

Where Your Loyalties Lie

by Southern_Witch_69

As the Dark Lord's most faithful servant, Snape has permission to claim Hermione Granger as his partner. Can his cunning save his arse yet again when the unthinkable occurs, leaving Voldemort dead and the Death Eaters caught?

Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 2

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This story was entered in the Sycophant Hex: Spring Faire Festival under the General Story: Severus Snape: A True Death Eater?

The criteria is below:

Summary: Write a story that assumes that Severus Snape is truly evil and has never given up working for Voldemort. The requirements for this entry are:

Rules:

1. The story must be from Snape's point of view showing his inner psychology and reasoning.
2. Develop a storyline that illustrates how Snape has never left Voldemort's service.
3. Include at least one original action that hints at Snape's true motive, but that can be interpreted by others in more than one way. (One classic example from canon is Snape threatening Quirrell while invisible Harry observes.)
4. Show a canon character assigning Snape a good or benign motive; show Snape gloating in private afterwards.
5. Include at least one reference to any canon incident showing Snape as a relatively good guy; have Snape recall the incident from his perspective, then describe his true, evil feelings and "real" motivation.
6. Show Snape's true thoughts on at least two major canon characters, and explain why he feels as he does about them.
7. Include the words "sycophant" and "hex" at least once within the challenge entry.
8. Show at least one incident of Snape carefully deceiving his romantic partner to maintain his cover (either Hermione in Ashwinder, or another canon character or the author's OFC in Occlumency).
9. Mention at least one hope or desire (again, from Snape's perspective) that he directly hopes to accomplish by making the choice for evil.
10. Show how Snape precisely hopes to get away with it all (i.e. what exactly are his plans?)

Notes:

1. Whether or not Snape gets away with it is up to the authors' discretion.
2. How his partner feels about his actions, if he does get exposed either through Voldemort winning, or being discovered by the Light, is up to the author.
3. All standard SH rules and posting guidelines apply.

Where Your Loyalties Lie is an Honorable Mention by the Wizengamot.

Disclaimer I've borrowed characters and situations from J.K. Rowling's creation and have manipulated them to fit into my plot.

Severus could see her mouth moving and knew that she was speaking, but he couldn't really say what she was talking about, as he'd begun to ignore her words. He had more pleasant things to think of. For one, he'd just become a married man. No, he wasn't some sentimental fool that believed in such rubbish as love and happily ever after. Marriage had an entirely different meaning for him. It meant that his wife would finally be allowed to sleep in his chambers each night, and he could have his way with her at any time he so desired. No one, even the prudish headmistress, could claim that it would be inappropriate to have her there where the students could see.

"Are you listening?" Minerva asked, moving her hand in front of his eyes.

"I apologize. My mind seems to be wandering."

The witch smiled knowingly. "Thinking about your weekend alone with your wife, eh?" He smirked in reply, not wanting to continue her line of conversation. Nonetheless, she continued in a conspiratorial tone by saying, "I can see how much you love her. It's only natural to *finally* want to show her, what with all this time you've waited."

Severus looked at her in disbelief for a moment. Did she honestly believe that he'd never had Hermione before? He chuckled as if in acquiescence, but he was truly laughing at her. *Ah, Minerva! Ever the prude and apparently, a closet dunderhead. I've had my talons into your precious Hermione since she took her N.E.W.T.s.* He thought arrogantly. Did the woman truly believe that he and Hermione had never lain together simply because she was proffered special chambers in another section of the castle near Minerva when she'd come to the castle for a stay over? Perhaps some of Albus' pretended feeble-mindedness had rubbed off on her when he was still alive.

Maybe it was an acquired talent of all Hogwarts Headmasters and Headmistresses. He'd always respected Minerva, even when she'd taught him, but since she'd taken over for Albus, she seemed to annoy him more with each passing week. He knew the true reason that she'd begun to irk him. She was now more thoroughly entrenched in the Order and with protecting Hogwarts since Albus died. That meant she was even more of an enemy to him and his cause. Pity. He'd enjoyed their many chats and even the bantering. He'd not let her stand in the way, however, if she chose to not move aside when the time came.

"I am just proud of you, Severus. You two truly are a well-suited couple. Should you need anything, you've only to ask," she said, squeezing his arm affectionately.

"I thank you, Minerva. If you'll pardon me...?" He needed to get away from the kindness in her voice and the joy in her eyes. It was not that he felt guilty. Honestly, it wasn't. He was simply not in the mood for listening to gibberish.

"Of course. Congratulations again."

He nodded and made his way towards the bar to get another drink. After he'd taken the needed swigs, he scanned the crowd and found Hermione. She was still chattering away with Potter. *I wonder how proud Minerva would be if she knew my true intentions?* In truth, he didn't love Hermione, and it was unlikely that he ever would. Love was for those pathetic henpecked fools like Arthur Weasley. There were a few other things that were more important to a joining. Sex, of course, was one of them, and compatibility was another. What he felt towards Hermione was along the lines of possessiveness. Whilst he did hold a certain *affection* for her, he would not allow her to influence him in any way. He'd chosen her to be his companion with the approval of his Master.

The Dark Lord had asked Severus if he would like anything as a reward for his services as his most faithful servant, and he'd thought about it over a long period. After much deliberation, he'd admitted that he wanted Potter's Mudblood friend as his partner after they'd claimed a final victory against the Order. Though the memory was well over two years old, he remembered it as if it had recently occurred.

"Severusss, have you given more thought as to what you would like as a reward. You have gained Lord Voldemort's respect, faithful servant," his Master hissed.

"Potter's Mudblood friend, I want her," he said in a clipped tone.

Before the Dark Lord could comment, Lucius interrupted in an incredulous voice, "What? Another Mudblood? You can choose any woman you want! Why do you degrade yourself by choosing those women?"

"You may answer, Severusss," the Dark Lord hissed when he looked at him in askance.

"Our Master wants us to have children worthy of training for service. I've taught her and worked with her. I know what she is capable of. Her cleverness mixed with my blood, my heritage, my power, and my intelligence would be invaluable to our Lord," he said brusquely. "I've seen what there is to choose from, Lucius, and I tend to want excitement in the bedroom, not some droll, eager to please witch bred to passively follow her husband's orders. In other words, boring sex! Having had her already, I know that will never be the case, not in my bedchambers."

"You dare say that you'll treat her as an equal?" Lucius questioned in disbelief. "She's not worthy of your station! Good Lord! Is there nothing else you want, man?"

"That'll do, Lucius. I see Severusss' point, and I concur with him. She shall not be touched and shall be saved for Severusss." The Dark Lord's ruby-slitted eyes glinted menacingly. "Unlike you, he rarely asks for anything. In fact, the only other reward he requested did not work out."

"Master, I apologize. It's the second time he has chosen someone beneath him."

"Lucius?" his Master asked, voice cold as ever.

"Yes, my Lord?" he asked, bowing his head slightly.

"Crucio!" He cackled wickedly as Lucius dropped and writhed with agony under his curse. "Lord Voldemort is displeased. Never speak or think that you are better than other wizards simply because you consider yourself to have an untainted bloodline. I am the most powerful wizard alive!"

A hand clapping his shoulder pulled Severus from his memory. "Lupin," he said evenly.

"Severus," he said with a nod. "I just wanted to say that you've made Hermione a happy woman. I thank you for that."

"How typical of you, Lupin. Whilst I should appreciate your sentiment, I shall have to point out that your gratitude is not necessary." He curled his lip slightly before saying, "Hermione will always be *cared* for." He made sure that his voice took on a suggestive lilt.

"Whether you want my gratitude or not, Severus, you have it."

He looked at the haggard man before him, scrutinizing his appearance. Lupin was one of the wizards on constant guard for Potter. Apparently, the brat had bought his pet werewolf a few new sets of robes. No matter. The loss of his shabby robes didn't change anything. He was still gaunt and held a tired look about him. The only worthwhile thing that the man had ever done in his life had been killing Pettigrew. Severus had never liked that self-serving little bastard. When they'd raided Grimmauld Place a few months before, Pettigrew had taken on Lupin, thinking his silver hand would easily kill him. The berk never even had the chance to raise it against his foe. A deftly placed and purposely created curse had justly taken him out the moment he'd advanced. If he'd been informed correctly after, Lupin had created it and crafted it for no other purpose than to seek out Pettigrew. Afterwards, it had been decided that the curse should be known to all as the Sycophant Hex. The Dark Lord only mentioned once that he missed the tosser's eagerness to do even the most distasteful of tasks. Other than that, the loss of the rat's life had gone unnoticed.

Lupin's eyes moved to watch Hermione as she talked to Harry, and Severus wondered, not for the first time, if the man had some romantic inclinations towards her. The wistful smile playing upon the man's lips said it all, and Snape couldn't resist goading him.

"It's been nearly three years since she graduated. I am most fortunate that she chose to spend more than the last two getting to know me. I must say that when I saw her again for the first time, she'd changed so much that I knew that I wanted her. She was no longer the pesky little student that I had remembered." He raised an eyebrow. "It didn't take much to get close to her, and look at us now. We are married." He clapped the man on his shoulder. "I can only hope that you find someone as I have."

He smirked as Lupin lost his smile and scowled slightly. "Good evening."

"Yes, it is," Severus agreed, watching the man shove off to mingle with the crowd. *How dare he covet what's mine?* It seemed that this was the second time that Lupin had been fascinated with a woman that a Potter held dear. Lupin used to look upon Lily the same way, but he'd never had the bollocks to voice his feelings. He'd always been a weak fool, cowering around his friends and not standing up for what was right. In the end, Lily had never known that her friend had wanted her. *Potters!* The bastards! Both generations he'd been in contact with could only be described as arrogant, egotistical arses.

This time a Potter wouldn't get his witch. He'd done all the right things and made all the right moves. When the Dark Lord had found out where the brat was located back in the year 1981, he'd promised Severus a reward for learning and being responsible for the Fidelius Charm that had been placed upon the Potters. Severus' request had been for Lily to be spared and given to him. He'd known that she could eventually be manipulated and made to follow his ways. Part of him had wanted her as a trophy of sorts, a reminder that he'd gotten what Potter had held dear. In the end, she'd refused to allow his Master to kill her child. The Dark Lord had told her to stand aside more than once, but she'd refused. He'd had no choice. He'd killed her, and by doing so, he'd sealed his and Harry Potter's fates.

It had been a dark time, and he'd never been more relieved at having been situated as a spy in Dumbledore's camp. The old man had vouched for him until the end, never knowing that Severus truly wasn't the man he'd believed him to be. He'd gone to Dumbledore under the pretenses of seeking redemption. He'd claimed that the Dark Lord had forced him to witness the murder of the only woman he'd ever loved. He'd claimed to want vengeance in the form of justice. Neither was true. He'd worked for weeks setting up false memories and scenarios to project when Dumbledore delved into his mind.

There was, of course, the Veritaserum that he'd secretly been given, but being a superb Occlumens, he'd been able to answer all of the man's questions with ease. He'd been expecting it, and he'd prepared accordingly. The Dark Lord had given him permission to tell Dumbledore that *someone* close to the Potters was giving him information on Order business. He never did divulge a name though. This alone had prompted Dumbledore's request that they use a Fidelius Charm to protect themselves. His Master had used the information to his advantage.

Severus ordered another drink whilst pondering recent events and the current pesky Potter. The Dark Lord had finally decided to move against Potter and the Order at their headquarters when they'd least expected it. However, the boy had gotten away again, and he owed his luck to Dumbledore, who happened to be present. He'd somehow sensed that something would go awry and had spent the night there. There hadn't been many there...Moody, Lupin, a couple of Weasleys, Tonks, Dumbledore, and Potter.

Hermione had been dosed with a Sleeping Draught at his home. Severus wanted to make sure that she wouldn't be near the skirmish. The Dark Lord had advised him to dose her, slip away to give them access to headquarters, and slip back. He'd planned to awaken the next morning and pretend to be horrified that her friends had been lost in a surprise attack. An attack that he'd not been informed about. He was then going to tell her that she had to go along with his *pretending* to support the Dark Lord to keep their lives until they could find another way out. Slowly but surely, they'd have simply *accepted* the way of things. The plan would have worked had Dumbledore not been there. Potter and the others escaped whilst Dumbledore fell in his stead.

Everyone, even the Dark Lord, had been gobsmacked that the man had gone down so easily. Nonetheless, it was reason for his Master to rejoice. The one and only person that he'd ever been believed to fear had died. Nobody had been sure who'd cast the curse, but they'd all seen the green jet of light hit him squarely in the back. It seemed as though he'd fallen in slow motion, a look of surprise and peace upon his face. Severus had knelt next to him immediately and shook him. Though the man was his enemy, he'd still felt...something at his loss. Perhaps it had been some misdirected devotion that lingered momentarily. Instead of looking upon this as a betrayal, his Master had simply patted his shoulder, saying, "Come, Severus. Death frees all bindings."

Things had been looking better for his Master and his fellow Death Eaters since that fateful night. With Dumbledore out of the way, it was only a matter of time before they'd be able to locate Potter. What they hadn't planned on was Moody spicing him away to some secluded location with an unknown Secret-Keeper. For the last few months, they'd tried to find him or his Secret-Keeper relentlessly. Hermione had been uncertain if the boy would even attend their binding ceremony. He'd come though, and he'd spent most of the time talking to Hermione with his guard hovering about them closely.

The plan to have Hermione had coincided with another plan to gain Potter's trust through a show of false friendship. It was hard not to continually snap at the insufferable brat when he conversed with him, but he'd been managing to *play* nicely. He decided it was time to get a little information. As he neared the pair, he noticed that Moody and Tonks edged closer. Paying no further attention them, he nodded to the boy. "Potter." Then, he looked at his lovely bride. "Hermione," he said silkily, lowering his head to kiss her chastely upon the lips. "I'd say it's nearly time for us to leave."

"You're right. It's been a long day. I'll go to the loo for a moment."

"I'll be right here," he said, brushing her hair away from her face in what he meant to be construed as adoring affection to her and any watching. Once she'd disappeared, he turned to face her friend. "Well, I am surprised that *they*," he nodded to the others, "allowed you to come out tonight."

"There was no choice. I wouldn't miss Hermione's binding," Potter said cautiously. "Sir, if I might speak openly?"

"It's never stopped you before," he replied dryly.

"Right then," the boy said, seemingly nervous. "We've never truly gotten on well, and I hated the fact that Hermione would have anything to do with you when I first found out. Over the past couple of years, I've watched the two of you together, and I admit that she's never been this happy with anyone, not even Ron."

Severus nodded. *Haven't gotten on well? I hate you, Potter. I hate you more than I hated your father. Your mother chose to save your life instead of hers. I could have had her. The Dark Lord could have defeated you long ago and saved us a lot of trouble.* "It's good of you to note that my attentions towards Hermione have always been respectable." *Depending upon how you look at it, of course.*

"Well, in a couple of weeks, while we still have time off from Auror training, I would like to visit. Maybe Ron could be included as well. What with training and the problems of late, the three of us have yet to spend a personal day together in over a year."

"Perhaps," he said noncommittally, tone bland. Inwardly, he was ecstatic! His Master would be overjoyed to know that their patience was finally paying off. "Where has Weasley gone to anyway?"

"He had to leave. His date had a bit much to drink," Potter said. He went on to talk about the Concealment and Disguise training he'd been receiving privately from Moody, Shackbolt, Tonks, and a few others. Every now and then, Mad-Eye would clear his throat and try to look over Severus as if searching for something incriminating. He often wondered if the old arse liked being able to see everyone's nakedness. He hated the bastard, and he inwardly supposed that part of him feared that the jerk could see things that others couldn't, such as a direct look into your soul. Something that Occlumency couldn't block. Severus gave Potter his utmost attention, knowing that anything said could have some meaning for his Lord.

It was likely that he could delve into the boy's mind at the moment and not find much of anything blocked away. There were too many witnesses, however, and he'd never be able to explain himself. Back in Potter's fifth year, it had been a blessing to be allowed the chance to teach him Occlumency. He'd loathed spending the extra time with the brat, but each meeting had proved a success. He'd been able to weaken his mind enough so that the Dark Lord could invade it whilst he slept. He'd projected all things perfectly after Severus had informed him about Potter witnessing Arthur Weasley's attack.

All he had to do was goad and bully the boy a bit, and the little bastard would become angry and defiant. The only reason he didn't try harder to learn Occlumency was because it had been Severus instructing him to do so. Their plans had gone accordingly when the boy received precisely enough information to be lured off of the grounds of Hogwarts, even with that hideous Umbridge trying to rule over the school. *Probation! That bitch! She'd gotten what she deserved.* In fact, it had been the way that Hermione had dealt with Umbridge that had caught his attention. Someone as calculating and as devious as that could be an asset. His Lord had been tickled when he'd later told him what she'd done. He hadn't liked Umbridge much either, what with her sending those Dementors after Potter and nearly thwarting his plans later in the year. If anyone killed Potter, it would need to be the Dark Lord.

They had secretly hoped that once the nosy little pest had witnessed the Pensieve scene, purposely selected, he'd sympathize with the way his father and his gang had treated Severus. It had been working until Bella had killed Black. After that, Potter had blamed him for awhile. Through Hermione, though, they'd been able to build back some of that.

"Ready," Hermione said. "I suppose we should make our rounds to say that we are leaving."

"They'll notice," Severus purred. "I'd really like to get home soon." He pulled her to his side. "Potter, you won't mind bidding our farewells, will you?"

"Of course not. Congratulations again, you two."

"Night," Hermione said, waving to the few people around them. Severus pulled her closer to him and easily Disapparated.

They'd decided to spend the weekend at their home, waiting for a more opportune moment to have their lovers' holiday. He'd promised to help Poppy in brewing some of her supplies. So, he and Hermione would spend the coming Monday at Hogwarts. The matron had to take off time to tend to an ill family member and wouldn't be able to do some of her summer brews. Severus didn't mind that she'd asked. It gave him a chance to appear concerned for a fellow colleague and her family. What *concerned* coworker wouldn't want to help in some way?

"Severus, you've been lost in thought all evening. Are you regretting this?" Hermione asked softly.

He shook his head slowly. "I do not. I am simply in wonderment how things seem to be progressing for the best." Yes, soon they would have Potter's exact location. The brat wouldn't know what hit him.

She crooked her finger at him and started backing towards their bedchambers, removing clothing as she went. "I know a few things that will fill you with wonder."

"Is that so?"

"It is," she said seductively, reaching up to unfasten her locks from atop her head.

"You truly do look lovely tonight," he said honestly.

"As do you," she replied.

He closed in on her and kissed her lips forcefully. She moaned immediately and pressed her body against his. "Off," he murmured, pulling away her bra. For a brief moment, Severus pulled away to admire her figure. Though her breasts were not as large as he normally liked, the light rosy color of her nipples always beckoned him. Her soft abdomen led down to her womanly hips and plump thighs. Attired in only her gartered silky stockings, he knew that there was nothing keeping him from his treasure. She wore no knickers. Eagerly, he tore away his robes, revealing his thin frame clad only in underpants. "Mine," he said possessively.

"Legally," she said with a slight giggle, opening her arms to him. He picked her up and brought her to the bed as quickly as possible. "How long has it been?" she said between whimpers as his tongue found her breasts.

"Two days," he said, voice muffled by her flesh.

"Too long." She arched against him and pulled his head up. Their lips crashed roughly as they kissed with abandon.

He slid one finger into her body to be sure that she was ready, and as always, her wet heat was ready to welcome him. Positioning himself over her quickly, he slid in, intently watching her eyes as they widened slightly, as was normal. He enjoyed seeing the raw passion mingled with awe and acceptance in them. Severus teased her with a few slow strokes, causing her to cry out in frustration and buck wildly beneath him.

"My, we are eager, aren't we?" he said casually, inching out of her.

Some sort of growl was his answer, but he didn't hear the rest of it, as he flipped her over. The pillow muffled whatever sounds she was making. He positioned himself once more and used his hand to guide himself into her after two fumbled attempts to slide in with his hardness alone. It was hard to see where he was placing himself in this position, but once in, his hands gripped her waist tightly to help steady his strokes. She rested on her arms, head down, nails digging into the headboard. He smirked as he began pounding into her. She always left tiny scratch marks embedded into the wood. They never restored it either, wanting the scratches there as a reminder of how fulfilling sex was for them.

His heavy breathing, increasing with each stroke, mixed with the sounds of his flesh solidly hitting against hers as he repeatedly thrust into her. Her very vocal moans turned him on to no end. "Say it," he growled. "Tell me."

"You're the best," she screeched. "Nobody compares to you." He saw one of her hands glide down beneath her body and knew she was ready for release. He concentrated on her lusty throes of pleasure, succumbing to her will to withstand him and her internal clenching of muscles.

As if something had squeezed him by the bollocks, his semen spurted forth and filled her. With each fervent slam into her nonresistant body, he grunted with pleasure. It was only after her shaky legs had collapsed, taking him with her and causing his flaccidness to slip out of her, that he realized his culmination had come and gone. It had always been that way with her...mind-blowing. As per their normal routine, he moved to her side and rested, pulling her against him.

"I love you," she whispered.

"And, I," he said. She pulled the hand at her waist to her mouth for a kiss. It was always his reply. It could be taken in many different ways. For his part, it was the truth, and he was simply agreeing with her statement. He did love himself. How could he not? He'd been trained from an early age to always look after himself and go after what he wanted. If a couple of words kept her content, so be it. He kissed her shoulder in show of affection. It wasn't long before her arse was pushing back against his groin, causing him to slowly harden. He flipped over onto his back and allowed her to have her way with him. It was her turn to do the extra work.

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"I can't believe we're married," she said happily.

He opened one eye and grumbled, "Go to sleep, wanton." Her hand had slid down to grope his waking erection.

"Why? Too much excitement last night?"

That got his attention. "Dare you say that I am incapable of going again?"

"Well, we did have sex three times."

"It's the middle of the afternoon! I've certainly rested since our two couplings last night and the one this morning. I simply have a need for a couple of other things at the moment."

"Such as?"

"The loo," he said, pulling away from her and getting out of bed. "Food wouldn't be amiss either."

"While you were sleeping, I had a shower. Why don't you take one and meet me in the kitchen? I'll fix something for you," she offered.

"Very well."

After relieving himself and showering, he dressed and made his way to her. She was reading the *Daily Prophet*. "You look refreshed."

"I feel it," he said, taking the offered cup of coffee. "What are you smirking at?"

"I just can't believe that I'm a wife!" She grinned cheekily. "How does it feel to be a husband?"

He thought for a moment, wanting to give her a satisfactory yet honest reply. "Well, to be honest, I suppose it's a novel feeling, but on the whole, I don't feel any differently about you today than I did on yesterday morning. I've seen you in the same way since we've become close. I knew that this would be our goal."

Pleased, she smiled. "I see what you mean. The idea of being married is new, but a simple binding doesn't change or deepen one's feelings." She placed a stack of toast before him. "I figured something light would do for a start. Eat that, and when you are ready, I'll get the rest."

She'd been complaining that he was getting too thin and would always try to force food upon him. Lately, he'd lost even more weight, but he knew it was due to the extra time he was putting forth for his Lord. After things settled, he'd worry about such trivial matters. He decided to broach the subject of Potter. "Your pesky friend would like for us to visit with him and that horrid Weasley at some point soon."

"Yes, he mentioned that to me. Do you think you could stand being around them for an evening?" she asked, suddenly serious, all traces of amusement gone from her expression. He had the feeling that his answer would have an important impact on things.

"I would loathe to face the blighters alone, but for you and with you, I would endure some time with them. Why do you ask? Have you something planned?" he asked casually, pulling her discarded paper towards him.

Hermione took a deep breath. "I would like to have a small get together for Harry...here." She bit her lip slightly. "For his birthday, and I'd only invite a few of us, mind. It wouldn't be so bad."

Severus could have kissed her. Perfect! His Master would appreciate having Potter at such an easily accessible place at a particular time. He didn't want to appear too eager though. He sneered for a moment. "A *few* people?" She nodded. "Explain."

"Well, I guess Mad-Eye would have..."

"Absolutely not," he interjected immediately, tone falsely outraged. "I'll not have that arsehole here, casting his all-seeing eye all over the place."

"But, Severus, if he doesn't come, Harry can't come," she pleaded. "You know he appointed himself as Harry's personal watchdog since...Dumbledore died."

He pretended to think things through, scowling as he did so. "Who else?" He didn't mind if that blasted Moody came. If all went well, it would be the last thing the interfering bastard did.

"Some of the Aurors, the Weasleys, a couple of mates maybe," she said mysteriously.

"I shall only agree if I have final say on those coming," he relented with a dramatic sigh. He smirked as she beamed brightly. "And, the blasted gathering *withot* last long!"

"Not a problem," she said excitedly. "This gives us two weeks to plan everything. Thanks, Severus."

The rest of their late lunch was eaten in silence. When he finished, he rose and held out his hand for her. She took it immediately, allowing him to guide her back to their bedchambers for an intense session of sex. Whilst lazing about after, his prattling wife began talking.

"We've come such a long way. Haven't we?"

"Indeed." *Who would have thought that I would ever want to bed one of the Potter brat's friends?*

"I still can't believe that I actually thought you to be trying to jinx Harry's broom back in our first year. Ruddy Quirrell!" She smiled smugly. "Though if I hadn't set your robes on fire, he might not have been distracted." She leant over to kiss his cheek. "Thanks for trying to save Harry that day."

*I'd no idea what that wretched puling Quirrell was about. I was simply trying to ensure the brat lived long enough for my Lord to end his putrid existence once he had the stone.* He'd had to have many talks with Quirrell about his loyalties. Sometimes it seemed as though he was after the stone for other reasons. "Sometimes I wish I'd let him fall from his jinxed broom." That was the honest truth.

She laughed loudly for a moment, thinking it was a joke. "Did I ever tell you that it was Harry that threw that firework in Goyle's cauldron while I took the opportunity to sneak into your personal stores back in our second year?"

"No," he said darkly. "I'd suspected him and would have liked to have had him expelled. However, I hadn't the proof." Had he ever known that it was truly Potter, he'd have found a way to make the boy pay...and her for her part in it. As it was, he hadn't found out that it was she that had taken shredded skin of boomslang until much later. "I would say it served you right when you turned yourself partly into a cat." He chuckled at her outraged expression. She'd been a right pest back in her early days at Hogwarts. That particular year had been one of the few times he'd ever doubted if his loyalties were in the right place. With disgust, he remembered the exact moment. It had been when Potter had advanced on Draco's conjured snake, keeping it from attacking Finch-Fletchley. When he'd heard that Parseltongue, he'd been taken aback, and he'd taken to staring at Potter, not realizing he was doing so until the boy looked at him in askance.

Of course, he'd shrugged those thoughts away. Lucius' plan of bringing back the Dark Lord's younger form had already been set in motion. Parseltongue or not, he'd

believed that Potter wouldn't last when he'd finally meet the Dark Lord. Severus had been proved wrong many times. The little berk was luckier than the witch that found a Galleon every time she went out of her house.

"I thought you'd get Fudge to expel us for sure when the three of us disarmed you in third year," she said, looking guilty. "I regretted it instantly, you know. It's just that you'd gone mad. You were yelling at me, and then, you looked as if you were going to slam Harry about, what with the way you'd threatened him."

He nodded. "Yes, I believe I would have." His fingers twitched, aching to have his wand within them at that moment. Each time he thought of the blatant disrespect, he had to force himself to not hex her for it. Even though many years had passed, he still felt the impertinence full force. They'd cost him an Order of Merlin, albeit only a Second Class...even though Fudge had mentioned that he'd try for a First Class.

"I was so worried about you." She kissed his cheek. "I made sure they didn't forget you there. When I was checking on you, Remus came over and promised to take you to the castle, but he didn't want to revive you until we went back to the castle. I think he was afraid of what you'd do."

His chest puffed out slightly at that statement. "Never did have the bollocks to stand up to anyone, Lupin. He used to let his ~~friends~~ run about without ever reprimanding them for what they did. He was a prefect, you know," he commented.

"He was right," she said, shuddering slightly. "I've never seen you so angry as you were on that night. Then, you went off in front of Fudge. I thought he'd pee himself. I'll never forget those bulging, surprised eyes."

"I *knew* that you two had done *something* to let that bastard, Black, out of that tower, and that idiot, Fudge, was going on about having a soft spot for blasted Harry Potter. I could have hexed him!" Severus had nearly attacked Dumbledore himself, what with the way he was worried about Sirius. It had been little happenings such as those that greatly reinforced the rightness of following the Dark Lord. When he'd been sixteen, Black had tried to have him killed by sending him to where Lupin, as a werewolf, was located. Dumbledore hadn't expelled the bastard for it, barely punished him. He'd even allowed Lupin to remain in school.

The night that he'd bound Black and brought him up to the castle had been no different. He'd taken a few moments to listen to Black's story, and he'd bypassed Severus' word completely, helping him to escape. When Severus realized that the headmaster believed Black's tale, he'd taken a step towards him, truly wanting to attack him, but he'd refrained. When he thought of that night, among others, it didn't bother him as much that the old man had been killed due to his treachery. He should have left well enough alone and allowed the Dark Lord to do as he wanted.

"Fourth year was probably the time that I thought the worst of you," his wife admitted. "Slytherin seemed to always tease us, Harry and I. I know you don't like Harry much, but I hadn't realized until that moment that you truly didn't like me either." She moved to look into his eyes. "I thought maybe you were still angry for what had happened the year before."

"Perhaps," he said, not truly admitting to anything.

"The point taking and taunting over those ruddy articles weren't so bad. It was the way you treated me when Malfoy hit me with that blasted *Densuego* that was meant for Harry. It was the first time I'd cried in a long while."

What was she...? Right. Her teeth. *I'm glad it happened. Otherwise, she'd still look like a little rabbit.* "Yes, what a pity that you were upset about that, but it's in the past." He really hoped she didn't expect any other comforting. Hell, that had taken place nearly six years prior.

"I'm not slighting you," she whispered. "Not after all the other things you did."

"Oh?" he asked, partly curious.

"In our fifth year, you tried to help Harry learn Occlumency to protect himself, and you alerted the Order to come for us at the Ministry."

*Ha! Oh, do go on.*

"You carried me to see Poppy at the end of my sixth year after I'd fallen down that flight of stairs."

*Yes, I remember that. You'd been walking around in your nightgown. That was the first time my hands touched your flesh! Were you really sleepwalking?*

"Yes! How many times do I have to tell you that?" she asked, sounding annoyed. "I don't know why I was there. I just remember that odd dream about needing to walk to the kitchen."

"I didn't believe you, of course." *I found out later that Draco had put an Imperius curse upon you somehow, and he was trying to get you to the kitchen to dress you as a house-elf for all to see.*

"When I was upset that I hadn't enough time to prepare for my N.E.W.T.s after all the changes and skirmishes during our seventh year, you were there for me." She kissed his lips. "My dark guardian."

Severus smirked wickedly. "Dark indeed. That was when I kissed you the first time."

"I'd hoped that you would," she said, smiling at the memory. "The way you wiped my tears away and kissed my lips lightly." She sighed. "It was a pleasant surprise."

"Things nearly went awry." *I wanted to take you right there in that stairwell.*

"Oh! When Dumbledore came through right after that bit of snogging, I worried that he knew somehow. No matter. It was the start of something lovely."

"Was it?" he asked cheekily. "If I remember correctly, you all but fled the next day with your friends, graduating and hoping to never return."

"As I've told you before, I felt like I couldn't face you...not after...you know," she said quietly.

"Hermione, how many times do I have to tell you to not be ashamed of that? You were a welcome sight that evening when I opened my door."

"I know, but I hadn't planned on going there *for that*," she admitted. "I simply wanted to snog a bit." At this, she pulled his face to hers for a long, passionate kiss. "Then, nearly six months later when I had a break from my training, there was that attack at Hogsmeade. You carried me all the way back to the castle, and we made love for the first time. It was then that I knew I wanted to be with you. If six months hadn't erased the longing for you, nothing would."

Severus began kissing her again to keep from commenting. Little did she know, but that had not been the first time they'd been together sexually. Her last night as a student, the day he'd kissed her, she'd come down to see him. One thing had led to another, and he'd taken her virginity, shown her the way to womanhood. After they'd cleaned up a little, she'd begun to cry, regretting her brash decision and saying she'd not been thinking clearly by giving herself away to someone that didn't love her. So, he'd done what any respectable man would have done. He gave it back to her. He'd lifted his wand and cast an *Obliviate* on her to erase the act itself. The memory came to him then as he thought of her wide, surprised eyes when his wand lifted.

*"Hermione," he said silkily. He'd been sure to place two fingers inside of her, as he'd done before he'd actually entered her. "I think we'd better stop now, or I shan't be able to." If she felt uncomfortable from what had truly occurred, she'd chalk it up to the caressing and fondling of his fingers.*

Still dazed, she'd simply nodded and allowed him to kiss her. When he pulled away, she whispered, "Professor, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have come here like this. I do want this, but I'm not quite...ready." A mingle of shame and disappointment played across her face.

He pulled away from her completely, grabbed her clothes, and placed them in her hands. "Go to the bathroom and dress. I'll make some tea." He'd cleaned away the evidence of her loss from his rug and quickly made tea, adding a few choice ingredients to calm her and soothe any pain that she might have.

Chuckling, he released the memory. Things had worked out well. After the planned Hogsmeade scuffle, she'd been more than ready for him, and she'd never commented about the lack of virgin's blood or lack of initial pain when he entered her the next time. They'd been having it hot and heavy since, never looking back. He was quite satisfied that his Lord had allowed him to establish relations with her.

"What are you laughing at?"

"I was thinking of our first time together," he said honestly. "It was most satisfying." *For one of us at least.*

"Come here, husband," she commanded, pulling him over her.

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"But, we can always get it later, Severus," Hermione said in exasperation. "Poppy's potions won't take all day."

"No, just watch over these. It won't take long," he said, quickly becoming annoyed with her. He needed to meet with the Dark Lord to tell him all that he'd found out, but she'd been attached to his side since their binding. He'd been trying to convince her that he'd forgotten something at their home.

"Fine," she grumbled, looking at him suspiciously.

"Look," he said darkly. "If you must know, I've something to pick up for you in town. I wanted it to be a surprise. You've now ruined that. I shall have to ask you, Hermione, to not always question me about every single thing."

Her eyes softened. "Oh, I'm sorry! I've just been feeling needy lately. Go on! I can handle this. I'll just read something as they brew."

"Fair enough," Severus said, shaking his head. "I shan't be long." As quickly as he could, he made his way through the grounds of Hogwarts to the Apparition point near the path to Hogsmeade. He quickly Disapparated and reappeared instantly in front of an old building on Knockturn Alley. He entered and made his way to a small man sitting behind a desk.

The man glanced up at him, swallowed deeply, and frantically reached for a set of keys, extracting one. "Room ten," he said nervously, voice cracking.

Severus snatched the key away and plodded along the corridor to the room. He used the key, opened the door, and went inside. The Dark Lord had been paying Madame Edgecombe at the Ministry's Floo Network Office to secretly allot him unwatched usage of the Floo without anyone being the wiser. They had to change rooms each week for security purposes, not wanting any meddler to stumble upon a steadily open grate and make the connection. Besides, the Dark Lord moved about often enough.

He snatched a pinch of Floo powder from its pot and threw some into the grate, watching as emerald flames sprung to life. He knelt down and leant into the fire. "A place unknown," he said soundly. Ash began to whirl about his face, as the grate seemed to spin around him. Finally, he was looking into a posh study. "My Lord?" he called loudly.

"Here," a high, cold-pitched voice called. A moment later, his Master came into view. "Severusss, I thought you'd still be celebrating."

"I've news, my Lord, and I request to come through."

"Come," his Master bid.

Severus pulled back and immersed himself completely into the flames, stepping out into the study a moment later. He brushed the ash from his robes before kneeling again.

"Rise." A long, white hand extended down to help Severus rise. He took it, getting up quickly.

"I've good news," he said excitedly. "Finally, victory is at hand."

The calculating smile that his Lord flashed him made his spine tingle eerily. "I am pleased to hear it, Severusss. Have a seat, and tell me everything."

The pair sat as Severus recanted all that he'd been told at his wedding. He also mentioned Hermione's idea of a gathering for the dolt's birthday with minimal attendants. "It'll be simple enough, and being that we'll be in my home, we'll know that it's safe."

"So, this is where Potter's dumb luck will run out. Your *wife* is too trusting," he said with a sharp cackle. "Once you've taught her our ways and trained her, I shall accept her amongst us. You've chosen your mate well. Her connection to him will give us the chance we need to end this drawn out resistance."

"When the time is right, I will Stun her and keep her in my bedroom to keep her out of the fray. I wouldn't want someone to kill her accidentally, nor would I want her to damage anyone in our ranks."

"An understandable concern," he agreed.

"Potter is always flanked by Moody and a couple of others and a couple of others. I request permission to kill the paranoid bastard specifically."

"Granted, Severusss. Go back to your wife, make the necessary plans with her, and come back to tell me exactly when this will take place and those that will be present."

"Yes, my Lord," Severus agreed. "I thank you for allowing me to speak."

"Without that old Muggle-loving fool, Dumbledore, protecting him, I knew it would only be a matter of time before we had a chance to find out Potter's whereabouts," he hissed. "I admit to being disappointed when the Aurors hid him away from everyone...even from you, but I figured your witch would be the key to bringing him down. I was right."

Severus sneered. "The pompous brat dares to think that I would want to become *friendly*." Both men chuckled. "I shall leave you now."

He deftly made his way back through the grate and returned the key to the nervous man in the entryway. Once he was back in Diagon Alley, he made his way into the stationery store where he purchased a number of colorful parchments, multicolored inks, and a few fancy quills for Hermione. He also slipped into the jewelry shop to purchase a small pendent. He'd told her that he'd needed to go out to get something for her, so he figured he might as well make it nice. He'd gotten the extra things from the stationery store since she'd helped him to please his Master. Choosing her as his partner had been wise indeed.

Chapter Two

Chapter 2 of 2

Due to his role as the Dark Lord's most faithful servant, Severus Snape is given permission to claim Hermione Granger as his partner. Can his cunning save his arse yet again when the unthinkable occurs, leaving Voldemort dead and the Death Eaters caught?

Where Your Loyalties Lie is an Honorable Mention by the Wizengamot.

Disclaimer I've borrowed characters and situations from J.K. Rowling's creation and have manipulated them to fit into my plot.

Severus was lying next to her, propped on his elbow. He'd been watching her sleep for a few minutes. Potter's final birthday party would be taking place within the next few hours. How would she feel once she realized that he'd betrayed her? That nearly all that they'd shared had been a lie? Did she truly love him enough to go along with him quietly after her friends had been massacred, or would she continue to fight him until he had to kill her? Could he do it? He imagined gripping her neck tightly, watching the life leave her eyes. He shook the image away. He would not be able to do it if it ever came down to that. *I shall be sure it never comes to that by any means necessary. She will listen to reason and join us.*

She would see the power that the Dark Lord had. He would give them all places at his side and build a formidable following. They would enforce new laws amongst all, making the Wizarding world stronger. Those loyal to the oppressive Ministry's laws would be dealt with swiftly. The time of catering to Muggles would be over. Things would be better. All of the money that his father had once squandered away would be returned ten times over. His family home would be restored to him. Yes, Hermione would eventually be grateful that he'd spared her life and chosen her as his partner.

His hand reached out, and his fingers trailed along her jaw, rousing her from sleep. "Ugh! What time is it?" she asked grumpily.

"Early."

"How long have you been up?" She stretched and made her way to the loo.

"An hour," he called after her. A thought suddenly occurred to him. What if he was killed? What would become of her? It was highly unlikely, but there was always the risk. He supposed it would no longer matter if that happened. The Dark Lord would either keep her around or have her killed. He hoped it was the latter, as he knew some of the tactics the others used for amusement. They weren't pleasant. He heard the shower start and noted that it seemed to be calling to him. *I will have her.* The words *one last time* echoed after those thoughts, but he paid them no heed.

Severus glided to the shower, opened the door, and stepped in behind her. Hermione squealed lightly as his hands wrapped around her to pull her back against him. He nibbled on her neck momentarily before swinging her around to face him. Easily, he lifted her and lodged her against the wall with his body. Their lips locked whilst his hand reached down to awaken his lazy cock. The forceful spray of warm water had soaked his hair, which her hands had become entangled in.

"Open for me," he whispered into her ear. She maneuvered her legs slightly, opening further for him. He slammed into her with such force that they both cried out. Her legs wrapped around his waist, and her hands reached above her head to grasp a ledge in the stone wall. "You feel so good to me," he ground out between thrusts.

She eagerly moved against and with him, panting and mumbling incoherently as she did so. Her body arched so that her jiggling breasts were near his mouth. He pulled her closer, taking one into his mouth as he did so, inducing a delightful cry from her. After he suckled her breast and trailed his lips above to nibble upon her neck greedily, one of her hands had come down to rake its nails across his back. He growled deeply and continued to pound into her, allowing her to grind against him so that his pelvic bone stimulated her.

"Severusss," she hissed, sounding like a protégé of the Dark Lord. "Don't stop." Howls of pleasure erupted from her lips as she quaked around him. When her tremors subsided, she diligently continued to move with him to bring him to meet his culmination.

"Hermione," he roared triumphantly, erratically sliding in and out of her torrid body until he was completely spent. He remained inside of her even as his legs began to shake from overexertion and the added weight of her body. He slid down, taking her with him. "Hermione..." He was unsure of what to say. *By the way, I'm going to kill most of your friends today.* Nothing he could say or do would prepare her or cause her to accept it.

"I know," she murmured, misunderstanding him. "I feel it as well. I love you, too." He simply placed a small kiss on her brow and held her tightly. There was nothing he could say. He simply allowed her to believe as she would.

The next few hours were abuzz with excitement as she went about readying their home for the guests. When they started arriving in droves, Severus could feel his gut clenching. There were more arriving than he'd given her leave to invite...mostly Aurors and Order members. *Fuck!* He found the house-elf that he'd instructed to greet and accept invitations at the door.

"Dilly! Why are you allowing these people in without their invitations?" he demanded.

"Master, I is taking them all, I is," the elf said obediently, handing him a stack of invitations. All were written by Hermione's hand.

"We shall see about this," he grouched, striding away with the invitations. He found her conversing with Potter in their living area. "A word," he said darkly, not acknowledging her friend.

"Sure," she said, following him into their study. "What's wrong? Has the food not been prepared?"

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked, waving the thick stack of invitations in front of her.

"Sorry?" she asked, seemingly confused.

"You've invited more people than we agreed upon!" he said, tone dangerously quiet.

"Severus, I didn't invite some of these people. I swear it!" She snatched the invitations away from him and read through some. Her shocked face tilted up to meet his. "It looks like my handwriting, but I guarantee that I only wrote out the ones that you approved. What trickery is this?"

He could see the truth in her eyes. Someone else had invited the others and was able to forge her writing perfectly. "What fool would want to invite more people than the hosts have allowed?"

At that moment, there was a loud bang, and laughter could be heard. Above all the voices, the shrill taunting of one of the dreadful Weasley twins could be heard. "What's wrong, Ickle Ronniekins? Scared of a little noise, eh? Some Auror you'll make!"

"Shove off, Fred," Weasley shouted.

Severus' eyes met Hermione's. "I imagine that the two Weasley pranksters are the culprits. They shall pay for this," he said darkly, drawing his wand.

"No," she pleaded. "Don't make a scene, or things will be ruined."

"I'm afraid that they are ruined anyway," he said. He leveled his wand at her. He saw the look of surprise light her eyes just before he said *Stupefy!* He caught her before she tumbled backwards and placed her on the settee. He had to warn his Master. He quickly Disapparated to the back of his property where he knew the Dark Lord and the others were located. He knelt quickly and rose without permission. "Master, there is a problem!"

The slitted eyes narrowed even more. "What is it, Severuss?"

"Those Weasley bastards duplicated Hermione's invitations and have invited nearly twenty-five more people than should have been. What is your will?"

"This ends today," his Master said, in his high-pitched voice. "Everyone ready yourselves to Apparate in two groups."

"Potter is in the living area, as are most of the others," he informed.

"Very well. Go ready yourself," his Master said approvingly. "Group one will come with me into Severuss' living area. Group two will Apparate into his entrance hall."

Severus nodded and Disapparated back to his study. "Shit," he exclaimed. Hermione was gone. In a panic, he ran into the hall. He saw her talking to Ronald Weasley a few steps away. The boy's hands were digging into her shoulders as he shook her.

"Mione? Are you all right?"

"Get your hands off of my wife," Severus commanded, pointing his wand at him. "Always meddling where you shouldn't, eh, Weasley?" He reached out to pull the dazed Hermione towards him.

"Someone Stunned her, Snape! Found her in the study, I did! Bloody hell! Where were you?" A succession of loud cracks and pops drew their attention to the entrance hall. Weasley sprinted towards the living area screaming out warnings to the others. It seemed that people were running about wildly in a matter of seconds.

Severus quickly pulled Hermione back towards the study. "Stay in here," he yelled, shoved her in, and closed the door quickly. He had to get to his Master's side. Just as he lifted his wand to magically lock the door, a gruff voice behind him got his attention.

"Come on, Snape." It was Moody. "Time to take positions. They are a little earlier than we expected."

What the fuck is he talking about? He truly has gone mad. "If you'll excuse me, I have to help my Master." He allowed all of the loathing that he felt for the man to flow through him. "*Avada Kedavra!*" he yelled loudly. Only a surprised look graced the grizzled face as the green jet of light slammed into his chest. Severus smirked as his body fell with a loud thump.

It was at that moment that he realized the house was trembling with the force of spells and hexes being thrown about. It was as if the Order and the Aurors had been ready. That's what Moody had meant! Was there another spy? Who the hell could have known? The Dark Lord had told nobody, save Lucius. Had he turned spy? Did he blab to his son? Was Draco a spy? Severus didn't know whom to trust! He crept forward uneasily. There were shouts all around...in front, above, behind, and below. Both sides of supporters were running about. "What the hell is going on?" he asked aloud.

There was a loud scream behind him. He swirled around and saw a Death Eater clutching Hermione to him. It had to be the traitor. "Unhand her!"

"You've sabotaged us, Snape! The Dark Lord will kill you as soon as he kills Potter!"

"Lucius! You traitor! When did you tell Potter? Our Lord will have your head!" Severus said, wand unwavering as it pointed at his foe.

"Liar! They were lying in wait for us as we got here! They knew we were coming. The moment we Apparated in, someone placed an Anti-Disapparation Jinx that wouldn't allow us to Disapparate." Hermione cried out as he pulled her hair more tightly. "Release your enchantment, Severus, or I will kill her now with you watching."

At that moment, Hermione pulled her wand from her pocket and pointed it at the man behind her. *Diffindo!* she shouted.

Lucius shrieked as a large cut sliced across his face and released Hermione. She tripped over Moody's body and fell to the floor with a yelp. Severus used this to his advantage. "*Avada Kedavra!*" As his one time friend fell, his eyes darted to Hermione. Her hurt eyes met his.

"What's going on, Severus?" she asked, tears welling up. "I don't know what to think. You were the one to Stun me. How did the Death Eaters know that Harry would be here? Why did you kill Mad-Eye?"

It dawned on him that she'd heard everything that had transpired. This did not bode well. He would not lose her now; he'd chosen her as a partner. Together, they would prosper under the Dark Lord's reign over the Wizarding world. "I've no time to explain this, Hermione. I must find my Master," he said, nodding to the door behind her. "Get in. When this is over, I will tell you everything. You can..."

Something equivalent to a gust of wind entered his body and passed through him completely before exiting. He fell to his knees, body shaking. In the same instant, a few things happened. She reached out for him in horror to try to cradle him against her, crying as she did so. His Dark Mark burned painfully. He realized that a hush had come over the entire house. His Master had been defeated. There was no other explanation. "NO!" The loud yelling used up nearly entirely what was left of his energy. "NO! IT CAN'T BE!"

"Stay still, love," she murmured, rocking with him. "Let him go."

All that he'd worked for was gone. *Lucius had said that he wasn't the traitor, and he'd even accused me of being one. If it wasn't him.* His eyes met his wife's. "What have you done, Hermione?" he asked quietly. She had done this. Nobody else could have known the things that he'd been doing. She didn't seem all that surprised that he was faithful to the Dark Lord.

"Severus...I love you." She shook him wildly, crying, "Do you not know that?" She sobbed openly, confusion and grief apparent.

A roar of cheers and applause rang out from all over the house and seemed to be getting closer to them. Sure enough, Boy Fucking Wonder and some of his followers were closing in on them. "You set us up!" a ruffled Potter yelled. "How else would they have known that we would be here?"

"He Stunned Hermione," Ron confirmed, nodding wildly. "Looks like he killed Moody and Lucius Malfoy as well." He snatched Severus' fallen wand from the floor. *Prior Incantato!* Sure enough, a ghostly writing appeared proving that the last spell cast had most definitely been the Killing Curse. "You'll rot for that, Snape! Old Mad-Eye

always said something wasn't right about you!"

Potter yelled, "I should have known you'd never change! You deserve to be dead or rounded up with the others to go to Azkaban!"

"That's enough, mate," Fred said, trying to pull Harry back.

"*Deletrius*," Hermione said, swishing her wand and erasing the image. "He was defending me," she proclaimed loudly, holding him all the more tightly. Her wand was trained on Ronald, who had taken another step closer.

Severus was too weak to move much since that magical surge had passed through him to release him from his subjugation to the Dark Lord. Although all was lost, he did feel one slight victory. *She* knew what he truly was and still chose to defend him. He would go to Azkaban or his death, whichever the bastards chose, knowing that he'd still won something in the end. He may have failed the Dark Lord, but had things ended differently, she would have remained loyal to him.

"Get away from him, Mione," Potter said, stepping closer.

Her wand pointed to Potter then. "Get back, Harry. I saw everything. Ron is right. I was Stunned. Lucius did it. Severus was looking for him when he found Ron and me. The others came in, and Ron fled. Moody showed up. Lucius killed him and tried to kill me. Severus wouldn't allow it." She sniffed loudly. "I'll not let you touch him."

Auror Tonks limped up. "Stop," she called. "She's right. Some of us knew." Both Severus and Hermione blinked in surprise and looked at her. She pointed behind her to the end of the corridor. "Who do you think was able to round them up and disarm the stragglers as easily as that?" A collection of gasps filled the air as none other than Albus Dumbledore and a heavily cloaked person strode towards them. Severus felt his heartbeat quicken. He was back from beyond the veil! He would know what had transpired.

"Headmaster?" Potter sputtered. "How...?"

"Albus! You're alive!" Minerva shrieked, bringing her hand up over her mouth. Severus was glad that her attention had been redirected elsewhere. Her gaze had made him all the more uncomfortable.

The old man held up his hand. "All will be explained shortly. I think we need to clear out Severus' home. The dead will have to be handled accordingly. The captured Death Eaters will need to be sent to the Ministry's holding cells where they can decide what to do with them until their trials. As for Severus," he looked down to where Severus was being held by Hermione, "he did bring them here."

"Aha! I knew it," Ronald said smugly.

"Hush, Ron," Lupin chided.

"But, we were informed," Dumbledore said. "Severus, Nymphadora, Alastor, Hermione, and I knew exactly what would transpire here today."

Severus heard Hermione's intake of breath. "What?" she whispered in disbelief to herself. His eyes drifted from her to the cloaked person standing directly behind Dumbledore until the headmaster spoke again.

"We could not tell most of you the truth about my life or anything else, only to be ready for what Tom thought to be a secret attack. It's why we saw to it to invite a great deal of you. No children. Just those adults willing to fight. I thank you all for accepting."

"But...you couldn't plan this without telling me," Potter said indignantly.

"We especially didn't want you to know, Harry. We needed everyone to act naturally, or any number of spies could have tipped off Voldemort. Severus wrote a letter to me and had Hermione bring it to me the night Grimmauld Place was attacked. It's why I showed up there that night. Alastor, Remus, and Nymphadora were instructed to hide you away, Harry." He looked around at everyone. "As I knew that Voldemort would never move in on Potter if he thought him to be too well guarded, I was forced to fake my own death. You know the rest. We've been working to ensure that there was no loss of life on our side. I am saddened to see that things haven't worked out for Alastor."

Severus could listen no longer. His eyes closed and weakness overtook him. The magical releasing of his oath to his Lord had left him drained and depleted of strength. Different things drifted through his mind as he succumbed to sleep. Hermione had been working with Dumbledore this entire time. They weren't going to turn him over to the Ministry. He had failed his Master. He had killed Lucius.

Hours later, Severus awoke in bed. Hermione was sitting next to him, holding his hand. "I was worried," she whispered.

"Where...?"

"The others?" she asked. He nodded. The words wouldn't come to him. "Dumbledore is below with someone. The other lot cleared off."

He could see the disappointment in her eyes, and he could hear it in her voice. There was nothing he could say to ease her pain. He had his own pain to deal with. He felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude that she'd defended him and somehow talked Dumbledore into doing so as well. "Why?"

"I've had feelings for you since the end of my seventh year. We were tipped off that something was going to happen in Hogsmeade. I wasn't there on free time. As an Auror in training, I was able to go with the others. When you helped me and brought me back to Hogwarts, it was one of the happiest days of my life. I knew then that I would never feel anything like that for anyone else." She swallowed and looked away. "It wasn't until after that when Moody started asking me things, trying to get information about you. I felt so dirty after talking to him, that ruddy eye roaming about. He never trusted you."

"So," Severus said quietly. "You've been spying on me." Disappointment flooded his senses. *So, this is how betrayal feels.*

"Not at first. You have to believe that," she said softly. "You make me happy. In fact, after I realized that you'd fallen in love with me, I never told him about anything. I did not even let him know you'd disappear after you thought me to be asleep some nights. I would never have bound myself to you if I hadn't meant it."

Those words halted his disappointment. She hadn't betrayed him or his actions to Moody. If so, the man wouldn't have grudgingly let his vigilant guard down long enough to be killed. Severus allowed her to believe that he loved her. If she knew otherwise, it would change everything. He simply nodded, believing all of her words. "How long have you known that the Dark Lord would be coming today?"

She shook her head. "I never knew. Dumbledore had me confused earlier, but it's all clear now." She moved to the nightstand and retrieved one of the new parchments he'd given her. She dabbed a quill into some ink. "Write a letter to Dumbledore and tell him about the surprise attack on Grimmauld Place."

"What?" he asked incredulously.

"Do it," she commanded.

He began scribbling, giving details of entry and even a time. "I don't understand," he said when he'd finished.

She dried the ink with her wand and pocketed the note quickly, pulling something else from beneath her robes as she did so. "Dumbledore gave this to me, you know." She surprised him by showing him a Time-Turner. "Severus, there is something I wanted to tell you this morning when you made love to me in the shower."

Uncertainly, he asked, "What is it?" He was still partially shocked that she hadn't turned against him.

"I'm six weeks pregnant." He sucked in a deep breath. "I've been waiting for the right moment to tell you. I found out last week. The Healer said I must have missed a dose." She wiped a couple of tears away. "Just in case something goes wrong, which I think it might, I just wanted you to know." She kissed his lips softly and pulled away.

"What are you talking about?" he demanded.

"I'm going to save our family, Severus."

"What do you mean? When will you return? Stop!" She simply shrugged, stood, tampered with her Time-Turner, and vanished. "Hermione!" *What the fuck is she doing? She tells me about my child, and then she leaves without guaranteeing she will return!* The opening of the door had him sitting up quickly.

In walked the cloaked person that had been with Dumbledore. "Who are you?" he demanded. Severus had never felt more apprehensive before in his life. Had something gone wrong? Was this an assassin? He looked around for his wand and didn't see it. *Damn!*

The hood was pulled back and revealed the tired yet smiling face of...Hermione. "I'm back," she scurried forward and fell into his arms. "I thought I would never leave," she mumbled softly against him.

"What the hell?" She looked different. There were dark circles under her eyes, her face looked rounded, and her hair was at least a couple of inches longer than it had been. "What's going on here?"

She stood up and began to take off her cloak. "Dumbledore has gone now. He's going to straighten everything up at the Ministry. We're finally free to live our lives, and our child will not be burdened with any rubbish." She pulled the cloak away completely to reveal some Muggle clothing that displayed a largely swollen stomach. She placed a hand over it and smiled. "Right active, this one." Against his better judgement, he reached out to place a hand and was surprised to find the flesh to be firmly solid. His child moved against his hand.

In a choked voice, he asked, "How are you...so far? You said you were six weeks?" He knew the answer as soon as he asked the question, but he didn't interrupt when she spoke.

"I've missed you these past few months," she said softly, moving to sit with him. "I have had to relive everything. Dumbledore and I have been in hiding together, making sure things went smoothly. The Hermione that just left was only six weeks along. I'm nearly seven months along." She moved to lie on her side next to him. "Hope you don't mind. I'm a bit tired. I just need to rest for a moment."

"All right," he relented solemnly.

"Severus, I can still talk," she said, grabbing his hand for a squeeze. "It was I that wrote the extra invitations for the others; it was I that shot that jet of green light to make it look like Dumbledore died. I placed the Anti-Disapparation Jinx on the house after the Death Eaters Apparated in. I've been doing a lot of things. I am also Harry's Secret-Keeper, have been all this time."

His face contorted angrily. "So you know."

"Yes."

"Why would you still want to be with me? How could you trust me? How did you talk Dumbledore into giving me a second chance?" What had she bargained with? There had to be a price and some reason for it all.

"I love you," she said adamantly. "Some people will do anything for love. Just as you ensured my safety if Voldemort would have won, I've only returned the favor by ensuring yours."

Severus couldn't speak. Was that why he'd fought to keep her safe? *Love?* Ridiculous! He didn't love her. They had great sex. They were compatible. He wanted to possess her and own her, but he did not love her. *However, I am no fool. I shall simply go along with it.* "I see."

"I trust you completely. Nobody knows you the way that I know you, Severus. Besides, where else have you to go?" she asked haughtily.

Why that little witch! Knows me better than anyone, does she? Ha! "Are you saying that you are blackmailing me?" he asked cautiously, eyes narrowed.

"Of course not. I'm just being silly." She kissed the hand she held. "Dumbledore doesn't know that you've been dishonest about your loyalties. He believes that you sent me that night as part of your contribution to win the war for the Order. I told him that you went to your summons with Voldemort and before you'd realized what they'd planned, you were outside of Grimmauld Place. Someone else had leaked the information, breaching headquarters. I told him that you had a plan that involved faking his death, knowing it would be the only way to flush out the Dark Lord again."

He took in everything she said and appreciated her calculating mind anew. "You always think of everything, don't you?"

"I try," she said modestly.

"Perhaps you should not have been a Gryffindor."

"You're right. I was almost put in Ravenclaw, but I wanted Gryffindor." She kissed his nose.

He smirked. "What of Moody? You could have warned him."

It was her turn to smirk. "Why?" she asked distastefully. "He would have figured things out. He was already suspicious. I don't think he would have stopped until it came out that you weren't exactly rooting for Harry."

There was one question that he needed to have answered. "Hermione, if things had worked out differently, would you have still supported me?" She looked away from him. He turned her face back to scan her eyes, needing to see if she'd be truthful. "Answer me honestly."

"I would have loved you and hated you."

"Fair enough," he agreed. "Would you have acquiesced to my decision?"

She looked down to the hand on her stomach. "Eventually."

Severus watched as she allowed herself to fall asleep and couldn't believe his good fortune. There would be no having to hide his true feelings any longer. She'd accepted him as he was, and apparently, she hadn't any plans to change him. If he had to fail, he couldn't think of any other way he would have wanted things to turn out. Dumbledore still trusted him. He still had his passionate lover. Perhaps the respectability and renown that he and his wife...as instrumental keys to defeating the Dark Lord...would share would be enough to make up for the shame and poverty that his father had brought upon the Snape name.

There would be time for more questions. He was eager to know exactly how the Dark Lord was defeated. How many had survived? How many had been killed? Would everyone accept things as Dumbledore put them? He smiled smugly, thinking that he'd definitely done well to realize that Hermione's shrewd thinking and cunning would

be an asset. He scoffed, remembering her words. "Gryffindor or Ravenclaw," he spat. "Slytherin if I've ever seen one."

The amused expression left his face as a stray thought passed through his mind. Had he simply exchanged one life of subjugation for another? His eyes narrowed. He'd have to put her in her place and soon. She'd be easy enough to manipulate. He would never allow things to change. They would continue to live as they had before all of this had taken place. All he had to do differently was pretend to be in *love* with her, which shouldn't be very trying. She already assumed as much.

At that moment, she yawned and opened her eyes. "I love you," she whispered.

This was his first test. "And, I...*love* you," he said darkly, unable to keep the scowl from his face or the disgust from his voice.

She simply giggled. "I think I'd rather you just say the usual. Watching you force yourself to speak words that you hold private takes away the meaning for me." She pulled his hand to her stomach. "Let's try again. I love you."

"And, I," he said honestly, smirking. Yes, things would work themselves out. He applauded himself for being a master manipulator. For as clever as she was, she'd misread him completely, hadn't she? As long as his charade kept her happy, life would be good. "I wonder," he murmured aloud before kissing her temple.

"Wonder what?"

"How does it feel to be within you whilst you are in such *arounded* state?"

"Care to find out?" she asked cheekily. "It's been so long."

"For whom? If I recall, I had you in the shower just this morning," he said, cocking an eyebrow at her.

"Oh, good grief. Come here."

He paused momentarily at her issued command. Perhaps this was one area in which he could make allowances and give her some control. One of the most appealing things about her was her spontaneity and wickedness in the bedroom. The only time she'd ever been reserved was their very first encounter, the one he'd Obliviated. Even the time she remembered as being their first coupling had been spirited and filled with willingness to do anything. Yes, life was good. *Sorry, Master*, he thought sarcastically. *I suppose having a warm and willing wife, a promising future, and a small amount of renown shall keep me from missing you all that much. After all, I must look after my own interests.*

A/N: This was a fun challenge to answer. I want to say thanks to my betas for taking the time to go through this for me. Charmed_Nay, Meredith, CocoaChristy, and GinnyW had a sneak peek and helped to point out any funkies.

So, did you all like the Dark!Severus? Too soft still? I thought he was pretty dang sneaky, and I love that he still pulled one over on Hermione. Or, does he actually? ahahhaa... I'm mean, huh? teehee