting. He took advantage of Dumbledore's appearance and made a hasty retreat while glowering at Snape. "Don't you dare go near her again," he spat just before he turned the corner towards the bar.

Severus retrieved his scotch from the floor and attempted to walk back to his own private room. Albus noted his staggering. Just as the raven-haired wizard lost his balance and nearly fell to the floor, he was there to catch him. "Well, now, Severus. I think you have had enough excitement for one night. What do you say we get you a room so you can sleep this off?"

"Damnit, Albus! I do not wish to have a room where I can sleep this off! I would prefer to continue my own private celebration well into morning. Would you care to join me?"

The old wizard helped his young friend to stand and let him attempt to walk again. He barely took two steps when he was again on the floor. "Bloody hell!" muttered the Potions master. Albus again stepped forward and helped his young friend up. "Come along with me, Severus."

Severus felt in no mood to argue as Dumbledore Apparated him to a vacant room upstairs. From beneath his purple robes, the old man pulled out two phials. He handed one to his friend, and the other was placed by the bedside. "Drink the Sobering Potion now, Severus. I'm afraid that it will only help a little as it appears you've been drinking for many hours," he said sadly. "Lucky for you that I happened to bring along some Hangover Relief Potion as well," he continued, pointing to the phial on the night table. "Get some rest, dear boy."

Severus collapsed on the bed in a heap and was asleep within minutes. A wonderful side effect of the Sobering Potion, thought the headmaster. He shook his head slowly in despair as he looked at the man lying in a crumpled mess of black robes on the bed. He silently prayed that with some sleep, the troubled wizard would find some answers.

For the first time in several weeks, Severus was in a deep sleep.

Her hands were cupping his face as he lay on the snow covered ground, barely able to move; her soft soothing voice whispered into his ear, and he felt the wetness of her cheek against his palm.

He was standing in a quiet clearing in the woods with only the stars to shed their light, and she was standing next to him.

Hermione's innocent voice was asking, "Aren't you even going to kiss me?"

He was signing on a piece of parchment with the heading 'Desino Matrimonium.'

Her hands came into sight again...this time massaging Healing Salves over the curse scars and wounds he had sustained by the wand of Lucius Malfoy.

He was grabbing her arms as the anger seethed in him.

He was standing on the other side of the wall as Potter and Weasley were whispering at the Toil & Trouble.

"Aren't you even going to kiss me?"

He saw Hermione appearing at the top stairs looking sickly, pale, and thin.

Weasley was screaming, "You don't deserve her, Snape! You never did!"

Severus woke with a start. The words still rang in his head. You don't deserve her! He reached towards the empty phial that had contained the Sobering Potion and sniffed. Damn that meddlesome old foo!! he thought as he recognized the smell at once. His Sobering Potion had been laced with Re Vera Somino to encourage his body to dream truthful insights. What truth is it that I was supposed to see?

Amongst the many layers of clothing that he typically wore, he felt completely stripped as emotions began flooding over him. He now knew what it was that his anger had been hiding, and he did not like it. He felt naked and raw. Sometime whilst reliving his memories, the protective walls that shielded him from the world had crumbled around him.

He had insisted on signing the divorce without speaking with her, without allowing her to reach for his heart. He had never intended to allow himself to fe*dhat* way for anyone. The way that he'd started feeling for her had frightened him. Severus Snape had always seen love as a weakness that would crush him. Now, upon learning that she was pregnant by that prat and that she would soon pledge her life to him, he could see that love was not weak. It was strength, and it was the only thing that could protect him now that he was exposed.

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Severus learns that Hermione is to be married to Ronald Weasley. He becomes obsessed with stopping the wedding and attempting to convince her to marry him instead. This emotional journey forces him to face his true motives behind his sudden change of interest.

Chapter 4

It was early morning before Severus had devised the best course of action. He just needed to talk to her. Nothing more...just talk. He had come to the understanding that if she wanted nothing to do with him that it was best to let her go, but he needed to first give her the choice. That was where he had failed; he had never given her a choice.

He had taken the Hangover Potion shortly after waking, after checking to ensure that it was not laced with any other potions, of course. He was grateful to Albus Dumbledore, although he swore he would never let the ruddy old coot know.

All he needed to do was find some way to get her to talk to him. He was certain after yesterday's confrontation, however, that she would not even consider such a thing.

He needed someone to convince her to talk to him...but whom? He did not want to go to Albus about such a thing, although he was certain the old man would try to help. Unfortunately, Severus knew that since their forced marriage that was arranged by Dumbledore, Hermione did not trust the man as freely as she once had. She certainly turned out to be a better judge of character than I ever gave her credit for, Severus thought with a slight bit of amusement.

He did not dare go to Ron Weasley, not after his encounter with the young man in the bar. He was quite certain that the young man would hex first and ask questions later, not that Severus blamed him.

Miss Weasley? No, she was still his student. She was only visiting with Hermione now because her Head of House was a sap and allowed her to attend the trivial festivities over the weekend.

Potter? Possibly...even though the very idea of having to go to a Potter and ask for help nearly made him ill. However, the Wizarding world's saint was more level headed than Weasley. Severus actually stood a slight chance of still keeping his bollocks if he went to Potter as opposed to his wife's fiancée.

Severus cleaned himself up and refreshed his clothing. He ran his fingers through his lanky hair to get it out of his face and muttered a charm to clean it as well, even though he knew there was little he could do about its greasy appearance. He removed his black traveling robes and his heavy frock coat, leaving a plain white dress shirt and carefully tailored black trousers.

"Much better," came a voice from the direction of the mirror. "I was beginning to think that you had forgotten your coffin."

Severus sneered at his reflection, but he refrained from cursing the furniture. He had more important matters to attend to. He completed his morning ablutions in the bathroom and left to settle the bill with the establishment's proprietor. He still had an errand to run before he returned to number twelve, Grimmauld Place.

It was nearly nine o'clock in the morning before Severus appeared on the front porch of number twelve. He took several deep breaths to calm himself. He was not going to allow his volatile temperament to cause him problems this morning. He could not allow that.

He rapped firmly on the door and waited. Just as yesterday, he was again greeted by the same disheveled looking youth. This time there was a fierce fire burning behind those green eyes when he noticed who had come calling. "Professor Snape," he greeted sourly. "I'd say it was a pleasure to see you again, but we both know that would be a blatant lie. Please forgive me if I don't invite you in."

Harry attempted to shut the door on his unwelcome visitor only to have the bastard shove his way into the foyer instead. "Didn't you get a clue yesterday, Snape? Hermione wants nothing to do with you, and I'll be damned if I'm going to allow you to speak with her again!"

Severus gritted his teeth and fixed his gaze on the prat in front of him. "I need to speak with her before she marries that Weasley twit."

"What the hell for? So you can make her cry again? So maybe this time you can throw her across the room before you come to your senses?" raged the young man. "I don't think so. Now. Get. Out."

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose and focused his energies on keeping his temper tightly wrangled in. "I admit I was *upset* yesterday. I will not hurt her. I just need to speak with her," he said as calmly and as softly as possible.

"Why? So you can tell her that she can't marry anyone? So that you can tell her that she needs to be miserable the rest of her life, just as you are?" Harry ran his hands through his hair, which only helped in messing it up even further.

Just like his father, thought the professor with disgust. He took another deep breath. I must remain calm. "No, Potter. I do not wish for Hermione to be miserable. I just need to make sure that I give her the choice that I did not give her before."

"What choice?" asked the younger wizard suspiciously.

This is what Severus did not want to do. He did not wish to let this ex-student know about the mistakes he had made in his life. It had been painful enough to inwardly admit the feelings that he held for the girl; he did not want to expose himself to Potter that way. Like father, like son. The boy would likely use the knowledge against him. "It was a mistake to come here," he said as he turned back towards the door.

"Wait," said the boy, closing his eyes. "I know I'm going to regret this, but...I'll let you talk to her."

Snape turned back around and narrowed his eyes at him. No matter what the young man said, he did not completely trust him. This seemed like a rather quick turnabout for him

Harry opened his eyes and said, "Listen, Snape, I just want her to be happy. First of all, she needs to consent to talk with you. Then, I'll let you speak with her if you promise to leave her alone after this so that she can get on with her new life **and** if I can be in the room so that I can make certain that you don't harm her in any way."

"Agreed," replied Snape. This was his small opportunity. He knew that he would have to tread carefully; the sand was running out of the hourglass. "Now, if you would just fetch Hermione, then we can get this over with.

"She isn't here, Professor. She's at the Burrow."

"What? How am I supposed to speak with her there?" asked Severus as he began to let his anger show.

Harry rolled his eyes. "I will go talk to her. If she consents, then we'll Portkey to wherever it is that you wish to meet her."

"Fine, then." Severus pulled an emerald green silk handkerchief from the pocket of his trousers and whispered, "Portus," whilst tapping it with his wand. He handed the

handkerchief to the man and spoke, "The Portkey will activate in thirty minutes. It will take you both to my home in Suffolk."

Harry nodded as Severus Disapparated to his home.

Severus paced in the quiet den. It had been years since he had been here. The house had been closed up tightly with only one house-elf to tend to the day to day cleaning. Everything looked exactly as it had when he was a child. It was a small home, only two bedrooms, a kitchen, a den, and a lavatory. There was also an unfinished cellar below, although Severus never remembered venturing down there.

He was anxiously awaiting the arrival of Hermione. He had not informed Boy Wonder, but the Portkey would not respond to his touch. Potter would not be intruding. The conversation that he was to have with his wife needed to be private. He only hoped that she would agree to meet with him. The time passed quickly. He called the houself for a tea service and biscuits. Maybe he could get her to eat something whilst she was there.

Precisely thirty minutes from leaving Potter's home, Hermione appeared in the center of the room. She stumbled forward slightly, and Severus deftly caught her before she lost her balance. "Thank you," she muttered.

As she gradually got her bearings, she looked around the room. "Where are we? Where's Harry?"

"Mr. Potter shan't be joining us. We are at my home in Suffolk."

"You have a house?" she asked. "How could I be married to you for an entire year and not know that you had house?" Hermione sat herself down on the settee and leant forward to take slow deep breaths.

Severus watched her and realized what was wrong. He poured some tea and attempted to give it to her. "No, I can't have anything. I'll be sick," she said as she tried to push the cup away.

"It's a ginger, jasmine flower, and black tea, Hermione. It will help to settle your stomach." She looked up at him and accepted the proffered cup. She took a deep whiff of the aroma before taking a few tentative sips. Her roiling stomach began to settle quickly. "Thanks."

Severus nodded. He sat down in a chair placed opposite of her. "You asked about my home. This is where I grew up. You did not know of its existence because I did not wish for you to ever be here."

"Then, why, may I ask, am I here now?"

He carefully rolled his upper lip between his thumb and forefinger as he leant back and contemplated his answer. "I have come to realize that not allowing you into my life was a mistake. I would like to rectify that error now, even if it means having to live with Weasley's spawn," he said stiffly whilst pointing and her midsection.

Hermione was shaken by his words and his calm demeanor. Her hand trembled slightly as she placed the teacup on the table in front of her. She was so confused by his words that her thoughts were barely coherent. "What?" she asked. "I don't understand. How did you know about...?"

Severus held up his hand to stop her question. "I was a spy for over twenty years; any berk could recognize the symptoms. What I brought you here to tell you is that I now know that I made a *mistake* when it came to how I handled things between *us*." He could not even look at her as he spoke. To show this side of himself was extremely painful; one sour look from her or one scathing remark would cut too deep of a wound for him to be able to recover. Love may be strengthening, but if he were to be rejected after he admitted his love, it would be a crushing blow. "Is the pregnancy the reason that you are marrying Weasley?" he asked.

"Partly, yes, it is." Hermione stood up and turned around to hide the tear that was now streaming down her face. She wiped the tear away and spoke with unwavering confidence. "Pregnant and unmarried witches are not looked upon favorably in the Wizarding world. You know that. Ron is my friend. I know that he will take care of me."

It pained him to hear her talking about Weasley that way. "Do you love him?" he asked. Severus stood and mentally braced himself for her rejection. Silence filled the room. It seemed that neither was even breathing as he waited for her answer and as she pondered the reason behind his question. After several agonizing minutes, she finally broke the silence. "He is one of my best friends; of course I love him. What I need to know, Severus, is why do my feelings for Ron matter to you?" she asked as she took a step towards him.

He crossed his arms around himself in another futile attempt to protect himself. "It matters to me because I need you, Hermione." She took several more tentative steps to close the gap between them as he spoke. He took her closeness as a positive sign and continued. "Without you, I am nothing but the broken and exposed man that is standing before you now. You have crippled my defenses, and I need you now to make me whole. Long ago I developed a defense against life, against my own emotions." He reached his hands out to rest on her arms. "I never let anyone in. Somehow, Hermione, you broke through the wall, filling pieces of yourself in its place. Without you there, there are gaps and holes. I need you!" He had not intended to raise his voice at her again, but the urgency brought about a near panic in him. She had to understand. Severus pulled her closer to him and moved a hand to run through her mass of curls, bringing it back to cup her cheek.

Hermione leaned in to his touch. It was a comforting peace that she had not known before, but it was one that felt so right. She looked into his coal black eyes and saw a passion burning behind them that she had never seen. He pulled her into a tight embrace and spoke into her ear. "It matters not that you carry Weasley's offspring. I want you with me, Hermione."

She allowed him to hold her as the tears welled behind her eyes. He released her and tilted her chin up towards his face. "I want to kiss you," he said.

Hermione nodded her head in acquiescence. He leant down slowly and met her lips. They were soft, warm, and welcoming. Strength began to fill his soul as she opened her mouth slightly to invite him inside. His tongue tasted and explored her, causing him to nearly feel whole again. He let out a soft reluctant moan as she slowly pulled away to break their kiss.

She brought her hand up to cup his cheek. "I need to tell you about the baby, Severus."

He narrowed his eyes, fearful that she was still going to pull away from him. How could she...after he had opened himself to her like he had? He attempted to pull back from her, but she pulled him close with the hand upon his waist.

"It's not Ron's," she said quietly. "I found out I was pregnant the day that the Ministry Owl arrived stating that the law had been rescinded." She leant her forehead into his chest as he stiffened. She was afraid to see the rage that was sure to appear on his face. "I tried to tell you," she added in a whisper.

He relaxed. She had tried to tell him. This was entirely his fault...every bit of it. How can this woman still stand to be in the same room as I after all that I have put her through?" I know you did." he answered. "This is all my doing, not yours."

The admittance shocked her. She brought her head up again. Would he cease in surprising her today?

"Tell me that you will stay with me, Hermione. Tell me that you will complete me, that you will be my wife in both body and spirit."

"I would like nothing more," she answered assuredly.

He leant down and captured her lips once again, but he broke away quickly as he pulled up her left hand. He looked at the small ruby ring that decorated her finger and carefully removed it. "I am sure that Weasley would like this back," he said. Before she could answer, he replaced it with another ring that adjusted itself to fit her finger as

soon as it was in place.

Hermione looked at it carefully; she had expected the token ring from their marriage, the one the Professor McGonagall had picked out for her. She was startled to see that it was something different. "You replaced a ruby with an emerald? How fitting," she said with an amused smile. "Where did you get this?"

Severus' lips formed a small smirk. "To answer your first question, my dear, that is not an emerald. It is an alexandrite. The stone changes color depending on the type of lighting. Many say that it is an emerald by day and a ruby by night To answer your second question, it belonged to my mother. She left it to me when she died, only requesting that I pass it on to my wife."

Hermione's mouth grew into a smile that reached her eyes. This complicated man that she had suddenly found herself in love with just over two months before was surprising her at every turn. "I need to go back and speak with Ron," she said simply.

Severus nodded. He knew that would have to happen. It was unavoidable. "Would you like me to accompany you?"

"No," she replied, shaking her head. "I think it's best if I go alone. Harry will help me." She looked up and saw the worry on the older man's face. "Don't worry. I'll return. Harry knows how I feel about you; that was the only reason he allowed me to come to see you in the first place. He and Ginny both have been concerned that I was not making the right decision. I daresay that he may even be relieved."

A small part of him was afraid that if she left him now he would lose her forever. He wanted nothing more than to hold her there, to keep her tethered to him always. *You cannot do that, Severus. Trust her.* So, he did. "Give me the handkerchief." She complied by pulling the green silk back out of her pocket where she had stuffed it upon arriving to the Snape home. "*Portus*," he muttered as he again tapped his wand to the fabric. He kissed her on her forehead and whispered, "I love you," just as the Portkey activated, and she was gone from the room.

5

Chapter 5 of 5

Severus learns that Hermione is to be married to Ronald Weasley. He becomes obsessed with stopping the wedding and attempting to convince her to marry him instead. This emotional journey forces him to face his true motives behind his sudden change of interest.

Chapter 5

1 July 1999

Ms. Hermione Jane Granger-Snape has done it yet again. The young witch, only nineteen years of age, has again married Hogwarts' Potions Professor, Severus Snape, earlier today. You may remember that this young wanton of a woman was engaged to be wed to Mr. Ronald B. Weasley back in March of this year. As the Daily Prophet reported at that time, that wedding was called off as a result of extenuating circumstances. It was yours truly that uncovered the true nature of this cover-up. The marriage had been postponed to allow for tests to determine the paternity of the pregnancy that the young scarlet woman was attempting to cover-up.

If the girl previously had not proven herself to be a two-timing harlot, then this was certainly the eye-opener that was needed for young Mr. Weasley. It is nearly enough to make the witches of our world pity the Potions master, Professor Snape, for having to marry the wench in order to give his child a name.

"Oh, what an utter piece of rubbish!" Hermione shouted as she slammed the edition of the Evening Prophet on the dining table.

She felt him approach her from behind her chair and her breath hitched when he leaned down to whisper in her ear. "What is that? I thought there were a few bits of truth littered amongst the rubbish." He nipped at the ear and then guided her to stand whilst turning her around to face him. "Did you not marry me?"

She smiled slyly and answered, "Of course."

He ran his fingers through her hair. "And, are you not carrying my son?"

She reached her hands up to touch his face. "Proudly, yes."

Severus pulled her close to him and purred softly in his silkiest voice. "And, are you not feeling a bit wanton at this moment?"

Hermione did not trust her words to convey her thoughts or her emotions. She lifted her face up to capture his mouth with her own.

He gently bit her bottom lip as he ran his hand down along her bulging abdomen. As his hands rested there they were met by a gentle tapping from beneath the skin. Severus allowed his occupied lips to form a slight smirk at the attentions of his son. His wife pulled back slightly and looked at him curiously. "I believe that we still have the small duty of consummation to make this marriage legal, Madame Snape."

Her eyes shone with excitement as she smiled up at him. "I do believe you are right," she answered sweetly.

How did I wind up in this position? he wondered. She truly loved him, and though he rarely said the words, she knew that he felt the same for her. This woman was his wife, his partner in this crazy mixed-up life. She was every bit a part of him as he was of her. After forty years of loneliness, pity, and self-loathing, Severus Snape learnt that he was a human being.

He had never seen himself as one before. He had always relished the rumors about him being a vampire. What better way was there to describe me as the undead? He no longer felt 'undead.' He felt whole. That is the gift that Hermione gave him; she gave him his own life.

Severus was still the same snarky bastard he always had been. The students still feared him, he was still rather anti-social, and he was still commonly referred to as 'the great greasy bat.' No one could take that part from him, as the article had said about his lovely witch months before, witches do not change their warts. He was not a witch, but he felt the saying applied to him as well. Severus felt rather lucky, as he had sanctuary from his harsher and colder self, all thanks to her.

After the day he had confessed his feelings for his wife, he'd begun to court her. They'd spent time getting to know one another. She had returned to living at the castle with him, but Albus had been kind enough to offer Hermione her own quarters. Severus had agreed. Their relationship had been fragile enough and cluttered with complications;

compounding those problems with having to live with one another again would not have been ideal.

He had thought that they would wait to marry until after she had the baby. He did not want to rush her into anything that she was not ready for. Then, in late May, whilst visiting Poppy for antenatal care, Poppy had informed Hermione that she was carrying a boy. Hermione had left the hospital wing and rushed all the way down to the dungeons, barging into the middle of the third year Gryffindor/Slytherin Potions class. To save himself from complete embarrassment, because he was quite certain that whatever this young woman had to say would harm his carefully groomed image in front of his students, he'd found it necessary to scream at the class of students so that they would exit the room immediately.

Once they were alone, he urged her to share her news, which she did happily. At first thought, Severus did not understand what the big deal was. The gender of the child mattered little to him. Hermione, however, was quite adamant that it was important that it was a son. She had insisted that this was his heir and important for carrying on the familial line. That was when she told him that she wished to marry as soon as the Hogwarts Express left for King's Cross.

As they had not been sharing quarters prior to her announcement, they also refrained from any intimacy aside from a few kisses. Again, Severus did not wish to rush her. He knew first hand that her sexual experiences had been anything but pleasant. It was yet another reason that he loathed a part of himself and wondered why she would ever want to be with him.

After she had informed him of her desire for a marriage sooner than he had anticipated, he had decided it best to not press her for sexual intimacy. He was pleased when his instincts proved correct. She came to him, saying she still needed time, but she would very much like to consummate their marriage once the ceremony was complete.

Their second ceremony, held in the afternoon, was different than their first. Her mother was present, although still not thrilled with their union. Her friends were in attendance as well. There was no rushing in the middle of the night, no secrets, and no Ministry officials forcing them to sign documents that would force them to comply with copulation requirements. It was a joyous union, not forced. So, this is what she was referring to when she told me that some people actually marry because they want to.

Copulation was only required as a magical binding, but there were no time constraints in force. However, his young wife had promised him that the day of the binding would be the day they would become one again. A feral grin grew on his face. "What are you thinking about, Severus?"

"Only how badly I want you right now, my wife."

"Then take me to bed, husband." He gazed in her eyes for any sign of fear or trepidation and was met with only looks of love, sincerity, and passion. Severus needed no further encouragement.

"As you wish," he whispered as he deftly picked her up and carried her to the master bedroom of his small home. He carefully set her on the floor next to the bed. Severus stood next to her and reached down to lift the skirt of her dress robes and guided the robe up over her head. He was pleased to find that she had complied with custom and worn nothing beneath the wedding garment. He leant towards her and kissed her on her mouth, tasting her desire. He trailed the kisses down her neck, marking her as his own whilst he guided her to lie back on the duvet.

His mouth found its way down to her breasts, swollen from pregnancy, but he hoped they were not too tender for his attentions. Severus kissed and suckled on each small peak as she softly moaned in pleasure. He continued his trail down her body, across her taut and swollen belly and settled himself between her thighs. He inhaled her musky scent and began placing his attentions upon that which he had neglected for so long. He mapped her with his tongue, ingraining each morsel of information into his memory...her scent, her taste, and her response to his careful ministrations. Severus slipped one finger, and then a second into her already moistened core. Not long after, he felt her walls squeeze around them as she screamed his name.

He removed his fingers, lifted himself up, and smiled at his wife. She responded by pulling at his arms to join her. Severus wasted no time in removing his own clothing and climbed back on the bed to claim her mouth again. Hermione began to kiss him in earnest as she reached down a hand to massage his throbbing sex. "I want you to make love to me." she whispered softly as she began nipping and sucking his ear.

Severus complied with her wishes as she moved her hands to his back, and he slowly guided himself into her waiting channel, carefully lifting his weight off of her protruding midsection. With his first thrust, he knew he was home. It was a wholeness that he had never felt before, one that he never allowed himself to feel before. With each move, he felt more complete. It was not long before he felt her nails drive into his back as she clenched tighter around him and came again, tipping Severus over the edge into oblivion.

A/N: Very special thanks to my beta, southern_witch_69, she worked on a very tight schedule to help me complete this project. Thanks go to Warlock_Vader_69 for giving this a once over. Also, thanks go to Meredith and Cocoachristy, both gals read through this story giving me both input and encouragement.

The criteria is below:

Summary: Hermione is about to get married when a certain Potions master realizes she should marry him instead. He has forty-eight hours to stop the wedding and get her to marry him.

Rules:

- 1. Severus Snape is to be portrayed by Severus Snape. He does not have really silky hair. His nose is hooked, not aquiline. In other words, keep the Snape as close to canon as possible, in both appearance, and characterization.
- 2. Snape does not kill the other canon male involved (i.e. potential groom).
- 3. Snape does not snatch Hermione away from the wedding or some other such rubbish.
- 4. Snape is not to be turned into any of the following:
- Mr. Darcy
- A fluffy bunny
- A sap

Notes:

- 1. Hermione's potential groom may be any other canon character.
- 2. Any characters can be enlisted to help Severus in his endeavor.
- 3. Genre up to the author. The story can be comedy, angst, drama, or any other combination the writer chooses.
- 4. Hermione does not have to end up marrying Snape.
- 5. All standard SH rules and submission policies apply.