

Semper Fi, Hermione

by sinbad

What drives a woman to war? How does it become a personal matter?

Back to School

Chapter 1 of 5

What drives a woman to war? How does it become a personal matter?

This story is dedicated to my father and his friend 'Fat Matt,' who served together in Vietnam, and to all military personnel, past and present. Often the military do a thankless job.

Thanks, Dad

I do not own Harry Potter or any canon characters. The plot and original characters belong to me.

Sixth year student Hermione Granger, enjoyed her last days of summer vacation reading her favorite book, 'Hogwarts, a History'. Harry Potter and Ronald Weasley met up with her at Diagon Alley to get their school supplies a few days before the new term at Hogwarts began. The air was uncharacteristically hot and sticky, and it wasn't even noon yet. People were scurrying about, trying to get their kids ready for classes and doing last minute shopping, but there was a minimum of friendly conversation. War was looming in the distance, but for a few more days there was peace to be enjoyed.

The trio was to meet again on September first for their ride on the Hogwarts Express. Hermione was looking forward to creating, with her Head of House, a vigorous schedule. Hermione loved her academic challenges.

"Hermione!" Ron yelled, dashing across platform nine and three-quarters, sweeping her up in a bear hug, and swinging her off her feet. He blushed as Hermione lost her breath and hugged him back.

"Ron, you can allow me to breathe, " Hermione laughed.

Before much time had passed, she saw Harry and Ginny crossing the platform to join them. Harry was a little pink as he rushed over to greet his friend; Ginny was forced to slow down due to the crowd of children and parents trying to get their kids on the train and saying their goodbyes.

"How was your summer with your parents, Hermione?"

Ginny finally caught up to her friends and piped in, "Yes, did you enjoy your trip to France?"

"Oh, yes, guys. I loved it. We visited famous art museums, went swimming in our hotel's pool, and the food was divine. Mom, Dad, and I haven't had so much fun together in ages," she said, hugging her friends and smiling. "We'd better go get our seats."

The train ride was uneventful as they chatted and caught up with each other's summer antics. When the witch passed their compartment with the lunch trolley, Ron bought Chocolate Frogs, and Harry bought Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans and treated Ginny to Licorice Wands. Hermione didn't get any sweets, but she did not, however, say anything to her friends.

Later, when they were in the Great Hall listening to the Sorting Hat sing his song, Hermione was unsurprised to hear that the Hat's song included unity of the four houses, friendship and strength.

Headmaster Professor Dumbledore gave his speech. He still dressed outlandishly; tonight he was wearing a robe that had silver moons and stars and golden wands embroidered on it. There were no changes of the rules to note: no students were allowed in the Forbidden Forest, there was to be no hexing in the halls, good behavior earned house points, bad behavior took points away, and of course curfew must be followed. He finally clapped his hands and announced that the feast could begin with the words, "Tuck in, all."

The plates, silverware, and food appeared.

There was so much; beef in gravy that smelled heavenly, broiled chicken and new potatoes, several side dishes, and a variety of vegetables, some boiled, dripping with butter and cream sauces.

Hermione looked up at the enchanted ceiling for a moment before filling her plate. The bewitched candles hovered around them, and the ceiling was full of stars twinkling. She glanced at Ron, who had filled his plate with enough food for several people. Hermione rolled her eyes and ate her dinner of chicken, potatoes and plenty of spinach. After the main courses were finished and no one thought they could possibly eat another bite, the desserts appeared: cakes, lavish with frosting, pies of apple, all kinds of puddings with plenty of whipped cream, and fruit and nut trays.

The boys were already talking Quidditch. They were very excited about the first match and which teams would be playing.

Boys, she thought. Hermione had no interest in Quidditch. She smiled when necessary and thought about her schedule. She didn't make the same mistake as she had in third year when she had taken so many classes that she had to use a Time-Turner. She had done well and loved the challenge, but it was very tiring.

Finally, dinner was over. The trio of friends got up, still chatting and laughing as they exited the Great Hall. Hermione, who was still thinking about her classes, bumped into someone. Stunned at her clumsy action, she blushed as she looked up and saw black. She realized it was Professor Snape and began to stammer an apology when he cut her off.

"Fifteen points from Gryffindor," he snarled, venom dripping from his voice. He stalked away, his robes billowing behind him.

Ron and Harry made a face while Ron commented, "Snape is still a miserable git."

Hermione glared at him. "That's *Professor* Snape, Ron."

As they left the Great Hall, Hermione thought to herself, *Really, will these boys ever learn?*

Ron, Harry, Colin and Ginny began a game of Exploding Snap while Hermione started organizing her schedule. She was interrupted by Ginny's laughter. Looking up, she took great pleasure in the room, which was done in rich red velvets and gold braid trim on throw pillows and used as tie backs in the windows. Her eyes traveled the room to find the source of Ginny's laughter.

The group was sitting on the thick rug, which was smoldering a bit. Ron, who was an excellent chess player, wasn't very good at Exploding Snap. He had managed to make the deck explode while making his play. His face had soot on it and his eyebrows were singed. He looked surprised as Ginny muttered a quick, "*Reparo*," trying not to cause any more attention to be drawn their way.

Still laughing, Ginny said, "Now that Ron has provided unintentional entertainment, we had better get some sleep."

Harry glanced at the clock. "Ron, she's right. We have Potions right after breakfast. No need to have points taken off for being groggy."

The boys headed for their dorms and the girls to theirs. Everyone was happy as they headed for their beds.

First thing in the morning, Hermione prepared for classes. She took a shower, dressed, gathered all of her supplies including extra quills, parchment and ink, and made her way down to the Great Hall for breakfast. Just as Hermione was about to cross the threshold, she was grabbed painfully by the elbow. Looking up in alarm, she saw Crabbe, Goyle and Draco Malfoy. Crabbe pushed her into a niche in the wall, and the three of them sneered menacingly at her. By the sounds and smells coming from the Hall, she knew everyone was more than a little bit occupied to notice the predicament she was in. Mouth set in a determined line, Hermione tried to reach for her wand.

"Watch it, Mudblood," Goyle said as they moved in closer.

"Oi, Hermione!"

It was Harry. Relieved, she saw both him and Ron hurrying towards the Hall. Draco smirked at her, gave a small nod to his friends and went in to breakfast. Draco's goons let her go and slipped into the hall for their meal.

"You alright?" Ron asked, deep concern in his eyes.

Hermione nodded and strode into the Hall with purpose. Having sat down with her friends, she ate quietly, not really wanting to talk about her encounter.

Potions class was difficult as always. Hermione as usual put in her best efforts and kept her potion accurate.

Other students weren't quite so adept with their potions. Neville obviously added his ingredients in the wrong order, turning his potion to a strange shade of burnt orange. Professor Snape yelled at him for his incompetence and assigned a detention. Ron and Harry's potion was the right color, but still a bit lumpy, so they were berated for a few minutes. When Professor Snape got to Hermione, he glanced at her potion and growled, "Acceptable," to her, even though her potion was textbook perfect. The Slytherin students smirked at the Gryffindor students. Professor Snape never stalked their side of the room as he did the Gryffindor, nor did he snarl quite as badly at their efforts.

All of the Gryffindor side of the class was grateful as they bottled their potions and left.

Hermione, who had still been packing her books, didn't notice that Crabbe had taken his time and trailed after her instead of leaving with Draco and Goyle.

Professor Snape, who had been smirking at the students evacuating his class as if demons from Hades were following them, frowned as he saw Hermione being followed by Crabbe. *What is he up to?*

Thanks to my wonderful, kind, and witty beta, charmed 3. Forget Chocolate Frogs, she deserves all of Honeydukes!

Hogsmeade

Chapter 2 of 5

What drives a woman to war? How does it become a personal matter?

Semper Fi, Hermione

Chapter 2

Finally, the first Hogsmeade weekend arrived. The trio had breakfast in the Great Hall; Hermione as well as the boys expected a full day of fun, and as Ron would put it, 'A good meal makes a great day.' They ate their pancakes, eggs and sausage with gusto and returned to their rooms for their cloaks and money before meeting up in their common room.

While waiting for their chaperones Professors Flitwick and Snape, Mr Filch, the Caretaker, warned them about bringing banned items to the school and sneered at them. The professors arrived, and Professor Snape reminded them that their behavior reflected upon the school and in no way, shape or form were they to embarrass the school, or else. With that, the students and chaperones left the castle.

The morning was crisp and clear. The leaves showing red and gold, browns and yellows in all their glory. A bright and beautiful day to be sure. When they arrived in Hogsmeade, the trio split up. The boys wanted to go to the Quidditch Store and Honeydukes, and Hermione was going to the bookstore and would meet them later in the Three Broomsticks. They would then drink Butterbeer and hang out with their friends until it was time to go back to school.

Ron and Harry were having a great time with some of the guys, looking at the newest broom models. The new Firebolt in particular garnering much interest from them, especially Ron. The boys settled for purchasing polish and service kits for their brooms instead.

Next they went to Zonko's Joke Shop; it was nice but George and Fred's store, Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes, was quickly outstripping Zonko's. The twins were imaginative and all of their plots, jokes and schemes in school were in better use in their shop. Fred and George were so immersed in their work that their products were simply better than the other store's. Arthur Weasley's fascination with the Muggle world had inspired a whole new range of ideas for the boys to try out in their shop.

Harry and Ron often got to see new products before the general public, and Harry felt great being the one to get the twins started. They'd found their niche, and Harry truly believed people needed a laugh more often with You-Know-Who plotting. The boys spent a couple of hours laughing with Fred and George, and since the lunch hour was upon them and the shop would be shut down for it, Harry invited the twins to have lunch and Butterbeer with their old school chums.

Hermione perused several sections of books, totally losing track of time. There were so many books to look at and so many topics she was interested in. Hermione finally found two books that caught her eye for purchase. The first was *The Trouble with Trolls and How to Defeat Them* and the other was *Potions Enhanced with Charms*.

Hermione had been fascinated with Trolls ever since first year when she was almost killed by a mountain troll in the girls' bathroom. Although at the time she was scared out of her wits, it was what began the friendship with Harry and Ron, so the incident was never regretted. Hermione snapped out of her musings back to the present. Yes, these books definitely caught her eye. She hoped they would be as interesting as their titles suggested. She paid for her books and realized she was running late as she left the store. Hermione hurried, realizing she would be teased a bit by Ron especially for getting lost in a mountain of books. Ron aggravated her many times, teasing about the studious nature she possessed, but he was so good natured and fun loving it was hard to stay angry with him.

She cut into an alley, not realizing she was being followed by Draco, Crabbe and Goyle. She walked quickly, eager to share her finds with the boys when suddenly she was grabbed from behind and slammed into a brick wall. Her wand fell to the ground from her robes. Hermione struggled violently, determined to gain her freedom, but she was not strong enough to fend off the three boys, especially without her wand. Trying to get help, she screamed and cried. Her pleas for help went either unheard or were ignored.

Draco slapped her face so hard that her mouth began to bleed. Goyle, Draco and Crabbe took turns holding her while she was kicked, punched and slapped. Her body hurt, head throbbing painfully, when she heard Draco say, "My dad wants to meet you, Mudblood, *Portus!*" A quill was thrust into her hand, and she disappeared, leaving her books and wand on the ground.

Harry and Ron were getting worried. Hermione was often a bit late after being in the bookstore, but never this late. Fred and George were also concerned. They decided to split up into two parties and look for her. Harry felt a bit guilty not keeping together in a group; he knew that Death Eaters were on the loose. How often were the students told to stay together? Hermione was all alone because they didn't want to look at books. He was beginning to regret splitting up.

Their first stop was the bookstore as she was usually there. They didn't see her inside, so Harry asked the cashier about Hermione. He was very disturbed to find she was there and left over an hour ago.

Fred and George decided to go west, Harry and Ron would go east. Fred suggested that the bookstore would be the best place to meet and regroup. They would meet every fifteen minutes and check with the other team. George suggested they check out other stores that Hermione might have stopped in, but had no success at any of the stores that might have caught her eye.

Harry and Ron searched the streets and paths. The main roads were checked first as there were other students window shopping and wandering about. Harry asked every student they ran into whether they had seen Hermione, but to no avail. Panic laced his insides.

Ron was a few feet away checking alleys. He let out a yell of shock that brought Harry running. The twins heard and followed as well as a few students. A small crowd had gathered around the small entrance to the alley. The twins helped move students out of the way so Harry could get through.

Harry had faced the Dark Lord with less fear than what greeted him. In the alley Ron looked dead white, and Harry felt sick when he caught up with his friend. Some blood splattered on the wall and ground, two new books laying in the dirt and, even more frightening, a wand off to the side. Hermione's wand.

"Ron, get the professors. For Merlin's sake, *Hurry!*"

Thank you to my beta, charmed 3. I could not do this without her.

A Date with Death Eaters

What drives a woman to war? How does it become a personal matter?

Hermione was dazed and confused when she landed. She was so sore; everything just ached. She rolled over so she could see better and immediately wished she had not.

There were several Death Eaters around her. Lucius Malfoy, Rodolphus Lestrage and one she couldn't place, but she remembered seeing him when he fought at the Ministry of Magic. Shit, what was his name? Jugson, that was it.

"Look who's joined us," said a voice filled with an amused malice. A few sniggers were heard. "Let's not play sleeping possum, shall we, Mudblood? I know you are awake."

Hermione stiffened. Her hair was roughly pulled, forcing her neck back at an awkward angle, and she was pulled to her knees.

Jugson laughed, a richly evil one that sent chills running down her spine. As she struggled to get up, someone lifted her and threw her into Lestrage. He slapped her so hard her lip broke open and blood flowed freely, sending her staggering back into Jugson.

Hermione was cornered--like a mouse toyed with by a cat; she searched around the small room. There were no windows, only a door that Malfoy was casually leaning against and nothing else. Reaching for her wand and not finding it caused her further panic. Hermione let out a hair-curling scream of desperation. Laughter was their response.

Jugson grabbed both of her arms; he was tall enough that with little effort, she was on tiptoe, trying to keep her feet under her. Rodolphus lunged at her and punched her in the stomach. Hermione doubled over in pain, all the air having been knocked out of her body as tears streamed down her face.

"Welcome, Mudblood," Lucius drawled, "to my dungeon. I promise you will not enjoy your stay."

"As if I ever would enjoy the company of Death Eaters," Hermione gasped. Knowing her situation was bad and hoping to figure a way out; she tried to buy a bit of time. Maybe Harry and Ron had realized she was missing; maybe the professors were on their way.

Lucius warded the door, a feral grin on his face. "Crucio!"

The pain was immense. Hermione's muscles burned from pain. Her very skin felt like it was being torn, inch by inch, from her body. Just as she thought she would die, the pain stopped as suddenly as it had begun.

"That was to teach you your place: an insufferable Mudblood, nothing more. Did you think your friends would find you? Well, it doesn't matter now. We all know you are the brains of the three. I expect the Dark Lord will be quite happy with our efforts."

Jugson laughed again. "She doesn't know the half of it, does she, Rodolphus?"

Lestrage grinned and said, "Don't worry, little Mudblood. You will live to see your friends again. We will just make sure you are of no use to them." He stalked predatorily over to her. "Who shall be first?"

"While a Mudblood is not worth much, I do believe I shall be. I spoke to the Dark Lord about this idea, my son brought her here, and this is my party after all," said Lucius Malfoy.

Jugson wrestled a screaming Hermione down, pinning her arms over her head. Rodolphus tore her robes off, grabbed a leg, and sneered. She tried to buck her attackers off with no success. Malfoy rent her cotton panties from her body, lifted her hips and penetrated her.

Her cries were endless though her struggles diminished. He broke her like a fragile china tea cup.

"Well, well, a virgin Mudblood. Looks like I got a better deal than I thought. Who's next?"

Hermione prayed for death long before they had finished with her.

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Back at Hogwarts, things were abuzz. Harry, Ron and the twins arrived moments before the teachers and the rest of the students. Harry was already racing to the Headmaster's office while Minerva spoke to the twins, her lips pursed into a moue of distaste, and worry etched over her features as she grilled the twins like they were first-years about what was going on.

Severus, walking so fast his robes flew behind him, as if the hem was trying to keep up, was following Harry to Professor Dumbeldore's office. Filius, running to attempt to keep up with Severus, gasped at the passing students to return to their common rooms.

Harry, angry and frightened for his friend, outpaced everyone and arrived at Dumbledore's office first. His emotions were so badly out of control that he babbled almost incoherently.

"Hermione's missing!" He gasped over and over. He remembered the fate of his Sirius and still felt guilt about his death. This was much worse for him because he knew they should have stayed together to begin with. Harry was showing signs of shock; he was pale and shaky, and his pulse would have been off the charts had anyone checked.

Severus, Filius, and Minerva entered closely followed by Ron and his brothers. Severus seeing the state Harry was in, barked out, "Sit down, Mr. Potter!" which earned him an evil glare from Harry as he complied.

"We have a situation, Headmaster," Filius said. It took a long time, but the situation was explained, everyone telling their own part. Severus ended the discussion abruptly after the meat of the story by simply stating that this could never have happened if the group had stayed together.

Ron looked as if he were going to explode, but Professor McGonagall froze him with a stare. "For once, I must agree with Professor Snape. You were all supposed to stay together."

Ron slumped dejectedly; even his brothers were looking at Harry and him with shock and horror. Ron knew better himself. This was no game; they knew the risks, ignored them, and now Hermione was paying for not following the very rules designed to keep them safe. The boys were dismissed to their rooms with strict orders to stay there. No points were deducted, as their punishment was the knowledge that they had put their best friend into mortal danger.

Dumbledore shook his head sadly as the boys left. They had to grow up so young. He and the teachers headed to the main gate and Apparated to Hogesmeade where they met with the Aurors. The teachers used locator charms, talked to shop keeps and viewed the scene where Hermione was kidnapped. They could not find anything useful to find the girl. With heavy hearts they went back to Hogwarts and did the only thing they could. They waited.

# The finding of Hermione

Chapter 4 of 5

What drives a woman to war? How does it become a personal matter?

## Chapter 4 The finding of Hermione

After three miserable weeks Hermione became quite ill. Her treatment was savage: Raped at the whim of whichever Death Eater happened to be bored at the moment, nothing to eat and little water to drink. She lost weight and was dehydrated. The cold, damp dungeons had worked an insidious job on her. The damp, moldy air she had crept into her lungs, making it difficult to breathe, and violent coughing wracked her battered body. Sleeping was impossible between the nightmares and coughing. All hope was lost each time her body was used. Too weak to fight anymore, all Hermione wanted was death. Preferably quick, if not painless.

Malfoy was bored with her already. The girl was a shell of what she had been. For Lucius it was like a chess game. He ruined her mind, destroyed her body, and the best part was her giving up hope. That was, in his opinion, check and mate. The Dark Lord wanted a blow to the Order and most especially to Harry Potter. Returning her to her friends half-dead would do the trick. Even if she lived, it was more than likely her mind would be damaged forever. With any luck, he would be rewarded most handsomely for his efforts. Even if his job didn't earn any recognition, he did was amused by her pathetic cries and struggles. Snatching her right from under Dumbledore's meddlesome nose made all the Death Eaters laugh. His daring got him some respect from the inner circle if nothing else.

Malfoy noted it was almost midnight. Things should be quiet at Hogwarts, he mused while indulging himself with a glass of port. He decided it was time to bring things to a close with the Mudblood in his dungeon.

Hermione had fallen into an uncomfortable doze. She woke up from a harsh kick to the ribs. She curled into a fetal position trying, to protect her head and ribs from any more blows. Her breathing was raspy and shallow with a distinct wheeze to it.

"Get up, filth! I'm finished with you." Malfoy kicked her again, screaming at her to get up. "I'm done with you, useless thing that you are! Get up, you are leaving now!" When he saw that his only response from her was going to be a few whimpers, he snarled, reached down, and pulled her up by her arm. He noted her skin was dry and burning. He lowered the wards to his estate and Apparated them to an area near Hogwarts.

They walked about five hundred yards when he finally spoke, "We are quite near the wards on the Forbidden Forest side of the school. So sorry I cannot escort you to the door, as it is not in my best interests." With that, he shoved her. She slid down a rocky hill, her body landing at an painful angle, blood seeping from her head.

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Severus noted it was about three in the morning when he finished his meeting with the headmaster. Since it was so late he decided not to go to bed. He was restless and needed an outlet. Hermione's disappearance was eating away at him. He'd heard nothing from the Dark Lord, and he worried if his spying days were almost over. He was aggravated with the chit's kidnapping, and Potter and Weasley were more annoying than usual. They were watched constantly without their knowledge so they wouldn't go on some damn fool hardy mission to rescue their friend.

Professors Snape and Flitwick had searched Hogsmead; Locator Charms were used, and every proverbial rock was kicked over looking for the girl. The Aurors also did everything they could do as well. The Headmaster tried to aid them, but there was simply no trace of Hermione. Word was sent back to the school, and most of the staff came running to help in the search. All future Hogsmeade visits were canceled until further notice; unfortunately it was a day late and a Galleon short to help Hermione, but it would keep other students safe. Severus knew the Death Eaters had her and shuddered to think what they would do to her. He even wondered if she was still alive. All of little-miss-know-it-all's classes were affected. Her brains kept all of her teachers hopping; the other students couldn't seem to answer the simplest of questions without her. Hermione was the driving force of classrooms as well as the trio. Damn, he thought, Potter is falling apart at the seams because of his missing girlfriend. He passed a window in the hall, noted it was a full moon and decided to gather some herbs. The activity would do him some good.

The night air was cold so Severus cast a Warming Charm. He glided into the Forbidden Forest, melting into its darkness. He walked to the far side, deciding to gather Moon Flowers and Lavender. While the Lavender grew wild all over, the Moon Flowers were in only one area of the Forest he knew. He reached his destination and gathered enough of the herb to fill most of the inner pockets of his cloak. He was about to head back to the castle when he noticed some of the plants were disturbed. No one went out this far other than him, and there was nothing to note beyond those plants. Curiosity aroused, he decided to take a look.

What he saw shocked him. Not believing his eyes, he carefully maneuvered himself down the steep incline until he saw the Granger girl. He wasn't even sure if she was still alive, but he wouldn't, couldn't, leave her like this. Severus was finally able to reach her. Noting she was breathing, even if the chit's breath was shallow, at least she lived. Hermione was covered in bruises, her right ankle was obviously broken, and he suspected her ribs as well. Merlin alone knew what else was wrong with the girl.

"Hermione," he softly said, "wake up. You are safe now. I need to get you to the Hospital Wing." Severus was used to terrorizing students, but this wreck of a girl wouldn't be able to handle any roughness.

Hermione started sobbing. She must have been delirious because the Potions master couldn't clearly understand her. She repeated over and over, "No more, please no more," in a broken voice. To his absolute horror the girl tried to crawl away from him. She was terrified so badly that even in her deplorable, pityful condition she was trying to escape her torment.

Time was of the essence. The girl was in dire need of medical help. He made his decision quickly. Severus put her in a modified body-bind; she would not be able to move on her own, but he would be able to carry her, cradled against his body. The Headmaster needed to be notified, so he sent his Patronus ahead. Help would be waiting for them the moment they arrived back to the castle. Severus carefully scooped her up into his arms, watching her eyes her eyes glaze over; he could feel her frail body shaking through the spell. Severus draped his cloak around her to warm her and for the sake of her modesty.

He must have made some impression on her, as he repeated, "You are safe, no more harm will come to you," like a mantra. Tears streamed down her face, but she did stop struggling against the spell. Hermione went limp in his arms, allowing whatever faith she had left to be shown. She still shivered, but she accepted the spell to minimize any damage that could be done by struggling, as he suspected she would have done.

He was not surprised to see not only Poppy, but Albus and Minerva as well, all waiting for them to return. Poppy took one look at Hermione and with troubled eyes brought her to the Hospital Wing. She immediately started running diagnostic spells, clucking with disapproval, and retrieved many potions from her supplies, including potions for pain, Skele-Grow and a Dreamless Sleep potion, among others. Albus, Minerva and Severus were waiting for news about Hermione on the opposite side of the curtain.

"However did you find her, Severus?" Albus asked incredulously.

Minerva watched him, her eyes brightly shining with emotion. Severus took a deep breath, sighed and told them about his herb gathering that turned into a rescue mission.

Poppy finally emerged from behind the curtain. She cast a Silencing Charm to be certain they would not be overheard, called for Dobby and placed an order for chamomile tea and biscuits. When everything arrived she finally sat down, ready to face her co-workers.

"Hermione is very ill. She has several broken ribs, a broken ankle, a concussion, soft tissue damage and bruising over most of her body as well as pneumonia. She is also dehydrated and malnourished. I gave her a potion to prevent pregnancy and any sexually transmitted disease she may have been exposed to. I can only guess at the horrors Hermione was put through and if she will be able to recuperate mentally and emotionally. It is obvious that she was tortured with the intent of breaking her: I think she will live, but it is touch and go at the moment. No matter what happens, she will never be the same girl we all knew."

Minerva had tears streaming down her face; Albus looked troubled, and to a person who did not know Severus well, he appeared to be cold and withdrawn, but in reality, he was plotting revenge on behalf of the girl.

True evil had befallen a student in his care, on his watch. He felt a certain amount of guilt, as he was a chaperon for a Hogsmeade trip and she had been taken from right under his nose. Severus, true to his nature, assumed all of the responsibility for the current situation. Professor Flitwick might have been there as well, and the students had separated when they should have stuck together, but Severus didn't even think on those bits of information. He blamed himself, as he did every time Voldemort or one of his loyal Death Eaters did an evil deed.

Minerva was the first to speak the question weighing on everyone's mind. What should they tell Harry and Ron? Harry was not ready to face Voldemort yet, and news of his friend's mistreatment might push him over the edge. Severus harrumphed. Filius made the suggestion to say nothing except she was found, which was immediately discounted, and Albus finally made the decision to tell them what was needed only. Poppy's only suggestion was to let Hermione set the pace since no one knew everything.

The discussion lasted until dawn and was ended with hoarse screaming. Hermione had woken up in pain and terror.

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My thanks to charmed3. She spends a lot of time polishing my work and correcting my punctuation.

## Baby Steps

*Chapter 5 of 5*

What drives a woman to war? How does it become a personal matter?

### Chapter 5 baby steps

**Author's Note:** I'm sorry for the delay in the update, my personal life has been quite challenging. Also my previous beta had some issues and was forced to withdraw from beta reading. It is with much thanks that I introduce Charmed Force. She not only is a wonderful beta, but she took this story on well after it was started. Just to remind everyone, I'm a short, chubby Italian, not JKR. I do not own any canon characters, I am just playing with them. I will return them after I Obliviate and Scourify them.

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Severus left the Headmaster's office. He was trying to decide what the best way to help Hermione was. Brute force may cause more damage than good, and most women weren't exactly friendly and open to men after going through what Hermione had. He finally decided that he would approach her as a teacher; perhaps Minerva would be of assistance as well. Having another woman around would certainly help keep her calmer if nothing else. Merlin, what a mess! Severus rubbed the bridge of his nose, feeling a headache coming on.

Minerva left the Hospital Wing after Hermione cried herself to sleep. Hermione never spoke of what had happened to her; instead she appeared to blame herself. Her only comments were related to her not staying with the boys and how much trouble she had caused everyone. Minerva tried to let Hermione vent, but she didn't know how to help her.

Severus had decided that the first thing he had to do was speak to Minerva. They might celebrate their houses and have an ongoing rivalry, but the reality of the situation was they were fairly good friends. He knew he needed her help and assistance. Minerva had a good head on her shoulders, was the contact for Drs. Granger and as Hermione's Head of House would know more about her than the other teachers. He had already decided that he may not be the best person for Hermione to talk to; his image worked against him.

Minerva wasn't in her office, nor was she in class as it was her free time. Severus did not need Trelawney to predict Minerva's location and headed to the Hospital Wing.

Sure enough, Minerva was sitting with Hermione, stroking her hair as if she were a favored cat. Hermione was, thank Merlin, asleep. Her face was puffy with red blotches. He sighed. It was obvious that the girl had been crying; he didn't blame her, but Severus never could deal with a woman's tears. He had felt helpless many times when revels had destroyed Muggle women and the only thing he could do for them was put them out of their misery.

Severus saw his old Transfiguration professor and was startled at just how old she looked. One of her cubs had come to harm, and the grieving woman looked every bit of her age. He was suddenly sure he couldn't put her through any more grief. He would have to help the poor girl with his own less-than-pleasant demeanor. He was a good man but knew little of women, less of young ladies and nothing about how to help such a victim. He had raped women many times as a new Death Eater and killed victims of rape later as a mercy after Death Eaters were finished. That was the only comfort he could afford those poor women. He had no choice. He had saved more lives as a spy than he could have by any other action. If Voldemort ever discovered his true role, he would be killed slowly and with much pain. The Order needed all the information it could get about Voldemort's movements, and no one could replace Severus as a spy.

'Albus thinks I could help, does he? Experience with this, my arse!' Severus thought to himself. Unless Albus thought Severus was going to Avada the girl, he had no clue what to do. He did, however, have an associate who was a Squib working for a Muggle 'Crisis Center'. She dealt with this kind of thing often, and she knew the wizarding world, so she wouldn't need to be Obliviated. He would have to bring it up with Minerva.

He caught the Transfiguration professor's eye and jerked his head towards a few chairs on the far side of the Hospital Wing.

Minerva stroked Hermione's hair one last time and quietly left her bedside. "Severus," she said with a curt nod. "Why are you here?"

"I just left Albus's office. He wants me to 'help' Miss Granger." He sighed before continuing. "I don't think I can do much for her to be honest. She already scratched my face, and I have given her and her friends little reason to trust me. Do you have any suggestions?"

"She hasn't said anything to me. We could contact her parents--we probably should contact her parents."

"I have a friend who may be able to assist Hermione better than we can. Her name is Ursula; she is the daughter of associates of mine. She is a Squib so she knows of both worlds, and her line of work is dealing with..." his voice faltered a bit, but he continued, "with women who have been... assaulted. She is a counselor at a Muggle crisis center."

Minerva looked startled for a moment. She was quite curious about this woman and what she may be able to do, but Severus's demeanor did not suggest he was about to say any more about her. She didn't know what to say; this was new territory for them all. She didn't care much for the Potion master's cool exterior, but she did understand that it was very necessary for his survival.

This war was dragging on, and she was tired, everyone involved was tired, but they had to continue. Hopefully, Harry would be in the position to end things soon; she had to admit ever since the Triwizard Tournament, the year that Voldemort came back, they had been preparing for war. Skirmishes between the Order and the Death Eaters were becoming much more frequent, neither side gaining much ground. Severus's spying gave them enough information to stop some of the Dark Lord's plots, but he couldn't know everything, and he was balancing a fine line of negligible disinformation and gaining useful information without getting caught. The day Severus was found out to be a spy would be the day he died.

Whomever this woman was, Minerva prayed she could help. Severus could keep his secret on the how and when he met her; it just wasn't important in the long run.

Slipping into the Hospital Wing, Severus spoke briefly to Madame Pomfrey. She left the hospital to give Severus the privacy to question Hermione. She didn't like it, but the girl needed help she couldn't provide. She could only heal the physical; the emotional fallout landed squarely on the shoulders of a man deemed to have no compassion, yet witnessed and lived through horrors upon horrors. As she left the room she told him where the Calming and Dreamless Sleep Draughts were located.

Severus sat on Hermione's bed, his weight depressing her mattress. The poor girl was frozen in shock and fear, her eyes rolling wildly, instinctively pushing the man away from her. He grasped her hands firmly together, preventing her from either pummeling him or hurting herself in her pitiful, weak struggles. He spoke to her calmly, with authority, telling her she was going to drink a Calming Draught. He held the vial to her lips, forcing her to drink it slowly and trying not to make her choke. He waited a few minutes for the drug to take effect.

"Hermione," he said. "I know you are upset. Merlin knows you have every right to be. I am trying to help you. Alright?"

Dazed brown eyes refused to meet his gaze. She had given up her struggling, though he couldn't tell if it was from the Calming Draught or sheer terror from him restraining her. He slowly lifted her chin so he could see her face better. Her eyes tightly closed, she tried to turn her face and pull away from him. He realized that she had generalized her fear to all men and his heart broke. He wondered if she would ever be able to have a relationship with a man. She deserved a happy life in the future with a career and children if she wanted. So much potential that may have been ruined if her heart and mind couldn't be saved. Softly, he spoke again.

"Hermione, do you remember what happened? Can you tell me?"

Her reply was purely physical as she panicked and struggled for freedom. Being too weak to force him away, she tried to curl into a fetal position. Silent tears slid down her cheeks; her demeanor was defeated. He would get nowhere fast this way. He was forced into using his last resort.

Trying a different tack, her teacher used his best bat-of-the-dungeon voice and informed her that since she would not speak he would have to get the information without her participation. He was disgusted with himself, but to help her they needed to know what happened. He knew there was no hope of her volunteering the information. With the utmost care he pulled her upper body close to him, easily deflecting her attacking hands. He got her as comfortable as he could without risking either of their safety. He murmured an apology and made eye contact. "Legilimens!" he said.

He began sorting through her memories, sifting gently rather than forcing what was needed. He held her as gently as he was able, trying to use his body language to reassure her even if his actions wouldn't. He gagged at what he saw in the corridors of her mind and marveled that she had come back at all. He got what he needed and broke contact. Hermione curled into herself, whimpering in pain. He gave her some Dreamless Sleep Draught and stayed with her until it took effect.

He would see the bastards dead as soon as he could.

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Ursula was an intuitive woman, smart, caring and funny. She loved her job as well as despised it. Helping women survive the aftermath of rape was one of her greatest challenges in her profession. Getting the message across that rape is not a crime of passion, but one of subjection is the first step. Society had a tendency to make women feel guilty for being a victim; even worse, women were treated like they are the perpetrators.

Saturday, even though she was on call, was one day she didn't schedule sessions. As long as her phone didn't ring, she could catch up on housework and her friends. She saw women only if there was a crisis.

She was surprised to hear a tapping at her window and even more so that it was an owl.

"Well, well," she whispered. She rarely had communication with the wizarding world, and only wizards communicated by owl. She let the owl into her home, went to her kitchen for a small bowl for water and a piece of bacon leftover from breakfast. She gave the owl food and drink and relieved it of its letter. Her eyebrows shot straight to her hairline when she saw the Hogwarts Seal, recognizing it from her sibling's school days.

Ursula opened the letter. Recognizing Severus's cramped script, she eagerly scanned the contents. She had fond memories of him as a youngster; he had a gift for potions and would tell her all kinds of stories from school. She idolized him as a kid and never understood how he could follow a mad man. It was much later, after her family was warned about an upcoming attack by Voldemort, that the pieces fell in place for her. Her father didn't listen to the warning and her family was wiped out. It was the same script that she read as a child and later used in the letter that warned her family. She did not know why he tried to warn her family, but she was grateful for the effort.

The cramped, spiky handwriting was not difficult to follow. She read all about Hermione, her kidnapping, how she was found and how she was acting. The end of the letter was a plea to come and help the Muggle-born student.

Ursula needed no other prompting. She had heard of the Order of the Phoenix, how it was trying to stop Voldemort. Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts, employer of one Severus Snape and... leader of the Order. She mused over all the puzzle pieces. She suspected there was more to the story of Severus than what the world knew. She picked up the phone and called her employers; she had plenty of sick time and vacation time saved up. Her decision was a simple one. The war that had torn up her world was heating up again, and this time she was in a position to help, even if it was in a small way. She quickly penned a note and tied it to the owl's leg. She would be there in a week.

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Author's Note~

Rape is a common way to break a woman's spirit and has been used for eons in war and as a crime. It is a method that encourages the victim blame herself for what happened. The courts are of no help since the victim is the one on trial so to speak. The victim is cross examined and questioned about what she was wearing, if she drank anything, how she led the attacker on. She has to prove herself innocent. A rape trial is almost opposite to the trial of every other crime. Instead of the accused being innocent until proven guilty, it is the victim who must defend herself and prove she is innocent. Until society changes and people are educated about the true nature of this crime, I don't foresee a change in the American legal system.