

# Saving Grace

*by potterbrat*

This is a story inspired by the Tim McGraw song, "If You're Reading This." This is NOT a songfic. What happens when Hermione's dreams don't exactly turn out the way she had planned? Will she be able to deal with the hand that life dealt her?

## Prologue

*Chapter 1 of 13*

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A/N: Here is the first chapter, as promised! Thanks to my wonderful beta RobisonRocket. I am an absolute troll when it comes to comma use. But, RR waves her magic wand and voila! They are all fixed.

Saving Grace

Prologue

"The Dark Lord is dead!" All across the Hogwarts grounds, the same words could be heard. A few of the shouts were angry, but most were full of joy and elation.

Harry Potter, still clutching his wand tightly, stood resolutely over the body of the madman who had haunted his dreams for ten years. The same man that had not only taken both of his parents but had also deprived Harry of a normal childhood.

Harry couldn't move. He just stared at the body, not believing the nightmare was finally over. The shrill cries from the remaining Death Eaters, muffled slightly by the celebrations of those fighting for the Light, seemed to be an echo to Harry. All he could hear was the pounding in his heart. The last thing Harry wanted to do was kill someone, even Voldemort. In the end, he didn't have to.

A wide grin spread across Harry's battered and dirty face. Yes, Voldemort had taken a lot from Harry probably more than anyone could ever imagine. However, he did not take Harry's innocence or self-respect. Harry, on the other hand, had taken Voldemort's magic with an ancient curse discovered, ironically, by Lucius Malfoy.

Rather than try to live as the Dark Squib, Voldemort chose to die by his own sword the same sword he'd conjured moments earlier to use on Harry so he could "watch the blood of Lily Potter flow into the earth."

A loud cackle shook Harry from his frozen stature. The voice of Bellatrix Lestrange bellowed through the crowd. Harry staggered away from Voldemort's body and collapsed. Before he lost consciousness, he heard her yell, "I got one of the little redheads!"

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Severus Snape heard the voice of Bellatrix moments before she was hit by a curse from Molly Weasley. He didn't know whom she hit, but whoever it was had to be in the Forbidden Forest because that had been where Voldemort had set up his little camp.

Severus Apparated to the exact location before anyone else had a chance to get there. What he saw made his breath hitch. On the ground, in a fetal position, was Ron Weasley.

The man Ron Weasley looked very much like the boy Severus used to know. When he saw Ron stir, Severus let out a breath he didn't realize he was holding and rushed to Ron's side.

As he crouched down, he could tell that Ron was having a hard time catching his breath. "Mr. Weasley Ronald where did she hit you?"

"I... don't... know. I hurt... everywhere. I'm cold so cold on the inside."

Severus paled. He knew immediately what the boy no, man had been hit with. "I'm going to lift you up so I can get you to the clearing and get a better look. It would be better for me to carry you rather than levitate you because of your internal wounds."

If Ron felt any abhorrence to this suggestion, he didn't show it. Instead he put his arm around Severus and allowed the older wizard to carry him into the clearing where the moon was bright.

With a gentleness that surprised Ron, Severus laid him down on the ground. "There isn't much time, Mr. Weasley. I need to assess where most of the damage is, so that I can make you more comfortable."

"Professor, can you just... get me to... the... hospital wing?" Ron asked, taking ragged breaths.

Severus looked at him sadly. "I'm afraid I can't do that, Mr. Weasley. The curse that Bella hit you with is irreversible."

Ron looked horrified. "What do you mean?"

"I mean it is killing you from the inside out. The symptoms you described are the same of a curse that the Dark Lord taught his followers. It also happens to be one of Bella's favorites," Severus finished in a quiet voice full of bitterness.

"So," Ron said, resigned. "There is nothing to be done. I'm going to die, aren't I?"

"The poison from the curse will travel slowly through your bloodstream, and then yes, Mr. Weasley, you will die. I cannot contain the inevitable, but I can make you comfortable."

Ron let out a small laugh. "When Hermione's grandmother died of cancer, the Muggle Healers told her parents the same thing. They couldn't stop the cancer from killing her, but they could make her comfortable. Only thing is, she was eighty-six. I'm only twenty-two. It's funny how someone without magic can live longer."

Severus lifted Ron's head and gave him a phial of pain-relieving potion. "I guess it is somewhat like a Muggle cancer. I am sorry, Mr. Weasley."

"S'alright. Listen, I know there are a lot of things people wish they could say before they die. Since you're the only one I'm going to be with, I guess I can tell you." Ron pleaded with the professor in an even voice provided by the effects of the potion.

Severus closed his eyes and settled himself on the ground beside Ron. "Alright, Mr. Ron I know I'm not exactly your choice, but if you wish, I shall listen."

"First of all, there is a note and a jewelry box in my rucksack that I'd like for you to give to Hermione. I wrote her a letter last night, just in case I didn't make it through the battle. I was going to ask her to marry me. She's pregnant, you know, but I would have asked her anyway. She's going to have a girl, first Weasley girl since Ginny."

"And tell Harry not to blame himself for any of this, because he will. Tell him that he was the best mate that anyone could ever have. And tell him to take good care of my baby sister, but to watch out for her wand. She's right scary, that one."

"Tell my parents that I love them, and I don't regret following in their footsteps by joining the Order. I want them to know how proud I was to be their son. I feel like my life had a purpose."

"Tell my brothers that I appreciate them teaching me how to be strong. Tell them that I love them. Tell Fred and George to teach my daughter everything they know. I want her to bring as much laughter to the world as they have always done."

Ron's voice cracked, but he continued. "And Ginny tell her how much I love her. I'm proud of the strong woman that she's grown into, and tell her to take care of Harry. He loves her so much, and he will need her strength to keep from punishing himself."

Feeling a bit uncomfortable by Ron's confessions, Severus started to fidget. "Would you like for me to summon your intended and the rest of your family? I could send a message. They know that Bella hit you, so they are bound to be looking for you now."

Ron's ears turned pink. "No, Professor. I would rather not see my mother's sadness. And when I close my eyes, I can see Hermione's bright smile. You know the one she gets when she figures out an answer to a problem. That's what I want to see when I close my eyes for the last time. I don't want to see her tears."

Severus nodded in understanding. "I will stay with you, then, if you'd like."

Ron nodded. "Yes, I would like for you to stay. I don't want to be alone."

Ron looked uncertain about what he wanted to say next, but his courage kicked in, and he started to speak again. "Professor, I just want you to know how sorry I am for always being such a git to you when I was a kid. I was stupid not to trust you when all you were trying to do was keep us alive. I regarded you with contempt rather than the reverence that Hermione always tried to prove you deserved. For all of that, I am sorry. I will go to my grave with respect and gratitude toward you."

Severus gaped at him. He didn't really know what to say. The Ron Weasley he knew would have stumbled through some sort of bitter apology that Miss Granger would have forced him into. But *this* Ron Weasley was a grown man who seemed to have a newfound eloquence way beyond his years. Severus felt a tinge of regret that he wouldn't get the chance to know this man. They could have been friends. He cleared his throat.

"It wasn't your fault, Ron. You were an adolescent, and I was your reviled teacher. I didn't make things easy on you and your friends. I didn't exactly invite you to like me. And I want you to know that you have earned my respect as well. It's unfortunate that it takes a situation such as this to let you know that. You are loyal to a fault, Ronald Weasley, and your bravery is incontrovertible, as your sorting proved. I am honored to have fought alongside you."

It was Ron's turn to gape. His mouth twisted into a grin. "I really must be dying, Professor, or you never would have said those things."

Severus smiled the first genuine smile Ron had ever seen. "I would have had to *Obviate* you if you were to make it out of this clearing alive."

The silence stretched for a few moments until Ron spoke again. "Professor, I know why you killed Dumbledore. I know he was dying Harry told me. It was sort of a mercy killing, wasn't it?"

Severus froze. "I will not end your life. The blood of Albus Dumbledore has stained my hands permanently. I don't believe my soul could survive another death of a friend by my hands."

Ron gave him a withering look. "You think me a friend?"

"Indeed," Severus replied solemnly.

"Then, can I ask something else of you? When this is over and I'm gone, will you look in on Hermione from time to time? Make sure she's alright. Make sure she doesn't have problems with our baby. I know Hermione is going to find someone else and fall in love. If he's no good, can you just kind of steer her into another direction?"

Severus nodded even though he didn't know how he would do all of that, but not wanting to upset the young man.

"Thank you, Professor. By the way, did we win?"

Severus shuddered. "Yes, we won."

Ron blinked his eyes slowly. "Brilliant. My little girl won't have to live in fear. She will be free."

"Yes, she will be free. Go to sleep now, Ronald Weasley; there is much happiness waiting for you beyond the Veil."

Ron closed his eyes. Severus sat in silence and waited. When Ron's ragged breaths became quiet, Severus checked his pulse.

Closing his eyes, Severus allowed an errant tear to slide down his cheek.

A/N: I know! Drama, drama, drama! Please leave a review. I hope to have the next chapter up shortly.

# Chapter 1

*Chapter 2 of 13*

This is a story inspired by the Tim McGraw song, "If You're Reading This." This is NOT a songfic. What happens when Hermione's dreams don't exactly turn out the way she had planned? Will she be able to deal with the hand that life dealt her?

A/N: I really appreciate the kind reviews I have gotten for this little fic. I believe that fluff should be a warning, so here it is: EXCESSIVE FLUFF WARNING!! Thanks again to the talented RobisonRocket. She beta'd Broken and Better Than Me, so I wouldn't dream of using another.

Chapter 1

Hermione's brown eyes glistened with unshed tears as she peered out the window from Ron's childhood bedroom of The Burrow. She smiled absentmindedly as she watched her fourteen-year-old daughter give a hug to Devon Malfoy, who had just Apparated into the backyard with his mother and father, Luna and Draco Malfoy. It still struck her that Draco would end up with the eccentric Ravenclaw, but somehow, they just seem to fit.

Today was the fifteenth anniversary of the fall of the Dark Lord. Everyone had gathered at The Burrow: all the Weasleys and their children, the Malfoys, the Potters, and the Snapes. Hermione closed her eyes tightly. *Not everyone*, she thought sadly.

In her hand she clutched a letter that she had read so many times she knew it by heart. But, it was one of the few things that she still had that gave her strength on days like this. Not only was this the anniversary of Voldemort's defeat, it was also the anniversary of Ron's death. Hermione allowed the threatening tear to slide down her cheek.

"Oh, Ronald," Hermione said out loud. "You should be here. You deserve this celebration as much as anyone else."

At that moment there was a knock at the door. Hermione heard the silky voice of Hogwarts' newest Headmaster. "Hermione, are you in there?"

"Yes, Severus, come in." Hermione didn't even try to hide her tears or the letter that she still held tightly.

The door opened quietly, and Hermione looked up. The sight of the formidable Potions master still took her breath away after all these years. She smiled gently at her husband, and he approached her cautiously.

"I thought I'd find you in here. How are you holding up?"

Hermione wrapped her arms around Severus' waist and laid her head on his shoulder. "I'm okay. I've just been thinking about how much Ron would have loved this little gathering. He always loved parties, especially at The Burrow. He and Harry would be off playing Quidditch or otherwise engaged in some sort of scheming with the twins. Oh, my goodness. I can't imagine what sort of trouble he would have gotten into with the Potter twins and Gracie. It's pretty bad when Devon Malfoy is the only sane one in that group."

Severus laughed. "Ah, yes, but wait until the next generation of Weasleys comes to Hogwarts."

"Don't forget our own son, Severus. Brian can be quite a tricky sort himself. And with his big sister there to cheer him on, well... you will have your work cut out for you, Headmaster."

Severus grinned. "I never should have informed the senior twins of their brother's desire to turn their niece into their protégé. Had I known that I would marry her mother and raise the holy terror, I would have kept that bit of information to myself. However, I do believe that the evil uncles took Ronald's request to even higher levels when I became Gracie's step-father."

"Ah, come on, darling." Hermione reached up and gave her husband a chaste kiss. "Don't be so hard on Fred and George. After all, it was you who took Ron's request of watching over me to heart. When he asked you to look in on me from time to time, I'm not sure he meant for you to marry me."

"Well, I do take my responsibilities seriously. It's actually Grace that I was looking after. You just happened to be around," Severus said nonchalantly.

"Excuse me, am I interrupting something?" A voice from the doorway broke the banter.

"Of course not, Gracie," Severus said, striding over to kiss the young girl on the cheek. "Have all of the guests arrived?"

"I think we're still waiting for Aunt Ginny. Uncle Harry said that Lily was fussing about a hair ribbon that she couldn't find. Oh, by the way, Dad, Uncle Harry would like to

speak to you. He's down in the garden."

"Ah, yes, I need to speak with him as well. Hermione, Gracie, I will see you lovely ladies later. Oh, and, Grace, please drag your mother down soon."

Grace laughed. "I will. Don't worry."

After the door closed, Grace turned toward Hermione and watched her intently. Hermione started to squirm under her scrutiny until her precocious daughter sighed.

"What is it, Mum? What's got you so down?"

"Oh, Gracie, just thinking about the way life use to be, the way things might have been, and the way things are. I'm sorry, love. I don't mean to be so melancholy. Tell me, how is young Devon?"

"Don't even think about changing the subject. You're thinking of my father, aren't you?" Grace asked, sitting on Ron's bed.

Hermione sat down next to her and put her arm around her shoulders. "You were always a perceptive child. Yes, I was thinking about Ron. You are a lot like him, you know. He would have been so proud of the young woman you're growing into. Of course, I don't know what he would think about you fancying a Malfoy," Hermione teased.

"I told you not to change the subject. Devon and I are very good friends. I'm too young to be thinking about boys." Grace smiled prettily at Hermione.

"It sounds to me like Severus has been sending you subliminal messages. I can see him now: while you sleep, he is whispering in your ear, "I am too young to like boys," over and over. He is so worried that you will grow up too quickly."

Grace blushed. With her brown eyes and dark, curly hair, so much like her mother's, she was quite a beauty. But, she had a fight in her that was so much like Ron's that Hermione felt herself thinking about him every time she looked at her daughter. Grace was a mischievous girl, with the help of her Uncles Fred and George and her Uncle Harry, who always had a hard time hiding his guilty grin when Grace would get into trouble. Hermione knew that Harry had his hand in whatever it was that Gracie got caught doing.

Hermione smiled at her daughter. Yes, Ron would definitely be proud of his little girl. Hermione unconsciously tightened her grip on the letter.

Gracie frowned at her mother. "What is that, Mum?"

Hermione gave her daughter an exasperated sigh. "Oh, it's nothing for you to worry yourself about, Darling."

"Okay. Tell me something, Mum. Are you unhappy? Are you and Dad having problems?"

"Of course, I'm happy. I love Severus very much. I just get this way on this date. I wish you could have known your father, Grace. He was such a wonderful man. He used to drive me mad, though. He and your Uncle Harry were absolute nightmares in school. It was difficult trying to keep those boys on the right track. But, I loved them dearly. Even before I fell in love with Ron, I loved him as a good friend. I think that's what I miss the most his friendship."

"When I watch you play chess or Quidditch, Merlin, you look just like him. Sometimes it will be in the way you laugh, or the twinkle in your eye, or even the way you cock your head to the side you remind me so very much of him."

"And then... well, I don't know what I would have done without Severus. He saved us both, Gracie. He was such an arse when I was in school completely the opposite of Ron. But, he has always been a good man. He loves you so much, you know. He has never looked at you as Ron's daughter, or even *my* daughter. You've always been *our* daughter."

Hermione laughed. "Although, when you aced your Potions exam last term, I believe you were just *his* daughter."

Gracie grinned. "And when I get into trouble?"

"Oh, that's when you become the Weasley twins' evil niece or, my personal favorite, Potter's Prodigy."

Grace sighed. "I do wish I could have known my real father, but I think I got pretty lucky with the father I got."

Hermione frowned at her daughter. "But, Gracie, you do know him."

At Grace's look of confusion, Hermione continued. "Ronald Weasley is in the air that you breathe. He's in your face every time you look in the mirror. He's in every chess move you make and every goal that you save. He's in your laughter and in your tears. When I was in school, Harry told me something that our old Headmaster told him. Those who love us never really leave us. Ron will never leave us, Gracie. He died fighting for a world where we could all be free from darkness."

Grace let a rare tear slide down her cheek.

Hermione hugged her tightly. "You're right about one thing, though. You are a very lucky girl to have been raised by Severus Snape."

"Indeed," Severus softly replied from the doorway.

Hermione wiped her eyes and giggled. "How long have you been standing there? I thought you were speaking with Harry about something."

"In answer to your first question, I have been standing here long enough to hear how you used me to help you raise this delightful little terror," Severus teased. And I did speak to Potter. However, I don't think I need to be saturated with his company longer than necessary. Besides, I'm a man on a mission. Ginevra and her daughter have just arrived. She asked me to fetch you--something about a photo album."

"I almost forgot about that. I'd better go." Hermione stuffed the letter into the pocket of her robes and left the room.

Grace started to rise and follow her mother when Severus stopped her. "Sit down, please. I'd like to speak to you."

Grace did as he said and sat back down on Ron's bed. Severus didn't speak right away. He took in his surroundings for a moment. The room was still bright orange in tribute to Ron's favorite Quidditch team. There were still clothes in the closet, and Ron's school trunk was left open at the foot of the bed. Severus smiled at Molly Weasley's insistence that Ron's room remain untouched.

Grace couldn't stand the silence any longer. "Did I do something wrong, Dad?"

Severus gave her a penetrating look. After all of these years, he still loved to hear her call him that. "No, you didn't do anything wrong that I'm aware of. I'm sure the twin idiots and Potter will have you into all sorts of nonsense before the day is over, however. No, I want to talk to you about your mother, and I also would like to speak to you about your father."

Grace was taken aback. In her entire life, he had never talked to her about her real father. "What do you want to talk about?"

Severus took a tentative seat on the bed next to her. Although he and Hermione had an eleven-year-old son who loved Quidditch and insisted on plastering the evidence all over his bedroom walls, Severus still seemed out of place in Ron's childhood room.

"This day is always hard on your mum. You know the circumstances as to why that is. I have always done my best, Gracie, to stay out of her way on this occasion. I can't deny my own ridiculous tinge of jealousy whilst I witness her sadness. It's like this every year, but somehow... I don't know why, but this year seems to be even more difficult."

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose. "There was one other day. You have probably forgotten."

"What day?" Grace asked.

Severus' black eyes bore into her brown ones. "The day you went to Hogwarts. Your mother was nearly inconsolable. I think she cried harder on that day than she did at your father's funeral."

"Why do you think she's having such a hard time with this year, then?"

"I think it has a lot to do with the fact that we have gathered here at his childhood home. We usually celebrate at the old Order Headquarters where the Potters live. This year, however, Molly wanted to gather here. Your grandmother has never liked Apparating, and she says that she feels like a bone breaks every time she uses the Floo."

Grace snorted. "I think she likes to fuss over everyone, and she feels more comfortable doing that in her own home."

Severus chuckled. "You definitely have the measure of Molly Weasley."

The room grew silent again. Grace gave him a curious look. "Dad, why are you telling me all of this?"

"I'm telling all of this because you are growing up, Grace. I don't like it, but it's a fact. I'm afraid that if I blink, you will be too grown up for me to sit with you like this. I'm afraid that if I go to sleep tonight, you will be graduated and have a career by morning. I used to think people were crazy when they spoke of intimate and sentimental issues. I used to think they should just let destiny happen and to hell with the rest of it."

"What changed your mind?" Grace asked.

"Ronald Weasley changed my mind. On the day he died, he told me all the things he wanted everyone to know. He spoke of his love for his family and for Hermione. He spoke of how happy he was to be having a daughter. He loved you before you were even born. It was an honor to be the recipient of his message."

"So, that's why we're having this little talk. You are afraid that if tomorrow never comes, you would be sorry that we didn't have this between us?"

"Exactly," Severus answered simply. "I don't want another day to go by without you knowing how much I love you and how great a privilege it is to be your dad."

Grace threw her arms around Severus' neck. With a choked sob, she said, "I love you, too, Dad."

Severus had to fight tears of his own. He scowled at her. "Look what you and your mother have turned me into. I'm a sentimental old codger. Albus Dumbledore would have a field day with this."

Grace giggled.

They both turned toward the window when they heard loud shouts.

"Well, it sounds like your uncles are here. Let's go down and see what trouble those twits can get you into."

"Just give me a minute, okay? I want to sit in his room for a little while."

Severus kissed her cheek and used his thumb to wipe a stray tear from her cheek. "If you ever need anything, Grace, you need only ask. I would steal the moon for you if it were in my power."

Grace merely nodded, and Severus swept out of the room, leaving her alone with her thoughts and the whispering walls of her father's bedroom.

A/N: There will only be a couple more chapters on this fic. I meant for it to only be a one-shot, but the fates have chosen to make it more. Please review.

## Chapter 2

*Chapter 3 of 13*

This is a story inspired by the Tim McGraw song, "If You're Reading This." This is NOT a songfic. What happens when Hermione's dreams don't exactly turn out the way she had planned? Will she be able to deal with the hand that life dealt her?

A/N: This chapter took a few re-writes to finally finish. RobisonRocket is my fabulous beta who got this out the day after I sent it to her. I place total blame and responsibility for my slow update upon the talented notsosaintly. If she hadn't written such a great fic (Strega Letteraria), I would have gotten this chapter out sooner. If you haven't had a chance to read SL yet, I highly suggest that you do. Okay, time to get down to business...

### Chapter 2

After Severus left Ron's old bedroom, Grace stood from the bed and walked over to the opened school trunk. Crouching down, she started to pull out some of Ron's old school things. There was an old Gryffindor Quidditch uniform. Grace remembered Harry telling her that Ron played Keeper the same position that Grace played. She smiled at the thought.

Next, she pulled out some of his old school books. She flipped through his Transfiguration text, giggling at some of his artwork that had been doodled on the pages. She would bet her broom that her mother hadn't seen these books. Grace cringed when she thought of the way her mother reacted at seeing Grace's Transfiguration book with doodles in the margin. Gracie liked that this was another of her father's traits that she had inherited.

She was so lost in her thoughts that she didn't hear the door open. She only reacted when she realized that someone was taking a seat on the floor next to her.

Blushing guiltily at getting caught, she smiled shyly at Harry. "I'm sorry, Uncle Harry. I know I shouldn't be going through his things. I think Grandmum would have a fit if she

caught me, but I couldn't help myself.

Harry grinned at her, but didn't comment on that. "I come up here sometimes when we come to visit Molly and Arthur. When I was growing up, I didn't have a very good relationship with my aunt and uncle, so I came here during the Christmas hols. The Weasleys were so good to me. They treated me like one of their own. They were and still are the best family I have ever known."

"What was he like, Uncle Harry? My mother talks about him sometimes, and so does Dad. They both have different views of him, you know. Mum tells me things about his loyalty and his bravery. Dad always tells me that my father was a very loyal friend, but his potion-making skills were quite abysmal."

Harry laughed. "Yeah, Snape would say that. But, he's right, they *were* abysmal."

"You knew him best, though. I already know what kind of man he was, and I already know what kind of *soldier* he was. What was he like when he was being himself? I guess what I want to know is *who* was Ron Weasley?"

Harry contemplated his niece's request. He knew this day would surely come. If he were being honest with himself, he would admit that he knew that they would be having this conversation as soon as he started up the stairs. He had watched Snape descend the stairs alone. When Snape gave him a silent nod, he felt he had to get her and bring her down. He was no good at these kinds of things, but he really didn't have a choice now.

Harry stood up and reached down to help Grace up off of the floor. Still holding her hand, he guided her to the bed and sat down, patting the place beside him. Harry didn't speak for a few moments, and Grace started to feel disappointed that he wouldn't tell her anything.

Harry sighed in defeat. "Do you see that bed over there? That's the one I used to sleep in when I'd come here when I'd come home. That's what The Burrow has always been to me, you know. This is the first place, other than Hogwarts, where I felt truly at home. The house is fantastic, but it was the people in this house that made it home."

"Ron was the first friend, besides Hagrid, that I made in this world. Actually, Ron was the first friend I had in any world. I was shy and scared, and I had thought that someone had made a mistake. I didn't know anything about the magical world because I never knew anything about my parents. I was so afraid that I would be the only kid at Hogwarts that wouldn't have a clue. I just knew I'd fail miserably."

Harry became lost in his own thoughts for a moment before he continued. "Ron made me forget that I was *The Chosen One*. He was always trying to make things look easier than they were. He made things less serious. I don't know if I would have survived without him. He always stood in my shadow. I didn't want him to; it's just the way things were."

"He was *real*, you know. I could tell him anything. Well, I mean I never told him about my obsession with his sister. He didn't know any of that until the day I kissed her after a Quidditch match." Harry blushed when he remembered who he was talking to.

Grace grinned but didn't say anything. She was too eager for Harry to continue.

"Your father was the best chess player Hogwarts had ever seen. He was fantastic. Nobody could beat him. Snape played him once, during Christmas at Headquarters. It was brilliant. Snape was so angry because Ron beat him, but he gave his best effort not to let Ron know."

Grace laughed out loud at the vision she had created in her mind. "What did he say?"

"He just left the table and nodded to Ron, saying something like, 'Good game.' It was hilarious. I think Ron's head grew an inch or so after that."

They both laughed at the thought.

Harry sobered quickly and studied the beautiful girl for a moment. He'd watched her as a child, looking for signs of his best friend. She had so many of Ron's traits and characteristics that it used to pain Harry, but now he was able to watch her without a sense of loss. He felt blessed that a part of Ron was still on this earth. Harry cleared his throat.

Grace's giggling subsided, and she waited for Harry expectantly.

"Gracie, has anyone ever told you how much you look like Ron? I know you have your mother's crazy hair, and her dark eyes, but everything else is so *him*. I know you've been told this a million times, but he would be so proud of you. And I bet you could have given him a run for his Galleons on the chess board."

"Maybe that's why Dad won't play with me. I've tried to get him to sit with me, but he always makes excuses."

"Maybe you're right," Harry conceded.

Grace eyed Harry for a stretch. "Uncle Harry, can I tell you a secret?"

"Sure you can, Gracie. That's what uncles are for. Okay, maybe you can't trust *all* your uncles, but you can trust me."

"I'll be starting my fifth year at Hogwarts soon, you know. Mum said that our Head of House always talks to us about our career choices in the fifth year. I know what I want to do, but Mum is going to freak. I have to tell her because she's the Head of Gryffindor, but I don't really know how I'm going to tell her that I want to be "

"Yes?" Harry prompted.

"I want to be an Auror. I know it's strange, me being a girl and all, but I really want to do it. I want to fight the Dark Wizards just like you and just like my father did. I know it's dangerous, but there's nothing else I want to do, Uncle Harry."

"Calm down, Gracie, calm down. There's nothing strange about girl Aurors. I know lots of girl Aurors that are really good at their jobs. But, I don't think it's your mum that you've got to worry about because Hermione's always been a feminist. To be honest with you, it's your dad that you've got to convince. And if you can do that, you will have to put up with Molly Weasley's resistance. When that's all said and done, it will be all of your uncles that will be worried to death for you me included."

Grace blanched. "But, you just said that there's nothing wrong with being a girl Auror."

"I didn't say that it wasn't dangerous. It also doesn't mean that I won't be worried about you. I have to worry more, Cubby, because I'm your godfather. I think there's a whole chapter on it in the Godfather's Handbook." Harry grinned and bumped her shoulder with his own.

Grace rolled her eyes. "Uncle Harry, you haven't called me Cubby since I was little."

"Well, honestly, you're still little. On a serious note, though, I think you're brilliant. I will never go behind your parents' backs, but after you talk to them, I'll help you with the training. By the time you graduate Hogwarts, I'll make sure you're prepared."

Grace threw her arms around him. "Thank you so much. I don't know what I would do without you."

"You'd be a bookworm or a greasy git," laughed Harry, earning himself a slap on the arm from Grace.

"That's my dad you're referring to. You'd better lay off, Harry Potter, or I will tell Aunt Ginny."

Harry paled. "You wouldn't. I thought we were a team."

"We are, but my dad is off-limits."

"Okay, no more Snape jokes," Harry said.

Grace sighed. "I don't know how to approach him about becoming an Auror. He still sees me in nappies. What would you say if Lily told you she wanted to be an Auror?"

Harry grimaced. "That's not fair. Lily? An Auror? Ugh, I don't think I could stand it. Besides, she's only twelve; that's too young for her to be thinking of such things."

"Weren't you only twelve when you rescued Aunt Gin from the Chamber?" Grace crossed her arms over her chest and eyed him.

"I really need to tell Hermione to stop telling you things," Harry mumbled.

The door to Ron's bedroom opened, and Ginny stood with her arms crossed. "There you two are. We are about to start lunch and then we're going over to the Memorial. Afterwards, Gracie, your mum and dad want to go over to Ron's grave and leave some flowers. Harry, we're going with them."

"Yes, dear. Come on, *Cubby*, I'll race you."

"You'll do no such thing, Harry Potter," said Ginny. You'll walk like the adult you are *supposed* to be.

Harry nodded and then winked at Grace conspiratorially. As soon as Ginny left the room, they both took off, nearly knocking Ginny down the stairs. An angry outburst from Ginny was on the tip of her tongue. She changed her mind as she decided her husband looked dead sexy running around like a naughty child.

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Instead of the usual chaotic affair, lunch was somber. Even the Weasley twins were able to contain their practical jokes for the occasion. Though the rest of the Wizarding world was celebrating the anniversary of Voldemort's defeat, the Weasley family and their guests still felt the pang of loss.

One by one, they Apparated in front of the gates of Hogwarts in order to attend the Memorial service for the lost heroes of the Final Battle. The Memorial had been the act of conspiracy between Harry and Severus. It was an idea they had come up with before the first anniversary. They wanted to honor the heroes without the sort of fanfare that had plagued Harry his entire life. This Memorial was, if nothing else, a gift to the people who really didn't feel like celebrating.

The silence stretched throughout the crowd of mourners. They took their time reading the names that were etched into the stone that had been erected under the tree by the lake. There were occasional sniffs and soft murmurs that were carried off with the calm summer breeze.

Hand in hand, Severus and Hermione made their way through the crowd toward the stone. Grace followed behind them with her head bowed. Once they had reached the stone, Hermione traced Ron's name with her finger, the same way she did every year. Severus watched her closely for a sign of sadness. Hermione's eyes were dry when she smiled up at him.

He smiled back at her. "Are you alright?"

"Better than I thought I'd be. Severus, I know we just got here, but I think I'm ready to go. I want to take some flowers to Ron's grave before it gets too late. Then I'd like for you to take us to dinner."

Severus' eyebrows shot up. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm quite sure. I have some things I need to say to Ron before I lose my nerve."

Severus regarded her for a moment. "What of the Potters? I believe Ginevra had planned to go with us."

"Could you just tell them that we're going now? I wouldn't dream of telling Ginny that she can't visit her brother with me, but you have a way with words, my dear. I'm sure you can find *some* way of getting us out of here," Hermione said flirtatiously.

Severus narrowed his eyes at her. "Very well, I will make our excuses. Wait for me outside the gates."

Hermione watched Severus disappear into the crowd and then turned to go toward the gate.

"Mum, are we leaving already?" Grace asked, surprised.

"Yes," Hermione answered simply.

"Um, okay. I'm just going to go say goodbye to Devon."

Hermione gave her daughter a knowing look, but didn't comment. Instead, she told Grace to meet them at the front gate.

Several minutes later, they were leaving the flower shop. Severus had asked Hermione if she wanted to Apparate to the cemetery, but she declined.

"I think I'd rather walk."

The cemetery, where Ron had asked to be buried, was at the edge of Hogsmeade, just a mile from the main road.

Finally reaching Ron's grave, Hermione sat down on her knees in front of it. She laid the bouquet of wildflowers in front of the large marble stone and smiled.

Ron's stone was very simple. His name was written in large letters across the top with his dates of birth and death inscribed directly underneath. A Gryffindor lion separated the dates from the epitaph, which read: HERE LIES OUR BELOVED SON, BROTHER, FRIEND, AND FATHER. MAY THIS TRUE GRYFFINDOR FIND PEACE KNOWING HE TOUCHED THE LIVES OF SO MANY.

Severus touched Hermione's shoulder to get her attention. "Would you like some privacy?"

Taking a deep breath, Hermione said, "No. I think I need you and Gracie here with me for what I'm about to do."

Without waiting for a response, she took both of their hands and pulled them down with her, so that she was flanked on either side by the two people that meant the most to her.

Taking another deep breath, Hermione spoke to the headstone. "Hello, Ronald. I've got Severus and Gracie here with me. Oh, you wouldn't recognize Severus. He's not the man we remember from school. And you would be so proud of your daughter. She's quite the beauty that we always knew she would be. She's so smart, Ron, and she stands up for what she believes in. She can play a mean game of chess, just like you. I honestly think she could have beaten you."

"I'm here today, Ronald, to let you know that I have to let you go." Hermione's voice cracked a bit, but she continued on. "I will never forget you, Ron. Your laughter and your spirit will live forever in our Gracie. I hope you understand my decision because I would hate for you to feel betrayed."

"Your tombstone tells the truth, you know. You are a true Gryffindor. You have touched so many people, Ron, even in death. I can't imagine what my life would have been like if you and Harry hadn't rescued me from that troll."

Hermione tried to hold her tears in check as she stood, still holding hands with her husband and her daughter. "Severus gave everyone your message, Ron. He told your dad that you were proud to fight like he did. The twins were thrilled to have your permission to corrupt your daughter. Ginny stood by Harry when he blamed himself for everything, just like you said he would."

"And your brothers, Ron, all of your brothers hold you in the highest regard. They are all so proud of you. Charlie named his firstborn son after you. Ronnie's twelve now, and he tells all of his friends that he got his name from his brave uncle, who died a hero. Sometimes it makes me angry because I know how badly you wanted everyone to be proud of you, and you're not here to enjoy it. You're not here to see how much you are loved and honored."

Angry tears were dripping from her eyes now, and she let go of the hands she was holding in order to wipe them away. She took a few deep breaths and whispered to the headstone. "Your story will never end, but it would be easier to tell if you were here to tell it."

Hermione placed a kiss on Ron's name. "I'll be going now, Ronald. You will always be my best friend, but I have to let you go now. Please, forgive me."

Hermione turned to go, once again grasping the hands of Severus and Gracie. As they made their way through the maze of headstones, a strong gust of wind burst through, causing a whistle to echo around them.

Grace tightened her grasp on her mother's hand and whispered, "He forgives you, Mum, and he understands."

Hermione laughed out loud, finally freeing herself from the ghost of Ronald Weasley.

A/N: I have to admit my elation when RR told me this last part made her cry.

## Chapter 3

*Chapter 4 of 13*

This is a story inspired by the Tim McGraw song, "If You're Reading This." This is NOT a songfic. What happens when Hermione's dreams don't exactly turn out the way she had planned? Will she be able to deal with the hand that life dealt her?

A/N: This chapter is kind of short. It's really a transitional chapter that I couldn't elaborate on. I am also extremely sorry for the slow update. It may not look like it, because of the short chapter, but I had my first bout with major writer's block. I always try to give you guys the best, so I had to re-write this a couple of times. Thanks so much to my beautiful beta, RobisonRocket. Bless you, RR! I wouldn't know where a comma goes if it came up and bit me in the rear!!

Chapter 3

Hermione felt completely drained by the time they had arrived back home to Spinner's End. She knew they needed to start packing up for their return to Hogwarts, but she just couldn't find the energy. She knew she needed to start getting herself ready for dinner, but she just sat in her chair in her bedroom.

Grace had gone over to the Malfoys to pick up Brian, and Hermione had a feeling they'd be there for a while. Sure enough, not sooner had she thought it, did her husband come through the door with a bewildered grimace on his face.

"What is it, Severus? You look slightly... disgruntled."

"Grace just Floo called me from the Malfoys. She has so *kindly* offered to stay with Brian so I can take you for a lovely evening of dinner and dancing."

Hermione frowned. "I think she's a bit young to be home alone, not to mention the added responsibility of her younger brother."

"That's exactly what I told her. But, she was ready for me to say that."

Hermione's eyes widened. "What did she tell you?"

"She said that the Malfoys would *love* to have them stay with them until we come home. And then that Luna woman insisted that I just let them stay the night because there is plenty of room at the Manor."

Hermione chuckled. "What exactly are you worried about, Severus? Draco and Luna will watch our children, and you can take me out on a much needed dinner date."

Severus scowled at her.

"Oh, I get it. You're concerned about Gracie's *friendship* with Devon, is that it?" Hermione crossed her arms and waited for the answer.

"Hmph!" Severus responded.

"Come on, Severus," Hermione said. She started walking toward him with her hips swaying seductively. "A private dinner with candlelight and music could be very... encouraging."

Severus watched Hermione's fingers walk slowly up his arm. He crossed his arms in an attempt to stay focused on the matter at hand. He was losing.

"You know how quiet the house is when the kids are away. Can you just imagine how *quiet* it's going to be when they are out all night long?"

That was his undoing. He grabbed her and pushed her against the wall. "You, my little minx, forgot about the sounds of you screaming my name."

Hermione pushed gently on Severus' chest in order to move him out of the way. Swaying her hips from side to side, she made her way to the bathroom. Severus could hear her low chuckle and, right before she closed the door, she turned back to him.

"I suggest you get dressed if we plan on making it back home at a decent hour."



After she closed the door, Severus whispered to himself, "I don't know what I was thinking when I married a witch half my age. That woman will be the death of me." Severus heard the shower come on, and with a lascivious smirk he took off his robes and headed for the bathroom. He was in need of a shower as well.

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Severus and Hermione were halfway through their dinner, making polite conversation and completely avoiding the subject of the day's events. Once their plates were empty, the waiter appeared and filled up their wine glasses.

"If you are interested, I shall bring the dessert menu over," the waiter said.

Without taking his eyes off of Hermione, Severus replied, "You can hold off on the dessert for a while. Right now, I want to dance with my beautiful wife."

The waiter gave a slight bow and departed.

"Severus, you are such a charmer," Hermione remarked as she allowed her husband to take her hand and lead her to the dance floor.

As they swayed together, the rest of the restaurant's patrons disappeared, and they became the only two people in the universe. They locked eyes with one another, and Severus lightly brushed his lips across Hermione's. They never noticed when the music stopped; they continued, locked in an embrace on the dance floor.

"Hermione, do you have any idea how much I love you? For as long as I can remember, you have been the only light in the darkness that has been a part of my life for so many years. I owe Ronald Weasley such a tremendous debt of gratitude, and my only regret is that I don't know how to pay it back. He gave me you and Grace, and essentially, my beautiful son. He is responsible for my life having a purpose for which I didn't think possible after the war."

Hermione stopped swaying and put both of her hands on either side of her husband's face. "Severus Snape, you have repaid the debt in so many ways. You took care of us. More than that, you have loved us. You have always been a good man. You saved us me and Grace. You saved us from a life of loneliness and sadness. You gave me a reason to love again, when I didn't think it was possible."

"Hermione, I don't know if this is the right time to bring this up, but I need to ask you something."

"I've learned, Severus, that there is no such thing as a right time and a wrong time. You may ask me anything you want."

Severus took Hermione's hand and guided her back to their table where the dessert menus sat untouched. He took pride in the smiles and nods they received from those who noticed their continuous dancing long after the music stopped. He couldn't help but notice a few of the men ogling his wife, and another surge of pride shot through his heart. He pulled the chair out for her and kissed her hand before returning to his own seat.

He moved his chair closer to her so that he could avoid eavesdroppers. To the other customers, it looked as though they had carried their private dance to the table. Taking her hand in his, he rubbed circles on the back of her hand with the pad of his thumb and looked deeply into her eyes.

Hermione smiled. After all these years, his gaze could still pierce her soul. "Okay, what is it that you need to ask me?"

"What was all that about this afternoon? What made you decide to have... words with Ronald's tombstone?"

Hermione sighed, and Severus thought he'd overstepped his bounds, but she smiled at him. "It was time. I know how much my missing him has been a burden on our marriage. You have been so wonderful and patient with me. I had to do it for your sanity as much as my own. Severus, I want to tell you something, but I want you to know that it doesn't change my love for Ron in any way. Ron was a wonderful man and a wonderful friend. When we were in school, we skirted around the idea of a relationship for so long."

"I think, deep down, our relationship was something built out of loyalty and trust. I believe that, if Ron had lived, we would have married. We probably would have had a very long and loving marriage. But, I want you to know that I'm not sorry that I married you. I loved Ron, but what you and I have is a completely different kind of love. We have loyalty and trust, yes, but we also have passion. I'm not saying that I wouldn't have been happy with Ronald, because I would have been. But, I don't ever want you to think that I settled when I married you."

Severus smiled at her. "What do you think Ron thinks of us?"

"He's probably wondering what compelled me to marry the Bat of the Dungeons," Hermione said through giggles.

Before Severus could respond to her, the waiter came back to the table. "Have you decided on dessert?"

Severus gave Hermione a feral smile and said, "No, I believe we are ready for our check. I need to take my cheeky wife home and punish her for her insubordination."

The waiter blushed and left the table. Hermione's giggles stopped immediately, and she gasped. "I can't believe you told him that. That poor boy has probably heard stories about you, and he's going to call in the Aurors."

"Well, then I suggest we run away."

"Severus, you are an arse!"

"Ah, but you love my arse, my dear."

The waiter returned with their check, still blushing. Severus left some gold on the table to cover the bill and to give the waiter a substantial tip. He stood and pulled Hermione up from her chair.

"Shall we, Mrs. Snape?"

"We most certainly shall," replied Hermione.

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#### MEANWHILE AT THE MALFOY MANOR

Grace Weasley was not happy. She was trying to have a nice game of chess with Devon, but her little brother was having none of that. She had a funny feeling that Brian had been given instructions by their father to never let her be alone with Devon.

She thought to herself, *honestly, it's not as though we're doing anything wrong. And it wasn't as if Devon were her boyfriend... or anything* Grace sighed.

As if the gods were answering her unspoken prayer, Luna poked her head out from the kitchen door. "Brian, would you be so kind to accompany me into the garden? I need some help gathering some tomatoes for dinner."

"But, Aunt Luna, it's getting dark," Brian objected. Irritating his sister seemed like a much more enjoyable pastime than picking tomatoes from the darkened garden.

"Yes, it's getting dark, but the best time to pick tomatoes is when the sun is going down and the moon is coming up. Come along."

Brian fought the urge to roll his eyes. He loved Luna, but sometimes she was just so out there.

After Brian followed Luna outside, Devon and Grace continued to play in silence. After a few minutes, Devon finally cleared his throat and spoke.

"So, Gracie, why don't you just go ahead and check me so we can be done with this game?"

Grace smirked. "Now, where is the fun in that?"

Devon shrugged. He watched her as she watched the board intensely. He had wanted to get her alone for a while, but now that he had her, he wasn't sure he had the courage to ask her what he'd been dying to ask her.

Sensing this, Grace took the initiative. "Whatever you have on your mind, Dev, just spit it out."

Devon sighed dramatically and sat back in his chair. "We've known each other our entire lives, Grace."

Grace gave him a strange look. "Yeah, so?"

"You know there's going to be a ball this year, right?"

"Of course I know that. I'm a Prefect, just like you, so I got the memo. What are you on about?"

"Will you go with me? Will you be my partner at the ball?" Devon asked, flushing.

Grace grinned. "You're cheating a little, don't you think? You're asking me before we even go back to school."

Devon hung his head. "Well, I was hoping you'd say yes to that because I have something else I want to ask you."

"Alright... I will go to the ball with you. What else did you want to ask me?"

"Willyoubemygirlfriend?"

"I'm sorry, Dev, I didn't quite catch that."

Devon looked her square in the eye and asked again, "Will you be my girlfriend? I know it's weird and all, because we've been friends for so long, but I really like you."

"I don't think it's weird at all, Dev. Of course, I'll be your girlfriend. But, we can't make a big deal out of it around my dad. You know how he is."

Devon grinned, feeling much more lightheaded than he had a few moments ago. Just then, Draco came into the room.

"Hey, kids, where's Luna and Brian?"

"They're outside, picking tomatoes," said Devon, still smiling.

"Picking tomatoes? Oh, yeah, it's nearly dark. That's Luna's favorite time to pick tomatoes. I don't know why something about the moon and the sun. How's the chess game coming along?"

"We're having fun, Uncle Draco."

"That's good to know. Um, Gracie, why don't you hurry up and check my son so you can get the game over with. I might even let you play me."

"That sounds like an easy win," Grace giggled.

"Enough of that cheek, young lady," Draco said sternly.

Grace took mercy on Devon and checked him after two more moves. She started piling the chessmen back on the board quietly. She was Devon Malfoy's girlfriend. She couldn't get that out of her head. She also couldn't wipe the grin off of her face.

Draco took Devon's vacated seat and also took the first move. Devon excused himself to help his mother. He also wanted to send Brian back into the house so he could tell Luna about Grace agreeing to be his girlfriend.

Brian came in and went straight to the kitchen, muttering about setting the table.

Draco and Grace played in silence for next twenty minutes when Grace finally won. "See, Uncle Draco, I told you it would be an easy win."

Draco raised his eyebrows at the girl. "Hmph! I let you win, little one."

Grace just giggled. "I think I'll go and help Aunt Luna. Why don't you practice, and we'll play again tomorrow before I have to go home."

Draco grinned, and Grace stood to go into the kitchen. Devon and Luna had just returned from the garden when Draco spoke up.

"Another game sounds great, Gracie, I'm looking forward to it. Oh, by the way, I find it extremely weird that my son's new girlfriend calls me 'Uncle.'"

Grace turned Weasley red and ducked into the kitchen.

A/N: Next up, Grace talks to dear old dad about her career choice.

## Chapter 4

*Chapter 5 of 13*

This is a story inspired by the Tim McGraw song, "If You're Reading This." This is NOT a songfic. What happens when Hermione's dreams don't exactly turn out the way she had planned? Will she be able to deal with the hand that life dealt her?

A/N: We're almost to the end. I appreciate everyone sticking with me on this. As always, thanks to my beta, RobisonRocket!

Saving Grace

Chapter 4

*HOGWARTS DURING FIFTH YEAR*

"But, Mum, can't you at least talk to him?" Grace pleaded.

"Grace, this is your thing," Hermione said, taking quick strides back to her office above the Transfiguration classroom.

"Mum."

Hermione kept walking.

"Mum, stop!"

Hermione, ignoring her daughter's pleas, still kept walking.

Finally having enough, Grace yelled, "Professor Snape!"

That did it. Hermione stopped dead in her tracks and turned around, glaring at Grace. Approaching slowly, Hermione said in a low voice, "In my office, now."

Grace flinched at her mother's obvious anger and dejectedly made her way to her mother's office.

Once inside, Hermione closed the door and motioned for Grace to take the seat in front of the desk while Hermione decided to lean against it as to give the impression of being a formidable opponent.

"Now, you listen carefully, Grace Ginevra Weasley. I will NOT tolerate you raising your voice at me. Not only am I your mother, but I am also your Head of House. You WILL respect me."

Grace had the decency to look abashed, which caused Hermione to ease up on her.

"Now, I believe you would like to discuss your wanting to be an Auror. I'm not sure who put that into your head, but you might as well decide on something else."

Grace mumbled something under her breath.

"What's that? I didn't quite hear what you said?" Hermione asked sternly.

"Mum, is there anyone else that you have discouraged from doing what they want with their lives, or is it just me?"

Hermione sighed and moved around to sit in her chair. It seemed her daughter wasn't easily intimidated.

"Gracie, I just worry about you. There was a time when I had to go into battle, and it's very tough. Not just physically hard, but it does things to your mind. I probably would have died if Ron hadn't insisted that I stay at The Burrow after I found out about your impending birth. I was so angry with him, too. It was just as much my responsibility to protect Harry as it was his."

"But, you *fought*. Maybe not at the Final Battle, but you did fight. Do you not think me capable? Do you not think me strong enough or smart enough?"

"I believe you are extremely capable, Grace. Your strength and intelligence have nothing to do with my fears. I'm a mother, and unfortunately, that's my only argument I have."

"So, will you talk to Dad for me?"

"Grace, you do realize that you don't need parental consent when deciding a career. Do what you need to do, and we'll deal with him later."

"You don't understand, Mum. I don't want his consent--I want his blessing. I just want him to be proud of me, and I don't want to go behind his back." Grace finished, dropping her gaze to the floor.

Hermione stood and came back around the desk. Kneeling in front of her daughter, she raised Grace's chin and whispered softly, "He is proud of you, Gracie. But, I'm afraid that if you want him to give you his blessing, it is you that will have to ask for it. Use your Gryffindor bravery and go talk to him. It won't be easy, mind, but this is something he needs to hear from you."

They both started when they heard a soft knock on the door. Hermione stood after giving Grace's hand an affectionate squeeze.

"Enter," Hermione said.

The door opened, revealing her husband, and Hermione smiled when she heard Grace's sharp intake of breath.

Severus stepped into the room with obvious frustration plastered all over his face. "I just came by to give a bit of advice to the two of you. It is most unfortunate to have a row inside of a castle whose walls can... talk. There I was, strolling through the corridors, looking for a dunderhead to terrorize, when I heard the most peculiar bit of gossip amongst the paintings. Would either of you care to venture a guess as to what I heard?"

Grace sat rigidly in her chair, still facing her mother's desk. Hermione, on the other hand, smirked Slytherin-style and strode to where Severus was standing.

After giving him a peck on the cheek, she looked pointedly at Grace and then back into Severus' obsidian eyes. Then, without a word, she swept from her office.

With a calculating stride, Severus made his way to Hermione's vacated chair, folded his arms over his chair, and waited.

"Right then," Grace said to herself, raising her chin to look him in the eye.

Severus raised one eyebrow at her indicating her to just get on with it.

"I want to be an Auror," Grace said with all the Gryffindor courage she could muster.

"I see," Severus responded dryly.

Grace, losing a bit of bravado, continued. "Did you hear me? I want to be an Auror after I leave school."

No response.

"Dad, aren't you going to say something?"

Severus narrowed his eyes at her. "Have you finished your Potion's essay?"

Grace was stunned. "What? What does that have to do with my wanting to be an Auror?"

"Please accept my apologies, Grace. I didn't realize you wanted to me to say something about a specific topic." Severus' silky voice reverberated through the room, sending an involuntary chill down Grace's spine.

It was moments like these that Grace felt full appreciation for how powerful and terrifying Severus Snape could be. She was so used to the softer side of him the nurturing father, the loving husband, and the distinguished Head Master that his Death Eater/spy persona always took her by an unsettling surprise.

Grace cleared her throat and took a deep breath. "Dad, I would like to be an Auror when I leave Hogwarts. I believe that I am a fully capable witch, for I have had the best teachers throughout my life. Fighting the Dark Arts is not only in my blood, it's in my character. I may have Ron Weasley's blood flowing through my veins, but it's you who taught me to fight for what I believe in."

Severus softened slightly. He would have to use a different approach with his too-bright-for-her-own-good daughter. He would have to be honest. Coming around to the front of Hermione's desk, he leaned on the front and then patted the empty spot on the desk next to him.

Grace stood and propped herself on top of her mother's desk so that she was sitting next to where Severus was standing. They both remained silent for a few moments.

With his eyes focused on nothing in particular, Severus chose his words carefully. "Grace," he said softly. "By the time I was your age, I was on my way to becoming a Death Eater. I studied and learned the intricacies of the Dark Arts until they became a part of me. I learned spell after spell hex after hex. I even created a few of my own. When I took my Mark, it burned my skin as lover's caress."

Grace raised her frightened eyes toward Severus. He had never spoken of his life as a Death Eater. She knew that he was one, of course, but she was always told the stories of the ex-Death Eater turned spy. She couldn't suppress her tremble, but she loved him and knew he wouldn't hurt her.

"Dad," she asked, "why are you telling me all of this? Do you think that I'm going to get *involved* with dark wizards or something?" Grace tried, but failed to keep the hurt out of her voice.

"You misunderstand me, child," Severus said softly. "I cannot help but fear that you will run across someone who was like... me. You see, Grace, before I found my way through Albus Dumbledore, I would have stopped at nothing to achieve the highest praise from the Dark Lord."

"Albus saved me, yes, but will there be an old codger out there ready to save the next group of lost witches and wizards that are ready to follow the next fool who tries to become a dark lord? Who knows? But, my worry is that you will become a victim of their hunger for power."

Grace looked pleadingly at Severus with tears streaming down her cheeks. In a surprisingly calm voice, she said, "I promise not to let you down. I know that I don't have to get your permission, but I need your understanding, Dad. You have to understand that this is something that I have to do."

"And you must understand that, as your father, I am terrified for you." Severus, who had never been an emotional sort, found himself trying not to choke on his next words.

"Gracie, I have fought against the most despicable curses, and I have seen some of the most horrid crimes. But, none of those things are comparable to the pain I would suffer if anything happened to you. Your mother keeps telling me that I saved the two of you, but the truth of the matter is that I was the one who was saved. Ronald Weasley gave me a reason to keep going, and your mother gave me a reason to love. But, it was you who gave me back my soul."

Grace threw her arms around Severus' neck and whispered, "I love you, Dad."

"And I love you, Grace. Which is why this is so hard for me... You have... my blessing. I will support you in your endeavors."

Grace sobbed harder. "Thank you."

A few heartbeats later, Severus let her go. "Well, now, I guess you had better get back to your dormitory and get to work on your essay. And I will get back to terrorizing students."

Grace giggled. "Why do you still patrol the corridors now that you're the Headmaster?"

Severus smirked. "Come now, why should all of my fun be taken away just because I got a promotion. If I hurry, I might even be able to catch Mr. Malfoy out-of-bounds."

"Dad," Grace gasped. "Please don't start giving Devon a hard time just because I'm his girlfriend."

"Why, Grace, I'm appalled. Is there another reason to give the brat a hard time, other than the fact that he's your *friend*?"

Grace fought the urge to roll her eyes. She smiled instead, allowing Severus to win this round.

"Fine, I will go finish my essay, but first I want to go to the owlery."

Severus furrowed his brows. "Who on earth are you sending an owl to at this time of night?"

"Oh, I need to write Uncle Harry. I promised him that I would write to him after I got your blessing. He said he would help me train, but only after I talked to you."

"I see. Well, then, I suggest you get going. I believe I will retire for the evening. I have suddenly lost interest in scaring *students*."

Grace couldn't help the ominous feeling she got from his choice of words, but decided not to comment. Instead she kissed his cheek and said, "Okay, Dad. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, love. I will see you at breakfast."

Hermione reappeared moments after Grace left her office.

"I just saw our daughter, Sev. I assume your decision was in her favor?"

Severus nodded and stood. Without saying a word to his wife, he went through the side door that connected to their suite.

Hermione followed him, oblivious to his state-of-mind.

"I'll put some tea on," Hermione said.

Severus didn't answer her. Instead he went straight to the fireplace, muttering to himself.

"Severus, what are you doing?"

Again, he didn't answer her.

"Severus!"

He turned to look at her. "What?"

"What is the matter with you?"

"I don't know what you mean?" He sneered.

"Don't give me that rubbish. Grace seemed to think the two of you had a wonderful talk, and you're acting like a mad hippogriff. Tell me what's bothering you."

"Grace and I had a nice chat, yes. I agree. Why don't you put on some tea?"

Hermione watched as he started rummaging around the fireplace, still muttering to himself. She caught a few words such as: kill him... mind his own business... bloody brat... who he thinks he is...

"Hermione, where in Circe's name is the bloody Floo powder?"

Hermione walked calmly over to the fireplace and handed him an urn that was right in front of him. "If it were a basilisk, it would have bitten your head off. Now, are you going to tell me what this is about and who you are calling at this hour?"

"I will speak with you about this later. As of right now, I have business to take care of."

Before Hermione could say anything else, Severus grabbed a handful of powder and threw it into the fireplace, bellowing one word.

"POTTER!"

A/N: Sev's not happy with our be-speckled boy, is he? Please leave a review.

## Chapter 5

*Chapter 6 of 13*

This is a story inspired by the Tim McGraw song, "If You're Reading This." This is NOT a songfic. What happens when Hermione's dreams don't exactly turn out the way she had planned? Will she be able to deal with the hand that life dealt her?

A/N: FINALLY! I know it has been a while since I have updated this fic. I have had a severe case of writer's block for which there is no cure. I am so sorry. Please, forgive me. The fabulous RobisonRocket sent this back to me less than twenty-four hours after I sent it to her. I am such a lucky-duddy to have a beta like her.

ADDITIONAL WARNING: I am aware that our beautiful professor is not a fluffy sort in canon. However, we have never seen him as a father. One can never describe what comes over us when we become parents. I believe that even Snape could spout sonnets if JKR would have allowed him to become a loving father. We can never prepare ourselves enough for the love we have for our children--it's a love that is completely incomprehensible and uncompromising.

Chapter 5

Ginny poked her head into her youngest daughter's room. Five-year-old Jasmine was sitting up in her bed, giggling hysterically. Harry was sitting on the edge of her bed, grinning mischievously and waiting for his daughter's laughter to subside.

Between fits of giggles, Jasmine said, "Then what happened? Tell the rest, Daddy."

Harry, who still hadn't noticed his wife's presence, grabbed his own wrist animatedly and said, "Then he said, 'I'm dying. It's killed me.' And you know what the prat did? He tried to get Hagrid sacked. He was such an idiot, Jas, you should have seen him. Hagrid pick him up and ran all the way to the castle with him. Draco looked like a rag-doll bouncing around, crying the whole way."

Harry and Jasmine were both hysterical now. Harry had tears rolling down his cheeks, and he tried mercilessly to compose himself to continue his story, but to no avail.

"Ahem."

Harry jumped. Ginny was standing at the door with her arms crossed and one eyebrow raised at him.

Harry coughed. "Oh, hey, Gin. I was just telling Jasmine a bedtime story."

"I see," Ginny said.

"Oh, Mummy, Daddy is so funny. Did you get to see Mr. Draco flopping around like a rag-doll?" Jasmine asked innocently.

"Um, no, I wasn't in their year at Hogwarts, so I didn't get to see Mr. *Dracflopping* around." Ginny said and then fixed her eyes on her husband.

"Harry, Severus is downstairs, and he would like a word."

Harry stood and kissed Jasmine on the forehead after tucking her in. "Now, you go to sleep, little one. If you don't, Mummy won't let me tell you anymore bedtime stories."

"I promise, Daddy."

Before Harry reached the door to the bedroom, Ginny stopped him. "Hang on a minute, Harry."

He waited for Ginny to kiss their daughter, and they both walked out together. "What is it, Gin?"

"I can't believe you! Why would you tell Jasmine that story? You and Draco are supposed to be friends."

Harry gave her an innocent grin. "We are friends. But, when we were kids, he was an evil wanker. Come on, Gin, he'd be the first to admit it. I like making Jas laugh, and stories about Malfoy are funny."

"But, Harry, you *know* she's going to say something to Draco."

"So? Have you completely forgotten what Devon called me when he was just learning to talk? He called me 'Potty.' Do you honestly think that was a coincidence?"

"Oh, for Merlin's sake, Harry, you are an incorrigible three-year-old. Ugh! Now I know why the fates didn't give me any sons. The overgrown child that I'm married to is all I can handle, and that's saying something as I have Fred and George as brothers."

Harry stuck his bottom lip out in a mock pout. Ginny giggled.

"Go on, you silly child. Severus is waiting, and he didn't look happy," Ginny scolded.

"I'd be more concerned if he *did* look happy," Harry mumbled more to himself than to Ginny as he started down the hallway toward the stairs.

As Harry reached the bottom of the landing, he was unsurprised to see his former nemesis standing there, tapping his fingers on the banister.

"It took you long enough, Potter. I don't like to be kept waiting," he said.

"Well, hello to you too, Severus, to what do I owe the pleasure of your delightful company at such an indecent hour?" Harry asked dryly. "Surely Lily hasn't landed herself into so much trouble that you felt it necessary to make a house call."

"Neither of your twins has anything to do with this. I would like to speak to you about *my* daughter. I would like to know why you felt it necessary to encourage her wishes to become an Auror."

Harry sighed. He had been expecting this visit at some point. "Come into the sitting room, Severus. I'll pour us some Firewhiskey, and we'll discuss this."

Without a word, Severus swept from the room and headed toward the sitting room. Harry rolled his eyes at the billowing of Severus' robes. Some things never changed.

Harry closed the door of the sitting room behind him and took a seat in the large armchair next to the fire.

"Have a seat," Harry said, indicating the chair opposite from him.

"I'll stand."

Harry shrugged and poured two glasses with generous amounts of Firewhiskey. He took a sip of his and gestured toward the second glass for Severus.

Severus took the glass, but remained standing.

Harry sat back in his chair and allowed the silence to stretch between them.

Severus frowned at him. "Well?"

"Well... what?" said Harry.

"What have you got to say for yourself, Potter? I want to know why you put the idea of being an Auror into my daughter's head."

"Oh, come off it. I didn't put the idea into her head. She told me she was interested in becoming an Auror, and I told her she needed to talk to you and Hermione about it first end of story," Harry said calmly.

"End of story? Why didn't you talk her out of it? For some insane reason, Grace *likes* you and would have listened to you. You could have talked her into teaching or something like that. You know, something that wouldn't get her *killed*." Severus' words were spoken softly, but still laced with anger.

Harry eyed his companion for a moment while trying to choose his words carefully. "Look, Severus, please sit down so we can talk like adults and not as if I'm still your student."

After a few moments, Severus gave up the battle of wills and took the seat. "Fine, I'm sitting, now start talking."

"Well, first of all, you know that I would never encourage Gracie to do something that would put her into immediate danger. I should hope that I don't need to defend my concern for my own godchild's safety and well-being. That being said, I would never give her the impression that her wishes and dreams are foolish. She was adamant, Severus. This is what she wants, and if you would stop seeing her in nappies and start seeing her as the bright young witch that she is, you might have a better understanding."

Harry paused for a moment and waited for an interjection, but none came, so he continued.

"I know she's young, but she's not going to start hunting criminals tomorrow. She's still got two years of school. There's still plenty of time for her to work toward her goal, and it's also time for her to change her mind."

"She loves you, Severus. She knows how hard it will be for you to let her go, but this is important to her. You've been a great father to her; I think Ron would even agree to that. The best thing you can do for her now is support her and help her if she needs it. That's what I plan to do. I'm going to do everything I can to make sure that she's at the top of her game. She'll be the best damn Auror the Wizarding World has ever seen, you'll see."

Severus heaved a defeated sigh. "I just I don't know what I would do if something were to happen to her."

Harry shifted uncomfortably in his chair. An angry, scowling Snape he could deal with, but a helpless and worried Snape well, that would take an entirely different level of understanding.

"Severus, I..."

"Listen, you don't know what this is like. I feel so useless right now. I am in such a precarious position with her. From the day Grace was born, I have felt an overwhelming sense of protection over her. It's a feeling that comes from deep within. Even before I courted Hermione, I felt drawn to the child. I would even go so far as to say that it was Grace who brought me and Hermione together. I don't know what it was about her or why I let myself become so attached to her. Perhaps it stems from my time in the forest clearing with young Mr. Weasley. I will admit it, I didn't want to be the one to hear his last words nor did I want to be the one to carry out his requests."

Harry looked at his hands. "We appreciate everything you did. But, you didn't have to do it, you know. You had sacrificed so much already. You could have just walked away and started over, but you chose to do what he asked you to. I have always wondered about that. Honestly, Ron was far from being one of your mates." Harry's last statement was punctuated with a questioning look at his companion.

Severus contemplated Harry for a moment. He fought the inclination to remind Harry that he wasn't exactly one of Ron's top ten favorite people, either, but that argument was for another time. Severus rubbed the bridge of his nose and said, "If you had asked me then why I chose to stay with Mr. Weasley in that dreadful forest, and subsequently deliver his messages, I don't know that I would have had a suitable response."

"And now?" shrugged Harry.

"At the time, I didn't feel it to be a burden, therefore I just did what I felt had to be done. I felt I *owed* the Weasleys some sort of closure. Arthur and Molly had always been kind to me, even though I was a bastard to their children. They accepted that I had a... purpose in that God-forsaken war, and they never questioned my actions. But, now that I look back on that night, it would be foolish for me to say there wasn't more to it than that."

"What was it, then? What sort of answer did you come up with, and what does it have to do with the *precarious* position you are in with Gracie?" Harry asked.

Snape looked toward the fire and took a deep breath before he began his explanation. "Alright, I'll tell you. You see, I had been a pawn in someone else's game for so long that when the war was over, I vowed that I would never live in servitude again. When Ronald Weasley's dying wish became my responsibility, I accepted it without regret. I imagined that I would deliver his last words to his family, check in on Hermione and the baby from time-to-time, and then go back to teaching dunderheads. I was finally going to be at peace with my life. I had accepted that I would always be alone, but I was free so I was not despondent."

Harry listened in silence. He gave his full attention to Severus, hoping to gain some understanding from the most complex man he'd ever known.

"I did my job, Potter. I did what Mr. Weasley had asked. I delivered his messages, and I checked in on Hermione. We became friends quickly. She was a breath of fresh air to a man who hadn't had an intelligent conversation in a very long time. On the day that Grace was born, Hermione was at the castle. She had borrowed a book from my private collection, and she had come to return it. I invited her to stay for tea, and we were having a delightful disagreement over the effect peppermint had when mixed with dragon's blood. She is a stubborn witch. She was in mid-rant when she went into labor. I carried her all the way to Poppy."

Severus grinned to himself. "I remember pacing the corridor like an expectant father. When I heard Grace's wailing, my heart skipped a beat. Poppy opened the door and told me that Hermione wanted to see me. I will never forget that moment for as long as I live. When I walked into the room, Hermione was sitting up in the bed, beads of sweat rolling down her cheeks, frizzy hair standing on end, and Grace wrapped in a pink blanket in her arms. It was the most beautiful sight I had ever laid my eyes on. She had asked me if I wanted to hold the baby, and I panicked. I had never held an infant in my life, but I felt an inexplicable pull from the child. From the moment I held her in my arms, I knew that I would never want to let her go. I was paralyzed by her. Suddenly, everything that I had ever done made sense. Those things had brought me to that moment, and I felt... cleansed."

"I couldn't get through a day without thinking about Grace. I would Floo call Hermione every night to check on them. Naturally, the more I thought of Grace, the more I thought of Hermione. I woke up one morning and realized that I had fallen for both of them. The rest, as they say, is history."

"The precarious position that I'm in is due to the fact that I am not her biological parent. I may be made of sterner stuff than some, but contrary to popular belief, I am human. If I were Grace's *real* father, I would probably have stamped on the idea of her becoming an Auror immediately. As much as I consider Grace my own, I am not prepared for her rejection of me as her father. I don't ever want to push her to the point of reminding me that I am, in fact, her *step*father. As many horrors that I have seen in my lifetime, the prospect of her hating me would top them all. I never deserved her, and I am always waiting for the proverbial other shoe to drop, and I would lose a precious gift."

Severus sat back in his chair and stared thoughtfully into the fire. Harry watched him for a moment. This was a man who Harry had known for years, but he realized that he hadn't even scratched the surface where Severus Snape was concerned. He actually felt sorry for the man who had dealt him so much hell. He knew he had to say something, but he was at a loss. As the silence stretched, Harry cleared his throat, hoping his words wouldn't tumble disgracefully out of his mouth.

"Severus, I thought you knew Gracie better than that. If she heard you refer to yourself as only her *step*father, she would probably never speak to you again. I loved Ron. He's the best friend a bloke could have ever had. I never thought I deserved him or Hermione as friends, but there you are. Yeah, he probably would have been an excellent father, and it's regrettable that he never had the chance with Gracie. But, the fact of the matter is, Ron isn't here. *You* are her father the only father she will ever have. She didn't need your approval, you great prat. She went to you because she *wanted* your approval. If you had told her that you didn't want her to become an Auror, of course she would have been angry. She's a bloody teenager for Merlin's sake; that's what they do. But, she would still love you, and she would still look at you as her father. Unfortunately, she would also have let go of her dream out of fear of letting you down."

Severus was stung by Harry's last statement. He closed his eyes as the painful truth of Harry's words washed over him.

As Harry watched Severus, the thought hit him that there was a time, long ago, that Harry would have taken great pleasure from the Potion master's despair. But, this wasn't the evil bat of the dungeon. The man before him was someone he had great respect for. He needed to say something to lighten the mood.

"You know, Grace becoming an Auror should be the *least* of your worries," Harry said matter-of-factly.

Severus looked up with his eyebrows furrowed.

Harry grinned. "How on earth did we let her become involved with Devon Malfoy? I mean to say, it's not like we were blind-sided by it. The boy didn't come out of nowhere. He and Grace have been spending far too much time together for years. I think you should have put a stop to that a long time ago, old man."

Severus smirked. "*You* are supposed to be her protector, are you not? Why, you're the Savior of the Wizarding World, couldn't you have done something about young Malfoy? My, my, after all this time, you have proven to be... lacking. I am most disappointed in you, Potter. Most disappointed indeed."

"You know, maybe you should give me a list of things I'm allowed to do as godfather. I seem to have missed something," Harry said.

"I don't know that I could write a text fit for someone with the academic capacity of a flobberworm, however, I shall try," Severus deadpanned.

Harry laughed out loud at this last statement. He was hoping to get the sarcastic wit out of his old professor, and he did. Only seconds ticked by, however, before the air became thick once again.

Severus put his drink on the table next to the chair and stood. He watched the fire dance over the embers as he let the silence penetrate the air. He finally let out a deep sigh and turned back toward Harry, who was now standing behind him. He nodded his head toward Harry and turned to leave.

"Severus," Harry said.

Severus stopped, but didn't turn around.

"For what it's worth, I think you were the best man for the job you know, by raising Gracie. Like I said before, she loves you, and nothing you ever say or do will change that."

Harry noticed Severus' slumped shoulders straighten a small fraction, and Harry smiled to himself. Severus did not respond to his words, though. Silently, they made their way through the house. As they walked, Severus regarded Harry out of the corner of his eye for a moment and then cleared his throat.

"Potter, be sure to clear your calendar for the next two summer holidays."

Harry gave him a questioning look. "Oh and why do I need to do that?"

"Because you will be busy helping me train the *best damn Auror the Wizarding World has ever seen!*" Severus said, raising the corner of his mouth in what Harry perceived as the closest he would ever get to a smile.

Harry grinned widely, though. "You're on."

Severus didn't say another word. Harry followed him to the foyer, and when they reached the front door Severus turned to face him again. He gave Harry a brief nod and left.

Harry locked the door and looked out the window. After watching Severus Disapparate, he turned to go back upstairs and came face-to-face with his wife.

"What on earth was that about?" Ginny asked.

Harry smiled. "All these years, our old professor has thought of Gracie as belonging to him. But, I think the great, bloody git has finally realized that *he* belongs to *her* as well. And, he thinks I'm thick."

A/N: I know you were all hoping for a Harry/Snape showdown. I hope you're not too dissatisfied.

## Chapter 6

Chapter 7 of 13

This is a story inspired by the Tim McGraw song, "If You're Reading This." This is NOT a songfic. What happens when Hermione's dreams don't exactly turn out the way she had planned? Will she be able to deal with the hand that life dealt her?

A/N: Once again, I come to you with my tail between my legs. It has taken me a few weeks to get this chapter finished. I have been busy. I've posted a couple of one-shots: 'Twas the Night Before Deadline and Voldemort the Red-eyed Serpent. If you haven't already, you should check them out, so you can see that I'm not always so dramatic. Thanks again to RobisonRocket!

Chapter 6

*TWO YEARS LATER*

Grace stared unblinkingly at her reflection in the large, ornate mirror which was nestled in the corner of the Head Girl's dormitory. If one were to ask her if she was nervous, she would probably laugh in their face. Nerves she could deal with nerves could come and go with little worry. But, Grace wasn't nervous: she was terrified.

The Potter twins, Lily and Anna, were sitting on her bed, looking through the latest edition of *Witch Weekly* and waiting for Grace so they could go to breakfast together. Anna, looking at her watch, jumped to her feet in a panic.

"Gracie, we're going to be late for breakfast. Come on, Lils, you know I don't like to be late," Anna whined on her way to the door.

"Oh, for Merlin's sake, Anna, we've got the Head Girl with us. We're not going to get into trouble. Besides, it's just breakfast. We can grab a slice of toast and still make it to our first lesson. *And*, in case you haven't noticed, today is N.E.W.T. day, so our teachers are too busy running around to be concerned about a little tardiness *especially* from you," Lily said, and Grace groaned.

Anna crossed her arms over her chest. "Why wouldn't they care if I'm tardy?"

"Because," Lily said, "You're *you*. They love you the teachers. You're never in trouble, and you make about a thousand points on all your exams. They would never be angry with the perfect little Gryffindor Prefect. Anyway, it isn't as if we have any exams or anything. We already finished our O.W.L.s, and we're only still going to lessons so that the teachers have an excuse to drive us mad."

Trying not to be too offended by her sister's comment about the teachers, Anna allowed some of her panic to subside. Lily was right after all. She took a moment to study her twin as she was reminded once again of how different the two of them were. As a matter of fact, their little sister, Jasmine, was probably more like Lily than she was. Granted, when they were at home during the holidays, Lily could persuade her to get into a little mischief. But, at school, she was all about books and learning. Lily was always the one getting detention and having points taken off, but Anna would always work extra hard in classes to get the points back. Lily was a chaser for the Gryffindor Quidditch team, while Anna could be found in the spectator's stands with her nose in a book. Yes, on the outside, they were identical down to the last freckle. But, on the inside, they were as different as night and day.

Anna smiled lovingly at her sister. They may be completely different, but Anna and her sister were as thick as thieves, and she counted Lily as one of her best friends. Even though they were identical, Anna always felt that Lily was the prettier of the two. She thought Lily's green eyes sparkled a little more; that her red hair was a little shinier; and that her smile seemed to always be a little brighter.

As soon as Lily saw the smile on Anna's face, she knew she'd gotten through to her. "See, sister dear, you agree. Now that that's settled, what are we going to do with our friend here?"

Grace gave Lily a petulant stare. "What's that supposed to mean? What did I do?"

"Gracie, we've known you since we were born. We know when you're scared to death. Now, come on, tell us what's eating you," Lily said.

Grace looked from Lily to Anna then back to Lily. "I'm fine, honestly, you two, you're making such a fuss."

Anna smiled knowingly. "Are you worried about your exams?"

Grace grimaced.

"Aha! You are worried about your exams. My baby sister has it right, doesn't she?" Lily asked. "I can't believe it."

Anna rolled her eyes. Now was not the time to argue that she was not her *baby* sister. Lily was only older by five minutes, but she always seemed to make such a big deal



about it. When Anna *did* argue that it wasn't a big deal, Lily always reminded her that her Hogwarts letter arrived a whole thirty seconds before hers...Anna's...did.

"Gracie, what my *eldest* sister is so tactlessly trying to say is that we know you will do great on the exams because you have been studying like a mad woman, and you know this stuff. Your dad has been teaching you potions from the time you were born, and you are excellent with all the other subjects. And, you've been learning defense with our dad for the past two years. If I must say so, he's the best there is."

"Yes, that's what I meant to say," added Lily. "Look, Gracie, you'll do fine. You completely aced your O.W.L.s, and to be perfectly honest with you, I don't have a clue how you did that. We sat for our O.W.L.s earlier this week, and they were horrible. I'm sure I got a big, fat T for History of Magic that class is dreadful."

Grace smiled at the twins. They might be younger than her, but they were her closest friends. Having grown up together, they were more like cousins, and she trusted them completely. Aside from Devon, they understood her more than anyone else could. However, they didn't know what was going through Grace's head today. Today, she would be making a life changing decision, and she hoped beyond all hope that she was making the right one.

Grace sighed heavily. "I love you guys. Thank you so much for trying to cheer me up. Well, let's get down to breakfast and get today over with."

She took one more look at herself in the mirror, sighed, and then followed her friends out of the dormitory.

When they reached the Great Hall, the buzz of excited chatter reached their ears. She smiled warmly at Devon, who was making his way over to her from the Ravenclaw table. Lily and Anna grinned at Grace and excused themselves.

By the time Devon reached her, some of the butterflies flitting around in her stomach had died away. "Hey," she said.

"How're you feeling this morning? You look a little pale. Come on, we'll get you some breakfast." Devon grabbed her hand and led her back to the Ravenclaw table.

"Is this alright, or would you rather sit with the Gryffindors?" he asked.

"This is fine, Dev. I don't care where I sit, honestly. I don't think I can eat anything, though," Grace said.

"Maybe you should at least eat a piece of toast. Come on, your dad is watching you. The man hates me enough as it is, Gracie. Next thing you know he's going to accuse me of making you starve yourself."

Grace stole a glance at the Head table and, sure enough, her father was staring right back at her. She gave him a small wave and, in true Snape fashion, he acknowledged her with the slightest of smiles that only Grace could detect the one he saved just for his wife and children.

"Alright, I'll eat some toast," Grace said with a defeated smile. "Besides, old mother hen with the wicked sixth sense has just looked my way. I don't know how she does it, but I swear my mother knows exactly how many calories I eat every day."

"You're right. She's watching you pretty closely. Merlin, she's as bad as Mrs. Weasley," Devon added. "Here, have some bacon. *You're looking a little thin*," he deadpanned with a perfect impression of Molly Weasley, causing Grace to nearly choke on her pumpkin juice.

Their laughter earned them a curious glare from Severus and a wink from Hermione who hid her grin with a sip from her teacup.

"So," Devon began. "Have you told either one of them what you're planning to do?"

Grace's grin faltered, and she shook her head soberly.

"You haven't changed your mind, have you?" Devon asked cautiously.

"No," Grace answered. "I haven't changed my mind. I want this, Dev, more than anything. It means more to me than being an Auror. It means more to me than being a witch. You understand, don't you?"

Devon softened immediately at the desperate look in Grace's eyes. "You know, I think I do understand."

Before either of them could continue their conversation, Severus stood and approached the podium.

"Silence, students, I need your full attention." In true Snape form, he displayed his formidable power by silencing the students with barely a rise in his voice a voice that still sent pleasant shivers down Hermione's spine.

"With the exception of seventh-years, when you are finished with your breakfast, you need to go to your regularly scheduled classes so that your teachers can try to fill your heads with some last minute education before you retire for the holiday. I believe this to be a waste of time, but alas, I have been out-voted." Severus finished with a contemptuous glance at Hermione, who smiled innocently back.

Twenty minutes later the students from sixth year and below had finished their breakfast and cleared the Great Hall. Severus stood once again so that he could address the seventh-year students.

"Now," he began with a sinister sneer. "You will soon begin your Nastily Exhausting Wizarding Tests. There is no need to be nervous...." he drawled. "Just remember that you have all had the very best education possible, and *some* of you might be able to receive decent marks. Of course," Snape's eyes fell on Devon, "some of you will only scrape by."

Grace smiled at Devon. She knew her dad was aware of Devon's brilliance; he just enjoyed baiting him. She rolled her eyes he could be so childish.

"Listen closely now; I don't care to speak to you like you are toddlers, but some of you need special care. Before you begin your exams, you will need to fill out your personal information, which is located at the top of each exam. This information asks for your full name, birth date, where you live, and the names of your legal guardians. Please endeavor to fill this section out completely and without errors as it is legal and binding. Your entire professional career could be ruined if you misspell your name." Once again, his eyes rested briefly on his daughter's companion.

"Now that I have provided you with the information that is necessary to fulfill the requirements of my employment, you have exactly twenty minutes to get to your first exam. That is all."

Severus gave Grace a furtive look before leaving the podium. She understood this as a "come see me" look and nodded.

"I will catch you up, Dev; my dad wants to see me." She gave him a kiss on the cheek and excused herself.

Grace walked slowly so that the rest of the students had time to clear the Great Hall. She knew that her dad, being the private man that he was, would appreciate this.

As soon as she reached his side, she waited as the last student finally exited the Great Hall. She then turned to him and was taken by surprise with the concern she saw in his beetle-black eyes.

"What's the matter, Dad?"

"I actually wanted to ask you the same question. You seem distracted this morning, and your mother and I noticed that you didn't eat much breakfast. That really isn't a

good way to start your exams, Grace."

"I'm alright, honestly. I guess I'm a little nervous about the test," Grace said without meeting his eyes.

Severus noticed her odd behavior, but didn't comment. "You have studied very hard; I don't see any reason why you should be nervous. Listen to me, child; if there is something bothering you, try to put it off until the exams are finished. Then, you can come and speak to me or your mother about it afterward. You need to be concentrating on your exams right now, and nothing else."

"Okay, Dad. I'd better go now, though. I don't want to be late," Grace said. Before she left him, she gave him a swift kiss on the cheek. He gifted her with a smile, rarely seen outside a private setting.

Grace left the Great Hall, and Severus stared at the empty space that she'd vacated. He was so lost in his thoughts that he didn't hear his wife enter through the staff-room door.

"Severus, is everything alright?" Hermione asked quietly.

"Hmm," he responded.

"Snap out of it, Headmaster," Hermione scolded.

"My apologies, my dear; did you need something?"

Hermione frowned. "What has gotten into you? You are a million kilometers away."

Severus reached down and gave her hand a squeeze. Finally taking his eyes off of the empty space, he focused on her.

"Everything is fine, Professor Snape," he said cheekily. "Would you care to have lunch with me in our chambers this afternoon?"

Hermione narrowed her eyes at him. She knew he was hiding something, but he was a much better Occlumens than she was a Legilimens. She sighed. "I'd love to have a private lunch with you, darling. Maybe you will be ready to tell me what's on your mind by then."

Before he could respond, she had vanished.

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In previous years, the exams were held in the Great Hall. This year, however, the exams were to be held in Hogwarts' vast library. This decision was based on the amount of time it took students to clear the Great Hall after breakfast and the Headmaster's impatience with them.

Grace found her seat and waited for the exams to be handed out. She felt a prickling on the back of her neck and turned around to find Devon watching her. He gave her an encouraging smile, which she returned in kind.

Once all of the tests were handed out, the Ministry examiner cleared his throat. "Now, students, I assume you are privy to the rules of this examination. There will be no talking until you exit this room for your lunch break. You have also been given instructions on filling out the top half of your exam for each lesson. You have exactly one hour to complete each exam. You will have three exams before lunch. Good luck."

Grace looked at the top of her exam paper, took a deep breath, and dipped her quill into her ink bottle.

She began to write:

GRACE GINEVRA WEASLEY

Smiling to herself, she took another deep breath and added... SNAPE.

A/N: I hope you enjoyed this chapter. I wonder what Snape will think about Grace changing her name on her exams. I have been pretty vague on her name, but I will go into more detail in the next chapter.

## Chapter 7

*Chapter 8 of 13*

This is a story inspired by the Tim McGraw song, "If You're Reading This." This is NOT a songfic. What happens when Hermione's dreams don't exactly turn out the way she had planned? Will she be able to deal with the hand that life dealt her?

A/N: Thank you so much for all of the positive reviews that I've gotten on this story so far. You guys really know how to make a girl feel special. You wouldn't love my story nearly as much, however, if I didn't have RobisonRocket to beta for me. Cheers, RR!!

Chapter 7

The day of graduation had finally come. Most of the students had gone home for the holidays the previous morning. Severus and Hermione were still in their quarters, preparing themselves for Grace's graduation, which would take place promptly at noon.

Severus was sitting in his chair, reading the newspaper and sipping his tea. He was trying to ignore his wife, who was rushing in and out of their bedroom, muttering to herself. He hadn't even noticed when she stopped in front of him until she cleared her throat.

He dropped his paper and fought the urge to laugh out loud at the woman before him. She had one high-heeled shoe on, her hair in disarray, and her arms were crossed over her chest.

"Is there a problem, my dear?" he asked innocently.

"Yes, Severus, there is a problem. Our daughter is graduating in three hours, I can't find my other shoe, I can't find my earrings, and you are sitting there without a single care in the world. Tomorrow, she will be going straight for Auror training with Harry, and I won't have a chance to tell her... to let her know... Oh, Severus, my baby is leaving me." Hermione finally broke down into a heaving mess.

Severus stood from his chair and wrapped his arms around her. "Shh... Hush now," he soothed. He guided her over to the sofa and pulled her into his lap. He allowed her to sob into his chest for a few moments longer until she started to quiet.

"Now, are you a witch or not, Mrs. Snape? You shouldn't have any problem finding your shoe and your earrings if you use your wand. Grace is *not* leaving you, my love. She might be starting her life, but she isn't leaving you out of it. You knew this day would come, darling. We have done the best we can in raising her to be the fine woman that she has grown to be."

Severus took her face into his hands and used his thumbs to wipe away her tears as Hermione nodded in agreement with him.

"I know, Severus, I know. I'm just worried about her. I'm so afraid she's going to get hurt," Hermione said.

"This is true, but you can rest assured that she will not be in any more danger than you got yourself into when you were just a child. Would it make you feel better if I threatened Potter's life if anything were to happen to her?" Severus asked, half jokingly.

Hermione nodded her head. "Would you, please? Tell him that you will use some really nasty hexes on him if she so much as breaks a nail."

Severus chuckled. "It will be my pleasure. You are quite frightening, my dear. Now, find your belongings and do whatever it is you do to tame the wild beast that is sitting atop your head."

Hermione slapped him on the arm. "You are a complete arse, Headmaster."

"Yes," said Severus. "But, you *like* my arse."

She removed herself from his lap. He stood up as well and grabbed both of her hands. "I'm going to go check on Brian and make sure he's getting ready, and then I'll find Potter and have a little talk with him. You are going to finish getting dressed and then pop in on Grace to make sure she's getting ready."

Hermione nodded again. "Don't forget to threaten Harry when you talk to him."

"I wouldn't dream of forgetting such an important request from my lovely wife. I must assure you, however," Severus added with mock sincerity, "I will deliver your message to the boy with absolute reluctance and regret. I can't promise nastiness, but I will *try* for you, darling."

Hermione giggled as Severus kissed her on the forehead before leaving to fetch Brian.

An hour and several lipstick checks later, Hermione was finally together physically, that is. Emotionally, she was still fighting the random onslaught of tears. She checked herself in the mirror once more before she headed to the Head Girl's dormitory.

Upon arrival, she stood in front of the closed door for a few moments, gathering her courage. It wouldn't do to have Grace see her as such a mess. Taking a deep breath, she knocked softly on the door.

"Come in, Mum," Grace said from the other side of the door.

Hermione opened the door to see her daughter standing in front of her mirror, straightening her robes.

"How did you know it was me?" Hermione asked.

"I was expecting you, and I'm actually surprised it has taken you this long. How do I look?" Grace twirled around for her mother, who immediately started to tear up again.

"Mum? What's the matter?" Grace inquired, moving to her mother's side.

Hermione waved off her concern. "Oh, nothing, I'm just being silly. You look beautiful, Grace. We are so proud of you, you know. Severus is walking around as if he is personally responsible for you graduating at the top of your class. You must have some pretty impressive test scores."

Grace paled. "Has... has he seen them yet? I was sure that I wouldn't get my scores back for another week."

"No, he hasn't seen them. An official from the Ministry dropped the graduation certificates off with us this morning and congratulated him with the news that you are at the top of your class."

Grace beamed, trying not to look too relieved that the secret of her name change was still unknown. The thought of that caused her face to fall as she considered the man that she'd been thinking so much of lately.

At Hermione's look of concern, Grace asked her, "Mum, do you think my father would be proud of me, too? I mean, I know he would be happy, but from what everyone tells me, he wasn't much for academics."

Hermione sat down on her daughter's bed. "Come sit with me, Gracie."

Grace did as her mother asked and sat gingerly on the bed.

"I could probably sit here and tell you exactly what you want to hear: that Ron would have been so proud that his daughter made such high marks and that she's the top student of her year. But, I'm not going to do that."

Grace looked at her mother with confusion and something akin to sadness, which broke Hermione's heart.

"God, you look just like him when you look at me like that. Gracie, I think you misunderstand me, darling. Ron would have been proud for everything you've done. If he were alive today, he would have entered the Great Hall walking a little taller and holding his head a little higher than everyone else. He would have driven everyone insane with stories about you just to emphasize how brilliant you are, and by the time he would finish, there would be no question as to why you deserve such honors. He would have fiercely boasted that you were not only the smartest witch in Britain, but the smartest witch in the entire world."

Hermione closed her eyes and smiled.

"I can see him so clearly with his blue eyes sparkling with so much happiness and his chest puffed out with pride. But, we're not at your graduation. We are at The Burrow, and you have just received your first toy broom. You're zooming around and giggling with your hair flying in the wind. Now, I can see Ron with his goofy grin watching you beat Draco Malfoy in chess."

Hermione opened her eyes to see Grace smiling at her with tears in her eyes.

"So, you see, Gracie, Ron would have had pride in *everything* you did, whether it be graduating at the top of your class or saving your tenth goal against the Slytherins."

"Do you really think so, Mum?" Grace asked quietly.

"I know so. I also know that the reason I can see him so clearly is because he is always there. He's with you, Grace, wherever you go. He cheers you on when you play Quidditch, and he stands in the shadows watching while you play chess. He will be here with you today as well, standing in the background with that silly grin plastered on his face."

"Thank you, Mum. I don't mean to be so melodramatic; it's just that I have a lot on my mind today."

Hermione gave her a tight hug. After pulling away, she wiped Grace's tears that had gone astray.

"Think nothing of it, sweetheart. Graduation day can be a very emotional time for all of us who are involved. I even asked Severus to threaten Harry to make sure that you stay safe when you become an Auror."

Grace gasped. "You didn't?"

"I did. I was a weeping mess this morning. But, don't you worry about it. I know Harry would look after you even if he didn't have a threat to his life looming over him."

Hermione checked her watch. "The ceremony starts in less than an hour; are you all packed up?"

Grace looked around her mostly empty room and shook her head. "I've got a few odds and ends that I need to take care of. You go on, Mum, I'll meet you in the Entrance Hall soon."

"Okay, I'll see you in a bit." Hermione kissed her on the cheek and left.

Grace followed her mother to the door and watched her until she disappeared from sight. Closing the door, she leaned against it and sighed. In less than an hour, her parents would find out what she'd done.

They would know that she changed her name on her N.E.W.T.s, which would subsequently appear on her diploma. She would go into the Auror program as Grace Weasley Snape. She had a feeling that her mother would understand, but, would her dad? Surely, she thought, he won't be angry that she wanted to use his name. But, would he be angry at her for not asking him first?

She looked around her room again. There were a pair of shoes next to her bed and a few items still scattered on the bedside table. Her eyes focused on the photographs that she had yet to pack.

She walked slowly over to the bed and sat down. She regarded the photos with a smile. One of them was of herself being chased by her little brother taken just a couple of years ago. There was one of Devon standing behind her with his arms wrapped around her; her dad hated that picture.

She placed both of the photographs in the trunk which lay open on the floor next to her bed. She reached for the next one. She was very small, and she was being held by her dad. Next to him, her mother was smiling up at the camera, holding Brian, who was only an infant.

Tears blurred her vision at the sight of the only other picture on the table. She'd heard the story, of course. When her mum told her father that she was going to have a baby, her Aunt Ginny was ready with a camera. Grace watched, entranced, as her father smiled at the camera and then got on his knees to kiss Hermione's belly. He had wrapped his arms around the back of her legs to hug her tightly to him.

Grace smiled as the magical photograph replayed his movements over and over like a small movie. When he looked at the camera again, Grace saw his blue eyes sparkling with happiness, just like her mum had described moments before. She could almost hear his laughter as he dropped to his knees again.

"Oh, Father," Grace said, using the moniker she had always used to separate him from the man that had raised her. "Are you going to be there today? Are you going to swell with pride and cheer me on just like Mum said you would? Are you angry with me for changing my name? Do you feel betrayed? I pray that you can forgive me, Father. I pray that, wherever you are, you are laughing with that sparkle in your eyes."

Grace allowed a tear to fall onto the frame of the photograph before she wiped her eyes. "There are so many questions that I have for you. There is so much that I want to know that can't be told in stories. What did you want to do with your life? Did you have dreams for me?"

Grace lightly stroked the tip of her index finger across his face, knowing her questions were in vain; the answers would never come. She sighed miserably and placed a kiss on his face in the photograph, letting another tear slide down her cheek at the thought that a photograph is all she would ever be able to kiss.

She smiled through her tears and whispered, "I've got to go now. I know I won't see you at my graduation, but somehow I know you'll be there."

Fifteen minutes later, she was all packed up and on her way down to the Entrance Hall. She was running behind and thought she'd be lucky to get there in time for one more hug from her mum and brother. She knew that her dad would already be stationed at the podium in the Great Hall.

Just as she'd thought, Brian and Hermione were waiting, somewhat impatiently, for her.

"There you are! You're late, Gracie," scolded her younger brother.

Grace rolled her eyes and, without a word, kissed both of them on the cheek before rushing into the Great Hall to take her seat.

After all the guests and graduates took their seats, the Headmaster cleared his throat and began his introductory speech. The entire time Severus was speaking, Grace's heart was pounding out of her chest.

Devon, who was sitting behind her, gave her a small squeeze on her shoulder. She turned around, and he winked at her, which made her feel slightly less sick.

Her dad's voice was like an echo to her as he continued his end-of-term speech. After all, she'd heard it every year since he had become Headmaster. She looked around her to see if there were any faces in the crowd that she could recognize. She saw Devon's parents sitting next to her Uncle Harry and Aunt Ginny. Behind them, she saw the sea of red hair, which represented the Weasley family, and felt a pang of guilt. She hadn't even considered their feelings. Before she could dwell on her new found feelings of misery, it was time to stand.

Severus called the names, one-by-one, to receive their graduation certificates. She knew that she and the Head Boy, Michael Knott, would be the last to receive their diplomas. She glanced at Michael, a Slytherin whose father was a friend of Devon's father, and gave him a small smile. He was very nice, but she had never thought of him as Head Boy material. She had always thought that Devon would have been made Head Boy, but suspected her dad had something to do with the appointment of Michael.

She was shaken out of her thoughts by her dad's voice, congratulating the students for their accomplishments. *Here we go*, Grace thought to herself.

"Now we are at the moment in which I present the Head Boy and Head Girl. I am especially pleased," Severus added to the crowd, "that our Head Girl, who also happens to be my daughter, is this year's top student."

He cleared his throat. "I present to you: Michael Aaron Knott," Snape said aloud. Michael reached the podium and shook Severus' hand as he accepted his certificate.

Severus stood straight again, and Grace felt her heart stop beating.

"I now present to you: Grace Ginevra..."

Severus froze, staring at the certificate. Slowly, he raised his head and locked eyes with Grace. For several heartbeats that felt more like a lifetime to Grace, they were the only two people in the Great Hall.

Grace was only vaguely aware of the whispers surrounding her. She couldn't move, but she couldn't look away from him either. She could see her mother moving towards the podium where Severus still stood frozen to the spot.

As she reached the podium, she looked down at the certificate and then looked up at Severus. It wasn't until she squeezed his arm that he took his eyes off of Grace and looked down at Hermione.

Grace watched her parents as if they were moving in slow motion. When Severus looked down at Hermione, she smiled at him with tears swimming in her honeyed eyes. He placed his hand over hers that was still lying on his arm and then turned to face Grace again. When she saw his smile, she let out a breath that she didn't realize she'd been holding. Suddenly, everything around her zoomed back into place, and the voices in the Great Hall seemed to eclipse.

Severus cleared his throat loudly again and held up his hand. The chatter ceased instantly.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to present our Head Girl: Grace Ginevra Weasley... *Snape*." He spoke the name with his voice reverberating off of the walls so that nobody would misunderstand him.

Grace walked slowly to the podium to accept her certificate. She glanced toward the Weasley family, and her heart leapt when she saw happy tears falling from her grandmother's eyes.

With her legs shaking, she stepped onto the podium and reached for her certificate. However, Snape didn't hand it to her. He seemed to be having an inner battle with himself as he regarded her as if seeing her for the first time. Suddenly the battle was over; he'd made up his mind. A pin drop could have been heard throughout the Great Hall as he swept her off of her feet in an emotional embrace. Severus Snape former Death Eater and evil bat of the dungeons was crying.

A/N: I have already started work on Chapter 8, so by the end of the Christmas holidays, I should have it out for you. I wish all of you a very happy holiday and a Merry Christmas. May you be blessed with love and family this holiday season! I hope Santa brings you what you ask for. As for me, I just want that snarky Professor that we all know and adore! ~potterbrat~

## Chapter 8

*Chapter 9 of 13*

This is a story inspired by the Tim McGraw song, "If You're Reading This." This is NOT a songfic. What happens when Hermione's dreams don't exactly turn out the way she had planned? Will she be able to deal with the hand that life dealt her?

A/N: I know it's been a few weeks, but I have been under the weather. I've had what the experts call "faux flu." Anyway, I know this is going to come as a huge shock to you all, but I'm not making any money off of this story. Neither is my wonderful beta, RobisonRocket -- even though she should.

Chapter 8

*THREE YEARS LATER*

Severus was sitting at his desk in the Headmaster's office, reading over the Divination syllabus that Professor Trelawney had dropped off earlier in the evening. Though he still wondered what the purpose of having a Divination class was, he knew that he needed to give her syllabus the same attention as he did all the others. He eyed her notes incredulously.

"Reading tea leaves, crystal gazing, palmistry... *mind reading*? Where in Merlin's name does she come up with this rubbish?" Severus said aloud.

He heard a soft chuckle behind him. Severus rolled his eyes and spun around in his chair. "Is there something you find humorous, Albus?"

"Don't mind me, dear boy. I am merely enjoying myself as I listen to your yearly rant over Sybill's lesson plan." Dumbledore smiled. "Does she still keep her fire blazing all term?"

Severus noted that even in a portrait, his old friend still had a sparkle in his blue eyes. "I wouldn't know; I don't frequent the Divination classroom. I find it to be a ridiculous subject and am curious to know why we still waste our students' time with it."

"Now, Severus, are you telling me that you actually *care* about your students' time?"

"Don't start with me, old man. I'm not in the mood. I have to get through three more of these tonight, and I would like to get finished so that I can make it back to my quarters in time for dinner." Severus turned back to his desk. Giving a petulant sigh, he pushed Professor Trelawney's lesson plan aside and picked up the one from Professor Sinistra.

"Do you have big plans for dinner?"

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose impatiently and turned back to face his former Headmaster. "Albus, is there a reason that you'd like to hold a conversation with me when I have already informed you that I need to get these looked at? To answer your question, my daughter will be joining us for dinner this evening."

"Do yourself a favor, Severus, and take the remainder of those to Hermione. That lovely wife of yours is more than capable of helping you. Now, tell me, how is Grace? I assume she is a full-fledged Auror now."

Knowing that Dumbledore would not relent in his questioning, he reluctantly stacked the remaining syllabi and returned his attention to the portrait behind him.

"Yes, she has been an Auror for over a year now," Severus said, not bothering to hide his obvious pride in the girl.

Albus gave him a knowing smile. "Yes, she's quite a young woman, isn't she? Tell me, is she still besotted with the young Malfoy heir?"

"You know, for a dead man, you certainly are inquisitive. I believe the boy is still around, yes. I try not to delve into Grace's personal life," Severus added.

"Of course, you don't," Dumbledore said pointedly. "He's a bright young man, Severus. I'd think you should be quite pleased that she would still be involved with a boy that you've known all of his life. Wouldn't that be more agreeable than someone that she's just met?"

"You speak as if they are going to get... married," Severus said with disdain.

"I only speak of what I know. I can't predict that they will marry, but she will marry someone some day, and she will eventually become a mother."

"That's quite enough! I'll not discuss this with you any longer. Talk of marriage is completely off the mark; she's too young. She has just started her career, for Merlin's sake. Now, if you want to discuss the fact that I still don't have a decent History of Magic teacher, I'll gladly give you an audience," Snape chided.

"Yes, I've heard that Professor Binns has finally come to the realization of his demise," Dumbledore said thoughtfully.

"Unfortunately," Snape pointed out, "there are far too many witches and wizards who have yet to come to that realization. Some, curiously enough, are so perpetually ignorant of their own mortality, that they still... meddle."

Albus chuckled softly. "Your gift of subtlety is beginning to unravel, old friend. Let's see, I believe you will find the perfect replacement for Professor Binns right under your nose."

Snape made a noncommittal noise deep in his throat.

"So, tell me, Severus, has young Devon completed his studies at that wizarding university in London?" Albus asked conversationally.

"I believe he has. I'm not certain, as I do not keep up with the boy," Severus replied.

"What was his course of study again? Ah, yes, I remember Grace telling you that it was History. She was not surprised, if I recall, because he had received an Outstanding in his N.E.W.T. for History of Magic."

Snape grunted. "And you say that my gift of subtlety is beginning to unravel. I know what you are hinting at, Albus, and I don't think the boy is capable. He is barely out of his teens."

Albus' grin caused a frown to crease Severus' face.

"I found myself in your situation many years ago when I was still the Headmaster of this school. I recall needing a Potions professor, and I rectified the situation by hiring a young man who had just graduated. He was not even as old as Mr. Malfoy at the time."

"No, Albus. I'm not hiring the brat as a professor."

Albus' retort was interrupted by a knock on the door. The only people who had the password were his wife and children, so Severus didn't hesitate in asking the visitor to enter.

When Devon Malfoy stepped in, Severus glanced up at the portrait of Dumbledore, who was suddenly snoring against his frame. Severus rolled his eyes and faced Devon.

"Well, I guess I don't have to ask how you got in here. What do you want?"

Understanding that to be the best invitation he was going to get, Devon stepped fully into Snape's office. Severus did not offer for the young man to have a seat.

Severus took in the boy's appearance and noted with hidden amusement that he was nervous about something. *This ought to be interesting*, thought Severus.

Devon paced back and forth several times until he finally seemed to gather his courage. "Sir, I need to talk to you... to ask you... Ugh, why is this so hard?"

"Here's an idea," Severus interrupted. "Just. Spit. It. Out. You're wasting my time."

Devon took a deep breath and said, "I want to marry Gracie."

"Do you think you could possibly speak English? I haven't yet learned the language of *Troll*."

Devon pulled himself up with all the courage he had, and his prepared speech was completely forgotten.

"Sir, I intend to ask Gracie to marry me, and I would like your b-blessing, please."

Severus stared at him as if he'd grown an extra head. The silence stretched between them for, in Devon's opinion, several hours. Devon could feel his heart beating in his ears, waiting for Snape to say something.

Finally, Severus stood and walked around his desk, so that he was only mere inches from the insolent boy who dared to walk into his office and make such a ridiculous request. Severus crossed his arms and stared into Devon's eyes. Devon was less than an inch shorter than he was, but it didn't matter. His intimidation tactics were legendary, and he was damn well going to use them now.

Devon was ready for this, however, and was determined to maintain eye contact with Snape. He also knew that he was risking his mind being invaded with Legilimency, but he didn't care: he had nothing to hide. He was ready for the intrusion, but nothing happened.

Snape's expression, as well as his voice was impassive. "My daughter," he began, "has a career to think about and I doubt she's prepared to marry at such a young age. Why do *you* want to get married, Malfoy?" Then, with his voice dripping with sarcasm, Snape added, "Oh, I know, is it because she makes you *happy*? How... *sweet*."

Devon regarded him for a moment and then shook his head, knowing Snape was trying to get under his skin. "Of course, she makes me happy. But, that's not the only reason. Professor. Grace and I have been attached to one another from the time we were children. When I was in my fifth year here, my mother asked me where I saw myself in ten years. I told her that I didn't care where I was as long as Grace was with me. She told me that I was wise and that I held my future in my hands. Most people laugh at my mum because she's different, but those words stayed with me because I knew she was right.

"But, there are many reasons why I want to marry Grace. I love her more than I could ever imagine loving anyone. She's beautiful, yes, I won't deny that, but, there's so much more to her than that. She's so smart and such a strong-willed person. There's nothing in this world more beautiful than to see Gracie happy, and I want to be the one to make *her* happy. Besides all of that, how many people get to marry their best friend?"

Severus turned and took the seat behind his desk. He gestured toward the chair in front of his desk and indicated Devon to take a seat.

After Devon timidly sat down, he waited for the older man to say something. Severus leaned forward. "Fine, you may ask her. She's an intelligent young woman, so I can't promise that she'll accept, but there you are. That's a risk you'll have to take."

Devon blinked. It wasn't exactly the reaction he wanted and was nowhere close to the reaction he expected. He certainly didn't want to think about Grace turning him down.

"If you are finished, please close the door on your way out," Severus said, looking at his papers.

"That's it?" Devon asked.

"What else did you have in mind, Mr. Malfoy? You have asked for my daughter's hand, and I gave it to you. I don't see how there is anything left to discuss with one another."

"I'm just surprised, that's all. I expected you to throw me out of here and tell me that I wasn't good enough for her. I also expected a few threats to my life," Devon said, feeling a bit anxious.

"Well, I thought you already knew that you weren't good enough for her, but with all that aside, I've already told you that my daughter is an Auror, Mr. Malfoy, which means she can handle herself quite well. Her own godfather, who also happens to be her uncle, is the head of the Auror division. Speaking of uncles, have you met them all? Let's see, there's Bill, who is a curse breaker for the bank; Merlin's beard, I bet he knows some nasty curses. There's Charlie, of course, a dragon tamer. There's Percy well, there's Percy. But, it's the twins that scare the hell out of me. They are devilish pranksters, but I would never want to get on their bad side. They are fiercely protective of their niece, whom they have taught everything they know."

Snape leaned forward and lowered his voice. "Do you know why I'm telling you all of this? Do you know why I am reminding you of all the wizards who would go to great lengths for Grace's well-being?"

Devon swallowed. "Because you want me to be aware of the danger I'm in if I hurt her."

Snape smiled his cruelest smile. "Not... quite. You see, if any harm comes to my daughter, either by your hand or your heart, the aforementioned gentlemen will only get what is left of you after I'm finished. That is, of course, if there is anything left. You are dismissed."

Devon stifled a tremor as he stood to leave.

"I am curious about something," Severus said.

Devon turned toward him apprehensively.

"Why did you come here? My daughter is a grown woman who does not need permission to get married."

Devon was stunned by this question and thought for a moment that he might have gotten himself trapped into something. He figured the best way to answer would be to just tell him the truth. He cleared his throat. "With all due respect, sir, you are her father. My mother told me that it was customary for some families to ask the father for his daughter's hand."

He gave a small shrug and continued, "My mum reminded me that your wife is Muggle born and that I need to show the proper respect for both sides of Gracie's ancestry. I would have asked you anyway, though."

Severus eyed him suspiciously. "And why is that?"

Devon shrugged again. "It's what my dad did before he married my mum. And my dad told me that you asked Mr. Granger before you married Gracie's mum."

"Indeed, I did," Snape said thoughtfully. "When did you plan to propose to Grace?"

Devon grinned sheepishly. "When we were little kids, we used to climb onto the roof at The Burrow every full moon while the adults were having drinks. We'd be really quiet so we could hear all the creatures that only came out at night. We imagined all the creatures that my mother always talked about, and we'd make up stories about them. When I asked my mother how I should propose, she just told me to take Gracie to the place that belongs only to us, whether it was a crowded café or a spot in the woods. I know it's a little childish, but the rooftop of The Burrow belongs only to us it's our spot."

Devon looked at the ground as he finished, feeling a bit foolish and not really sure why.

Severus cleared his throat. "There are some people who confuse extraordinary with *different*."

Devon looked up sharply at Severus.

"Those of us who know the difference," Severus continued, "are rewarded with Luna Malfoy's own brand of magic, which is her intellect. Quite a mystery, your mother."

Devon gave Severus a smile in gratitude.

"I owe her, Mr. Malfoy, for doing something that I myself could not do."

With his voice shaking a bit, Devon asked, "What was that, sir?"

Severus grimaced. He'd over-stepped an invisible line that he'd created for himself. He did not want to have a heart-to-heart with this boy who had the audacity to take his daughter away from him. And he certainly didn't want to do it within earshot of Albus Dumbledore's portrait. *Damn! I'm going soft*, he thought to himself. Severus sighed dramatically and gestured once again for Devon to take the seat in front of his desk. After Devon sat, Severus folded his hands in front of him and began.

"I saved your father's life, but I could not save him from himself. Luna saved his sanity and gave him a reason to live. My godson was only a shell of a man when the war ended. He had witnessed too many deaths, and too many lives that were destroyed. He had barely escaped the fate of becoming a Death Eater himself when I brought him before the Order."

"Before Draco courted your mother, he was often found in deep conversations with her. He confided to me that he was fascinated by her logic. She was as much a mystery to him as she was to those who knew her best. When he told me that he had fallen in love with her, I was not surprised. That is why I owe her: she brought him back from a place within himself that only she could penetrate."

Neither man said anything for a several moments, both lost in their own thoughts. Devon's thoughts were of his parents, who sometimes acted like they were still teenagers. He smiled when he thought of how his dad looked at his mum and the way he always listened to her with his full attention. It didn't matter if she was telling him about her shopping day with Ginny Potter or if she was telling him about the latest creature that had been discovered. His dad happened to love her radish earrings and necklace made of butterbeer corks. That was the Draco and Luna Malfoy that he knew. Devon looked up at Snape. He knew that Snape knew a different Draco and Luna Malfoy well, at least a different Draco. He suppressed a shudder. He didn't want to think about *that* Draco.

Severus cleared his throat and gave Devon a furtive look. He was fighting with his conscience again, knowing what he needed to do, but feeling as if it would cost him more than he was willing to pay. With a defeated sigh, he said, "There is something that you wanted from me that I haven't given you yet. You... You have my blessing, Mr. Malfoy, along with my daughter's hand."

Devon almost choked, but regained his composure with a grin. "Thank you, sir. That means a great deal to me."

Devon stood from his seat and stuck his hand out. Severus eyed his hand for a moment before he shook it.

"Well, I guess I had better go, Professor. I have a job interview early in the morning, and I want to get a good night's sleep. Mum will kill me if I have bags under my eyes."

Thank you for your time, sir, and the talk."

Snape nodded to him, and upon hearing a small cough from the portrait behind him, he inwardly cringed. "Mr. Malfoy, have you ever considered teaching?"

A/N: Please stay tuned for the next chapter. It's the last one before the epilogue and I plan for it to be quite emotional. You know me -- I... Must... Have... Drama!!!! Cheers!  
~potterbrat~

## Chapter 9

*Chapter 10 of 13*

This is a story inspired by the Tim McGraw song, "If You're Reading This." This is NOT a songfic. What happens when Hermione's dreams don't exactly turn out the way she had planned? Will she be able to deal with the hand that life dealt her?

A/N: This chapter took me a while, because it's a bit longer than normal. I had so much more, but I'm going to have to carry it over for another chapter. I really hope you all enjoy it. Thanks so much to RobisonRocket for waving her magic wand and fixing my errors. Grace and the original characters are mine. All others belong to JKR.

### Chapter 9

Severus groaned tiredly. It was only two weeks into the new term, and he felt as if he desperately needed a vacation. He was currently in his office, nursing a shot of Firewhiskey and reading his latest issue of *Alchemy Today*. This was a rare treat for him because he rarely had spare time.

He heard a small cough coming from the doorway of his office. He was not startled; Severus Snape could not be startled. He knew who it was and had known she was there from the moment of her arrival. Still, he continued to read, paying no mind to his visitor.

"Are you just going to ignore me?"

Severus smirked and dropped his magazine. "Has it not occurred to you that I am currently in the middle of something?"

Hermione took off her heels, sauntered over to him and took his magazine out of his hands. She sat on his desk, placing her bare feet on his thighs, and frowned at him. "I'm bored, Severus."

"And, because of this, you believe it necessary to harass me? Don't you have papers to grade or house-elves to free?" Severus asked.

"I've already graded everything, and the house-elf comment was cruel and completely unnecessary. It's Friday night, and now that Brian and Gracie are out of school, we don't have responsibilities to keep us here. Let's go dancing."

Severus ran his hands up her calves and continued up her thighs. "That sounds agreeable. It has been quite some time since I've paraded my little trophy wife around town. Go put on your blue dancing dress that you bought over the summer, and I'll be down in a few minutes."

"Why not come with me now?" Hermione asked with a pout.

Severus scooted closer to her and pulled her into his lap so that she was straddling him. He kissed her softly. He pulled back and moved a stray hair behind her ear.

Hermione wrapped her arms tightly around his neck and leaned in for another kiss. He obliged her willingly with a more forceful and deeper kiss than the previous one.

Moments later, needing oxygen, they pulled away. Their eyes locked in a loving caress. Hermione was the first to speak.

"What were we talking about?" she asked breathlessly.

"I've no idea," Snape said in a whisper and kissed her again.

Severus started placing light kisses down her neck and was beginning to undo the top button of her blouse when Hermione squeaked and pulled fully away from him, redoing the button with trembling fingers. She then removed herself from his lap and stepped away from him, straightening her skirt.

"What's the matter?" Snape asked frowning.

Hermione didn't answer, but Snape followed her gaze to find the source of her sudden shyness.

"Albus, do you have nothing better to do than to spy on us? Don't you have a portrait hanging in Potter's house that you can visit?" Severus asked crossly.

Albus smiled weakly. "Whatever do you mean? I just woke up and planned to engage Dilys in a game of chess. You may carry on."

There was a groan coming from another portrait, and Phineas Nigellus spoke with obvious disapproval. "I would think that, as a Slytherin Headmaster, you would have a bit more respect for your position, sir. But, here you are, cavorting around like some randy teenager."

Dilys Derwent giggled girlishly in her portrait and looked pointedly at Phineas. "Oh, I don't know, Phin. I've been hanging here for quite some time, and I recall another Headmaster who didn't mind *cavorting* with a certain Astronomy professor at one time. And, if I'm not mistaken, that Headmaster was also a Slytherin. Surely, you haven't forgotten about that."

Phineas scoffed and disappeared no doubt visiting his portrait at Grimmauld Place, leaving Dilys to break into more giggles.

"Enough!" Severus bellowed. "I am the current Headmaster of this school, and if I want to spend time with my wife in my own office, I shouldn't have to entertain an audience."

Dilys cleared her throat. "Albus, you said something about chess?"

Severus turned back toward Hermione, who was still very red, and smiled. "Now, where were we, wife?"



"I was on my way to our rooms to find my blue dancing dress. I'll only need about half an hour to get ready. I'll see you then," Hermione said with her voice unnaturally high. She slipped back into her shoes, fumbled for the door handle and left quickly.

Severus sighed heavily and returned to his magazine. As he flipped through the pages to relocate the article he had already begun, he spoke aloud to the room at large. "You should all be counting your blessings that your portraits are inflammable. However, I don't believe there has been a charm implemented to save you from being transfigured into Muggle paintings. I would keep that in mind if I were you."

He was pleased to hear a few mutters and a couple gasps of offense.

Twenty minutes later, he heard a noise outside his office door. He peered at the closed door, smirking. He had hoped his wife would return to continue their rendezvous. But, when the door opened, it wasn't Hermione.

Harry Potter stood tall and confident, but there was something in his eyes that Severus recognized as fear. For all the years he'd tried and failed to put that look into the eyes of the son of his childhood nemesis, Severus knew right away there was something wrong.

He jumped from his chair like a madman, striding toward Harry as if he'd had fire in his heels.

Once he'd reached the younger man, he grabbed him by the shirt collar and pushed him against the wall, his wand drawn and at Harry's throat. With his voice quiet and malevolent, he asked, "Where is she?"

"St. Mungo's," Harry said, trying desperately not to sound as terrified as he felt.

"Is she...," Severus' voice trailed off.

"She's alive," Harry said, correctly guessing the question.

Severus was only centimeters from Harry's face as he ground him harder into the wall. "You had better pray to whatever deity you believe in that she stays that way."

"Just go, Professor. Hermione's already on her way. She sent me to fetch you," Harry said. His face was turning red from lack of breath.

Severus didn't respond as he let go of Harry unceremoniously. Harry barely had a moment to regain his balance as he coughed and rubbed his neck.

Severus mumbled an incantation, and Harry knew it was to remove the Apparation wards on the castle. A moment later, he was gone. Harry drew his wand to Disapparate, but the wards had already been reset. Harry couldn't help but roll his eyes.

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Severus stormed through the entrance to St. Mungo's and angrily approached the counter in the reception area. There was a small witch speaking softly to the receptionist, who was trying to help her with paper work. Severus crossed his arms and tapped his foot impatiently.

Both women ignored him and continued with their discussion.

Having had enough, Severus finally interrupted them. "I am looking for a patient," he said, trying to keep his agitation in check.

The receptionist gave him a simpering smile, which reminded Severus painfully of the toad-like smile of Dolores Umbridge. She even spoke in a soft, girlish voice. "If you could please wait behind the white line, sir, I will be with you in a moment."

Severus looked around and saw a white line painted on the floor and a sign pointing to it that read: PLEASE WAIT BEHIND THIS LINE.

Furiously, Severus moved to stand behind the line. He stood there for a few seconds until his agitation had reached its limit. He regarded the two witches angrily as he heard them both giggle with one another.

Severus stepped over the line and approached the counter again.

"Sir," the receptionist said politely, "I beg your pardon, but you must stand "

She didn't have a chance to finish her sentence, as Severus' patience had finally been pushed to the boiling point.

"I don't give a damn about your bloody line," he said with his voice barely above a whisper. "I need to find my daughter. Her name is Grace Weasley Snape, and she is an Auror who was brought here this evening. Tell me where she is... please," he added in mock courtesy.

The receptionist flinched as if she'd been slapped hard. Never the less, she wordlessly nodded her head and looked down at her list.

"She's on... on the Fourth Floor: Spell Damage. You will find the nurse's station on your right as soon as you exit the elevator."

Severus nodded his head and fled toward the elevator. Once he had arrived on the Fourth Floor, he spotted red hair disappearing around the corner and followed.

The corridor dead-ended into a waiting area, which was full of Weasleys. He knew better than to feel slighted for not being the first person on the scene. The Weasleys had a way of getting the word out quickly when one of their own was in danger.

Arthur Weasley met him in the entry-way of the waiting area with a handshake and a sad smile.

"Severus, we all just got here. Hermione is in with Gracie right now. She told me to send you in as soon as you got here. They will only allow two of us at a time, and we knew you would be here soon, so we waited."

"I appreciate that, Arthur," Severus replied.

He had just turned to go into the room when the elevator stopped, and Harry, Ginny, Devon, and Brian stepped out. Ginny went directly to her mother while Devon and Brian walked tentatively toward Severus. Harry hung back for a moment.

"Dad," Brian said. "I just got back from the Ministry. I need to fill..."

Severus held up his hand to interrupt his son. "Potter, you are not welcome here."

"But, Dad," Brian argued.

"If it weren't for Mr. Potter and his fanciful ideas of being an Auror, your sister would not be lying in there right now," Severus said coldly.

"Dad, you don't know what happened," Brian tried to explain.

"I don't need to know the details, Brian. All I know is that my daughter is lying in a hospital bed, and it's *his* fault."

Before he could say another word, he nodded at Devon and turned to enter the room.

Brian turned back to Harry. "You didn't tell him?"

"I didn't really have a chance," Harry muttered sadly. "Look, it's alright. I'll just go up to the tea room. If there are any changes, please, come and tell me." With a last withering glance at Ginny, Harry left.

"My dad can be such a git sometimes," Brian said to Devon.

"He's just worried, that's all, we all are. Look, Brian, I need to go and Floo call my mum and dad." Devon gave his future brother-in-law's shoulder a pat and left.

Brian gave him a half-smile, knowing the man just needed something to keep himself busy.

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Severus quietly entered the room and took in the sight before him. His wife was sitting in the chair next to the bed that was being occupied by his very pale-faced and unconscious daughter. Hermione sat close with her head lying on the side of Grace's bed. Severus could see that Hermione was holding her hand and stroking her knuckles. On her ring finger, there was a diamond engagement ring that sparkled in the dim light of the hospital room.

Hermione lifted her head and gave Severus a watery smile. His heart fluttered upon seeing her stricken face.

"Come and sit down, Severus," she said quietly.

He noted that her voice cracked with sadness. He picked up the folding chair that was sitting at the end of the bed and placed it next to her. Before he sat down, he placed a kiss on Grace's damp forehead.

"I'm so glad Harry got you here so quickly. I'm also so sorry that I didn't wait for you. I just had to hurry. Oh, Severus, I don't know what to do. This is my baby. I hate not knowing if she's going to be alright. I've been talking to her, but I don't even know if she can hear me or not." Hermione let out a choked sob.

"Shh, I know, darling, I know. So, tell me, what did her Healer say? What was she hit with?" Severus asked.

"I haven't seen her Healer yet. Harry brought her here straight away, but he wanted to get to us as quickly as possible, so he didn't wait around to ask questions. He said that he just gave the emergency staff her name, a brief explanation and left," Hermione said.

"Figures," snarled Snape. "All Potter seems to be good at is causing trouble."

"Severus, that's not fair. I talked to Brian for a few moments while Gracie was being transferred to this room. You haven't the whole story."

Before Hermione could say another word, the door opened, and a nurse appeared.

"Well, I see our patient is resting. I just need to get a quick check of her vitals, and then the Healer in charge will be in here in a few moments. He has given strict instructions that this is a very special patient, and he wants to tend to her himself."

Severus and Hermione shared a confused glance at one another.

The nurse went about her business, checking Grace's pulse and her temperature and making notes on her clipboard. She finished writing and turned to face Severus and Hermione.

"Well, I'll just leave you two now." The old nurse smiled benevolently and left the room.

"She seems cheerful," Hermione said absently.

The door opened again, and a tall gentleman in a white coat hurried into the room with his head down, reading the clipboard that the nurse had just made notes on.

Without seeming to notice Severus and Hermione, he walked straight to Gracie and held her wrist.

"Excuse me," Severus said gently. "Are you the Healer in charge?"

The man stood and turned toward Severus and stuck out his hand. Severus felt his entire being slip into some sort of alternate universe.

"You? You can't be a Healer," Severus said, dumbstruck.

Hermione jumped up and threw her arms around the man's neck. "Neville! I can't believe it's really you. I had no idea you were a Healer. Last I heard you had gone into the Muggle medical field."

Neville Longbottom gave her a gracious smile. "I did, Hermione. I am a Muggle surgeon. I still have an office in Muggle London, but St. Mungo's thought it would be a good idea to have someone on here that was trained as a Doctor as well as a Healer. They needed someone to head the staff for the Spell Damage patients, and they hired me."

Severus sniffed indignantly. "I thought you played with... plants."

Neville smiled at his former terrifying professor. "I still enjoy teetering in my garden, Professor. I mostly grow plants to be used in potions for healing purposes."

Severus regarded him with a bit of contempt for a moment before changing the subject. "What can you tell me about my daughter?" he asked, feeling sure that the dolt he used to teach couldn't tell him anything.

Neville sighed, slightly stricken over Snape's obvious lack of confidence. "I can tell you that she has lost a lot of blood, which has been replenished. I believe Harry and your son can give you the details of what happened, but she was hit with a Severing Charm."

Hermione gasped, and her hand flew to her mouth. "Neville, you can't be serious. Is she going to be alright?"

Neville looked at the ground and then met the blackness of Severus' eyes. He felt something pass between them, if only for a moment, then he looked back at Hermione. "To be honest with you, Hermione, that really depends on how you want her to be healed."

"What do you mean?" Hermione asked fearfully.

Neville sighed. "I told you they hired me because they wanted someone who was qualified in Muggle and Magical healing. The fact of the matter is they hired me because I am a surgeon."

Severus balled up his fists. "What are you getting at, Longbottom?"

"You are both familiar with the Muggle world, Professor Snape. The x-rays show that Grace has some internal damage: damage, Professor, which can only be repaired with surgery."

"You are not serious!" Severus snapped. "Grace is not the first patient to ever cross the threshold of St. Mungo's with internal damage. Are you telling me that she's the first to ever need to be cut open?"

"Absolutely not, Professor; unfortunately, most patients who cross the threshold of St. Mungo's with internal damage never cross it again. Sadly, that means that in some cases, the process of magical healing is not effective enough to save their lives. I'm afraid that in Grace's case, she would need immediate attention. I can assure you, sir, I am a fully qualified surgeon. Thank Merlin she wasn't alone when she was hit. Otherwise, she would have gotten the full blow of the curse, and we wouldn't be having this conversation."

Severus set his eyes coolly on Neville, but didn't comment on his last statement.

Neville raised his chin in a moment of childish defiance. His voice softened a bit as he said, "I will give you two a few moments to discuss what you want to do. Grace is in stasis for the time being, so she's not in immediate danger. If you decide that you don't want me to do the surgery, I need to know as quickly as possible so we can start on other means of trying to save her. If you need me or if you have any questions, please inform someone in the nurse's station, and I will be readily available."

"Thank you, Neville," Hermione said.

Neville nodded at the both of them and left the room.

Severus looked at a spot on the ceiling. "This is some kind of punishment. My daughter's life is in the hands of Neville Longbottom."

A/N: I love reviews! They are almost as seductive as Sev's voice.

## Chapter 10

*Chapter 11 of 13*

This is a story inspired by the Tim McGraw song, "If You're Reading This." This is NOT a songfic. What happens when Hermione's dreams don't exactly turn out the way she had planned? Will she be able to deal with the hand that life dealt her?

A/N: This was a very difficult chapter to write. I have recently lost my beloved bulldog, so I had to take a small break to keep my own sadness from affecting my chapter. I hope you like the outcome. RobisonRocket is my comma hero!!

Chapter 10

Hermione and Severus both left Grace's room to allow the rest of the Weasley family to visit the ailing girl. Severus was a bit disgruntled when Molly insisted on allowing Harry entrance to the room, but his wife ushered him away, reminding him that he needed to speak to Neville.

"Potter has no business in there, Hermione. I don't want him around my daughter," Severus said with a scowl as he watched Harry and Ginny enter the room.

"Last time I checked, Severus, she is also my daughter. Please, don't do this right now. Grace is all the Weasleys *and* Harry have left of Ron. Don't make a scene; Molly is barely standing as it is."

Sure enough, when Severus looked over at the Weasley matriarch, she was a complete mess. They had just exited Grace's room, and Arthur had to practically carry her back to the waiting area.

"You know, I think I'm going to go up to the tea room and get her something," Hermione said. "You go speak to Neville. And, Severus, try not to be a complete arse. He's no longer your student, nor is he a child."

Severus nodded and watched her until the elevator closed. He made a mental note that his wife was one of the strongest witches he'd ever known. Her ability to think of others at a time like this was astonishing to him.

He shook himself out of his reverie and made his way to the nurses' station. He recognized the squat little nurse sitting behind the counter as the same one who had checked on Grace whilst he and Hermione were in the room with her.

"Excuse me, I am Severus Snape, and my daughter is Grace Weasley Snape. I need to speak with her Healer. Do you happen to know where I would be able to find him?"

"Yes, Professor Snape. Healer Longbottom told me that you or your wife might be asking for him. He told me that he would be in his office. It's right down the hall and to your left," the kindly witch said as she motioned which way to go.

Severus nodded his thanks and followed in the direction she had pointed. Once he'd reached the door, he saw that Neville was standing with his back toward him, looking over some notes on a clipboard. Severus took a moment to study the man before him. Neville was a tall and slender man now, not the dumpy boy he'd once terrorized.

"Would you like to come in?" Neville asked with his back still to Severus.

Severus smirked. "I see your perceptiveness has changed, Longbottom."

He stepped into the room and closed the door behind him. When he turned back to face Neville, he noticed that he had turned around and held a small smile.

"Professor, I hope that you can see more than just my perceptiveness has changed. Have you and Hermione made a decision?"

"I have some questions for you first, Longbottom."

Neville gestured for Severus to have a seat, which Severus took, and then Neville sat down behind his desk.

"Before we go any further, Professor, I would like for you to call me Neville. I won't be so bold as to presume that you could call me *Healer* Longbottom, or even *Doctor*, as I'm known in the Muggle world, but I think I would prefer that you call me Neville rather than Longbottom."



Grace had so many questions running through her mind for the man that she'd only ever heard stories about.

"I'm sorry about what happened to you. I've always wondered what my life would have been like if I had you to grow up with as my father instead of my dad. I know that sounds corny, but I just wanted you to know that."

Ron grinned at her. "That doesn't sound corny. Honestly, it sounds like something I would have said. You're a lot like me, you know. But, thankfully, you're more like Hermione than me. You probably wouldn't have had such high marks if I had raised you, so be glad of that."

"I'm not sure that marks are all that important. I know Uncle Harry would give up everything if he could have his parents back," Grace said.

"Yeah, but Harry didn't have *any* parents. You've got two really great parents. Snape's been good to you, yeah?"

"He has, Father; he has been really good to me. I think he has a hard time with his feelings sometimes, though. You know, he'd never really had a family until he took in me and Mum."

"He had a tough time of it, growing up like he did. He had to play spy for the Order the whole time he was a Death Eater. I can't even imagine what he must've gone through all of those years," Ron replied.

"So, you're not angry with Mum for marrying him?" Grace asked.

"Nah, they're good for each other. I know he loves her, and she can read all her books to him. Your mum has always been a stickler for academics and stuff. I probably never would have gotten through any of my classes if she weren't around fixing all of my mistakes. She's pretty great, your mum."

"Yeah, she is. Listen, I need to know something: Were you angry with me for changing my name?"

Ron grabbed her hand, and Grace was surprised to find that it was warm. She looked into his eyes and noticed they were bright with unshed tears. Her heart constricted with the idea that she'd made a mistake all of those years ago.

"Grace, what you did was the mark of a true Gryffindor *and* a true Weasley. I could never be angry with you for honoring a man you had come to see as your father. Snape earned the right to give you his name when he married Hermione, but he never pushed you. You had to do it on your own, which made it even better. That was the best gift you could have given him, and in your own way, it was the best gift you could have given me."

"What do you mean? How was it a gift to you?" Grace asked, suddenly very confused.

"By taking his name, you allowed me to pay back a debt that I owed him. It's kind of hard to pay up when you're dead, you see. But, you took care of that for me," Ron told her.

"What debt did you owe him?" Grace asked.

Ron gaped at her as if she'd grown an extra head. "I owe him for lots of things, really. He stayed with me in the clearing that day, he delivered all of my messages, and most importantly, he's taken care of you and your mum. He's raised you right, Gracie, and that's worth a million debts."

"All of this time, he's thought he's owed you something for allowing him the chance to take care of us," Grace said with a watery smile. "Thank you, Father, for telling me all of this."

"You're welcome. There is one thing that Snape and I have disagreed on, though," Ron said pointedly.

"What's that?" Grace asked.

"Malfoy? He's letting you marry a Malfoy? Honestly, I just don't get it: a Weasley and a Malfoy," Ron rolled his eyes dramatically, and Grace giggled.

"Listen, come with me; I want to show you something," Ron said.

Ron grabbed her hand, and they stood from the bleachers and started walking together. She didn't even notice when the pitch had turned into a graveyard his graveyard.

"Why are we here?" she asked in a panic.

Instead of answering, he pointed to his grave. "That's where your mother let me go," Ron said with a tinge of sadness. "I loved her so much, Gracie. I wanted you to know that. I still love her, if that's even possible. When she finally let me go, I was so proud of her for being so strong. I tried to let her know that I forgave her, even though there was nothing to forgive."

"I told her that you did," Grace whispered.

Before Ron could speak again, there was movement out of the darkness. It was Severus Snape.

"What's he doing here?" Grace asked, suddenly very frightened. "Oh, no, is he dead, too?"

"No, he's not dead. He's here to see me," Ron said.

Before she knew it, they were standing right next to the headstone where her dad had knelt down into the soft earth. Grace was shocked to see the man she'd known to have the ability to scare even the ghosts of Hogwarts was crumbling before her eyes. She tried to reach out to him, but Ron stopped her.

"Don't. He can't see you, but you might stop him from saying whatever he came to say. He's going to blame me, I just know it. Don't stop him, Gracie; he needs to do this."

Grace watched in horror as Snape raised his pale, tear-streaked face to look at Ron's headstone. He stared in silence for several moments until he finally spoke.

"You unimaginable bastard. Why are you doing this to me? Not even I deserve this sort of punishment. Have I not done what you've asked of me, Weasley? Oh, dear God, I can't take this kind of pain. I have served you to the best of my ability. Is this my punishment for falling in love with Hermione? I would change things, if I could. I would rather not know what her love feels like if it would save that little girl. Are you angry with me for loving them both? Are you feeling slighted that I've had so much time with Grace, and you never got the chance to know what it's like to be her father? Please, Weasley, I'm on my knees, begging you not to take her away from me, yet. If I could take her place, I would."

Snape began to sob into his hands. Grace looked on with a mixture of pity and fear. Ron, however, looked nonplussed.

"You can't allow him to think this has something to do with you, Father, please. Nor can you let him think he's being punished. You must do something. Push him over or something," Grace said desperately.

"Shh, Grace, he will get there. We have to give him the chance to figure it out on his own," Ron said soothingly.

Snape sat back on his heels. "I love her, Weasley. Grace is mine, now. I've put up with a lot in my time with them. I've never asked to read that bloody letter that you gave Hermione, yet she keeps it in her little box and reads it every so often. I did not ask her to let you go, so please don't put that on me. I would give anything if she could belong only to me, but I would be a fool not to believe that a part of her will always belong to you. I can't compete with you, Ronald. I'm here at your mercy, my friend."



"At which point was Auror Weasley Snape attacked?" Jack asked, making notes on his parchment.

"Right after Brian stepped off of the train, Grace and I greeted him, and I left them to retrieve his belongings from the luggage compartment. I was only a few feet away from them when I heard someone shout something. I turned to see a woman with her wand drawn, so I drew mine and ran back to Grace and Brian. I was too late, though. She had already thrown the hex," Harry said sadly.

"You weren't too late," Brian interrupted. "You were brilliant." Brian then turned his attention to the Auror. "As soon as that lady tried to hex my sister, Harry pushed her out of the way. If he hadn't, the hex would have gotten her right in the heart. And, I'd also like to add that Harry threw a shield charm in front of me at the same time that he pushed Gracie because I was standing right behind her. When he pushed her out of the way, the hex might have gotten me, but Harry threw up the shield before I even realized what had happened. He even took a blow to his arm in the process. Before that lady knew what had hit her, Harry had Stunned her," Brian said breathlessly. Then, looking right at his father, he added, "He saved both of us, and he could have been killed doing it."

Severus was in complete shock from learning the circumstances of the day's events. His pride would not allow him to meet Harry's eyes.

Brian broke the silence. "Who was that lady, sir?"

Jack sighed. "Her name is Lucy Creighton. Her husband's favorite hobby was torturing Squibs, that is until Auror Weasley Snape had him locked up in Azkaban. I guess Lucy was a bit angry and missed her husband. She won't be missing him anymore though, because she's in Azkaban with him now. Fortunately, they didn't have any children to carry on the family tradition. Well, I think I have everything. Thank you for your time and give my best to Auror Weasley Snape."

Jack put his parchment in his briefcase and left.

"Well," Brian said, breaking the silence. "I'm going up to see if Gracie's awake."

"Alright," Severus said. "I'll be up in a moment. Potter, may I have a word with you?"

"Yes, of course," Harry said with a small wave to Brian.

Severus watched his son enter the elevator then turned back towards Harry. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"You didn't really give me a chance," Harry replied, trying to keep the bitterness out of his voice.

"Listen, I " Severus started.

Harry put his hand up to stop him, "Save it, Snape. I don't want to hear what you have to say. I just want you to listen to me for a change. I love Grace as if she were my own. If you think that I didn't blame myself for this as much as you blamed me, then you're wrong. I should have talked her out of being an Auror, but I knew deep down that nothing I could have said would have changed her mind."

"I owe you, Potter," Severus said.

"You owe me nothing," Harry said quietly.

Severus looked at the ground and then back into Harry's emerald eyes, so much like his mother's. "I owe you an apology. I seem to owe a lot of people that these days. I don't know what came over me, Harry. I felt so empty."

"I understand, Severus, I understand. You were just being a concerned father. It happens to the best of us," Harry said with a smile. He gestured to the elevator. "Let's go see how our girl is feeling."

Severus nodded and smiled for the first time in what felt like an eternity.

A/N: I hope you like this nice, long chapter. The line, "So, it hasn't even crossed your mind that there's some sort of poetic justice of having my daughter under your care?" was inspired by a review from sinbad. Thanks, sin, for the great idea!! Hope you don't mind that I used it. One more chapter and then the epilogue. I know that I've said that before, but there is something I couldn't fit into this chapter, so it will have to go to the next.

cheers! ~\*potterbrat\*~

## Chapter 11

*Chapter 12 of 13*

This is a story inspired by the Tim McGraw song, "If You're Reading This." This is NOT a songfic. What happens when Hermione's dreams don't exactly turn out the way she had planned? Will she be able to deal with the hand that life dealt her?

A/N: I know this chapter has taken a while to get out. I'm really sorry about that. I blame it on the wonderful stories that I've been reading. There will only be an Epilogue left. Please, read and review. Thanks again to the almighty RobisonRocket -- Without you, I'm not me.

Chapter 11

Severus stood in the doorway of the bedroom that Grace occupied before she was old enough to attend Hogwarts as a student. He silently reminisced about the precocious child she had been with an entire castle to explore. He smiled when he felt arms reach around him from behind.

"What are you doing?" Hermione asked.

"I was just thinking," Severus replied.

"What were you thinking about?"

"That when Grace was merely seven years of age, she could have greatly contributed to that bloody Marauder's Map," Severus said with a derisive chuckle.

"Very true," Hermione said absently. "She should be arriving any moment now. Devon said he would bring her here straight away. It will be nice having her here with us, even though it will only be for a short time."

"I'm pleasantly surprised she decided to stay here," Severus said thoughtfully. "I thought you were going to have to put up a fight, but thankfully, she was agreeable that this would be the best place for her to recuperate."

"Well, I reminded her that she couldn't do anything on her own yet, and she can get immediate medical attention if she needs it," Hermione said.

"And her mother is here to baby her," Severus added dryly.

"Ha ha ha! You are too funny; but, yes, I plan on fussing about her for as long as she'll let me," Hermione said, causing Severus to chuckle.

"What is taking that boy so long?" Severus asked grumpily.

Hermione rolled her eyes and detached herself from her husband. She walked around him to sit on Grace's childhood bed. "Don't you think you're being a wee bit impatient, Professor? Gracie had to take the train; Neville's orders, remember?"

Severus gave an agitated groan. "I still don't see why we couldn't ride with her."

"Because, darling, she wanted some time alone with Devon. He is her affianced, if you recall. Just be glad she's decided to put the wedding off for a while otherwise she'd be recuperating under *his* watchful eye instead of yours."

"Ten points from Gryffindor for your cheek, Miss Granger," Severus grunted.

"Oh, come now, Severus, lighten up a little. She will be fine," Hermione said cajolingly.

Suddenly, there was a resounding knock coming from the large, oak door.

"That's her," Severus said as he bounded to the door with Hermione on his heels.

Just before he opened the door, he stopped to straighten himself, but Hermione playfully elbowed him out of the way and pulled the door open.

"Gracie!" Hermione bellowed and through her arms around her daughter.

"Hello, Mum. Ugh! You're suffocating me," Grace said jovially.

"Well, come in, come in. You too, Devon, come in. We'll have a cup of tea," Hermione said.

As they entered the foyer of the Headmaster's residence chambers, Grace came face to face with Severus. "Hello, Dad," she said quietly, suddenly shy.

"Hello, my dear," Severus answered and then strode forward to take Grace into a gentle embrace. After he let her go, he gave a curt nod to Devon before silently bidding them both to follow him into the sitting room.

"Thank you both for letting me come back here to recuperate," Grace said, slapping Devon's hands away as he tried to help her into a chair.

"You don't have to thank us, Grace; you're our daughter. It isn't likely that we'd turn you away," Hermione said, setting the tea tray down.

Devon immediately reached down and poured Grace a cup of tea, adding two sugar cubes. "Here you are," he said, handing her the cup.

"You have got to stop fussing, Dev. You're driving me mad," Grace said, rolling her eyes.

Severus and Hermione watched the exchange in amused silence. The silence stretched on after Devon sat down next to Grace and sipped his own tea.

"So," Hermione began. "Have you two set a date, yet?"

Grace and Devon exchanged a furtive glance. "Actually, we were hoping to do it next month. I should be fully recovered by then, and we can do it here in the castle. That is, of course, if the Headmaster is agreeable," Grace said with a gentle smirk toward Severus.

"Oh, how lovely," Hermione beamed. "Of course, he's agreeable. I can help you, you know. I've never been terribly gifted with decorating, but I can call upon some old friends of mine who are fantastic. Let's not forget your Aunt Ginny: wicked with charms, that one. And, Luna, of course," Hermione added quickly.

Grace nodded her head absently, which caused a frown to crease Hermione's brows.

Severus studied his daughter for a moment. "What is the matter, child?"

Grace exchanged a glance with Devon, who gave her hand an encouraging squeeze and said, "Tell them, Gracie."

Grace gave him an appreciative smile and took a deep breath. "Mum, Dad, I need to tell you about some things that happened while I was unconscious."

Taken aback, Severus and Hermione simultaneously leaned forward.

"I saw my father; I spoke to him, actually," Grace said softly without meeting their eyes.

"What do you mean you *spoke* to him?" Hermione asked concernedly.

Grace looked her mother in the eye and repeated herself with more confidence. "I spoke to him, Mum. My memory of the exact circumstances is a bit hazy, but I remember everything we talked about."

Hermione shrank back in her chair. "I don't understand," she whispered to herself.

Severus, on the other hand, was looking closely at Grace, but spoke to his wife. "Hermione, listen to her; she will help you to understand."

Grace narrowed her eyes at him. "You understand, don't you?"

Severus nodded his head slowly. "I have never had the experience, but I've heard it takes a very magically gifted person to have such an encounter with someone who has passed on. I believe you must also hold a strong bond of sorts with the person whom you connect with. I would guess that you saw him as he was before he died still a young man."

"Yes," she agreed simply. "He looked to be in his late teens."

Hermione let a tear slide down her cheek. "He was twenty-two," she said quietly.

"Dad, he wanted me to tell you that all debts have been paid in full and that they have been for a long time," Grace said. She had decided not to tell him that she'd



witnessed his breakdown in the graveyard. "He was very thankful that you didn't leave him alone in the clearing that day," she added.

Severus looked down at his hands and gave a slight nod.

Grace looked pointedly at her mother. "Mum," she said gently.

Hermione, still gaping at her daughter, started a little, "I'm sorry, honey, this is just so much to take in."

"Listen, Mum, he had a request for you as well."

"H-He did?" Hermione said nervously.

"He said there is a letter that he wrote you the night before the Final Battle. He wants you to let me and Dad read it," Grace said with a crack in her voice.

Hermione paled. A part of her didn't want to believe what Grace was telling her. She wanted to think that it was all just a dream or something, but Grace didn't know, she *couldn't* have known, that the letter was from her father; she had never told her what it was. She stood with her knees shaking and left the room. Only a moment later she returned, clutching a box.

Devon started to stand. "I think I'll go to my own quarters for a while, Gracie. This is a family thing here."

"For which you will soon be a part of," Hermione stated calmly. "Please, stay."

Devon gave a slight nod and sat back down next to Grace.

Hermione held the box in her lap. "I didn't want to believe it was possible that you saw your father, but, I'm glad that you did. It fills some sort of gap, you see. One of the hardest parts about losing Ron was that he would never get to meet you. I'm glad that you had the chance, however strange it was, to finally come face to face with him. I should have shown you this letter a long time ago, but I just couldn't. This letter was the first and last thing he ever wrote to me." Hermione finished with a brief cough to disguise her tiny sob.

She took a deep breath and continued. "Severus, you of all people should have read this letter ages ago. I owed it to you to share it with you, as you have shared so much of yourself with me."

"Hermione, I understand why you didn't show it to me. That letter was something of Ron that was yours and yours alone. You don't have to show it to me now if you would prefer," Severus said uncomfortably.

"Nonsense," Hermione said. "I need to let you read it. I think it would finally give me some closure of some sort."

With shaking fingers, Hermione opened the box on her lap. She took out a wrinkled piece of parchment and handed it to her husband. "Would you please read it aloud? I don't think I can."

He nodded and gently took it from her, allowing his hand to caress hers for only a moment. He opened the letter carefully so as not to disturb its fragile creases. Many years of handling delicate potion ingredients allowed him the intuition to handle the aged letter with just as much care and concentration.

He glanced at his audience briefly before clearing his throat to read the familiar scrawl of the Gryffindor student whom he'd been forced to ridicule and the man whom he'd befriended, albeit too late. Severus felt a tinge of pain and guilt as he began to read in his melodic tone:

*Dear Hermione,*

*I know you probably weren't expecting a letter from me, but I wanted to do this even though George said it was a bit morbid. You know -- the glass half empty and all that rot. But, I felt like it was the right thing to do. You never know what tomorrow will bring, right? So, if you're reading this, then I must have been finished off. If I am, then I hope I was really brave, and I had to fight at least five other blokes at one time before they finally took me down.*

*I wanted to tell you, too, how happy you made me when you told me you were pregnant. I still can't wrap my brain around that bit. If you had told me a year ago that I was going to be a dad, I probably would have fallen off my broom. But, knowing that our baby girl is growing inside of you is the best feeling in the world. I hope she looks just like you, 'Mione, because you're the most beautiful woman I've ever known. Having you as a mother, I know she will be strong-willed and intelligent. I hope she will grow to fight for what she believes in no matter what it costs her. All of my life, I've been surrounded by strong and brave women, so I know she'll be the same way. I know that I'm not a very religious bloke, but I believe there is a real God up there somewhere, and not just the mythical ones you read about. But, I know there is a God because He sees what we're up against, and He has given us a gift. Our baby is God's grace, and it goes to show that there are some things greater and more powerful than magic.*

*Make sure she learns not to sweat the little things in life. Don't make her choose finishing an essay that isn't due for two more months when she'd rather be outside playing Quidditch or taking one of my brothers down in the best snowball fight in history. Let her be a kid because that's what this war is about. She shouldn't have to grow up fast like we did.*

*One of these days, you're going to move on to someone else. You'll get married and probably have more children. I want you to know that I'm okay with that. You will have to learn to let me go. I don't want you to ever feel like you're being unfaithful to me when you find someone else. Just be careful and make sure he's good to you and our little girl. I trust your judgment you did hook up with me, after all.*

*It's getting late, love. I'm going to leave this letter in my bag because I'll know that you'll get it if something were to happen to me. If something does happen, just know that I'll always be watching over you. I love you, Hermione, and I hope you never have to read this letter.*

*Yours Forever,*

*Ronald B. Weasley*

Silence filled the air as Severus folded the letter carefully and handed it back to Hermione. He met her eyes and was shocked to discover that they were dry and she was smiling.

Grace, on the other hand, was sobbing into Devon's shoulder. He had a tight grip on her and gave his future in-laws an apologetic smile.

"Gracie, there is no need for tears," Hermione said gently.

Grace extracted herself from Devon and glared at her mother. "Maybe not for you, Mum, but you've read that letter hundreds of times. Those were my father's last words, and he spoke mostly about me and his love for me. I needed to hear that. I needed to hear that a long, long time ago. My entire life, he's been part of my imagination... an entity that I couldn't grasp. You've told me that I know him because I know myself, and I'm just like him. But, you don't understand what I've needed all this time. I've needed something from him that you couldn't give me, and it was in that letter all this time," Grace finished bitterly.

Hermione's smile had faded the moment Grace began to speak. She looked down at her hands guiltily.

Severus sat up calmly. "Mr. Malfoy, would you kindly escort my wife down to the kitchens and ask the house-elf, Dobby, to make her a strong cup of tea? I need to have a word with my daughter."

"Yes, sir," Devon said with a soft squeeze of Grace's hand. He stood and offered his arm to Hermione, which she took without looking at either Severus or Grace.

Once the door had closed behind them, Grace began to defend her comments, but Severus held up a hand to stop her.

"I believe you've had your turn, child; it is my turn now," Severus said without a hint of emotion.

He stood from his seat and walked to the fireplace. He took the decanter of Firewhiskey off of the mantle and poured himself a drink, not offering one to his daughter. He returned the decanter to the mantle, but did not return to his seat. Staring into the fire, he seemed to be mulling over his words. Finally, when he spoke, it was in his low, velvety voice, and again, free from emotion.

"When you were born, your mother was a terrified child of only twenty-three-years of age. Your father was not just her beloved, he was her dearest friend. Before you accuse her of being a selfish witch, you should know her story. She did not have the opportunity to finish her time at Hogwarts because she, along with your father and godfather, were in the midst of hunting and destroying pieces of the Dark Lord's soul. Quite a sad turn for the cleverest witch of the age, wouldn't you say?"

Severus didn't wait for a response, and Grace knew he wasn't really asking for one. So, he continued.

"It took approximately four years of hiding, spying, and... *soul searching* before it all came to an end on that fateful day. The war was over, Grace, when your father was murdered by Bellatrix Lestrange. Imagine what your pregnant mother went through when I brought her a body and a knapsack. I cannot describe the pain and devastation that she underwent. It was enough to kill her, but she forced herself to be strong for you, thereby, not taking time to mourn his loss. That letter and you were all she had left of Ronald Weasley. After your birth, she clung to you for dear life, and the letter was forgotten for many years. I don't believe she ever took it out again until I saw her with it on the day of the anniversary party at The Burrow."

Severus heaved a sigh and walked back to where Grace was sitting. He knelt down before her and, after wiping a stray tear from her cheek, grasped both of her small hands into his larger ones. He spoke lovingly, as if she were still a small child.

"You must understand something about your mother, my love. She wanted nothing more than for you to know your father; however, she wanted you to find him inside yourself. The words spoken in that letter were merely words. The true love that he had for you is all around you: Your mother, the Weasleys, your godfather, and all of those who loved him. They have given you much more of Ronald Weasley than a piece of wrinkled parchment could ever give you. But, that wrinkled piece of parchment and her memories are all that Hermione could hold onto. She had lost so much on that battlefield that she deserved to have something that would only belong to her. If you believe she was selfish, then perhaps she was in a way. However, she has spent her entire life as a giving friend and a loving mother to you and your brother, and therefore, I don't believe you or anyone else has the right to make her feel guilty for not sharing a single piece of parchment. If you feel that you will find more comfort in that letter than you have found in the eyes of so many who knew him and loved him, then perhaps you haven't looked hard enough."

Grace crumbled to the floor and wrapped her arms around him. "Thank you so much, Dad. You're right, as usual."

Locked in an embrace is how Devon and Hermione found them. The moment Grace spotted her mother, she stood steadily from the floor and was in her mother's arms in an instant.

"I'm so sorry, Mum. I never should have said those things. I don't know what came over me," Grace sobbed.

Hermione soothed her daughter with soft words of love and forgiveness. When Grace had finally calmed down, Hermione walked to the table and picked up the letter.

"Here, darling, I want you to have this," Hermione said kindly.

Grace shook her head. "No, Mum, it belongs to you."

Hermione took Grace's hand and placed the letter inside her palm and closed her own hands around Grace's so that the young girl would have a firm and understanding grasp on her father's words. "This letter never belonged to me; I know that now. I was just keeping it safe until you were ready to have it. I truly believe that's what Ron intended all along, which is why he told you to read it. His love for you was the strongest he'd ever had for anyone, and that's saying something. And, just in case you didn't notice, it was Ron who gave you your name."

At Grace's puzzled expression, Hermione gestured for her to open the letter. Hermione pointed to the untidy scrawl of the last sentence of the second paragraph. Grace smiled peacefully at the words: *Our baby is God's grace, and it goes to show that there are some things greater and more powerful than magic*

Grace beamed up at her mother. Hermione wiped an errant tear from her daughter's face and turned away from her to retrieve the box which had held the letter for so many years. "There's something else that you deserve to have," Hermione said, as she strode back to Grace, clutching the box.

She opened the box and Grace's heart hammered in her own ears when she set her eyes on the slender and well-worn sliver of wood that Hermione withdrew from the box.

Hermione held Ron's wand firmly in her hand for a moment. "It contains one unicorn tail-hair," Hermione said as she handed the wand to Grace.

As soon as Grace took the wand, it emitted a spark, which caused her to giggle. "Unicorn tail-hair; just like mine," Grace said astounded.

Hermione smiled at her. "Yes, my love, just like yours."

## Epilogue: Amazing Grace

Chapter 13 of 13

This is a story inspired by the Tim McGraw song, "If You're Reading This." This is NOT a songfic. What happens when Hermione's dreams don't exactly turn out the way she had planned? Will she be able to deal with the hand that life dealt her?

A/N: Well, after finishing this Epilogue, I lost every bit of it with a computer crash, so I had to re-write it. It's a lot shorter than the original, but my muse changed course.

Here is the finished product. I hope you enjoy it. I only own Grace and the other people that you don't recognize from the Harry Potter phenomenon. Thank you, RobisonRocket!! You're the bestest!!!

Epilogue

Amazing Grace

Grace sat on the bench, facing her parents, with the light breeze blowing her graying hair into her eyes. It was an unusually warm day for late October, and the freshly fallen leaves scattered the ground around her. She smiled as she brushed a strand of hair out of her eyes.

Sighing contentedly, she began to speak. "Hello. How are my favorite people today? I know it's been a while since I've sat down with you and shared the latest gossip, so here I am."

"You would be so proud of little Ava, Mum. She was sorted into Gryffindor yesterday. Oh, stop groaning, Dad. You were ever so happy when Cissa was sorted into Slytherin. I still don't know how *that* happened. I've always thought you'd had a hand in it, somehow. She turned out to be a wonderful asset to that house, though, I dare say. She has just been appointed as the Head of Slytherin House. Not bad for a woman who happens to have Muggle blood, eh?"

"I'm not sure if Brian has been by to see you or not, but he has some news. I shouldn't tell you, because it's *his* story to tell, but I'll tell you anyway. Adrianna is getting married. Can you believe it? It's about time I'd say. My niece is the only one of your grandchildren that hasn't gotten hitched, yet. She's marrying that bloke she works with – an Irish Muggle from Dublin."

"The kids are all doing alright, of course. Ronald is Head Boy, now. I'm so proud of my grandson, I can't stop smiling. Constance is a Prefect, and she just started her sixth year. All of my grandchildren are finally at school, so I get to see them every day now. Oh, did I forget to tell you? I am the newly appointed Potions mistress. You should have seen Uncle Harry's face when I told him that I turned in my resignation at the Auror Department last winter. Aunt Ginny said that he could finally die in peace, knowing that he didn't have to worry about me any longer and that his godfather duties had finally been sorted out. Bless him. Being an Auror was nothing compared to teaching Healer Longbottom's great-grandson. He's a nightmare."

"But, alas, Uncle Harry did finally pass on. He died peacefully in his sleep the day after his ninety-ninth birthday. Remember how he used to joke that he would never live to be one hundred? He was right, wasn't he? Aunt Gin is getting on alright, though. She has nine great-grandchildren to keep her busy. There is finally a boy in the Potter family, by the way. He's Jasmine's grandson, and they named him James. I can hear you groaning again, Dad. Stop that. Poor Uncle Harry had always wanted a boy to name after his own father, and he finally got one just a few months before he died."

"Devon is going into his fifth year as the headmaster, and he's doing a lovely job. Luna passed on last year, but she went in style. She said that she had much to do on the other side of the veil, and she couldn't wait to get there. Draco had a difficult time of it. He'd said that living without her wasn't any fun, and he, too, passed on just three months later. Devon misses them, but he's happy knowing they're together."

Grace allowed a silent tear to slide down her cheek and wiped it away quickly when she heard footsteps behind her.

"Mum, is everything alright?" Her youngest daughter, Cissa, approached her.

Grace motioned for her to sit with her on the bench.

Cissa sat with her and repeated her question, taking her mother's hand.

"I'm alright," Grace finally answered. "I'm just catching them up on some of the latest news. I didn't mean to worry you, darling."

"I wasn't worried," Cissa said. "Dad just wanted to make sure that you got back in time for the Halloween Feast. He was going to come himself, but I told him that I'd get you and make sure you made it back alright. He doesn't like for you to Apparate by yourself. I tried to tell him that you were more than capable, but you know how he can be."

"Yes," Grace chuckled. "Your father has always been a little suffocating."

"His heart's in the right place, though. He just worries, you know," her daughter chided.

"I know, darling, I know. I'm just going to sit here for a few more minutes, if you don't mind. They might have something to tell me, and it may take them a little while to form the words," Grace said gently.

"Do you mind if I stay here with you?" Cissa asked.

"Of course not, darling," Grace said.

They relaxed on the bench and let the silence stretch between them. The day was coming to a close, and it was getting darker in the open field where they sat. The only sound that could be heard was the sporadic breeze rustling the trees. Neither of them had any inclination to leave, even with the anticipation of the Halloween Feast scheduled for that evening.

The minutes ticked by when suddenly, they both sat upright when the wind picked up, blowing the leaves furiously over the ground. Grace met her daughter's eyes and laughed out loud when a raindrop landed on Cissa's nose.

"Was it supposed to rain?" Cissa asked, wiping the raindrop away with the tip of her finger.

"No, I don't think so," Grace said, grinning. "Are you ready to go now? We have a feast waiting for us."

Cissa smiled at her mother. "Yes, I'm ready."

They stood and Grace said her farewells to her parents. They walked in silence until they reached the end of the gravel road leading to Hogsmeade. Cissa knew her mother liked this walk and never complained that she wouldn't just Apparate to the gates of the castle.

Cissa finally broke the silence. "So, do you think they're happy?"

Grace smiled. "Of course they are, Cissa, didn't you hear them? My father was the wind that moved the leaves. Dad, of course, was the rain. My mother was the whisper of the raindrops as they landed on the leaves and your nose. I wonder what they'll say next time."

Cissa hugged her mother close to her. "Will you let me come with you next time, so I can hear them again?"

"Of course you can," Grace said.

"I'm glad they're together," Cissa said pensively.

"Why wouldn't they be? It's what my dad wanted after my mother passed away. My father told me once that there were no more debts to be paid, but I think, in his own funny way, my dad wanted to be one up on my father. He was such a sneaky Slytherin," Grace said as the rain started to pick up.

Per tradition, they both turned to look at back at the row of headstones standing together at the edge of the open field.

Hermione had been laid to rest between the two men who loved her the most.

If you're reading this

There's gonna come a day

When you move on and find someone else

And that's okay

Just remember this

I'm in a better place

Where soldiers live in peace

And angels sing Amazing Grace

So lay me down

In that open field out on the edge of town

And know my soul

Is where my momma always prayed that it would go

And if you're reading this

I'm already home

A/N: Once again, I want to thank all of you who stuck with me and Grace.