

More Than Fantasy

by RachelW

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Fast and furious, secretive and stolen; that's how it was at the start: an accidental brushing of bodies while moving from one crowded room to another, eyes locking for that instant. That time I accidentally bumped into him and felt his hardened cock; his eyes had locked on mine, and he'd given a small, barely perceptible thrust of his hips even as his lips had moved to give me a terse 'Watch where you're going, Lupin'. No one else noticed. I was nearly left stunned.

I was busy then, too busy to pursue the urges. I knew he wanted me, too; his dark eyes, outwardly fathomless depths to others, seemed to broadcast his intent.

I've always been an observer; I've always paid careful attention to who is doing what around me. In the past, my youth, there were times that I now regret not having spoken up when I should have. I'm not a gossip; I kept quiet about Harry and Ginny, who got up to much more than her mother would have approved of after Sirius died. Let them take comfort in each other; I was young once, I remember.

Then there was Hermione...and the fact that she, too, was secretly aroused by the black-cloaked man during the summer before her fifth year. Her hormones were raging, and he did cut quite a figure; I couldn't blame her, really. I did make the time to offer my friendship to her...she was in a fragile place; a crush on an older man was not a sign that she truly wanted a sexual relationship, but something deeper, a connection. So I gave it to her.

I wrote her letters and gave her a kind word when it seemed she needed it. I wondered, when she saw me during that Christmas break spent at Grimmauld Place, if I'd overstepped my bounds. Her brown eyes lingered on mine, drifting over my form in a way not borne of platonic thought. But I kept my interactions friendly and innocent and ignored the looks and smiles she hoped I'd pick up on, pretending I didn't see them. I let her think I was a touch lavender; I believe she thought Sirius and I had been an item.

It started late one night, after Severus had come to Grimmauld Place to report on Order business. She'd finished her fifth year and was due to start her sixth, soon. She would hold hands with Ron Weasley and talk to him, but things were awkward, and she didn't truly return his affections, though she did try. Such a sweet girl, Hermione.

I was shattered by the death of Sirius Black. Perhaps the emptiness I felt at his loss made me more perceptible to an easy encounter, a physical closeness I wished I could have shared with him when he was alive. Underscoring my grief was my worry for Harry and his destiny.

Where was I? Oh yes, the night I let her believe I was gay. I'm not...you might say I play both sides of the fence. A fierce kiss and a good shag, a tender moment and

comfort in another's arms aren't restricted to only the opposite sex, at least as far as I'm concerned. Anyway, I'm losing track again. So there we were in the kitchen. Severus came in and I was very aware of his presence, as always. For a change, he stopped to have a cuppa before leaving the house and even took a seat at the head of the table, between Hermione and me.

His piercing, black eyes fell on me; then he looked down at his black tea. I looked across to Hermione, to continue our conversation, but her eyes lingered on Severus another moment before she looked back to me. She blushed when she realised I'd seen. I ignored it, just as I did all the other signs of her ripening body, her growing awareness. It wasn't my place to say anything, wasn't my place to do anything beyond act as her friend, her guardian.

I felt a hand on my knee, then, and stifled a jump. Then, a 'tap' of his finger. I talked to Hermione while I reached down, attempting to be subtle, and found his hand, taking the piece of paper from him. He finished his tea and told Hermione he needed her help on a potion and for her to meet him in the workroom in an hour. Her eyes brightened, and mine narrowed a moment in suspicion. He left for the storeroom; always grace in motion, so fluid his stride. I coughed, purposely, to get a chance to sneak a glance at the note.

Your room. Midnight.

That was all it said, but those three words were enough.

Hermione was excited at spending the evening with him, brewing potions; it was obvious, the way she fiddled with her teacup and cast hopeful glances towards the door through which Severus had disappeared.

"Be careful," I told her softly. Her eyes widened.

"What do you mean?" she asked, an attempt to mask.

"Severus Snape is an alluring man, attractive in his own way...a dangerous one, too. Hermione, I wouldn't want to see you hurt."

Her lips tightened, and she regarded me for a long moment before nodding. "So...you think he's attractive, then?" she asked hesitantly, several moments later.

I only smiled and tilted my head in a half-shrug. Her eyes widened, and then she smiled back. Perhaps that was a disservice to her. She seemed even more open and free with me after that, thinking I was 'safe' to flirt with, and she would mention snippets of her attraction to Severus here or there...never overtly, though. But still, her eyes would linger on mine longer than what was completely innocent.

Midnight that night found me in my room at Grimmauld Place. The doorknob twisted a moment before the clock struck twelve, and he stepped in, silent and shrouded. We didn't need words; we both knew what the other wanted. Robes pushed aside, his pointy hips against mine, a struggle of tongues and cocks and hands.

It was secretive, always in the dark. He brought a silky oil. Always prepared, Severus Snape was. It certainly made our first time together easier. It continued that way. Usually, a clandestine meeting in my room at Grimmauld Place, occasionally one of us - usually me - on our knees, pleasuring the other in another stolen moment. We never talked about it.

I decided to change that when, during the summer break between Hermione's sixth and seventh years, she seemed even more allured by the dark Potions master.

"Do you let her work with you alone often, Severus?" I asked him.

He'd just dismissed Hermione from helping him in the cellar. Her face seemed flushed, and her eyes didn't quite meet mine when she left the room, heading upstairs to sleep.

"She has an extra-credit project, Lupin. What do you think you're getting at?" he muttered back at me.

"I do notice these things, Severus."

His jaw set in a firm line and he nodded once, understanding immediately what I meant, not bothering to try and deny it. "Jealous?" he asked, sneering.

I rolled my eyes at him as I closed the door. "She's seventeen," I told him firmly.

"She'll be eighteen in September."

"And still your student."

"Not forever."

"What could you possibly see in her?" I asked next, growing more than a little irked at his answers.

"She is attentive...observant...respectful...not like her friends. No, Lupin, I'm not about to bed a student; don't look at me like that. And do you think I haven't noticed the way you are with her? Yes, such a *respectable* mentor-figure aren't you? Tell me, is that why, nine times out of ten when I see the two of you sitting together, your feet are touching? Is that why you both look at each other the way you do?" He sneered triumphantly at me.

My stomach clenched, and I swallowed. I really had tried to keep things distant enough...friends, but no more. I'd tried not to touch her, especially not after that time I had reached to pat her shoulder just as she moved, and instead, my hand fell on her breast. We both lingered longer in that touch than was appropriate, then pretended it had never happened.

"Yes, Lupin...how noble of you to feel guilty about it now. Now, are you going to get over here and suck my cock or will I have to bend you over this table?"

~*~

I worked on keeping my distance even more after that, but couldn't bring myself to stop writing her. I was her friend, and I knew if she thought I didn't want to talk to her, it would hurt her. She was strong, but still, I hoped to be another steady rock in her life, someone she could count on as she watched her best friend descend into madness and tried to be a good girlfriend to Ron. I told her she should look out for herself, never do anything she wasn't completely comfortable with...that, if someone really, truly cared for her, he would wait; he would understand. Perhaps I was deluding myself when I said that, too. Certainly, the shock I felt when my hand stroked hers while offering those words of comfort should have brought me to my senses. But she seemed happy to hear what I had to say.

Later, we met by chance long after midnight, bumping into each other in the darkened hallway; I'd just come from the loo, and she was on her way. Her hand slid up my chest, stroking the exposed skin over my collarbone in the loose-fitting nightshirt.

"Hermione, excuse me," I whispered, nearly choking on the words.

"Remus, about what you said to me...I understand...thank you," she whispered back. Then her other hand was behind my neck and her lips were on mine and my hands were on her waist and my tongue in her mouth, her tongue eagerly stroking mine.

"NO!" I hissed, stepping away. "Hermione, we can't."

She bit her lip, and I could barely see moisture come to her eyes.

"Sorry...I forgot...I know you're not..."

"Hermione, I care for you...and believe me, it's not as if I don't want..." I trailed off, taking in a deep breath. "Yes, I know...I remember saying that...it doesn't mean I'm only..."

Understanding was in her eyes then.

"I'll still be here, later...when you've graduated. Before then, I can't...do you understand?"

She nodded and kissed me again, this time softly, barely brushing my lips.

~*~

The guilt when I heard she'd had a solid break-up with Ron tore at me. What was I doing? Twice her age. I wanted to be her friend, her mentor...but that was a lie I told myself; I wanted to be so much more.

I made the mistake of asking Severus how she was faring, partway through the fall term, when he brought my Wolfsbane Potion.

"That's why she's not letting the Weasley boy paw her anymore, is it?" he asked, chuckling. "I don't think she can make up her mind...she makes every excuse to stay late on her potions project."

"Severus..." I growled, warning him.

"I won't touch her, not yet. Besides, she has no evidence that I've ever thought of her as more than my student, and she won't for some time."

It was time to talk, finally. A year and a half of quick shags when we could catch them, and we'd never really talked.

"Then what are you doing with me?"

"Enjoying myself. Whatever this is doesn't seem to be stopping you from thinking of pursuing her, too, does it?"

"It's not right; she's still a child."

"She's grown up far faster than any child should, and even before this war she wasn't the same as her classmates. We could...of course, come to an agreement on the situation," he offered.

"What do you mean?" I asked suspiciously, so ready then to think the worst of him. He wasn't the only one holding grudges and suspicions long past when they should have been dead.

"Once she graduates...and once she does have a bit of time to grow up, she would be able to handle the both of us."

Once she grows up...that's what I was waiting for. At times, my urges made me feel as some Humbert Humbert lusting for my own personal Lolita. But that wasn't it at all. It *wasn't*. I saw in her the *potential* for the woman she could be. I saw the beautiful spirit she carried within her. I wanted to watch that spirit bloom, come to life, and then, when she was ready, only when she was ready, would I think of taking the next step. I wondered if I'd already ruined that, or if the coming war would ruin it, instead.

Wait... "Both of us?"

"Yes, Lupin, both of us. I've watched her, especially this past year. I believe, if we asked her to choose between us, neither of us would win. However, as you and I are quite *well acquainted*...I believe it could work. That is, if you could handle sharing?"

"What about what Hermione wants?"

"We *are* what she wants, Lupin. I'll prove it to you, too, Christmas break. Wait and see."

~*~

The months before Christmas break were filled with worry and doubt. I kept my letters to Hermione as innocent as I could: stories of my days at Hogwarts, questions about her friends and studies. I pointedly said nothing about Severus. Her letters, while on the surface innocent, were underscored with her desires and dreams, and yes, if you read close enough, her hopes that there could be something more between us after graduation.

I came so close, so many times, to confessing how wrong I was, telling her I couldn't talk to her anymore, that I should never be alone with her. I never did. The thought of Severus having her, of nothing of her for me, might have been part of what held me back. Other times, I told myself that I really was nothing more than her friend, wholly appropriate in every way.

When Christmas break finally came, there was barely time for Severus to prove what he wanted. The war was nearly in full swing, the Wizarding world a dark and dangerous place. I told Severus, one night when we lay in bed together, our carnal desires spent, that she was under too much pressure, that whatever he was planning, it wasn't the time. He told me not to worry; she would be fine.

Then, I wondered if perhaps both of us shouldn't just leave Hermione be. We had each other...there was something missing...tenderness, true affection and intimacy. Perhaps, if we'd had that? I moved to kiss him...our kisses were never tender or intimate...always searching, always rough.

He stiffened under me at first, and I stroked his chest softly.

"What are you doing?" he asked in a whisper.

"Severus...we've been *fucking* each other for long enough...haven't you ever wanted something more?" I kissed him again, tenderly, attempting to convey to him more than just lust. "Besides, if you think we can both have Hermione, don't we owe it to her to have something more ourselves..." I nibbled his earlobe. "If she really *does* want both of us, I'm sure she would want more than just our bodies together. Severus...if you truly care for her, I'm willing to try...but if this will be nothing more than a conquest for you, I'll have nothing to do with it." Words of challenge between tender caresses.

He was hesitant, though finally agreed. And when we moved together, it was new, different...special. Not a hasty fuck in a stolen moment...he let free a part of himself, finally...and finally, my fears were eased. Severus has always been a good man, deep down. It's hard to tell, only because he works so hard to never let anyone see it, masking his true feelings with something flippant or harsh.

~*~

"Miss Granger, good morning," Severus said, sipping his Earl Grey.

"Morning, Professor Snape."

She seemed hesitant as she walked into the library of Grimmauld Place. Severus and I were sitting across from each other, a chessboard between us. Fitting.

"Good morning, Hermione," I said softly. "Did you sleep well?"

"Yes, I did. And you?"

"Well enough. Join us for tea?"

She looked between us, a hint of nervousness. She probably felt trapped between us, conflicted in her feelings. Severus was right; she wanted us both, but that wasn't something she thought was acceptable.

"Please, Miss Granger, have a seat. I am preparing to make a point to Lupin. A witness to see the logic of my methods would not be remiss."

I nearly glared at Severus; he could be so cocky, then. But as always, he had a plan; he was prepared. The chessboard was adequate explanation for whatever point he was going to make. Hermione stepped into the room and seated herself; the three of us were arranged in a triangle. Again, fitting.

"Now, Remus, Miss Granger...the nature of the problem is simple." He indicated his queen, which was set to take my knight or my bishop. "We have before us a simple scenario. There are, however, many solutions to this simple problem. The *traditional* solution would tell us that there are only two possibilities that are acceptable...two choices." He looked pointedly to Hermione, then to me, before looking down at the chessboard. "*Traditionally*, it is thought that if you do not take one of these two choices, the only other option would be to not make the choice at all...to *forfeit* the opportunity ahead. Do you follow me, Miss Granger?" he asked.

I looked to Hermione, who was frowning at the chessboard. She looked up, at each of us in turn, then back to the chessboard. I knew she was starting to wonder if Severus was actually talking about chess.

"There is another option. However, one cannot apply this option on the chessboard. Sometimes, in life, when the conditions are right, one can take *both* options before you. This is a rare occurrence, one that is not always the easiest road, but one that is valid, nonetheless. Wouldn't you agree, Remus?"

"If the conditions are right, yes, Severus...I could agree. Hermione?" I turned to her.

She was sitting ramrod straight, her eyes narrowed slightly as she looked between the two of us. So shrewd, even at her age, she would understand. I hoped she would understand; I hoped she wouldn't think we were both crazy, or worse.

"So, Professor, if you cannot take both options on a choice in chess, what is this point you're trying to make to Remus?" she asked.

I had to resist smiling. She could get right to the point so well.

"Simply that one should be aware of the possibilities, understand when the conditions are right for one to take both options before them. Life isn't always a game of chess. But, just like chess, one must still wait for the prudent moment...if the play is set in motion *too soon*, it could be disastrous."

"Yes, I see..." Hermione said slowly.

~*~

It changed then...Hermione, instead of seeming to worry when the three of us found ourselves in the same room together, seemed to relax around both of us. I told Severus that she should know about what was between us, too. He agreed, but said it wasn't yet the time.

And so we waited.

The letters continued when we had the time. Severus and I shared our moments together when we had the time. The war raged on, until finally, Harry defeated Voldemort. It wasn't easy, nor was it without cost. I found myself frantically searching the bodies on the field after the Death Eaters had attacked in full. Hermione was hurt, but not mortally. Once I found her, she came with me to find Severus. On the way, there were the others: her roommate, my former student, Lavender Brown; Rubeus Hagrid, too...but he went valiantly; Albus Dumbledore...too many to name, too many for me to want to think about now. We finally found him and tossed his Death Eater mask aside; lest he be counted among them in the hectic clean up.

He was injured, and though it wasn't immediately life-threatening, he was in grave pain, yet he wasn't quite a serious enough case to be at the top of the triage list. Hermione and I took him, together, to his quarters in the dungeons. She supplied fresh compresses, and I stripped him of his clothing. He was vaguely aware of our attentions. Hermione tenderly washed blood from a wound on his head, while I cleaned the less pleasant results of the Cruciatus Curse, then tucked a quilt around him, wincing at the huge purple bruise spreading on his hip.

Hermione stayed with him. She was injured, and while she'd been able to help in the immediate aftermath because of adrenaline, she couldn't continue beyond that. I returned to help, notifying Ron, with a pang of guilt, that Hermione was fine and was tending one of the injured. Harry, thankfully, lived.

It took Severus some time to recover; Hermione remained with him as he drifted in and out of consciousness. I relieved her when she was too tired to go on during that insane week following the battle. Once he began to recover, Hermione was relieved, but distant, the terrible scenes from that battle haunting her, I'm sure. I suggested she return to her friends, and she did. She went home to her parents a week later.

Severus never again walked without a limp. By the time Healers were able to get to him, the damage to his sciatic nerve in his right leg was too great, irreparable. He wouldn't teach after that, either. I didn't contact her, wanting to give her time to recover, to deal with her own demons; then got caught up helping Severus in his recovery, acting as his work assistant so he could brew my Wolfsbane Potion.

Severus bought a house in the Orkney Isles; only three rooms, but it was enough. He told me it would be easier for him to brew my potion if I stayed there and to pay for it with upkeep on his garden; it was his way of making an invitation. Time went on, and when I thought of writing her, it seemed harder.

~***~

And, for three years, life has been simple: there is the garden, which I tend; the cooking, which we share. I deliver the potions Severus brews to order; the closest to a steady job I've ever had. We discuss, from time to time, what might have been with Hermione. Sometimes, when we're in the heat of passion, a mutual fantasy of her is used to stoke the flames...but we're both reluctant to contact her again.

For my part, I'm afraid that the hint of what once was, was really nothing more than a crush. I know people tended to give her more responsibility, more credit than they would give another girl her age. But that didn't mean she couldn't have had a simple, teenage crush on a man she admired...on two men she admired. Yes, she seemed mature, but I think she needed more time to grow up, discover herself; it was so easy to forget that she was so young.

For his part, he is self-conscious about his limp. In bed I can hardly tell the difference, but on his feet, he walks with a cane and an uncomfortable lurch, his right leg dragging limply behind him. We don't have visitors, and if I want to see someone, I go to them. I hope to convince him to go out again, but he took such pride in his graceful stride, his precise movements. Now, when he brews potions, he has to sit on a chair at the counter. I think he would be ashamed for Hermione to see him, no matter that I try to convince him otherwise. Sometimes, I wonder if I'd spoken up during those moments when we were but schoolboys, if he might not be so sensitive about possibly being made fun of for that...an old guilt, one I try to make up for now.

As I'm sitting, reading the morning *Prophet*, an owl flies through the open window. We don't get much mail, and Severus looks up from his breakfast, watching as I take the missive from its leg.

"It's from Hermione," I say. He is looking at me blankly. "She wants us to visit sometime...says she has a new house in Bristol." I read eagerly; the sight of her handwriting bringing back a surge of memories from when we used to share frequent letters.

"Don't just sit there looking at it," Severus snaps.

I rise, taking the letter with me, and we read together. She doesn't say outright that she's still interested; she left room for interpretation, room for us to make that move.

"Well, are you going to go see her? You always did want to break out of that mentor role."

I look at him incredulously. "Did that last curse addle your brain, too? I wasn't the only one."

"Yes, just what she wants, her greasy, crippled former teacher," he says bitterly, using his wand to levitate his dirty dishes to the sink.

"Severus, it was *your* idea that we could both pursue her in the first damned place!"

"That was then...this is now. If you want her, you can have her. Don't feel obligated to remain here; you're deluded if you think I'm your jealous lover." He heaves himself up, grabs his cane, and hobbles outside, his lame leg dragging behind him.

I write her back; Severus pretends to be uninterested. But in the three years we've lived together, I've come to know him well. While at one time our relationship was a quick, fierce shag in stolen moments, it's more than that, now. Severus pretends we aren't an 'item', that I'm a houseguest who sleeps in his bed only because we seem to end up there, anyway. I indulge this.

~*~

I do go to see her when she writes back. Severus remains home, saying he has to work on a potion and can't be bothered. I hesitate to leave him like that, but I know he won't go to see Hermione, not now.

Our reunion is awkward, at first. She smiles and invites me in, serves me tea. Her house is a little bigger than Severus's; she has been doing well in getting a career started. Our conversation progresses, but is mostly about the past. She and Ron had tried again to make it work after graduation, but parted as friends after only a few months. Who has done what, where they're at now, small talk...then silence again. She mentions having dated some more, but never really found what she was looking for. I sip my tea, so does she.

"Harry told me you were staying with Professor Snape," she finally says, getting to the point.

Harry and I have stayed in touch, meeting about once a month for lunch. He doesn't really understand why I'm there, but he accepts it.

"Yes, Severus says I might as well stay there and do something to earn my Wolfsbane," I joke. "His leg...you know, chores around the garden...at least he has magic, but sometimes it's not enough."

"I hoped he might come, too," she tells me. "That night...back in Grimmauld Place...I've wondered since then, well...and that odd conversation about chess that last Christmas break. Um...not to bring up something I shouldn't, I just can't seem to stop thinking about it..." she trails off uncomfortably, and I reach across the tea table and place my hand on hers.

"I always hoped that it was more than a crush."

"Me too."

Her hand grasps mine firmly.

"I'm sorry...I don't know why I ran back home to my parents like that..." Tears form in her eyes.

"No, don't be. It was a hard time for everyone; I understand."

I move from the chair to sit beside her on the couch and hold her close, the way I never allowed myself to do before. Three years, such a long time since I've seen her, but it seems like nothing.

"How long have you two been...?"

"It started the summer after Sirius died. No," I tell her, "Sirius and I were never...like that. I wasn't his type...he was quite exclusively a ladies' man. But Severus and I...it's hard to explain, I suppose."

"That night...you told me that after I graduated, you'd still be there."

She leans close to me, our lips meet and it's like coming home. She's so soft...her lips pliant... nothing like Severus's firm, stubbly jaw and tight, thin lips. I'm lost in the moment, in her soft skin, the curve of her hip, the hollow at the base of her throat. Eventually, we come to a stillness and quietly observe each other.

"Hermione...just so you know...I can't leave him," I tell her. My fingers brush her hair back, and I search her eyes. I want her, now more than ever...but now, Severus means so much more to me than only a heated, lustful moment. I can't I won't leave him; if Hermione were to ask that of me, I wouldn't.

"He misses you...he won't admit it, but he cared for you; he still does. Would you come with me; would you see Severus again?"

"I've always wondered what he wanted...it seemed clear after that one day...but..."

"He wouldn't do anything when you were a student...but yes, he most certainly did."

"Do you still think one can have both options...does he?"

Her brown eyes are so deep, so beautiful...and I can only look into them for a moment, wishing. She's older now; I can see the difference, in a number of ways.

"Things have changed...it's not a choice of one or the other of us anymore...and Severus, well, he would need time...but, if you're willing to try..."

She nods her understanding and our lips meet again and my hands move to her waist, wrapping around her body.

"Yes, I'd like to see him again; I've missed him...and you," she says, her head resting on my shoulder a moment later. She chuckles. "This is kind of an odd situation, isn't it?"

I agree. Not too much later, I bid her goodnight.

~*~

The pasta goes into the boiling kettle and I flick my wand at the knife and cutting board, starting the chopping of the red and yellow bell peppers. I want this meal to be perfect. Severus has been fretting all day, pretending to be irritated that I am being presumptuous in bringing a guest to *his* house. I didn't comment this morning when he

studied himself in the mirror after emerging from the bathtub. I've never before seen him wash his hair three times in a week, much less a single day. I'm not going to say anything now, as he sets his cane against the wall and attempts to walk a straight line without it.

Basil, I need basil. I rush out into the garden to gather it, and when I return, Severus is sprawled on the floor, a fierce scowl on his face.

"This is stupid!" he yells. "Why are you doing this?"

I continue to cook, knowing from experience that trying to help him up only makes him angrier. "Come now, Severus, she wants to see you."

"Did she tell you that before or after you'd fucked her senseless?" he snarls, finally landing on the couch.

"Severus...I've already told you that didn't happen. Now, just stay put and I'll take care of this. She'll be here soon."

The bread comes out of the oven and I place it on the counter to cool. The salad has been tossed with just a touch of vinegar and oil. The basil is aromatic, simmering with the sliced peppers and chicken in a touch of olive oil.

As I toss the simmered vegetables and chicken with the pasta, there is a knock on the door.

"This is still a stupid idea," he mutters quietly, as I pass him to get the door.

~*~

Hermione compliments the food. It's awkward, at first. Snape has barely said two words since she arrived, but I see the way his eyes linger on her. I wish he would say something; Hermione is getting uncomfortable. I clear the dishes, and finally, hear them begin to speak once I'm in the kitchen. It's small talk, but a start.

He grows quiet again when I emerge.

"Just noticed we're running low on firewood. I should go gather some...it's getting harder to find, might take me about an hour. Will you two be fine until I get back?" I ask.

Hermione smiles at me gratefully, understanding what I'm doing, while Severus looks stricken. I don't wait for him to speak; I simply leave. Yes, it's a feeble excuse. It's not at all difficult to conjure a warm fire.

I spend a few moments gathering an armload of dead, dry wood. I check my watch and sit down to enjoy the sunset, determined to give them time alone together...they need it. Hermione mentioned they used to talk when they worked together, sometimes at length. I know he can do this again. He's self-conscious, but I'm sure once he gets comfortable with her again, comfortable that she isn't going to laugh at his limp, he'll open up to her.

I check my watch once more. Half an hour. The sky is nearly dark.

Finally, I think I've given them enough time to break the ice, and I return to the cottage, lighting the path with my wand. I'm relieved to find Hermione and Severus leaning towards each other, elbows resting on the dining table; they look to me a moment, then continue talking. There seems to be an anticipatory hum in the room.

All we need now is some wine. I light the fire, gather three glasses and a bottle of Riesling and take a seat at the table on the other side of Hermione. Severus catches my eye when Hermione's head is turned and gives a short nod. I'd suggest we move to the couch, but I know any progress Severus has made in warming up would be shattered. The silence isn't awkward this time as we sip our wine. And after a short while, Severus speaks.

"Remus's cooking is passable, I suppose."

I nearly snort. *Passable?* But his intent is clear with his next statement.

"Italian cuisine is his speciality; however, if you'd like to sample decent *French* cooking, I daresay I'd have to be the one to cook if you're looking for more than slop." He raises an eyebrow haughtily, the corners of his lips quirking up, and sips his wine.

"Really?" she asks with a laugh. "Remus, does he always put down your cooking?"

"I'm afraid so, yes," I answer, smiling.

Conversation flows easily after that. We begin with a discussion of ethnic cuisines, and it moves forward from there. We've all travelled a bit and have a story to share of our journeys through other countries. Severus laughs, truly laughs such a rare and welcome sound.

The night ends with an invitation from Severus; he offers to cook if she can join us next week.

"Thank you," he says softly, much later that night, as we lay in bed. I don't ask what happened while I was gone; that moment is theirs. Our coupling is slow, peppered with whispered words of our shared fantasy: Hermione between us.

~*~

She continues to come to dinner at our place near weekly after that. We don't seem to need to discuss the situation; where it might lead. She's very much aware of it. We seem to have an unspoken understanding that we want to move slowly, so we do. When I am incapacitated from the monthly transformation, I tell him to go ahead and see her, but he doesn't.

Sometimes, the three of us sit on the couch after dinner, sipping wine, Severus and I both lightly stroking her shoulders, our fingers bumping into one another's as conversation goes on for hours. Sometimes, the conversation is light, and sometimes deep...touching on those things that happened during the war. Sometimes, there is a kiss, and she is careful not to give one of us more attention than the other. I smile and watch or nibble her earlobe as Severus kisses her deeply, knowing it will be my turn next, knowing when she leaves for the night, Severus and I will come together with an intense urgency.

"What about the two of you?" she asks one night.

I'm still dazed from an amazingly intense kiss, and her teasing fingers stroking me through my robes for a moment, and probably a little more wine than was wise.

"Hmm?"

"It's been four months now, and I've never seen the two of you ...well, kiss. You do, don't you?" She looks from side to side, a coy smile playing on her lips.

My hand is on Severus's shoulder, his on mine, draped behind her. I feel him tense.

Hermione scoots forward and spins around, sitting on the coffee table, propping her feet up on the edge of the couch. "Don't let me get in your way," she encourages.

"Well, Severus...you heard the lady."

I stifle a laugh as he looks between Hermione and me, appearing slightly alarmed. We've never let anyone see us in that kind of intimacy.

"Very well," he says, his fingers gripping the hair at the base of my skull.

I'm pulled towards him and he claims my mouth roughly. As my hands move down his body, gripping his hip firmly, I spare a sideways glance at Hermione. Her eyes are dark with intense arousal, her breath rapid and shallow. I decide to dominate the kiss next, burying my tongue deep into Severus's mouth as I skim my fingers over his hard, small nipples...catching another glance at Hermione. Severus's knee the good one moves to my crotch and presses against my length. I can't help thrusting against him.

He is the first to pull away, his breath coming hard and fast. He turns to Hermione, reaching out and grasping her hand. She moves forward, kneeling on the couch between us, and I capture her lips with mine.

"Hermione, stay the night," Severus implores her, his breath hot against her neck.

"Yes," she whispers back to him.

I groan, moving my hand up her thigh, and together, Severus and I unbutton her blouse. She is torn between trying to undress us both, but we are more than happy to assist her.

"The bed would be more comfortable," I mumble against the cloth covering her breast.

Severus has pulled the strap of her satin bra down and is laving her other breast, reverently. Without breaking contact, he reaches behind the couch to grab his cane while I grasp her thighs and pull her astride my hips, thrusting my cock against her. Her legs lock behind me and I stand, capturing her attention with my kisses as I carry her to the bedroom, allowing Severus to make his way there without intense scrutiny or awkwardness.

He lights a candle and undresses as I lower Hermione to the bed, nipping and suckling my way down her body, removing her bra, unfastening her jeans and pulling them off of her along with her boots and socks. The bed shifts as Severus moves to her side, leaning over her, kissing her, and I kneel at the edge of the bed, lowering my mouth between her legs; the heady scent of her body nearly blinding me with need.

My tongue darts between her smooth, shaved labia, and I realise she was very prepared for this to be the night. It's been a long time since I pleased a woman, but I know Severus adding his attentions to her breasts and neck will help cover for any fumbling I might have, at first.

It seems to work, as she cries out "Rem...oh...Severus...Remus..." her legs shaking and her hips thrusting up spastically in only a few moments.

She pushes against Severus's hip, and he takes her cue, sitting back against the head of the bed as he flicks the sheet to cover his atrophied leg. I watch for a moment as she trails bites and kisses down his thin torso, grasps his cock firmly, then moves down, stroking his foreskin, covering then revealing the head of his cock, covering him with her mouth.

Severus opens his dark eyes. "Come here, Remus," he manages to gasp.

I kneel beside his head, and he turns, grasping my sac gently as he takes me deep into his mouth. I groan and gasp as I watch Hermione pleasure him, the sight alone nearly enough to drive me over the edge.

She looks up, watching Severus suck me. Her hand continues to stroke him as she rises, eyes flicking up to meet mine. She's so beautiful.

I pull away from Severus then move behind Hermione, as she moves astride him. My finger finds her clit, circling it as Severus strokes and lightly pinches her nipples, then groans as she lowers herself upon him.

I put my attention to her neck, moving her hair aside to nibble as she rises and lowers rhythmically. My cock bumps against her cleft.

"Yes Remus," she whispers, reaching back and grabbing me, stroking me.

"Lean over," I tell her. She does, continuing to thrust against Severus. I quickly find the lube in the nightstand and return, watching the two of them strive together. Severus's eyes are closed, his hand wrapped in her hair as he thrusts up to meet her and strokes her back.

When I move between his legs, he opens his eyes and watches me intently as I cover my fingers in the slick substance and return my attention to her cleft.

"Remus, please...yes," she groans.

Severus's hands move to still her hips and he captures her lips; then spreads her slightly for me. With ease, she takes two, then three fingers as I prepare her; I have the feeling she's done this before. I'm glad; I want her first time with Severus and me to be remembered only with pleasure. I enter her slowly, steadily, gasping her name. I can feel Severus's length inside her on the other side of the thin membrane. She shudders when I sheath myself fully, and then rises, supporting her weight on her hands, moving her hips. So slow, so maddeningly slow. I long to grab her hips and pump into her, but I resist.

Then Severus begins to thrust up, and the feeling of him moving against me in her body, of her tight ring of muscle gripping my shaft, nearly drives me to climax too soon. I join the movement, and soon the three of us have a steadily, building pace.

Her soft moans build to a crescendo. Severus's eyes, visible over Hermione's shoulder, are squeezed tightly shut, his mouth open as his head arches back. I don't think I can hold on any longer; I can't remember the last time sex was this intense. I come; it's blinding; it takes me over and I nearly collapse.

I roll to the side, leaving enough room for Hermione, who follows after a long, languid kiss with Severus, and I take Severus's hand and squeeze it. We share a look; he smiles, appearing the most content I've ever seen him. Then she kisses me deeply, too.

It's so much better than the fantasy.

~***~

An overnight stay soon became regular weekend-long stays. We enlarged the bathtub with magic, and our after-dinner and post-shag conversations and bottles of wine moved there. Hermione and I attend functions together; we'll eventually convince Severus to come along.

I'm not sure who brought it up first, but it seemed only natural to discuss living together after nearly a year of that routine had passed. We started looking for a house, deciding that between Severus and Hermione working, a larger place would be affordable. We found one on the outskirts of Hogsmeade. At some point, Severus stopped being self-conscious about using his cane in front of her.

I can't say it's all been perfection and bliss. There was the time Severus awakened to find Hermione and me on the couch together, just as we were finishing. He was angry and sullen for weeks afterwards, thinking we had been in there because we didn't want him involved. Hermione had ingeniously set up a moment between the two of them, and I'd walked in when they were well into it and asked if they'd like company or would prefer to be alone. Later, I told him that it wasn't as if Hermione got upset about the two of us...We'd been seeing each other for five years before she came along, and it wasn't as if we didn't shag plenty when she wasn't around, so there was no sense in them abstaining during the full moon when I couldn't be there. After that, he settled down about it, and we've enjoyed those times when it's just two of us, rather than three; whichever two of us that might be.

It comes down to trust. It's scary when you realise that a relationship break-up would mean losing two people you care about...love...deeply, not just one. Though, I'm not sure I'll ever tell Severus to his face that I love him; I'm not sure he would know what to do with that. Sometimes, I think the only reason we've come this far is that when he gets uncomfortable, he tells himself I'm just someone to fuck, just like it was when we began, those fast and furious, secretive and stolen moments that were more about conquest and tension-relief than caring. I understand his limits.

Once the initial excitement wore off, Severus quickly became annoyed with Hermione's habit of leaving her hair scrunchies and quills...well, everywhere. Hermione finally got frustrated with the inevitable consequence of living with two men and invented a charm to automatically lower the toilet seat. Severus and I were both surprised to discover she's hopeless in the kitchen, so we arrange the cooking. We're not sure how she got along before; must have been lots of take-out.

Hermione and I have also been at the receiving end of a number of odd looks and concerned friends trying to tell us this isn't right. Word got around. Minerva McGonagall, the only other person Severus ever saw as a mentor besides Albus Dumbledore, dropped in to see us, likely checking in after said concerned friends asked her to come by and talk some sense into us. After a lovely evening spent catching up, and probably drinking a bit too much cordial, she became a regular visitor in our home. I'm not sure what she said to people after that; it was enough that they stopped with the advice.

Hermione's parents, though quite baffled and understandably worried at first, eventually came to understand, too. I believe Hermione's mother asking if the three of us were planning on having a child one day, when we were visiting last month, was sign of their acceptance. I don't think any of us knew how to answer that one, but perhaps it's something to consider for the future.

It's been six years this summer that the three of us have been together. Six years in which we've come to know each other's faults and strengths, but we also have the years before that we built on. I can't imagine living any other way, returning to the loneliness of those years after James and Lily died. Severus is much more relaxed now, too, and Hermione well, I know she could have had anything...anyone...she wanted. Severus and I count ourselves lucky that she chose us. I see in his eyes hope now, hope that has grown steadily over these years; a budding happiness he never had before. I feel it, too. We had those years between the two of us with Hermione as our shared fantasy...

The reality we live in is so much more than fantasy ever was.