

The Potion Master's Amalthea

by beaweasley2

Hermione goes back to the Shrieking Shack, determined to bring back Snape's body. When she gets there, there is absolutely no evidence of his death. Suddenly, somebody grabs her from behind. Who is it, and what really happened to Snape?

EWE and some changes to DH

The Potion Master's Amalthea

Chapter 1 of 9

Hermione goes back to the Shrieking Shack, determined to bring back Snape's body. When she gets there, there is absolutely no evidence of his death. Suddenly, somebody grabs her from behind. Who is it, and what really happened to Snape?

EWE and some changes to DH

~*-O~*

They had laid the body of Tom 'Voldemort' Riddle and those of the Death Eaters in a chamber off the Hall, away from the bodies of the others that had died fighting Voldemort, since nobody wanted them lying next to their loved ones. In the Great Hall lay all the wounded and the fallen heroes of the battle. Well, that is how history would recognize them. Hermione helped carry in another fallen, laying the fifth-year Ravenclaw down carefully. She stood up to look for Ron and Harry and saw Harry standing in a circle of redheaded men.

The death toll was harsh, in Hermione's view. The bodies of Percy, Hestia Jones, Elphias Dodge, Dung and Tonks, and so many others were laid out in two long rows, surrounded by those who had fought by their side, friends and loved ones, mourning their loss. Lupin was being carried in on a stretcher and gently laid next to Tonks. Colin Creevey's body was brought in right after his. A thick lump had formed in Hermione's throat, watching Professor Lupin's body pass by on a stretcher, but seeing little Colin Creevey was shocking. His tiny hand lay on his chest, exactly where the lump in Hermione's throat fell as she silently watched him pass her.

There had to be over fifty lying on the floor. More were coming in from the school grounds. McGonagall had moved the house tables against the walls for those who needed to sit. People moved around the dead and injured as the Healers and medi-wizards tried to help those they could, stabilizing injuries of those who were to be transported to the Wizarding hospital. Hagrid sat in front of the head table as a medi-witch and medi-wizard tended his multiple Acromantula bites as Grawp watched, crying from a hole in the ceiling.

Wearily, all jumbled together, teachers and pupils, house-elves and parents, sat in groups together, consoling each other or mourning the loss of a loved one or friend. Even the ghosts floated among them with their shoulders sagging. The centaurs stood in solemn vigil by their fallen brother, looking down at Firenze as a medi-wizard attended his wounds. Grawp knelt to peer in through a smashed window, then stood again to lean in through the hole in the ceiling, tears sliding down his cheeks, making heavy splashes on the table below him. Nobody bothered wiping them away from the surface of the table.

Hermione made her way over to the Weasleys and stood quietly beside Bill. Ron looked up at her, his eyes swimming with tears, still kneeling where he'd apparently carried in Percy's body, laying his brother at his mum's feet. Ron wiped away a tear quickly before it traveled too far down his cheek as he gazed at Hermione. She held out her hand to help him up. Once on his feet he didn't let go of her hand, needing her supportive touch.

Harry and Hermione stood silently with the Weasleys, surrounded by members of the Order. Mr. Weasley was standing with his arm across Mrs. Weasley's shoulders, trying to offer some sense of comfort as she stood crying over her two sons; Percy lying there on the floor dead, and Fred, lying unconscious on a stretcher with severe injuries and his left arm and leg immobilized in supports. George knelt next to his brother as the Healer from St. Mungo's stabilized him for transport. "Molly, he came back to us," Mr. Weasley said softly as she stared at Percy's body. "In the end he knew... He chose, and he chose us." Mrs. Weasley broke into great sobbing tears, and Mr. Weasley pulled her into his arms.

"Yeah, Mum, the git changed sides and died to save Fred," George added, receiving a scowl from Bill. "What? He did!"

"Don't be a git, George. At least he was placed here, Mum," Bill said, placing a hand on his Molly's shoulder. "They saved this section of the Great Hall for the Order members. At least he is being counted as one of them."

The members of the Order all its fallen members.. "Snape," Hermione said, pulling slightly on Ron's arm. "We should go bring him here."

Still stricken, Ron silently nodded, still holding firmly to Hermione's hand, both for comfort and support. "Yes, Hermione we should... But where is Harry...?"

"I don't know," Hermione said, turning Ron to face her. "But I need your help to get him." She wasn't sure if Ron was listening or not, his eyes were glassy with unshed tears. "Ron, I need you to come with me." Ron nodded again and started walking. Hermione guided him toward the doors.

Luna drifted over, coming up behind Ron and Hermione as they tried to worm their way from the Great Hall. "Ron, I think Professor McGonagall was looking for you."

Professor McGonagall and Professor Flitwick approached just as Ron turned to Luna. "Not right now, Luna. Hermione needs me to do something," he said, absentmindedly. Luna nodded and Ron turned to follow Hermione again.

They didn't get far. "Oh, there you are, Ron." Professor McGonagall stopped him before Ron and Hermione made it to the doors. "Where's Mr. Potter?" she asked concerned.

"I'm not sure," Ron said with a shrug. He turned and pointed. "I think he's last time I saw him he was by my parents."

"Professor Snape, he should be here, I need to go get him," Hermione interjected quickly before either Professor told her she couldn't go. "I know where he is, and he needs to be recovered brought here." Professor McGonagall and Professor Flitwick nodded, and they moved out of their way, both holding out arms to keep anyone else from following them.

Walking down to the Whomping Willow made Hermione uneasy. There were still Death Eaters out in Hogsmeade and possibly still in the Shrieking Shack, but she had to check. She tried to avoid the stains in the grass as they made their way down to the tree. Great gashes and holes could be seen in the castle towers and many battlements and turrets had been destroyed. The roof had collapsed in several places, there were great gaping holes in the walls of the castle, shattered and missing windows, and great chunks of rock and glass were scattered in the grass around them. The devastation brought tears to her eyes. "Hey, Hermione, it'll be okay," Ron said softly. "We'll bring him back to the castle and join my family. You'll see; everything will be all right."

She smiled as Ron pulled out his wand. He levitated a rock and aimed it at the knot in the trunk just above the tunnel entrance. It took him two tries to hit the knot and quiet the vicious tree. Ron climbed in first and Hermione followed.

She paused as Ron shifted the crate that blocked the entrance and climbed into the shack. The room was quiet and still. The floor was dusty, and except for her footprints and Ron's, there was no evidence that anyone had been in here for ages. Except that she had. *Harry had knelt here, right next to Professor Snape, and I did too* "We were in here just a few hours ago..." she said as she stared at the floor.

"I know, Hermione, I was with you, remember?" Ron said, shaking his head.

"Then where is he?" she asked, turning around, confused.

Ron was already returning to the tunnel to go. "Well, they must have taken him or something. Let's go. No point staying, is there?"

"You go. I'm going to look around a while. Something seems wrong out of place..." Hermione said. She had the urge to leave, the desire to return to the castle, but her mind refocused on the lack of blood on the dusty floor. "I just want to check one thing..." she said as she walked over to a door.

Ron was already slipping into the tunnel. He stopped and turned, only his head visible. "Want me to wait for you?" he asked.

"No... I'll be along in a minute. You go; I'll catch up to you in the tunnel." She opened the door and looked around the empty room. This was only her second time in the Shrieking Shack, the first time back in her third year. She'd had little curiosity for the place, but even then she remembered that there had been footprints in the dust on the floor: dog prints, rat prints, even cat prints and human. The urge to leave was strong, but seemed unnatural. *It's not fear... it's desire a Repelling Charm of some kind. Why on earth would someone cast a Repelling Charm in the Shrieking Shack?* She reached the stairs and gazed up. Footprints and scuffmarks could be seen on all the steps. *Evidence of people being here... But you can't get here without leaving footprints on the floor... there* She turned around again.

Going back to the room where Professor Snape had been laying, Hermione carefully examined the floor again. *No blood, Ron's big feet and mine... But I know I knelt here...* She turned around, checking her bearings. *Yes, right here. He was on the floor, bleeding, and I touched him.* She checked her hands. *I had his blood on my hands... wiped them on my jeans,* she recalled with absolute clarity. Looking down she could still see the smeared bloody prints *I'm not going crazy, he was here right here.*

Suddenly an arm grabbed her from behind, and the heavy weight of a body leaned against her back, nearly toppling her to the floor. A wand pressed into her side. "What are you doing here," a scratchy voice said in her ear. Hermione tried to turn, stunned, but his arm grasped her tightly as if using her as his sole support. The black sleeve of his robe smelled of dirt, sweat and faintly of blood.

"Professor?" she asked in complete disbelief. "I thought... you were dead I-I came to get you, b-bring you up to the castle where you belong..."

"To parade me around as your captive? Like some war trophy, perhaps?" he snarled.

"NO! I wanted to retrieve you and bring you back up where you belong," she insisted. "What can I...?" He stumbled slightly, and she turned grabbing onto him. "You need help, you need a Healer..."

"I need nothing from you," he snapped. His legs gave and Hermione was pulled down to the floor with him, kneeling, still locked in his grasp.

"What can I do?" she asked, looking down at him, worried.

"Nothing." He glared at her a moment. He tried to rise, but apparently couldn't.

Hermione stared at him, their bodies tangled together, deeply concerned for him, and unsure of what to do.

"In my left pocket, I cannot reach it with you grasping at me," he snarled, and then teetered, obviously growing weaker. "My anti-venom, a green vial... green..." She shifted her weight off him, and he slumped to the floor. Snape was deathly pale, shaking slightly and Hermione could only watch him, concerned. A rag of some kind had been wrapped around his neck and was stained in his blood, slightly oozing on his pale skin.

"Professor, what can I do? I only have Dittany with me. There are healing potions up at the castle," she started to say and was interrupted by his harsh, cold chuckle.

"I have the potion in my pocket, Miss Granger. Get it out. Left pocket," he said in a less scathing tone.

"You want me to reach into your pocket?" she asked, stunned. Usually he avoided physical contact of any kind, and she was momentarily intimidated to touch him in such a personal way. *Okay I know he grabbed me... But being grabbed is very different than just sticking your hand in someone's pocket especially someone like Snape!*

"Yes, Miss Granger, unless you intend to let me die. The green vial, then a dark purple one with a silver snake, and a cream ceramic jar," he forced each word out harshly.

I can't just slip my hand into his robes and grope his pockets. She pulled out her wand and used a Summoning Charm instead. "Professor how...? I can't get them out." He tried to scoff at her, and his laugh came out as a ragged cough. At the sound, she slipped her hand in and fumbled with the multiple vials, pouches, bottles and jars with a look of confusion. "I thought... How come I can't get it? How do I...?" she stuttered, annoyed. "I can't get them out."

"Put your hand in my pocket, Miss Granger, then Summon the ones you want non-verbally. It's Nagini's anti-venom," he instructed. Hermione nodded, her lips moved as she concentrated on the spell, and the bottle slipped into her hand. She pulled out one bottle of pale putrid green, removed the stopper and tipped the bottle to his lips. "Now, same pocket, Blood Replenishing Potion, a Regenerative Potion and a Healing Salve." She nodded again and slipped her hand into his pocket, concentrating on the potions and salve he mentioned. Two bottles and a jar rose to her fingers, and she scooped them out.

"Which one, sir?" she asked, holding the two potions, one in a green glass bottle and another in a vial of the deepest eggplant with a silver snake stopper.

"Green one," Snape simply said. She opened the stopper of the green one and he opened his mouth. She filled his mouth, nearly choking him. "Now the other one, pour a little on my neck," he instructed. Her nose wrinkled at the thought of removing his bandage, and he scowled at her. "Yes? You asked to help me, untie the scarf and pour it on the wound." She undid the knot and gently unwrapped his neck. The gash from the snake's bite was varied shades of red, grey and purple-blue. The wound looked like the snake had bitten half of his neck. She held up the second bottle, tipped a few drops into the wound and waited. Snape closed his eyes for a moment, obviously in pain. "Pour more on my neck, please."

She complied, watching his face carefully. His usually stern scowl was a grimace of pain. She tenderly moved a strand of hair from his face and his dark eyes opened, staring intently at hers. "If you would apply the salve and redress my neck, I would appreciate it. Then you may leave," he said with his usual disdain.

"No," Hermione said firmly. "I'll take care of your wound, then you will come with me to the castle..."

"No, Miss Granger, I will *not* be going to the castle," he snapped, reaching for his potions. "I'm not going up to the castle to be handed over to the Aurors." Hermione exhaled in a huff, and he glared at her. She handed the vial, bottles and jar to him, and he slid them back into his pocket.

Silence enveloped the room, and although she knew he tried, he was barely able to raise his arms. "Then, if I am not taking you to the castle, you have two choices; my bedroom at my parents' house or Grimmauld Place," she stated determinedly.

"Neither," he said, trying to sit up. Hermione helped him to rise. He leaned on her briefly and balanced himself, standing shakily. He turned, and Hermione, for an instant, thought that he was going to fall and reached for him. She felt the squeezing sensation of Apparation before she could summon help or intervene. However, the usual pulling sensation was slightly off, and she realized a moment too late that he hadn't adjusted for her extra bulk. Hermione added her will to his Apparation, hoping that she could boost his spell and they would land safely.

Suddenly, they appeared in a sitting room. Snape jerked his arm from her and fell, landing hard on the floor. Hermione knelt by his side and conjured a pillow for his head, then looked around the small room. *One door with a heavy lock and chain, the front door, perhaps... one window with heavy curtains, and bookshelves the walls are all bookshelves! This cannot be the entire house? "Professor?"* Hermione kneeled down by his side, rolling Snape onto his back. "Professor?"

He was unconscious. His breathing, although light, was steady, and he didn't feel too clammy or sweaty. He looked asleep. She looked around the room *Bookshelves... one small Floo... one window... one door.* The walls were completely covered with books, most bound in old black or brown leather and some newer *One threadbare sofa, an old armchair, one rickety table, and an old carpet... A sitting room perhaps. A sitting room with only one way out? No, can't be.* She looked for a light source and saw a candelabra hanging from the ceiling. Using her wand, she lit the candles. "They're merely stubs, only about four inches, if that. That won't give us much light for long, Professor," she said, more to hear a voice than for conversation. She crossed to the Floo and conjured flames, watching them dance in the grate, before turning to assess her situation.

No way out except by that door, which will let me outside... But if this is Professor Snape's house, there will be a Fidelius Charm on it if not countless complicated wards and protections. With the life he's led, this place would be more secure than even Hogwarts. I'd never get back and he will die because I won't be able to tell anyone where he is. She looked around for something to transfigure into a blanket. *Nothing... oh wait!* She tried transfiguring the sofa into a bed and levitated Snape onto her makeshift cot. Using the cushions, she made three more blankets and Transfigured the two throw pillows into a blanket and pillow for herself. *That will do for now.*

She slipped her hand into his pockets and tried to summon various potions. The anti-venom, Blood Replenishing, Regenerative and Pain Potions as well as the Healing Salve slipped easily into her hands when she Summoned them nonverbally. She tried again for various healing potions but only a Headache Draught and Bruise Salve slipped into her fingers, and she had no idea what the other bottles, vials and jars she could feel contained. "Well, at least I'll be able to tend your wound," she told Snape. "I hope you are sleeping and not unconscious from another serious injury. I'm not a Healer, you know."

She pulled out her evening bag and drew out the extra clothes she'd packed and fumbled inside for plates, cups and her tooth-brush. Hermione aimed her wand carefully and said, *Aquamenti,* filling both cups with water. Drinking hers, she tried getting Snape to drink some, managing to get him to swallow small amounts. "Well, you got some fluids in you. Maybe if I make some tea later, I can get that in you, too."

Now she had no idea what to do. She sat on the floor, hugging her knees, deciding her best course of action *I have some food, and I can make tea and water. But that won't last long. I cannot use the Galleon to summon help, because I'm sure I can't tell anyone where I am. And I can't just leave him here he'll die.* She turned to look at her one-time Professor and the man Dumbledore trusted more than any other. He looked peaceful, as if he were simply sleeping. *He's not in pain, thankfully, and I think I have enough of his potions to treat his wound three maybe four times. So, obviously, I'm going to be his Healer. For now.* She looked back at the fire and sighed. Her mind replayed the last scenes of the final battle.

Harry was carried toward the castle in Hagrid's arms. Hagrid crying "Harry's dead he's dead," over and over. Yet Harry was alive. Neville pulled Gryffindor's sword from the Sorting Hat just as Harry said he had in the Chamber of Secrets. Neville killed Nagini and Mrs. Weasley killed Bellatrix. Hermione shook her head. But the wand, the Elder Wand existed and Riddle had it. Nevertheless, it flew to Harry's hand the instant Riddle tried to use it against Harry.

Hermione turned again to check on Snape. He looked the same. *But if you killed Dumbledore, then why was the Elder Wand Harry's? Harry said it had something to do about Draco? Harry had Draco's wand, he took it from him... It couldn't be that simple could it?*

Hermione had bought her first wand from Ollivanders just before her first year at Hogwarts. *Mrs. Toblismire had arrived with my Hogwarts letter and stayed through lunch answering my parents' questions. I had begged my parents to let the Hogwarts representative take us to get my school things that very day, so excited to be going to such an exclusive school and to meet other kids like me. Mum and Dad relented, allowing Mrs. Toblismire to lead us into a pub that only Mrs. Toblismire and I could see and onto a street of objects and products that my parents could hardly believe was real.* Hermione recalled every detail of that day. *The sights, sounds, smells, and the people...*

She tried to remember that day in the wand shop. *There had been a boy and a girl cousins, at the counter buying their first wands. A pile of discarded wands lay on the counter. I marveled at how sleek, beautifully made and ordinary they looked.* Hermione chuckled, and a soft groan came from the man behind her. *There was one, though, that didn't look like the others, a sleek wand with a delicately carved vine and tiny leaves. It seemed to... not really glow... or... be alive... Yet it seemed to... slip toward me slightly. So, I picked it up, and the shaft glowed and soft stars emitted from the tip and it felt happy.* "Mr. Ollivander had said that 'the wand chooses the witch,'" she said aloud.

The man on the couch stirred. Hermione checked her watch. Nearly nine. *Should I redress his wound or do it tomorrow?* She laid her hand on his forehead, and it didn't feel hot. *Warm, slightly clammy, but I don't think he has a fever*

Suddenly she remembered the portrait of Phineas Black. She pulled the portrait out of her bag with some difficulty and propped it up on the chair, but the canvas was blank. "Professor Black?" she asked the canvas. It remained blank. *Probably still partying it up with the other portraits in the castle.*

She picked up the pain potion and tipped Snape's head back a bit to get him to open his mouth. He resisted slightly but she managed to get him to swallow a mouthful. She switched the bottle for the bottle of Nagini's anti-venom and gave him a mouthful of that one, too. Then refilled his cup and helped him drink as much water as she could get him to drink, then sat back and waited.

She finally fell asleep on the floor by his cot.

The sun's rays were making a white line on the old Persian rug as they shone through the slit between the curtains on the window, hitting Hermione in the eyes. She rolled over, trying to find a comfortable position, before registering that she was on the floor. Gingerly, Hermione rose, sitting cross-legged, looking at Professor Snape. He looked better slightly. Taking as much care as she could, she undid his bandage and checked his wound. The wound wrapped around nearly half of his neck, with the deepest tears in the front near his Adam's apple and his cervical spine. *Probably from the fangs.* It was a deep reddish-pink and light grey, in the areas where the snake's teeth marks had been, and whitish-yellow ooze in the center of the gash. The ragged tissue along the edges were purplish and yellow. *That does not look good!*

Hermione rummaged in her bag until she found a clean shirt and her Potions knife. She tore a new cloth from the shirt, setting it aside, and fished out her cauldron. "Scourgify," she repeated several times to assure herself that her cauldron was as clean as it could get and filled it with water, set it in the grate and relit her small fire. When the water looked warm, she carried the cauldron beside the cot and gently cleaned the gash on Snape's neck.

Careful not to pour out too much, she allowed several drops of the potion in the dark purple bottle to fall into the gash. Next, she smeared on the salve from the jar and re-banded his neck, careful to move his head as little as possible. She gave him a small amount of the anti-venom again and the potion from the green bottle and sat back.

During the hour that Riddle gave everyone to collect their dead and wounded, and for Harry to surrender himself, the house-elves, unsure of what they should do and wanting to 'help,' had been passing out trays of food and bottles of drinks. Several house-elves pressed sandwiches, chicken, fruit, breads and desserts on Hermione as she moved around the Great Hall. She had put a Stasis Charm on all the food and slipped it into her purse. Now, she was ever so thankful for the house-elves' thoughtfulness.

"Professor?" she asked, touching him again. He hadn't been all that responsive when she ministered to his wound but he had swallowed the potions. "Professor Snape?"

She pulled out a tea bag and two sandwiches, making a pot of tea and then soaking his sandwich in the tea. It looked disgusting, but it was food. *Liquidus,* she said swishing her wand at the contents of the cup. Hermione wrinkled her nose at the glutinous muck. "Too bad I can't make this taste any good. But you have to have something in you," she told Snape.

He moaned as she lifted his head, but he swallowed the small amounts of the liquid sandwich that she poured into his mouth.

With that accomplished, Hermione selected a book from one of his bookshelves and situated herself by the window, and began to read.

When the sky outside became too dark to read by, she fixed another sandwich mashed in tea and fed him before she ate. After that, she read by wand-light until she was sleepy.

This was to become her routine for the next four days.

~oOo~

Day 5

It had been four days of cookies, stale sandwiches and cakes, wilted fruit and water from her wand. She had to ration out the food to last, not knowing how long she would be trapped here. She was now hungry. Several times Hermione had pulled out her Protean Charmed Galleon to try to send messages, but no one answered. She doubted that any of her friends were bothering with them now that the war with Tom 'Voldemort' Riddle, as she had come to think of him, was now over. The portrait of Phineas Black was still propped up on the chair, but he had yet to make an appearance.

She had little to do but read books and tend Snape's wound twice a day. She had gone through several of his books already, mostly choosing the old books bound in black or brown leather and some more recently printed ones that she knew Hogwarts did not have in the library. She was surprised to see that not all the books were about the Dark Arts in fact, most of them weren't. Her study journal and quill sat on the floor as Hermione returned the books she'd finished and selected the ones she wanted to read next.

The sun was setting and the light was fading. *Time to check his neck and try and force him to swallow more soggy sandwiches*

"Who are you?" a hoarse voice broke the silence of the room.

Hermione stiffened, knowing that if he was awake, he would probably be quite angry with her. Especially since she had been attending to him as if his personal Healer, and she knew he'd most likely fume over some of the necessary intimacies she'd had to perform. Taking a deep breath to get her fear under control, she turned around, stepped over to where he could see her better and said, "Hermione Granger, sir."

His eyes opened wider, then narrowed them into a scowl. "Where did you take me, Miss Granger?"

"Um nowhere... You did," she said uncomfortably.

"I did no such thing," he snapped, obviously very irritated. He was silent for a while as he mulled over her statement. "How in the blazes did you... Where are we?"

"I don't know where you brought us. I believe that this may be your house, sir." She cringed inwardly while trying to maintain the appearance of composure.

"What in the bloody hell are you doing in my house?" he snarled angrily. "And what exactly do you think you are doing here?"

"Re-shelving books, Professor. I finished reading them, and I am putting them back as I found them," she answered more calmly than she actually felt.

"Reading what exactly?"

"A books from the shelves, of course," she said as politely as she could muster, ready for him to berate her. He rolled his head and groaned in pain. "I wouldn't do that, you'll rip your throat again, and I'm running out of your potions."

"How long," he asked.

She could tell that talking was difficult for him. "Five days," she said simply.

His eyes narrowed into a scowl, and she could almost feel the animosity radiating off him, even in his weakened state, and uncertainty sliced through her again "Five days?"

"Yes, sir," she said, coming closer to him so he wouldn't have to strain his neck.

"That is bloody unacceptable!" he snarled. Hermione stood with her arms crossed, not budging. "You will get out of my house this instant!"

"I'm sorry, sir, no."

"Excuse me?"

"Since I don't know where I am, and I'm quite sure you have a Fidelius Charm on the house, I'm not going anywhere until you are able to take care of yourself." He opened his mouth to speak, and she cut him off. "You have been a stone's drop from death and practically unconscious the whole time. I have been attending to you, cleaning your wound and administering your potions as best as I could to keep you alive. Not that I *ever* expect you to thank me. But until you are able to rise off that cot and do for yourself or allow me to take you to St. Mungo's I'm staying."

He glared at her hard, his teeth clenched and his breathing deep and forced. Hermione didn't move, budge or back down from his intense stare. After a long silence his breathing slowed and relaxed somewhat, but she could see that he was still very angry. "Fine."

"Now, we have a problem, sir," she said, once she saw he'd calmed down and might be reasonable. "I don't know how to leave this room, and as you can no doubt tell, it's a bit rank in here. Also, you need a bath, and so do I. Not to mention food, a change of clothes and I'm running out of your potions. So, what can we do about that?"

"We?" The tic in his cheek was back as he clenched his teeth.

"Yes, *we* as in you and I," she said with every bit of assurance she could muster.

"I don't want you wandering around my house."

Hermione nearly laughed. *Of course he doesn't!* "Okay, I won't wander. However, I'd like to have access to the loo and get you on a proper bed. I'd like to use the kitchen if you want food to eat, and access to this room. Is that acceptable?" she asked, trying to list out only basic requirements and hoped he'd understand the necessity of her requests.

He tried to sit up, struggling against both pain and his current weakness. Hermione reached out a hand to help him so he would not strain himself and tear the wound open again. She conjured several pillows to prop him up and support his head, held in place by magic. Once he was sitting up, he looked at her, appraising his situation and her request. "Fine, Miss Granger. However, you will limit yourself to the areas you have mentioned."

She nodded. "Now, about these potions..."

"Show me the wound," he said, cutting her off.

Hermione picked up a thin book and transfigured the cover into a mirror, then placed it in his hands. As gently as she could, she unwrapped his neck. The wound still oozed slightly with both small traces of blood and the yellow-white secretion she hoped didn't mean the wound was infected. The flesh in the gash was a dark reddish-pink, with light grey, yellow and white along the edges and in the center. The normal skin around it was still reddish, but it looked better than it had four days ago. "How often do you change my dressing?" he asked as Hermione rewrapped his neck.

"Twice a day." She crossed her fingers, hoping it was enough. He scowled, irritated at her statement. "I didn't know how often I was supposed..."

"No, you did not. How much potion is there?" Hermione retrieved the vials and handed them to him, waiting as he assessed the remaining contents. "I will have to..." Snape said, trying to get up, straining again, falling back onto the pillows and almost rolling off the cot. Hermione reached out to him, only barely managing to help him steady himself when he wavered, and then readjusted his pillows. "You will have to brew more," he stated with a glum, hopeless shrug, although he sounded petulant. "You will have to follow my exact instructions, Miss Granger."

"Of course, Professor. But I will need to clean my cauldron out and..."

"No, Miss Granger, you will have to assist me to my laboratory. The potion must be brewed in a silver cauldron," Snape said with a disdainful sneer. "Surely, you didn't think *all* potions were brewed in pewter cauldrons?"

Hermione bristled at his rebuke, but tried to keep her emotions from her retort. "How exactly? You cannot even stand up and I can't carry you. How do I get you there?" she asked as patiently as she could.

"I'll walk," he said defiantly.

Hermione crossed her arms and cocked her head. "You can barely sit up..." He glowered at her, and she crossed her arms, thinking. "I can levitate the cot and float you to another room, but you must know I have never used the Mobilis Charm except in school and never on a person on a cot by myself." His scowl darkened but she ignored him. "I could use the Mobilis Charm, and float you, but I'd also have to make you stiff as a board in order to float you safely. I really shouldn't put any kind of neck support on you... that would really aggravate your wounds, but your neck must be immobilized somehow to move you."

He nodded "You may, but you will immobilize my neck and backbone only. I will be allowed to use my arms and legs as well as speak in my own house."

"Fine, I think I can do that." She mentally reviewed the Leg-Locker Curse and the body modification she would need to use to only affect his spine *Cratis, or, no spinae*. "I think I know how to modify the spell, sir."

"That remains to be seen," he grumbled. "Expositus, the word is Expositus. It will open the bookshelf behind me," he said softly.

"Okay, that tells me how to leave the room." Hermione smiled, carefully directing the Leg-Locker Curse to immobilize just his spine, and levitated him off the cot. "Upright if you please," he snapped irritably.

She smiled as she turned him so that he floated upright in the air in front of her. "Better, sir?"

"Fine," he snapped. "But do be careful and don't go banging me into the walls or my ceiling."

Hermione smiled as she draped his arm across her shoulders. Trying to walk with him was difficult but she managed to follow his directions through the hidden panel in the bookcase, and then down a short hall to his potions lab, only banging him into both doorways slightly and only once into the wall in the hall. He snapped venomously all three times, even though she profusely apologized each time.

The potions lab was large and expertly laid out for maximum production, with the capacity to make multiple potions simultaneously and easy access to all the supplies, ingredients and instruments. A large L-shaped worktable stood in the center of the room near the wall. There was a large desk and a chair on her right. Across the room

was a double sink and cleaning counter with cabinets above and below it, full of various bowls and utensils. Next to the sink, a spigot jutted from the wall, providing a thin, steady stream of running water that fell into a stone basin. Behind the desk, above the worktable and part of the wall behind her, there were shelves full of ingredients, specimens, books, equipment and utensils and lots of vials, jars, and bottles of every size and shape, some empty and some full of potions. Hermione couldn't believe that she would be able to work in such a remarkable potions lab.

After Hermione Transfigured the chair into something more comfortable, and slightly resembling her father's Lazyboy chair, only more upright to allow him to see what she would be doing on the worktable, Snape began to bark orders. Hermione scrambled to collect all the ingredients and equipment he told her to get and set up the silver cauldron on the magical cold-blue flame. Working under his intense scrutiny was even harder to do than any lesson or detention she had ever had with him at Hogwarts.

She was measuring out the last remaining drops of Nagini's venom before introducing it into the potion, when Snape snapped at her, "That is all I have of the venom, Miss Granger. Measure carefully and be precise. If you are one dram off, you will ruin the potion, Miss Granger, making it toxic, and I will die."

Hermione desperately fought to control her hand, under the added pressure of his statement. "Of course, Professor," she said, maintaining her composure by concentrating on the scale as she rechecked the amount of venom. It was a hair shy of perfect. "Couldn't I just go and get the snake's head from Hogwarts?"

"No, you cannot. Nagini was a unique snake; she was cross-bred magically between a python and a cobra. The venom will only work if it was milked from her while alive and is still fresh."

"This is all we have and it's slightly off, just below the line," she said, turning to him. "Should I add it? Will it be enough?"

He pushed himself up slightly, and Hermione braced herself to assist him if he teetered again, but he wanted to be able to see the measuring cup in her hand. He leaned forward as Hermione turned to show him the amount. He stared at it for a while, then averted his eyes momentarily, obviously considering the risk, and then checked the measurement before saying, "It will suffice." He nearly fell back into the chair as he sat back down. Perspiration beaded his upper lip and forehead, and he looked paler from the exertion.

"Are you sure?" she asked, alarmed by his tone.

"Who do you think brewed the potions that saved Arthur Weasley's life?" he snapped. "Finish it."

Hermione added the venom, and carefully followed the rest of his instructions, relieved when finally the murky burgundy-red liquid turned a pale putrid green. As the potion set, she began the next potion. His directions were still spoken in harsh, demanding tones, but with a growing edge of weariness. She did each step carefully and exactly, minimizing any questions or comments so that he didn't need to speak any more than he had to. Nevertheless, she could still feel the stress of Snape's intent, critical glare as she worked and suppressed her nervousness, concentrating on the task before her. Several hours later, four cauldrons sat in a row, ready to be bottled.

Hermione turned to him, placing her hands on her hips. "So, should I change your dressing now or later?"

~~~~~

*Author's Note:*

*As the only evidence of the effect of Nagini's bite is Mr. Weasley's encounter, I have used his 'timeline' in consideration for this story. Using the Harry Potter Lexicon calendar for T0oP as a reference: Mr. Weasley was supposedly attacked on Dec. 18. On Dec. 19, Mr. Weasley allows Healer Pye to try using Muggle stitches. During Christmas, Mr. Weasley is still in St. Mungo's. On Jan 11, he arrives at Grimmauld Place, cured.*

*If Snape gave St. Mungo's the Regenerative Potion and Nagini's anti-venom Christmas day as I have stated in this story, Mr. Weasley was treated with Snape's potions for eighteen days before he was released from St. Mungo's.*

*So, I have Hermione tending to Severus for five and a half days by herself before Severus became conscious. She is with him through his twenty-one days of recovery.*

*The title: Amalthea [am-al-THEE-uh] was the nymph who nursed the infant Jupiter with goats milk.*

*In regards to the second paragraph of this chapter, I have changed the order in which the bodies are brought into the Great Hall and when, which does deviate from canon. And this is the point where I begin my story... I didn't intend it to fit canon exactly since I didn't particularly like the ending so I'm changing it significantly. I hope you don't mind...*

*I want to thank my betas: Ladyinthecloak and Machshefa for helping me with this story and making it fit for sharing. You ladies were great!*

*This was my main gift for Shadow\_ks in the SS/HG gift exchange. I was thrilled that she liked it so I thought I'd share it with you.*

## Hermione 'Nightingale' Granger

*Chapter 2 of 9*

Hermione knows that if she leaves, Snape will most likely die, since he can't move around without her help and his wound needs tending to. However, Snape's made it quite clear that he doesn't want her in his house. So, bucking up her Gryffindor courage... she'll stick things out for him – regardless.

Hermione 'Nightingale' Granger

~oOo~

Day 6

Snape woke Hermione up with a loud cough. She'd been dreaming about the events at Malfoy Manor, and in her dream things hadn't gone as well as they had in real life. Not that it had been a pleasant visit to begin with, but in her dream she watched as both Ron and Harry were tortured as well. The three of them had been chained to the floor with magical shackles, and Bellatrix was cursing Ron as Narcissa cursed Harry. Lucius was standing over her, her body nearly stripped and slashed as he loomed over her.

"Miss Granger."

The sound of her name broke through her dream, echoing down the great room in Malfoy Manor. The second time she heard her name it made her open her eyes, pulling Hermione from her half-awake, half-asleep state. "Bad dream, Miss Granger?" Snape asked from his cot.

Hermione sat up, stretching to ease the aches from having slept on the floor yet again. "Yes, sir. I'm sorry if I kept you up."

"You didn't, I've been awake for a while. I need to get up, Miss Granger, and apparently I will need your assistance," he said, waspishly.

Hermione yawned, still stretching. "In your condition, I think it's best you stay in bed, sir." She turned to look at him sitting crossed legged on the floor.

"I'm very well aware of my condition, Miss Granger, however, I need to use the loo," he said, not as a request or a demand but more as a statement of fact. "And I cannot get up, so unfortunately, I need your assistance."

"You are very well aware that I have a kind of diaper on you not that I'm insinuating anything by it, but it was the ~~only~~ way I could think of to... handle this particular problem." She tried to keep her voice as professionally clinical as possible. So far her parents would've been proud of how clinically professional she'd been able to be around Snape. "You were unconscious for several days, sir."

"This is not a request. I need to go to the loo." He shifted uncomfortably, unable to lift his head, grimacing and then turned to glare at her. "Do you find this comical, Miss Granger?"

"Not in the slightest." She rose to kneel by his bed. "Look," she said, keeping her composure. "I can try levitating you and carrying you to the loo, but I've never done this before, and it will take a while. I think you should know that I've never levitated anyone except in class, and while I can raise you, getting you to the loo will be difficult. If you have to urinate, I have a urinal I made from a cup, or just do what you have to do and I'll clean you up magically of course. I can simply Scourgify the contents away, just like real Healers do."

He'd been staring at her with disapprobation while she spoke. "That is completely unacceptable, Miss Granger. You are not going to be..." He squirmed uncomfortably, and then continued angrily. "I do not want you fondling my privates."

Hermione successfully suppressed smiling at his comments and managed to maintain a calm, medically professional expression as she faced him. "I assure you I have not. I have, sir, used magic to assist you and simple cleaning spells to clean you up. Please believe me..."

"FINE," He barked. "Give it to me."

Hermione simply nodded and Summoned the urinal, giving it to him. "I'll give you some privacy, then." She knew from some experience that it took him a few minutes to do his business, as her mum would have phrased it, and she knew that he wouldn't want her hovering around the room while he did. She rose and walked to the bookshelf that opened into the hall. "I'll be back in a moment, sir. Call if you need me."

"Just leave me, Miss Granger," he said, obviously disgruntled at the inconvenience.

Hermione shook her head, laughing silently to herself. *Oh, he's annoying, cantankerous, demeaning and waspish, but he has a quirky side. I've seen him with the other professors; and he can be funny. I know that he has a sharp intellect; and he's got a sarcastic wit, which he uses cuttingly, but if I could just get him to lighten up... But he won't, so just deal with it.*

She started to dig around in the kitchen to figure out what she could give him for breakfast. The sandwiches were nearly gone, as was the fruit. She still had a few desserts magically placed in stasis, but that wouldn't do for breakfast. There were some biscuits left... and a box of muesli in the pantry. Warm muesli it is. She opened the cupboards looking for a clean cooking pot, realizing that she really needed to find dish soap, and her gaze fell on a roasting pot. *Oh, this could work! If I can make it big enough I can use this as a bathtub! A real bath! Thank Circe!*

\*

"I'm quite sure that if I ask your owl nicely, he would be more than happy to take a letter to my friends so that they can send me whatever I need," Hermione said softly, but determinedly. Arimus, Snape's Australian Masked Owl, ruffled his feathers, snapping his beak in annoyance over the argument that had started in the sitting room and continued with her standing in the kitchen and Snape lounging at the dining room table, hollering at each other, then continues back in the sitting room. So, basically, they'd been arguing throughout the morning simply because she'd gone upstairs to retrieve a few things.

Hermione had brought Snape's owl from the upstairs bedroom, because she'd heard him screech and knew that the owl probably wanted food and water. What she hadn't known was that the window upstairs magically opened up for the bird whenever he wanted out to fly.

The second reason they were arguing was because she had brought down some of Snape's things as he slept, namely: a fresh set of clothes, undergarments, some pajama bottoms that apparently had been his dad's, towels, Snape's toothbrush, and linens and pillows from his bed, much to his great annoyance.

"Or you can go and leave me in peace." He lay on the cot, his arms crossed defiantly, clutching his covers to his bare chest, fresh from his bath, which had been in the enlarged roasting pan next to the Floo. Severus did not find this amusing, which he'd told her so repeatedly and in no uncertain terms.

Hermione had placed a Disillusionment Charm over his privates before placing him in the modified roasting pan, but Snape had grumbled and complained the entire time she helped him bathe. Not that he was at all incapable of bathing his front side himself, but he couldn't lean forward or scrub his back, so she'd needed to assist him. The mere fact was still making him unreasonably waspish and surly.

For their second day together, well, the second day with him awake, Severus was still as cantankerous, insulting and irritable as ever, despite the routine that they were establishing with one another.

"Would you stop being so utterly difficult! I had to use the Mobilicorpus Charm just to get you in there and back to your bed! You can't use your loo by yourself, and I'm still ministering the treatment to your neck four times a day," she pleaded, exacerbated. She would never have dreamed of speaking to him like this as his student, and tried not to think of it now. "And if I'd ever remotely considered a career as a Healer, *this* would certainly change my mind."

Hermione was on her knees, trying to clean the filthy carpet with a scrub brush she'd found to remove the stains from the carpet and floor. She'd managed to clean the hardwood floor as they'd argued and was currently scrubbing away on the rug. The magic cleaning spell she knew hadn't really removed any of the built up grime, so she'd decided it was best to do it the Muggle way. Besides, scrubbing was a good way to vent her anger, and she found that she'd enough pent up to invigorate her efforts and her determination. *If I'm going to be stuck in this room, it might as well be cleaner and smell nicer* She was starting to have renewed sympathies for house-elves.

"Well, if you had been tending to my wound four times a day from the beginning, I'd be healed by now!" he said in a huff.

*He'd at least stopped reprimanding me for my tone* "How the bloody hell was I to know it needed to be done every six hours!" she said through clenched teeth, dunking the scrub brush into the pan of soapy water and moving forward a bit. "You didn't exactly give me any directions."

"I didn't think you'd be following me home to play mediwitch on me! I don't want you here," he snapped, irritably.

Hermione ignored his comment, sat up and brushed a strand of hair off her forehead. "We need supplies *food*, and I want my toiletries!" she said, holding her ground, her

Gryffindor courage the only thing that kept her here at his bedside. She turned to look at him, and his gaze snapped toward the window. "I'm not leaving this house until you tell me *how* and what I need to know to get *back in* or until you can function *on your own without me*." She knew she was just being stubborn, but at this point, Hermione felt committed to helping him, even against his wishes. "It's either me or St. Mungo's. Choose!"

He glared ahead at the bookcase for a while before answering. "We can make your toiletries here," he snapped, almost childishly.

"We?" she asked surprised, raising her eyebrows and staring at him in disbelief as she turned to face him.

His head snapped to look out the window. "Yes, we." He didn't look at her, but continued to stare at the window she had somehow managed to open.

Hermione waved her wand to siphon up the dirty water and soap from the rug. "I'll have to use the Mobilicorpus Charm and Spine-Locker Curse just to get you back into the lab," she said, still not believing that he just offered to allow her to use his potions lab again. "Why we cannot just Transfigure the dining room into a bedroom is beyond me!"

"There is only a half-loo downstairs," he said defensively.

Hermione closed her eyes, inhaling deeply to calm herself. "I'm fully aware of that." She paused to see if he was going to make some retort. He didn't. He just stared at the wall at the foot of his cot. "I was able to Transfigure a roasting pan into a tub in the kitchen, your couch into a reasonable cot, and your chair in the potions lab... So why can't I Transfigure the dining room furniture into bedroom furniture, and ensconce myself here in your sitting room. At least you'd have some privacy."

He turned to glare directly at her, his dark eyes smoldering. "This is my house, and I don't want you changing it around, or adding girly touches like lace and flowers all over the place," he snapped.

"Do I really strike you as a lace and flower kind of girl?" she asked, sitting up and staring at him, stunned. "I was merely thinking about convenience. *Your and* mine. Unless you like having me carry you in and out of the sitting room six times a day, and sleeping at your feet, Professor."

He exhaled sharply, once again staring at the window. "I have a bedroom."

"I can't leave you in your bedroom. I'd be running up and down your stairs six to ten times a day not that I wouldn't appreciate the exercise but it would be exhausting." She fell back on all fours determined to finish the rug before dinner.

"You may leave at anytime, Miss Granger." He turned to stare at her, watching her scrub his carpet, crossing his arms, waiting for her to answer. She didn't. "What I want is to get dressed and to be left alone."

She didn't even stop scrubbing to answer him. "Your pajama bottoms and clothes are soaking in the kitchen. However, for now, you are going to wear the pajama bottoms and nightshirts because it makes it easier for me to take care of you. I will get to them in an hour, and you'll have those back all nice and clean."

"There are spells for that," he said pointedly.

"I don't know any that take out blood, and a good soaking won't hurt them," she said, finishing a corner of the rug and turning to start the other.

"I meant the rug, Miss Granger."

She looked at him just in time to catch him staring at her bum before he turned his head back to the window. "So you wait until I'm nearly finished to tell me this," she replied with a smirk. *Dirty old man.*

~o0o~

Day 7

She nearly dropped him twice and banged his shoulder against the doorway going through the concealed door into the hall and again into the wall on their way down to his potions lab. He wasn't heavy with the Mobilicorpus Charm, but he still wanted to be upright and given the semblance of walking, even if he had to hold onto her shoulders with one arm. Hermione had apologized both times, but his mood was ebbing from dreadful to horrid before they even reached the door to the potions lab.

*Does he always wake up each morning at dawn? At lest he could tell me which side of the cot is his 'right' side. Maybe then we could start out each morning in a better mood.* She silently counted to five with each breath, in order to control her own anger at him. *One. He's hurt. Two. He's sick from the venom. Three. He's an independent loner kind of guy. Four. He's used to having his way... Ha! That's a laugh... She nearly chuckled aloud, and he scowled at her. Five...*

"What could possibly be so funny, Miss Granger, about ramming me into the wall?" he snapped in irritation.

"Absolutely nothing," she stated. "If we were..."

"Give it a rest."

"Not until you acquiesce to my request to temporarily relocate your boudoir to the dining room and your lavatory to the kitchen, and let me Transfigure the sitting room into a bedchamber..." she said while she supported him as he lowered his wards to the potions lab so they could enter. "Thank you... for myself," she said as she helped him down the few steps and into his chair. "Just to make things easier on *both* of us. There. Are you comfortable enough?"

"I do not want you *redecorating* my house," he sneered as she helped him into the chair. "Aqueous extract, laurel, algae, laurenth salts, oils: castor bean, grape seed, wheat germ, hemp seeds, rosemary, citric acid, virgin Demiguise urine, Plimpy secretions," Snape began rattling the list of ingredients without preamble. "That is your base, Miss Granger, or do I have to write this down for you?"

"I thought that, since you always did in class..." she said. Snape looked at her with a scowl, and she turned and hurried to his shelves and store cupboard to collect the ingredients he'd listed. Snape repeated each ingredient slowly as he watched her move about his shelves.

"Jojoba, coltsfoot leaves, nettle leaves, Horsetail. Then, clary, sage, lavender, lemon, ylang ylang, calendula flowers, golden seal, achillea flowers, chamomile root, aloe barbadensis leaf, balm mint leaves, lappa root, wild cherry bark, henna, patchouli ..." he continued as Hermione scrambled to pull the items from his shelves. "And use the copper cauldron."

Hermione set the bottles, jars and boxes of ingredients on the workspace; Snape reached out with his knife and cut off a lock of her hair.

"Hey!" she exclaimed, grabbing her head.

"Needed for the conditioner cream rinse you wanted." He rolled the hair between his fingers and smelled the lock. "Fetch glycerin, farfara oil, jojoba seeds, peasifer beetles, mascula flower extract, paradite beans, lanolin, hellicale slugs, and black river snails... lauramine sap, olive leaf, wasabia and japonica roots," he continued. "Did you not hear me, Miss Granger, or am I wasting my time?"

Hermione went back to the shelves as he repeated his list. "Avocado oil, coconut milk, jojoba oil, soybean oil, rosemary leaves, nettle drops, oil of sandalwood, oil of lavender, geranium oil, dried horse tail, honey and almond oil, citric acid and witch hazel, Shea nut butter, lemon juice..." he continued listing each ingredient more slowly this time.



Neither the shampoo nor the conditioner were difficult potions to create, except that Snape didn't bother writing down the directions, preferring to snap and bark orders for each step from memory. He'd also insisted that Hermione brew both potions at the same time, alternating between cauldrons. Many of the ingredients went into both, but not at the same time.

After they were set aside to cool, he rattled off another list of ingredients for Headache and Muscle Relaxant Potions, setting her to work for him. With a flick of her wand, he made the directions appear on a large white board tacked up on wall in front of the worktable. Afterwards he used her wand again to make the directions for his Regenerative Potion appear, challenging her with a sneer and a cutting remark that if it was too much for her, she could simply take a break. She finished the complicated potion, and he swept the directions from the board, putting up the directions for an Anti-Infection Salve. The directions were simple enough, but the timing was fast, and the ingredients would have to be prepared quickly, precisely and with expert accuracy.

"What's the matter, Miss Granger? Too much of a challenge?" he asked with a cool silky drawl.

"Not at all, professor," she said cheekily and turned to collect the ingredients.

By the time she was through and was setting the cauldron aside to cool, she was sweating and breathing harder than usual, but feeling exhilarated and immensely pleased with herself.

"Lunch, Miss Granger," he said. He was paler, lounging in his chair. Hermione knew he had been doing too much, sitting there, directing her. "And time to change my dressing."

Hermione nodded and efficiently unwrapped his neck, cleaned his wound and applied the last of the potions in the vials and redressed his neck. She carried the vials to the sink to soak in scalding hot water and cleaning solution. She turned to face him, leaning against the counter with her arms crossed. "We are having mystery cans for lunch, I'm afraid. Would you like to rest here as I scavenge through your pantry or do you wish to be carried to the dining room?" she asked, biting her lip nervously.

He narrowed his eyes and his lips twitched irritably. "What is that supposed to mean?"

"I am down to three unidentifiable cans in your pantry, and seeing that they do not have labels, I have no idea what's inside them or if they are any good for consumption." He glowered at her menacingly. "Either that or I could make Plimpy soup?" she asked, pointing to the Plimpies she had cleaned to remove their secretions. "Or I could find some other ingredient to create some kind of soup," she said, pointing to the creatures stuffed in a large jars on his shelf. "Your choice."

He sat staring at the potion cooling on the worktable, obviously contemplating her remarks, sighing heavily and refusing to look at her. "Fine. Get Arimus and send him to get food."

"I'll be right back." Hermione said, slipping from the room before he could change his mind to get parchment and quill from her purse and quickly drafted a half scroll note. She couldn't write down where she was, and decided to hold off mentioning who she was with, simply calling him a friend in need. She explained that the house was protected under the Fidelis Charm so she couldn't say where she was and that if she left him alone he'd probably die, since she wouldn't be able to get back or be able to send help. She also added that because of the wards, she couldn't just take him out of the house either so Mrs. Weasley wouldn't wonder why she hadn't just taken Snape to St. Mungo's. She decided to leave out exactly how she got here, hoping that Mrs. Weasley would not consider asking that question either. She then wrote out a list of things she wanted, including her favorite brand of toothpaste and dental floss, hoping that Harry would get it for her. Once done, she ran into the kitchen to see if Snape's owl would agree, or if she could talk him into going for her.

"Arimus, are you awake?" she asked the owl politely. "I really need to make a request of you." Arimus opened his eyes and turned his head in her direction, regarding her serenely. "I need you to carry a message for me. We need food, and I must get a message to my friends. They will be terribly worried about me... and Professor Snape."

Arimus screeched sternly.

"I know that Professor Snape said this morning that he didn't want you to go, but he has changed his mind *really* just now in the potions lab," she implored. "All I'm asking of you is if you will fly to the Burrow, my friend Ron's house, for me? They're near Ottery St. Catchpole. Mrs. Weasley will pack a care package for us," she pleaded, then added, "including owl treats," as if bribing a small child.

Arimus turned his head, looking toward the door as if hoping that Snape would materialize.

"He's in the potions lab, resting a bit before I bring him in here for lunch," she explained.

Arimus turned to stare at her with his intelligent but unfathomable black eyes.

"If you won't go, I will have nothing to feed us including you unless you wish to do the hunting for us as well as yourself. I'm sure Professor Snape will gladly eat whatever you manage to catch." She was sure he stared at her scornfully, apparently indignant at her suggestion. "I suppose I could cook rabbits, but I don't think Professor Snape would think too much of eating rats, squirrels, chipmunks, gophers, beavers or weasels...."

Finally, Arimus ruffled his feathers, stretched his wings, and then extended his leg.

"Oh, thank you!" she exclaimed happily.

She carried Arimus into the sitting room and watched the owl fly out the window, feeling as if she'd won two victories today. One, she was sending a letter to her friends, telling them she was all right. And two, she had spent an entire morning, half a day, receiving private tutelage from Professor Snape on what she knew to be advanced potion making and learning new skills under his watchful eye. *Two days... I got to brew eight potions with him... advanced potions... and those knife techniques for slicing the different ingredients... I wonder if I will get to do that again?*

Hermione walked back to the dining room, wondering how she was going to feed him. It was hard to prop Snape up on the cot in the sitting room, and he wouldn't be able to sit at the table unless she did something to make it easier for him. She decided to Transfigure one of the chairs into a soft comfortable high back that could be angled to support Snape's body and still allow him to be mostly upright. After several tries, she had managed a suitable looking chair.

She went back to the potions lab and helped Snape 'walk' to the dining room, propping him up in the magically modified chair before she walked into the kitchen to fix something to eat. He sat brooding in his chair as she opened a can of tomato soup, tinned salmon and beans. She also found a tin of crackers and an old crumpled bag of biscuits. Hermione dumped the contents of all three cans into a pot and walked back to the potions lab for spices and herbs.

Snape merely stirred his soup, crumbled his crackers onto the surface, and scooped up a spoonful, grimacing after he swallowed. Hermione ate her soup as quickly as she could, then moved over to help Snape eat, but he adamantly refused her help. She rose to clean up the kitchen. She had finished wiping down the counters and was contemplating cleaning the bay window, when Snape spoke up, startling her. "I've eaten as much of this as I can."

Hermione turned around, and collected his plate and bowl. He'd polished off the biscuits and crackers, and half his soup. "I probably should change your clothes now," she said softly. "Do you want me to do it here, or in the sitting room?"

"Neither. I'm fine how I am. I would like you to brew Dreamless Sleep Potion and an Anti-Inflammatory... and I'll need a healing salve in case the wound becomes infected." Hermione stared at him in disbelief. "Unless you don't feel you are up to making..."

"Oh, no, sir! I mean, if you feel that you need me to make them for you..." she unintentionally interrupted him. She wanted to express her delight, but refrained, lest he changed his mind. "I'd be amenable to your request."

"You will need to assist me back to the lab."

"Of course, sir." She checked that the Mobilicorpus Charm and Spine-Locker Curse still held their effect on him, and then pulled his arm across his shoulders to carry him into the potions lab again. This time she managed to only bang him once as they passed through the doorway of the lab.

"Pull out my copy from Griselda Hardisty's *Comprehensive Healing*, volume four, and Dilys Derwent's *Moste Importante Potions, Draughts and Salves*"

She'd just finished the anti-infection salve, setting the cauldron next to the Dreamless Sleep Potion, and an Anti-Inflammatory Salve when a loud screech could be heard. "Arimus is in the sitting room, Miss Granger. Go get him," Snape demanded. "And I need to be changed again."

~oOo~

Day 8

He'd relented, finally. Hermione stood in the large room that made up the dining room and kitchen, deciding where to begin.

The kitchen was very much like the one at Grimmauld Place, only yellow, with old wood cupboards and white tile counters. Crockery sat on the glass shelves in the bay window over the kitchen sink. *Probably for growing cooking herbs... I'll see if Mrs. Weasley would send me some herbs from her garden* There was a pantry and a large cupboard on her left. *The pantry would work as a bathing area* She easily enlarged the space to accommodate the large roasting pan tub, a chair and small dressing table she'd found upstairs, still leaving plenty of room for the shelves that now stretched out along the back wall. *Fine, this will work nicely. I could remove or Transfigure the door to make a screen*, she thought as she waved her wand, first turning the door into a screen, then Transfiguring it into a curtain that could be tied back if necessary. *Better. The square kitchen area has an island work counter that could be Transfigured into a small table*, she reasoned. She opened the cupboards on the island counter, placing the extra cookware in the pantry and then Transfigured the extra counter space into a reasonable table. *And I will still have counter space near the sink to prepare food. This will work.*

Turning around, she considered the dining room area. It had a large wood table and six chairs, dish cupboard and hutch that were a dark wood of some kind. A wrought-iron candelabrum that hung from the ceiling, and several matching wrought-iron wall sconces were set at even intervals along the walls. Still the best light source was from the bay window in the kitchen. *I'll have to request that Harry send me some candles* She jotted down candles on her list of things she still needed on the next letter she was sending to Harry. *He'd said he didn't mind, and I feel far less guilty asking him for the items than Mrs. Weasley, although she'd said she was delighted to send me anything I needed in the letter she'd sent with the care package.*

Ron's letter had been accusing and whiny, which had irritated her, but Ginny had promised to help research anything Hermione might need in regards to healing spells, or potions, which was sweet. George's letter was deeply concerned for her welfare, and he promised to get her anything she needed as well. She appreciated the deck of Weasleys' cards and Scrabble Runes he sent her. So far, Snape hadn't been in the mood to play the game.

She turned her attention back to the dining room to consider where to begin. She aimed her wand at the chairs, moving them against the wall and as far from the table as she could. "*Trabis Mutationis Lectulus*," she said, Transfiguring the table into a reasonable sized bed. She selected the two sturdiest chairs and levitated them down to the kitchen. "*Cathedrae Mutationis Cervicalis*," she said, Transfiguring two of the chairs into pillows. *Not bad... and definitely not girly...* She made up the bed with the bedding she had pulled from the bedroom upstairs and washed that morning, transforming them to fit the dining table-bed she'd created. She folded back the covers so Snape could be placed in the bed easily. *Okay, now the dish cupboard and hutch... I'll need room for his clothes, pajamas and for linen*

The dish cupboard was full of very nice and fairly old china, which she'd expected, and the hutch held most of the serving pieces and silver. Hermione carefully removed the china and carried it into the kitchen. She found enough space for the china in the large cupboard next to the pantry on the bottom shelves.

Once she was all done, Hermione walked into the sitting room to assist Snape into his new bedroom. He sat in a chair she had Transfigured earlier into a more comfortable high-backed chintz chair, which comfortably support his head. He had his feet propped up on the bed that was once his couch. "So are you done rearranging my house?"

"Nearly," she said, standing before him. "You still have the choice you know, the dining room or the sitting room."

"I think I'd prefer the sitting room."

Hermione smiled. "That's fine, I'll just carry you into the kitchen and back three times a day for meals, and each night for your bath. I'll change your dressing at meal times and after you bathe. So, breakfast will be at six, lunch at noon, dinner at six and bath at midnight... That means I'll need to carry you to and from the sitting room four maybe six times a day and whenever you need to use the loo or want to be in the potions lab... Will that work for you?"

Snape glowered. "Fine. I'll sleep in the dining room. But I don't want you making a lot of racket when you cook."

"Okay, I'll try that's the best I can give you." She pointed her wand at his chest. "So, are you ready to see your new bedroom?"

He huffed.

"I'll take that as a yes. *Mobilicorpus*," Hermione said, since the Spine-Locker Curse was still on him. She lifted him from the chair and shifted Snape's arm across her shoulders to assist him into the converted dining room. The action was much easier for her now, and she noticed that he was able to move his arms more easily as well. As they entered the dining room, Hermione wished that she had a better view of his face to see his reaction, but his lack of condescending remarks was enough. Gingerly she placed him in his new bed and drew up the covers. "I'd better tend to your neck now," she said as she propped him up with pillows.

"The room looks acceptable," he said as she made sure that she'd placed his potions on the dish cupboard.

Hermione smiled as she walked to the sink to get warm water. "Thank you." She tended his wound as gently as she could and wrapped his neck with a clean cloth. "So will it bother you if I start supper now? I can wait an hour if you need to rest some."

"No, I'm hungry," he said curtly. She rose to go and he caught her wrist, pulling her to sit next to him. "Thank you."

Hermione smiled. "You're welcome."

"I know I have been difficult," he said simply, and his eyes flicked to the wall. Her smile brightened at the simple apology. "I don't want you here, but... thank you for staying."

"Well, you know us Gryffindors: we stand by our friends."

His eyes immediately jumped to her face and he cocked one eye bow. "Friend?"

"Okay. Professor, comrade... fellow Order member, and if you'd ever allow me yes, *friend*." His dark eyes held hers, making Hermione slightly nervous under his intent stare.

"Why would you do this all this? What do you hope to gain?" he asked, staring at her intently.

"I'm doing this because you are hurt, you would have died without help, and because I know you're a good man."

He scoffed at her.

"Don't kid yourself. I know you're surly, irritable and proud, but I've watched you with the other professors and Order members. Among those you consider your equals, you're personable, well liked and well respected even admired. I know that you're intelligent, very skilled and extremely knowledgeable on many subjects. Get past the roughness and you're an amazing guy."

Snape lay back on his pillows, although he never took his eyes off Hermione's. "Is that how you see me, Miss Granger, as some kind of wizard to look up to?"

"Look, I know you've had to do things, bad things, throughout this war, and I know you've made sacrifices plenty of them. I wouldn't lie to you and say I'd understand all of them, but I believed Dumbledore when he said you were on our side. He trusted you completely." She looked down at her hands, wishing to phrase her thoughts so as not to anger him. "I don't pretend to know why you did some of the things you did," she said, wishing she had the nerve to ask him why he killed Dumbledore. "There is a lot I'd like to know..."

"I'm sure there is," he said, closing his eyes. "I thought that you were going to fix us something to eat."

Hermione waited, and he opened one eye, then closed it. "Either start cooking or leave my boudoir," he said with a smirk.

She smiled; it was the nicest tone he'd used so far. *Maybe things are improving?* "Ham sandwiches and soup okay?"

"Better than what you made yesterday for lunch," he said.

\*

Hermione had quickly prepared the food, careful to slice the ham in thin enough slices so that it would be easy for Snape to chew, and placed them on a tray with his soup. He ate little of the sandwich but most of the soup, and after she redressed his neck, he laid back on his bed with his eyes closed.

She cleaned up the kitchen and began to replant the small herbs Mrs. Weasley had given her into the ceramic pots on the bay window shelves. After she was done, she filled the tub in the enlarged pantry and took a long soak, reminding herself to ask Ginny to send her some bubble bath. After her bath, Hermione cut several slices of the roast Mrs. Weasley sent her, and set it to simmer in the watered-down, left over soup, with a few onions and carrots. By dinnertime she hoped it would be a soft enough stew for Snape to eat. As she passed his bed to go to the sitting room, he reached out to grab her arm. "Where are you going?"

"The sitting room to read," she replied, surprised.

"Would you bring Vanderkirk's *Tales of Wanderous Myths* here?" he asked.

"Of course," she answered. "Which shelf is it on?"

He opened his eyes and looked at her with the smallest hint of a smile. "Third shelf on your right from the door I believe."

She hurried into the sitting room, searched and found the book. It was an old volume and dusty. She quickly cleaned it off with her wand and returned to give him the book. "Read it," he said, without opening his eyes.

"Pardon me?" she asked stunned, not sure she understood him.

Snape opened his eyes and looked at her. "Aloud. Would you read it out loud, please?"

"Sure," she said, walking to the kitchen to retrieve a chair and set herself at his bedside. "Where do you want me to begin?"

"The beginning, of course, Miss Granger."

~oOo~

Day 9

Hermione found a book on the shelves that spoke about owl husbandry and sat down in her chintz chair to read. Snape had been in a fairly foul mood that morning when she woke him for his dressing change and breakfast. He'd barely eaten any of his porridge. Not that Hermione had either. It had come out somewhat lumpy, and she'd burnt the sausages slightly. Even Arimus didn't particularly care for the sausages, screeching angrily to be allowed out to fly. *All right*, she'd admitted to herself. *They were extra crispy*. Hermione was tired and a bit cranky herself this morning. The six-hour intervals between dressing changes was making her weary.

She had informed Snape that she was going to take a nap before lunch, and he had chosen to simply ignore her as he lay on his bed with his eyes closed. The extra hour nap had improved her mood, and she felt better, but not yet ready to face Snape.

She was mentally taking notes on the suggested care and feeding of an owl when Arimus flew back in through the window and dropped a rabbit on her lap. Hermione jumped in surprise, and looked up at Arimus in shock. "Ah, thank you. Is this a hint or do you expect me to clean it for you?" She set down the book and examined the rabbit, holding it by its hind feet.

The owl simply screeched softly, watching her with his dark, expectant eyes. "All right then," she said, getting up and offering her arm, waiting for him to perch on her shoulder, before carrying him and his gift into the other room.

As she passed Snape heading into the kitchen, he opened his eyes. "What is that?"

She sidestepped around the kitchenette table. "Which? Your owl or the rabbit."

Arimus simply flew over to his stand and turned around to watch the people he was living with.

"Don't get cheeky with me," he snapped.

Hermione laid the rabbit on the drain board. "Just wanting to clarify your question, sir," she replied, looking down at the dead animal, then up at the owl. "Does, Arimus usually bring you gifts?" she asked, holding up the rabbit. "What does he expect me to do with this?"

"Cook it. He gets the heart and liver when you dress it out. He gets to pick at the ribs and back for dinner." Snape said closing his eyes. "Are you capable of making a decent rabbit stew, Miss Granger?"

"Won't know until I try," she answered cheekily.

"I don't appreciate your cheek."

"Hermione," she corrected him, digging in the drawers for a sharp knife.

"What?"

She found a skinning board next to a cutting board, and pulled it out. "Call me Hermione."

"I don't want to."

"Why?" she asked. He didn't answer. She turned to look at him and he closed his eyes again. "Fine. How do I skin a rabbit?" she asked, not really expecting him to answer her.

"Use a spell like, *Frōns-Levicorpus*, to hang the rabbit in the air by its two front legs. Make a few cuts, and then peel the skin off like pajamas."

"Excuse me?" she asked, stunned, turning around to face him.

Snape closed his eyes and relaxed against his pillows. "This is not hard, Miss Granger. Either you chop off the front feet, cut the skin in the middle over the animal's stomach and pull the skin off in both directions; the skin will peel off in two pieces," he explained patiently. "Then you chop off the head and hind feet. The other way is to chop off the front feet, cut across both legs and cut the skin around the head, hang the animal up, take hold of the skin in both hands and pull the skin downward. It should come right apart for you, then gut and fix the animal for cooking."

"Which is easier?" she asked, regarding the animal. She wasn't at all squeamish about the task. She'd prepared all kinds of insects and small critters for potions and had done plenty of slimy tasks in his detentions and classes. She'd just never dressed out anything as large as a rabbit before.

Arimus screeched softly, bobbing slightly as if giving his encouragement.

"I've always preferred the second, the skin comes off like wet pajamas in one piece," Snape stated. Arimus clicked his beak, bobbing slightly as if giving his assent to Snape's directions.

Hermione pulled out a cleaver and chopped off the front feet, then carefully sliced the skin as he had directed. It wasn't a neat job, but she now had the skin loose enough to pull it off. "*Frōns-Levicorpus*," she said softly, and the rabbit hung in the air in front of her. However, pulling the skin off was harder than Snape said it would be. Finally she had the animal skinned, cleaned and ready to cook.

She offered Arimus the heart, impressed by how daintily he ate the organ. "Thank you for the rabbit, Arimus."

He screeched softly, clicking his beak for the liver. She placed the liver on the dish attached to his stand and returned to the rabbit. She started the pot for the rabbit stew, then reheated soup and made sandwiches from the ham and homemade bread Mrs. Weasley had sent. Hermione set his soup and sandwich on a tray, adding an Anti-Spilling Charm on his soup bowl.

"Here's your lunch. Do you wish to eat first? It's nearly time to change your dressing again," she said as she walked over to Snape's bedside, carrying the tray over to him. He simply grunted and closed his eyes. *Well at least he was affable enough about the rabbit.*

\*

Hermione spent the afternoon, first cleaning up the kitchen, until Snape snapped at her to "desist with the racket," then going into the potions lab to clean there. She checked on the rabbit, adding in carrots, onions, celery, and some fresh herbs from Mrs. Weasley's garden. She was walking back to the sitting room to finish her letters when Arimus started clicking his beak.

Snape reached out his hand again to stop her retreat. "Wrap up the rabbit skin and head, and give it to Arimus. He knows where to take it."

Hermione nodded silently, Transfigured a slip of parchment into a large enough sheet and lifted her arm for the owl. He landed on her arm lightly, and she carried him to the sitting room with the package.

"I have a few letters to go to the Burrow. Can you handle both?" Arimus screeched softly and held out his foot. She quickly collected the finished letters, binding them together and tied them to his leg. With a simple click of his beak, he swooped down on the package, grasping it in his claws. "Thank you," she managed to say before he flew out the window.

Hermione selected a book and settled into her chair to read until dinner.

Arimus flew back into the room with two packages tied together, just as the timer went off on the table next to her cot. "Excellent timing," she said, and he hooted softly in response. She quickly untied the packages, noticing that they'd been charmed to be lighter for Arimus to carry. The large package contained candles, her toothpaste and dental floss and more fresh vegetables from Mrs. Weasley's garden. Ginny had sent her an old, worn book on basic Healing Charms, two bottles of bubble bath and a long letter. The other package was for Snape. She had Arimus sit on her shoulder as she carried the packages and Ginny's letter into Snape's boudoir, as he was now calling the Transfigured dining room, to give him his package and to put the food away in the kitchen.

"What's that?" he asked as she set everything down to leave his package on the bed next to him.

She collected up the larger package as Arimus flew over to his perch. "Which, the package or my letter?" she asked casually, walking into the kitchen,

"I don't appreciate your cheek, Miss Granger. What is in the package?" he asked as she deposited her care package on the kitchenette table.

"Stuff from my friends," she answered as she opened Ginny's letter and noticed a couple of articles she'd cut from the *Daily Prophet* and *Witch Weekly*.

Mrs. Weasley had sent a nice roast beef this time, still hot from the oven and a new loaf of homemade bread. She laughed, considering that she still had plenty from the previous loaf. *Mrs. Weasley must go through a loaf of bread a day the way she sends it here for us. I think I've only used sixteen slices and still have half a loaf*

"What, pray tell is so funny this time?" he snarled from across the room.

"Mrs. Weasley sent us a new loaf of bread. We still haven't finished the last one. That's all. I assume she makes fresh bread nearly every day for her family." She turned to face him. "So, for dinner we have ham, pot roast or roast beef. Which would you like?"

\*

She sat down and continued reading aloud from *Tales of Wanderous Myths* until he fell asleep. She wondered why Snape would want her to read this children's book to him. *It is interesting, and the stories are clever and well written, humorous, angsty with a touch of romance to the adventures.* But it didn't seem like the kind of book she'd associate with someone like Snape. She placed a marker and set the book down on the china cupboard, and pulled his covers up to keep him warm, and then made her way to her own bed. She glanced at the clock she'd set by her bed. *Two hours before I have to change him again. I might as well read.*

*Author's Notes:*

*Arimus is an Australian Masked Owl. (Tyto novaehollandiae), a type of barn owl from the non-desert areas of Australia. The facial coloring is white with short brown feathers around dark brown, forming the heart-shaped outline around dark brown or black eyes, familiar for the Barn Owl species. The Australian Masked Owl is blackish brown with*

grey and white spots on the upper body, and the under parts are white with brown spots, giving the resemblance of a dark brown and tan barn owl, instead of the more familiar tawny and cream coloring.

I have a great deal of gratitude for Ladyinthecloak and Machshefa for beta reading this for me. You ladies are great and I really appreciated you doing this. Thank you.

## Healer and Housemate

### Chapter 3 of 9

Never in all her years at Hogwarts did Hermione ever think she'd be spending this much time alone with Professor Snape, let alone be brewing potions with him in his own private lab! It was a learning experience of a lifetime... too bad he gets so cranky all the time.

~oOo~

Day 10

A small timer next to her bed chimed, waking Hermione from a restless sleep. Fragments of memories from her last year still haunted her dreams, and she wasn't yet conditioned to the time schedule she had to keep as Snape's full-time Healer. *Even at St. Mungo's, they must work in shifts* she mused, stretching. *Maybe I'll ask Professor Snape if I can use some of his Sleeping Potion or if there would be a lighter version of Dreamless Sleep that I can use.* She quickly dressed in a fresh short sleeve sweater and jeans with a pair of soft boots and exited the sitting room to check on her patient.

She found him asleep when she entered the room and debated waking him. She was going to serve eggs and toast today, knowing that she would be able to cook those well enough to be edible. *How badly can someone screw up scrambled eggs anyway?* Nine small vials and jars and the mixing bowl she'd been using to wash his wound sat on the shelves in the hutch. She carried the bowl into the kitchen to fill it with hot water and set a kettle on the stove.

She turned and exited the room, passing by Snape as he slept, and walked into the hallway that ran the length of the house, from the potions lab along the dining room and kitchen, ending at the back door. *The second exit except that I can't exit, which doesn't do me any good since I can't leave* She passed the half loo and a door to a room as she stepped from the dining room, heading toward the door that opened into a sunroom which also seemed to serve as an atrium. Herbs and magical plants lined the walls and filled tabletops. It also contained a makeshift clothesline now. She reached up to retrieve her flannel from the line and then collected the towels, pajamas and two sets of sheets she'd washed yesterday. *Maybe I can get him to lie on my bed while I change his. That would be easier than levitating him while doing it.* Once again, Hermione marveled at how gifted house-elves were. She still felt tired and stiff as she folded the sheets and carried the laundry into the dining room boudoir.

Snape's eyes were open when she walked past his bedside. "Good morning," he mumbled.

"Good morning to you too, sir." She set the laundry aside on her chair as she went to fill the bowl with warm water and cast an Anti-Spilling Charm. "Shall we see how the wound looks this morning?" she asked as she set the bowl on the bed. He only grunted his consent, his expression completely impassive as she carefully began to remove his dressing. There was some murky mustard-colored drainage on the bandage, but there wasn't any putrid smell emanating from the wound. In the sites closest to where Nagini's fangs had bitten him, the wound was still oozing slightly with tiny traces of blood and the yellow-white secretion that seemed to never quite go away. So far, he hadn't indicated to her that the wound was infected, but she was still worried. The flesh of the gash was not closing yet. It was still a dark reddish-pink, and the light grey, yellowish tinge was more prominent, and the free edges along the wound and in the center were a yellowish-white. The normal skin along the wound was a dark reddish purple and his neck looked slightly swollen. It didn't look any better to her than it had several days ago. She gently cleaned his wound, careful with her debridement so as not to tear open the delicate flesh. She tried to gauge whether the wound had closed up at all but was unable to tell with any certainty whether or not it had.

"Let me see," he hissed through clenched teeth.

She handed him the mirror and walked over to the hutch to gather his potions. She carefully selected what she would need *Deep Tissue Regenerative Potion, Anti-Infection Salve, Anti-Inflammatory Salve, Pain Potion, Muscle-Relaxant Draught, Skin-Regenerative Potion and Salve...*

"My neck is swelling, I'll need the Anti-Swelling Salve," he said with a scratchy voice.

Hermione picked up a Throat-Soothing Elixir. "I have it here and the rest. Don't you trust me by now, sir?" She set down the collection on the bed and measured out the dose from the Deep Tissue Regenerative Potion.

"Old habits die hard, Miss Granger. I trust so few people," he said and swallowed his potion.

She measured out the Pain Potion, handing it to him. "I think I can understand that, sir," she said as she picked up the Skin-Regenerative Salve to apply to his wound.

He flinched as she tenderly dabbed in the salve. "Do you?"

He said it as a barb, but Hermione chose to ignore his tone. "Yes. Considering everything you did and were forced to do in this war. I don't doubt you," she said as she applied the Anti-Infection Salve into the wound.

"As if you have any idea what I was forced or coerced to do, Miss Granger."

She aimed her wand tip to the salve, uttering the incantation from Ginny's book and watched the salve absorb into the tissue. "No, probably not. I do know that Dumbledore used you as his spy, personal Potions master, Healer and confidant. I assume that Riddle used you as a spy, infiltrator, and gods know what else," she explained as she applied the Anti-Inflammatory Salve to his entire neck. She was glad to see that the Pain Potion was at least helping him with the pain of her ministrations. "I suppose it would be arrogant of me to say 'I know what you went through,' but not improper to acknowledge that you played a *significant* role in the war. That's all I meant by my statement." Hermione carefully wrapped up his neck again as he stared at her in silence and then carried the old bandage to the sink to let it soak in soap before she'd have to clean it out.

That done, she washed her hands, changed Arimus' water and gave him one of the rabbit's front legs to eat. He clicked his beak at her when she tenderly stroked his feathers. She made breakfast, carrying Snape's food to him on a tray, before sitting down at the kitchenette table to eat.

"Why then do you refuse to sit with me if you claim to respect me so?"

Hermione looked up surprised at his accusation. "I don't!" Snape's lip curled into a sneer. "I mean, it's easier to eat at the table. I never could manage eating while holding a plate in one hand very well." His expression hardened. "Look, my parents used to have, or attend, cocktail parties frequently. Refreshments, appetizers, d'oeuvres... I always found it difficult to hold on to those little plates, balance my punch and eat. Especially when I needed to use a fork or knife. And buffets... I never really liked buffets unless there were tables."

Hermione noticed that his lips almost curled into a smile that disappeared as he ate. "So, what would you like to do after breakfast, other than turn me into a toad?" she asked cheekily.

What he wanted to do was brew potions. However, it was Hermione that brewed his potions, two cauldrons at a time as he snapped and barked orders, corrected her technique and berated or corrected her on how she held her knife, her spoon or her ladle. After the second set of potions, she turned on him. "Do you think it remotely possible for you to correct me without being such a tyrant?" she snapped.

His eyes narrowed in anger. "This is my house and..."

"Yes, your house. *Not* Hogwarts. I'm *not* your student. *And* this is *not* a classroom." She crossed her arms defiantly, not backing down from his angry glare.

He narrowed his eyes into a scowl. "You will show me due respect in my own house, Miss Granger."

"I have been everyday. I've put up with your insults, scolding, rebukes, reprimands, chiding and chastisement for years. I'm only here *to help* you. The *least* you could do is show me a little respect as well."

Snape glowered at her, his dark eyes narrowing dangerously. He pulled himself upright by the armrests of his chair, leaning closer to her. "I don't have to take this from an insufferable girl like you."

"No, you don't," she said more calmly than she felt. His movement didn't escape her notice, but she didn't acknowledge it either. "But *am* here, and I'm not leaving *yet*." Snape raised his eyebrow, and his mouth twitched. Hermione continued undaunted by his ire. "You cannot take house points from me, and I'm not doing all this as a detention."

"I don't want you here," he snarled.

"*You* brought me here, whether you intended to or not." She crossed her arms and tried to control her temper. "Consider it fate if you like. If I wasn't here, you'd *be* dead. You were nearly dead when we arrived here in your sitting room. And *another* war hero would have died but without the acknowledgement that you deserve."

Snape's lip curled up slightly. "I'm no war hero, Miss Granger, you're delusional," he said condescendingly with an expression that almost resembled humor, but the next instant he was sneering once more. "I'm a Death Eater and spy, a killer and a traitor. You have no idea the kind of man I am."

"*Oh, yes I do*. You do have good qualities when you allow people to see them. You're brilliant, dedicated, steadfast, reliable, talented, imaginative and creative. I read your seventh-year Potions book..." Snape looked at her thoughtfully during her admission, then glowered at her again, and his dark eyes narrowing dangerously when she'd mentioned his book. "What I can deduce from what I know about you, you're loyal, trustworthy and stoic. You are also the bravest person I've ever known. You give everything and expect nothing. *And* you usually get nothing in return, so you've come to expect that. No wonder you're so sour and untrusting."

Snape's face relaxed, and he snorted, and he leaned back against the back of his chair. "So you do see me as some kind of hero. I'm afraid that you are the only one, Miss Granger."

"Oh, you'd love to believe that, wouldn't you?" She smiled and relaxed against the worktable. "Do you think I am the only one that knows how much you contributed to this war? The only one who knows that you passed on valuable information to the Order, at great personal risk? The only one who knows that you stood by Harry, Ron and me, watching out for us all these years? Believe me, there are others who know all this, too. Or do you think I harbor some school girl infatuation for you and have placed you on some kind of pedestal?"

A deep chuckle escaped his throat and he scoffed at her, "Really, Miss Granger. How naïve." She opened her mouth, and he held up his hand to cut her off. "I know that if I'd been taken to the castle I'd be in an Auror-guarded room at St. Mungo's right now," he sneered before he schooled his features once again into their usual state of indifference. "As they waited until I was either dead or cleared to be hauled off to Azkaban."

"You don't know that," she answered more curtly than she intended.

He pulled himself upright with the armrests again, watching her with a sardonic grin. "Oh, don't I?"

"Believe me, when this is all over, they will know the truth. *Everyone*. I'll see to that personally. I'll have Harry, Ron, Hagrid and every member of the Order on my side, too."

"And I'll be in Azkaban."

She turned her head, exhaling loudly at his statement. She couldn't deny that *There will be a trial*. Her eyes fell on the four cauldrons cooling on the racks. "What are these for? These are not potions for you... However, I do know that they are healing potions of some kind."

"Yes, they are healing potions, Miss Granger. Very astute of you. They are potions to cure the effects of some of the more creative hexes and curses the Death Eater's like to use. Arimus will take them to St. Mungo's."

Hermione looked at him, with her head cocked to one side as she regarded his comments. "Oh, yes, just the sort of thing a hardened criminal would do create healing potions for those who were hit by spells the Healers at St. Mungo's wouldn't or might not be able to identify," she said condescendingly with a big smile. "A true self-centered misanthrope."

He leaned back in his chair, his expression impassive. "Are you finished chastising me, Miss Granger? There are more potions that need to be made, if you feel you are up to the challenge.

"Oh, I'm up for it, sir," she said standing up. "What's the list? Or are you just going to bark one direction at a time at me?"

\*

Hermione lay back in the roasting pot-tub, soaking away her aches from the long hard day in the potions lab. Four potions were simmering overnight and would need to be continued the next afternoon. They had eaten lunch at his desk in the lab since the four potions were at different stages and she couldn't leave them for too long. Nevertheless, she'd finished four more potions, bottled and labeled the eight potions they'd made that day, adding a Buoyancy Charm on the huge box, and sent Arimus off to deliver the potions to a Healer by the name of Kirkwell who Snape knew well and who trusted him.

Arimus had yet to return, and she hoped he wouldn't until after she finished her bath. Snape would need his dressing changed again in an hour, so unless Arimus returned before that, she had at least a good forty minutes to relax in the hot water. *At least he knew a charm that made beds make themselves. All I had to do was lay the sheets and blankets out on the bed and wave my wand. Something he could have told me days ago... unless he likes seeing me bent over his bed, struggling to even out the covers and tuck in the corners. But blimey, he gets so cranky when I have to bathe him.* She opened her eyes to listen carefully to the sounds in the room. He was snoring softly, then quieted. *He is improving, physically. He's able to pull himself upright into a sitting position as long as I have the Spine-Locker Curse on him like a kind of Muggle*

*halo support.* She closed her eyes and tried to sink lower into her warm bath water *I hate to have to wake him to change his dressing. He was up all day, and he will need his sleep. But that can't be helped, he's such a light sleeper.*

~o0o~

Day 11

"What do you think you want to know?"

Hermione had helped Snape to the table for breakfast, since he could now sit up by himself with the Spine-Locker Curse on him for short periods at a time. After changing his dressing again, she had practiced altering the curse to affect only his cervical and thoracic vertebrae, which allowed him a little better movement but still strongly supported his head and shoulders. She did notice that he was able to use his legs a little better and that he had good use of his arms now. That was highly encouraging to her at least, although when she'd mentioned it Snape became sullen.

"Pardon me?" Hermione asked, surprised. His question startled her since he hadn't been very talkative since she woke him up this morning. The letters Arimus had delivered late last night were folded up in his pocket, and Hermione knew that they had come from Potion Master Kirkwell, and the other letter was from the Healer-in-Charge of the Merwyn Mordaunt Spell Damage Ward for Accidental and Intentional Curses, Hexes and Jinxes.

"About me, Miss Granger," he said between bites. "You claimed to know me, to understand the motives behind my actions and everything I was forced and or coerced to do in this war." He watched her with an intense scrutiny as he sipped his tea.

She swallowed and took a sip of mint tea before answering. "I only claim to understand why you did some of the things you did."

"Some of the things I did," he repeated with a slow lazy drawl. "Like why I became a Death Eater? Like why I saved some people and betrayed others, such as Emmeline Vance, Charity Burbage and Theodore Smithers? Why I killed Dumbledore?" he sneered.

She looked up at him, bewildered that he brought up the very questions she'd been dying to ask him. "Well, no..." was all she could think of to say as a reply. She picked up a sausage link and bit the end off.

"Please use a fork," he snapped, and she dropped the sausage on her plate. "I suppose you expect me to tell you, to help quench your Gryffindor curiosity. How someone like me could do those things a true and loyal Gryffindor, like yourself, wouldn't dream of doing to people they knew."

She set down her fork and looked up at him contemplating his words carefully *Both a snide compliment and a cutting chastisement. How Slytherin* "Actually, no, I don't."

He ate a while in silence, watching her. Hermione felt like she was not only being evaluated but also judged.

"But you *would* like me to," he said in his smooth silky drawl. "You want me to tell you how I could betray friends, curse and hex someone I know, allow someone I know to die, or why I killed Dumbledore?"

Hermione looked up at him trying to suppress the emotions she felt at his words. "Yes, I do," she admitted.

"And you expect me to tell you?" he said scornfully.

"No," she said, shaking her head and cutting her sausage link in three pieces. "I don't. It would be presumptuous of me to ask."

"Pick one. Which do you want to know?" He asked, then ate another bite of his eggs, still staring intently at her.

Hermione looked up, her soft brown eyes meeting his dark fathomless black, surprised by his questioning gaze. Her gaze wandered to the edge of the table as she contemplated his offer, then she looked at his neck before her eyes flicked back to his eyes. "I suppose I would like to know why you became a Death Eater."

He regarded her for a moment. "My Mum had taught me Dark Arts before school to be able to defend myself from tormentors. She'd been picked on her first years and didn't want me to suffer as she did. Nevertheless, I was a loner at school, Miss Granger, picked on by four Gryffindors from the first day on the train. My only friends were Cearn Avery, Roche Mulciber, Rod LeStrange and Bella Black. Bella was different back then, and Rosier and Wilkes liked me. I got hooked in with them. Lucius and Narcissa were my house prefects." He paused to take another bite, and then continued. "Lucius would often have to speak to me regarding my dueling with Potter and Black during my first three years, but he encouraged me to do what I needed to protect myself. Around my sixth year, Rosier and Mulciber urged me to join the Dark Lord. The following summer I was brought before him. I was eagerly accepted and vouched for by both Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy and Rabastan LeStrange."

Hermione nodded, understanding what he was saying, and surprised that he'd confessed that to her. "Same way I became involved with the Order of the Phoenix it was who I was associated with. It was just sort of natural to join." He nodded. "And the people you say you betrayed... it was because you couldn't save them, wasn't it?"

"Your Gryffindor sensibilities would like me to say that was the case, wouldn't you? I hate to disappoint you. The fact is that sometimes I had ~~to~~ allow things to happen, make sacrifices to maintain my good standing, my role, *on both sides*. Even Dumbledore would make sacrifices for the greater good. The Dark Lord simply killed those who displeased him. However, both Dumbledore and the Dark Lord insisted that I do what was necessary to keep my cover at all costs. Sometimes I was unable to give advance warning of attacks or to prevent deaths... But do keep in mind I gave warnings to *both* sides of the war not just one, sometimes misleading and sometimes not. That was the role I played and I did it well."

Hermione looked up at him, unable to conceal the turbulent emotions that his confession gave her. "I do know that there were many times that you did give us warnings, that you did save lives."

"Don't glamorize it, Miss Granger. I always saved my own neck," he said scornfully. "But this isn't what you really want to know, is it?"

Hermione averted her eyes to the small timer sitting next to her. It was nearly time to do the next steps to her potions. "Yes," she answered, then looked back at Snape. His lips curled into a sardonic grin, and he quirked his eyebrow up a notch. "Well, partly," she confessed.

"It's time to check on your potions. Story time is over," he said, leaning back in his chair. Hermione quickly cleared the dishes and set them to soak to wash later. She cast the Mobilicorpus Charm and moved to stand next to him so that he could wrap his arm across her shoulders. She smiled as she noticed that he was actually able to walk somewhat, even though he still didn't have his full body weight on his legs yet.

"Is something funny," he snapped as they turned toward the potions lab.

"Huh?" She looked up at him and noticed that he was scowling at her. "Oh, no! I was just noticing that you have better control of your legs today."

"Oh."

\*

The day had gone rather quickly for Hermione. Of the four potions she started yesterday, one was finally complete, the other would be finished tomorrow and the third in two days. Snape had placed the directions for several potions on the wall. One potion, a variation of the Dreamless Sleep Potion she asked him for, was finished well before lunch; however, the other four potions had taken her nearly all day to complete. If Snape hadn't aligned the steps, coordinating the introductions of the ingredients with markers and arrows to indicate which ingredient went into each potion at which time, Hermione would have ruined all of them. However, his simple technique made

complete sense to her, and she went back to look at the wall after putting Snape to bed to carefully examine the technique in order to learn just how it was done.

She found a quill and parchment and wrote out what she remembered of two potions she'd brewed at Hogwarts and tried to coordinate the brewing times and ingredient introductions, using his technique. It wasn't as neatly done as his when she'd finished, but it was doable. She copied down two more potions at random, trying the technique again. She made several tries, but one part of the process still wouldn't fit properly unless she added a stasis charm. Frustrated, she stood up to figure out just how he managed to write out the process with four potions, when she was having trouble doing it with two.

She was still staring at the potion directions and wondering how Snape had coordinated the brewing times when she heard him call out her name. She quickly ran back to his side, realizing that it was time to do his midnight dressing change.

~oOo~

Day 12

Snape had been a bad mood all morning. Hermione smiled when she greeted him, but her smile only seemed to irritate him even more. He told her he'd already taken the Pain Potion, handing her the vial and crossing his arms. She chose to disregard his sullen attitude and managed to maintain her patience as she removed the dressing and cleaned his neck. He scowled at her the whole time, although he was at least cooperative with her. She let him apply the salves himself to the front of his neck and touched up the back of the wound for him. He couldn't do the Absorption Charm on himself, so she had to do that for him also, and he had spilt a little of the Deep Tissue Regenerative Potion on his chest, when he tried to pour out his own dose. So, he'd been curt and cantankerous while she measured out his Skin-Regenerative Potion and then redressed his neck.

Hermione's timer went off just as they finished, so she levitated and assisted him to the potions lab to observe the status of the potions. Afterwards, she assisted him to the table for breakfast, pleased he was using his legs more than before.

After breakfast, they had to return to the potions lab. However, after Hermione added the morning ingredients, there was a two-hour break before the next step for one potion, and the other two still needed to sit for three. Snape was adamant about staying put. "Just let me sit at my desk! I don't want to be floated around the house all day, Miss Granger. Leave me here. I have work to do," he snapped when she suggested that he go back to bed.

She knew better by now not to argue with him. "Fine. I'll be in the sitting room. Call me if...."

"I won't need you until lunch," he snapped.

Hermione went to her room and plopped down on the floor to finish scribbling notes with her quill. Her Latin dictionary, Charms books and a parchment lay in front of her, and her inkwell sat by her side next to three timers, one for each potion simmering on the worktable in the potions lab.

She had been encouraged by the fact that Snape was gaining strength in his legs, but knew that she should stop using the Mobilicorpus Charm, which was too strong now, so that he would gain sufficient strength to be able to walk again. Therefore, she was trying to create a spell that would support Snape upright, levitate him slightly and yet allow him to walk. She knew that Snape had invented the Levicorpus Jinx as a means to get back at Harry's dad and Sirius, although it suspended the victim upside-down. She was considering a variation using the Levicorpus and Wingardium Leviosa. *Leviosa, which means to lift up or raise. That's what's common between them.... Erectus, erecta or erectum, raised, upright, erect, respectively.* "So possibly consider, erecta," she mumbled as she jotted it down. *Erecta Leviosa?*

"How about hang, or hover?" she mumbled aloud. *Pendeo to hang. Pependi to hang loose, hover, to be suspended.* "Hover! Pependi Leviosa, that is a possibility." *I can levitate books and the chair but would it work on Snape? I need someone to test this on... Who can tell me if it works... His owl!*

Hermione went to the kitchen to see if Arimus would agree to let her levitate him. "I want to see if I can support you magically, but not actually float you in the air. Like magical Muggle crutches, only without the crutches," she tried to explain her intentions to Arimus. He ruffled his feathers in response and alighted on her arm, screeching softly and clicking his beak as if asking her something. "I don't think it will hurt you it may be uncomfortable but that's what I need you to tell me so I don't hurt Snape," she explained as she carried the owl into the sitting room with her.

Arimus seemed to agree to let her levitate him, although her few tries at varying the Levicorpus jinx didn't amuse the stoic owl. He screeched in protest each time he was hung upside down in mid air. He didn't care much for either spell using Mobilis, nor did he like *Pendeo Leviosa*, which literally held him up, wings stretched out as if hung on the wall.

Arimus landed on the back of the chair as soon as she released the spell, watching her quietly from on his perch.

She looked at her English to Latin dictionary again, and then turned to a Latin to English version to check the translations. *Similar. Okay how about suspend or hover?* She turned the pages and found the entry she was looking for. *Suspendo to hang up. Suspendere to prop up, support. Suspendi to keep in suspense, leave undecided... nope, definitely not...* Hermione considered then she wrote them down on her parchment just in case. *Suspendere is the closest. "Suspendere Leviosa, perhaps?"* She wrote down the possible incantations for the spell she was trying to create, and then looked up at Arimus again. "Shall I give it another go?"

Arimus screeched softly and ruffled his feathers again, then looked at her, his dark eyes impassive.

"I'll take that as a yes. Okay... *Erecta Leviosa*," she said using the same wand movement as she would have with the spell *Wingardium Leviosa*. He didn't levitate. Other than the appearance that Arimus looked like he was sitting up straighter, there wasn't any difference. "Well, I know what to use to get my kids to sit straight at the table."

Arimus screeched in annoyance.

"Oops, sorry, *Finite Incantatem*," she said, releasing Arimus who bristled then settled, looking at her annoyed. "I said I was sorry."

"Granger!" she heard Snape bark through the open secret panel.

"Coming!" Hermione rose and went quickly to see what Snape needed. Entering his potions lab, she approached his desk. "What is it?" she asked.

"What are you doing to my owl?" he snapped irritably, his back straight and his hands flat on the surface of his desk.

Hermione turned her head in the direction of the door. "Oh, um... practicing spells."

"On my owl?" he asked in a scathing tone, his dark eyes flashing angrily and his expression murderous.

"Well, um, yes," she stammered, dropping her gaze to the floor. He opened his mouth to reprimand her, but Hermione cut him off. "You have been getting stronger a little bit and you're able to use your legs more. Therefore, I thought that there had to be a spell to support you without actually levitating you off the floor, but still keeping your weight off your legs. Like crutches, only with magic and not stick supports that..."

"I know what crutches are, Miss Granger. I've used a pair!" he snapped, angrily. "That still doesn't give you leave to torture my owl."

"I wasn't!" she exclaimed and immediately regretted it. It wasn't actually a lie, but it wasn't the truth either. Arimus didn't like the effects of her attempts, nevertheless, he'd agreed to let her use him in order to help his owner. "I wasn't actually hurting him! Just suspending him... or was trying to. I told him to tell me if I hurt him or if he wanted to stop."



Snape's eyes narrowed as he glared at her. "So you think you can understand the subtle communication habits of my owl?"

"No, we have our own signals!" Hermione insisted, lest he think Arimus hadn't agreed to help her.

"Enlighten me," he said in a deep, deliberate drawl that sent shivers down Hermione's spine, his dark eyes narrowing dangerously.

"I asked him to click his beak if annoyed, to screech if he was hurt or to turn around if he'd had enough..." she quickly explained, "and didn't want to... do any others." She lowered her head, knowing that she should have told him first or to at least ask his permission. If he'd had his wand handy, she knew he would have cursed her.

"Others?" he asked slowly and deliberately.

Her eyes snapped up to fixate on his. "Yes, the ones I was trying..." His dark fathomless eyes glared into her as if reading her soul. "Of the spells I was trying to... create..."

Snape glowered as he looked at her, deeply thoughtful as if considering the best possible curse to use on her. "Show me." Hermione quickly ran to retrieve her parchment and hand it to Snape.

He snatched the parchment from her hand and read it carefully, his eyes narrowing several times. "This is what you have been doing all morning?"

"Yes," she admitted, swallowing under an angry glare. "Well... yes." *Oh Merlin, he's mad...*

He looked down at her parchment, his eyes scanning it quickly. "Erecta Leviosa, Pependi Leviosa or, Suspendere Leviosa, is this what you have come up with?" He handed it back to her as if it offended him. "What about other the seven you have listed in your notes. You have them all crossed off. Did you use all these on my owl?"

"No, only two of those, but I rejected the others. I tried Erecta Leviosa, and Pendeo Leviosa. I was about to try *Pependi Leviosa*," she explained, slightly intimidated. *Could he possibly forgive me for using his owl? I only did it for him...*

"What effect did you achieve?" he asked after a long pause.

*Now that's the professor tone I know so well* "Erecta Leviosa is great for poor posture," she said, a little too cheeky. "Pendeo Leviosa would be good if I wanted to hang a tapestry."

He shifted as if to rise from the desk. "All right, Miss Granger. Show me."

*Well might as well give a go...* "Pependi Leviosa," she said, but little happened.

"Stiffen the wrist and move the wand with confidence," he directed. She tried several wand motions, still with no effect. "Scratch that one, try the other," he said with more patience than she would have expected. However, little happened when she tried *Suspendendi Leviosa*. *Suspendere Leviosa*, however, worked the second try, but not the third.

"It's the wand movement, Miss Granger. Reverse the flick," Snape corrected her. Hermione tried again, and he was able to stand as long as he still used the desk for support. His legs were shaky, but he was at least standing. Nevertheless, the spell supported all his actual body weight. "Help me walk," he demanded.

Hermione adjusted his position so that her shoulder fit snugly under his arm. *As a couple we're the perfect height for each other*, she thought ruefully. "Where to?"

"My atrium," he asked, trying to make his legs move in a normal walking gait.

Hermione steered him along the hallway and into the sunroom. He appeared momentarily cross when he saw the clothesline, but made no scathing comment about it. Hermione had just helped him sit on a lounge chair when she heard her timers go off and ran to do the next steps of her potion.

When her potions once again needed to sit and simmer, Hermione walked down to the sunroom to peek in on him. "Stop gawking at me and come in." Hermione was stunned to see that he had a small Abyssinian Shrivelfig in his hands, turning the pot carefully to check the foliage. "Would you please set this on the table?"

"Sure. Ah, how did you?" she asked, flicking her finger from him to the plant. His expression turned to annoyance as he held the plant up to her. She took the small pot and placed it on one of the tables near him. "You can do wandless magic?"

"Obviously I can Levitate and Summon small objects. However, it seems I'm unable to Repell," he said, focusing his attention on the plants on the table in front of him. "What color and consistency are the potions?"

"One is finished and cooling. It's an opaque turquoise. The other two are a thick, visceral puce and a watery, burnt orange. I've lowered the flame on both. Do you want to come see?" Hermione noticed a potted euphorbia wood spurge wobble a little, then became still. "Do you want me to hand that one to you, sir?"

Snape shifted slowly to look up at her, with a bored expression, and turned slowly back to face the table of plants. "Apparently, yes. And no, I don't want to go see. Was there something else you wanted, Miss Granger?"

"Oh, yes, I need to change your dressing and it's time for lunch," she piped up, retrieving the plant. "What did you want today, ham or roast beef?"

"Let me guess, sandwiches and vegetable soup?" he asked, with his usual sneer. "Does it matter?" Hermione glowered at his tone. "Fine. Surprise me."

Hermione practically stomped into the kitchen, irritated by his curtness. She set the rabbit stew on the stove to heat, then pulled out both loaves of bread. *Can bread be transformed into cheese?* she wondered, looking at the older loaf. Only the six slices remained. *I've seen Mrs. Weasley transform milk and cream into cheese, and I think I remember her transforming bread...* She racked her brain for the charm she needed. *If only I could ask Ginny... Of course* She ran to the sitting room and pulled out her DA Galleon. *I have to keep it simple*, she thought as she held the galleon on her palm. *Tell charm change bread cheese?*

She waited only minutes before her coin vibrated and read: *Crustum Vero Cāseus*. It vibrated again, *Mozzarella*, then changed and read; *swish left, point*. It vibrated again as Hermione finished writing the first incantation. *Crustum Novo Cāseus*, appeared, then changed to, *cheddar cheese*, then read; *same wand*. Hermione wrote that down and *Crustum Mutatio Cāseus* appeared, then changed to, *makes Jack* a second after Hermione wrote that down, then vibrated again to read: *swish right, tap, tap*.

She tried *Crustum Novo Cāseus*, and on the third try, the slice of bread slightly resembled cheddar cheese.

Snape was lying back in the chair when she came to get him. He was wobbly, trying to walk to the table, but refused to be put back on his bed. She changed his dressing at the table and then made grilled cheese sandwiches. She tried asking questions about the potion and the next steps just for conversation. His answers were blunt and direct but at least amiable. She told him about Transfiguring the bread into cheese, but he merely grunted at that, unimpressed. She did notice that he ate the entire grilled cheese sandwich and more than half his soup, so she knew that his appetite was all right. Just as Hermione cleared the table, a screech came from the sitting room. "See whose owl that is, Miss Granger," Snape said wearily.

Hermione returned with a thin envelope and a sizable bag of coins. Snape read the letter, his expression slowly turning into a deep scowl. "What is it?"

"It's personal," he stated dismissively. "I think I should lie down." Hermione nodded and helped him to bed. "Come and get me before you introduce the schizocarp seeds or prepare the paneriflora flowers, Miss Granger. The next four steps are crucial. Now please go and let me rest."

She watched him silently a moment from the doorway before walking back to check her potions, adjusting the flame under one of the cauldrons. Just before the timer went off again she went to wake Snape and helped him walk to the lab to instruct her. She'd set the paneriflora flowers floating in raw sugar water on the worktable earlier and they had finally opened. It was the anthers and the ovule of the flowers she needed to use and Hermione had to peel back the petals, exposing the style and remove the ovule without actually touching the ovary itself. Snape guided her through the delicate process of trimming off the anthers and removed the ovules, grunting in approval when she successfully completed all six flowers.

She felt elated as she stirred the potion the required nine times, watching the color turn a bright orange. She added the Manjra juice to the second cauldron, dropped in the schizocarp seeds and lowered the flame, watching the turquoise color darken. He nodded and sat back in his chair, obviously feeling weary.

Snape used her wand to write three potions on the wall, using his technique of arrows and markings to coordinate the brewing timing and ingredient introductions. Still, the brewing of his potions was daunting and stressful under his critical stare. He still snapped his directions curtly, although not nearly as harshly as before. It was hard work, but she managed to produce each of the potions to his exacting expectations. She bottled the potions, wrote out the directions and affixed the labels, placing the bottles into a box. Snape had her place the Buoyancy Charm on the box again so Arimus could carry the heavy box to St. Mungo's that night.

By dinnertime, Hermione noticed that Snape was looking peaked. She changed his dressing, but he refused to eat, opting instead to rest until it was time to change his dressing again. Hermione ate the last of the rabbit soup alone, trying to be as unobtrusive as possible. She tidied the kitchen quietly and decided to read in the sitting room for a while. Snape's hand reached out and caught her wrist as she passed by his bed. "Yes?"

"Why are you doing all this for me?"

She was confused. "Because you were hurt..."

He made a subtle move of his head as if trying to shake his head. "Brewing my potion requests for me; inventing spells to help me walk... You figured out how to make cheese. This is more than just tending to my health."

"I like brewing potions with you. You're amazing and so brilliant. I'm learning so much from you. The spell... I don't have crutches and didn't know if you'd use them if I managed to conjure them." His thumb absently stroked the side of her wrist. "Like I said before, I'd like to be your friend if you'd ever let me."

His expression became thoughtful and his eyes momentarily unfocused. He let go of her wrist, laying his hand on his chest. Hermione saw the book she'd been reading to him laying beside him on the bed. "Would you like me to read to you, sir?"

He looked at her with a soft, appraising gaze before he simply said, "Yes."

~o0o~

Day 13

Snape was sitting up in bed when Hermione walked in to change his dressing and again wanted to try to apply the salves himself, although Hermione still had to help him reach the wound on the backside of his neck. Hermione was elated to see that the wound looked as if it was finally beginning to close. She was even more pleased that he was able to move around more easily and able to move his legs to the edge of the bed himself. However, he still needed to lean on her to walk to the table. She was becoming accustomed to walking arm-in-arm with Snape, accommodating his body to her own. In fact, his body fit rather nicely with hers, since her shoulder fit snugly right under his arm when he was standing upright. This slight fact often crossed her mind each time she helped him walk: from the bed to the table, to the potions lab, to the atrium back to the potions lab, and then back to bed to rest before dinner.

They'd spent the most of the morning in the potions lab, spent a few hours in the atrium while she did the laundry and he pruned a few of his plants. By late afternoon Hermione had brewed three more potions and more of the Deep Tissue Regenerative Potion, Anti-Inflammatory Salve and Skin-Regenerative Potion for Snape. She'd insisted that he take another bath before dinner, which resulted in an argument, but to which he finally acquiesced, even letting her wash his hair, albeit reluctantly.

Nevertheless and regardless of his protests, Hermione knew from the soft expression on his face as she worked the shampoo in his hair and massaged his scalp, that he did, in fact, like having his hair washed. She smirked at him when his usual scowl returned when she carefully rinsed his hair, careful to keep the shampoo from getting on his wound or in his eyes.

Arimus screeched from the sitting room just as Hermione was helping Snape back to his bed. "Arimus is back," Snape replied as Hermione helped him sit on the edge of the bed.

"Yes, I know. Right now you're more important; he can wait a moment." She helped lift his legs and waited until he was situated comfortably. Arimus screeched again, twice, and a bit louder.

"He doesn't like waiting, Miss Granger."

"Soo like his owner," she replied back.

Snape frowned in annoyance, saying, "Don't get cheeky with me," as Hermione added, "I know, don't get cheeky," simultaneously.

"Are you okay?" she asked, not really waiting for an answer as she turned to leave. "I'll go get him now."

Arimus was sitting on two packages that had been tied together, waiting for her. He rose to land on her shoulder as soon as Hermione entered the room, screeching as she levitated the packages rather than bending down to retrieve them. The smaller of the two was addressed to Master Severus Snape, from William Egbert Kirkwell, Master of Potions, St. Mungo's Hospital. As she carried Arimus into the kitchen, Hermione noticed a thick letter from Ginny jammed in-between the packages.

"What's that?" he asked as she walked past him to set everything down on the kitchenette table.

Arimus gently lifted from her shoulder and flew over to his perch. "Huh?" She set her care package on the kitchenette table "Which is what?" she asked as she turned to give him his package, examining her letter.

"I asked you, what is that," Snape snapped irritably, pointing at the table.

"I wonder if Crookshanks minds staying at the Weasleys?" she asked as she deposited his package at his side.

Snape scowled at her inattention. "That is not what I asked you."

"I'm sorry, sir. My mind was focused on something else, I didn't mean to be rude," she said. "What did you ask me?"

He bristled but held back any snide remarks. "I asked you to tell me what Arimus brought," he said in almost a saccharine tone as Hermione walked back to the kitchenette table to collect the larger package.

"Which? The package or my letter?" She opened up the care package. The pot roast, onions and carrots inside were still hot, and Hermione decided to slice off some pot roast for dinner before she placed it in the icebox with the collection of fresh vegetables from Mrs. Weasley's garden.

"Don't get cheeky with me, Miss Granger," he growled.

She smiled, noticing that some of the carrot tops looked as if a rabbit had gotten to them. "Arimus had a package for you, one for me and a letter," she said casually, picking up a fresh apple pie from the package and a new loaf of bread.

"The package, Miss Granger. What's in it?" he asked, setting his own package on the opposite side of the bed, unable set it on the dish cupboard next to him.

"All this is stuff from my friends," she said as she magically heated a potato, scored the tender meat and added some herb butter. She set the potato halves on plates next to the pot roast and carrots. "The usual care package from Mrs. Weasley you know so that you and I don't starve," she answered as she carried him his dinner.

She opened Ginny's lengthy letter to read while she ate and sat down at the kitchenette table facing Snape.

"What do they say," he finally asked between bites.

"It's from Ginny. She and Harry have agreed to get engaged, but are waiting to have the engagement party for when I can attend. And it looks like Fred will be released from St Mungo's as soon as he learns to walk with his artificial leg. Victoire Weasley, Bill and Fleur's daughter, is teething... Mr. Weasley's been given a promotion at work... Kingsley Shacklebolt's been made Minister of Magic... and... Yes," she said when Snape snorted in derision.

"I wasn't asking you to read the entire letter to me," he said irritably.

"I wasn't," she said, turning back to the kitchen. "I was merely giving you the highlights." He snorted in derision again. "Fine. If you don't care to know..."

"I don't like your cheek," he snapped.

She turned around again, crossing her arms. He was watching her, his eyes dark and scowling. Hermione watched him, trying to decide what to say that would help improve his mood.

His expression softened slightly. "Fine. Give me the *relevant* highlights."

She unfolded her letter, scanning the contents to find where she had left off. "Harry and Ron have been accepted into the Auror training program. Oh, the Ministry has consented to allot funds and construction wizards to rebuild Hogwarts. It will reopen and resume classes in three months. Students wishing to finish their education and take either their O.W.L.s or their N.E.W.T.s need only submit their requests to Griselda Marchbanks by the end of the week!" She looked over at Arimus expectantly and he clicked his beak as if to acquiesce to her unspoken request to take a letter to the Ministry official.

"You've missed nearly nine months of school, Miss Granger; surely you aren't considering sending in a request."

"Why not? I missed months petrified during my second year and managed to catch up," she nearly pleaded with him as if he were the one to make the decision to allow her to return to school. "I read all my seventh year books in the tent when we were in hiding, several times, even managed most of the spells, and read half the books in the Grimmuald Place library... I can do many of the advanced Transfiguration Spells, most all of the advanced Charms, figured out half of the Arithmancy equations and formulas... I need practice with my Ancient Runes, and I don't know which plants are N.E.W.T level, but I've read *Advanced Herbology and Planting, Maintenance and Management of the Magical Garden* twice. If I study really hard, ask for the back assignments and homework and..."

"I suppose you expect me to instruct you," he stated, his eyes narrowing as he watched her intently.

"No, um.... I didn't think that... you would..." She was desperately trying to suppress her hope that his statement was an offer as her eyes flicked from his face to the wall and back. "I that is if you don't want to..." She was hopeful, smiling, but really didn't expect him to agree. "If you could just tell me what might be expected regarding Potions and Defense... I could always read up... That is if you have books in your library on the subjects that I need."

His expression darkened slightly and she glanced toward the sitting room. "Where are your books?"

She looked at him, then lowered her head, staring at the bedcovers. "They were in the tent, when Ron, Harry and I were caught."

"I suppose you would like to borrow some of my books from my seventh year to memorize," he said derisively.

Her face lit up as if he'd offered her the world and promised to teach her himself. "Oh, would you? Would you really lend them to me? Sir!"

He wiped his face slowly with his hand, making a minute shake of his head. He looked at her, his dark eyes cold and thoughtful as he watched her expectant expression, then made the same subtle shake his head again as if he was about to do something he was really going to regret. "Upstairs, in a blue and white room, is my old school trunk. Above it is a bookshelf with all my old school books the ones I still have at any rate. If you do not mock me about anything I wrote in the margins, if you will swear to *never* tell anyone yes, you may read them. But I swear, Miss Granger, if you break my confidence, I will hunt you down and poison you."

Hermione nodded. "I promise, sir. Of course I'd keep your confidences," she said solemnly.

"Miss Granger, where is my wand," he asked.

"I'm sorry, your wand?" she answered as she pulled the covers up over his legs.

"Yes. What happened to my wand?"

"Nothing happened to it, sir." She stood up and brushed a strand of hair from her face. "It's in the china cupboard, top drawer on the right."

"I want it, please."

It was more of a demand than a request, and Hermione stood with her hands on her hips regarding him a moment. *Madam Pomfrey always said we shouldn't do magic until we were well. She'd been insistent. "Are you sure, sir? Using your wand too soon and in a weakened state..."*

He glowered at her, his dark eyes narrowing dangerously. "I want my wand, Miss Granger. I am fully aware of my physical state. Nevertheless, I am a grown wizard, and I *want my wand*," Snape said, impatience making his tone sharp.

"I never intended to take it from you. I kept it here with your clothes... for when you were better," she explained as she walked around the bed. "Are you sure you are well enough?"

"Miss Granger, just hand me my wand," he said in an even, cool tone.

*Reining in his impatience rather well*, she thought pulling out the elegant black walnut wand. "Just keep in mind that you still need me."

"Need you?" A deep chuckle escaped his throat, although his lip was curled in a scornful sneer. "How could I possibly forget?"

She smiled nervously as she handed him his wand. "All the better to hex me with I suppose."

His mouth stretched into a challenging smile as his fingers grasped the lathe-turned handle. "No, my dear, all the better to teach you with," Snape said as he raised one eyebrow and watched her jaw drop in amazement. "If I'm going to instruct you, I am going to need this. However, do not expect me to treat you with favoritism."

"You? Never," she said, grinning enthusiastically.

*Author's notes:*

*As a creative liberty and for this story, I have assumed that Avery, Mulciber, Rodolphus Lestrage and Bellatrix Black were in Severus's year at Hogwarts. I have also set Rosier and Wilkes a year or two ahead of Severus, and I placed Lucius Malfoy and Narcissa Black as having been in their fifth year and prefects during Severus's first year (just as Percy was prefect Harry's first year). That would make Bella maybe four and a half years younger than her sister.*

*I apologize for my rudimentary Latin. Latin words and definitions came from: the Notre Dame English to Latin site at: <http://catholic.archives.nd.edu/cgi-bin/lookdown.pl>*

*I have a great deal of gratitude for Ladyinthecloak and Machshefa for beta reading this for me. You ladies are great and I really appreciated you doing this. Thank you.*

## The Friendship's Challenged

Chapter 4 of 9

Never in all the years she'd known Professor Snape would Hermione have thought that not only would she to get to have private potions tutelage from him, but that he'd consent to tutoring for her N.E.W.T.s too! However, trust the Ministry to throw a bundimun into their tenuous relationship.

~oOo~

Day 14

The early morning sunlight poured in from the window, lighting the room with a pale warm glow. Hermione was already up, dressed and with her hair tied back with a strip of cloth, reading, cross-checking and cross-referencing between seven books laid out before her. She'd been up for an hour and had already asked Arimus to take a letter to George, asking him to send her parchment, quills, ink, seven composition books, a few journals and a study guide. She'd enclosed a note to Gringotts allowing George reimbursement from her parents' vault.

Snape had not only allowed her to have access to his seventh-year books, but he'd had Hermione pull down a large selection of his library, which was now stacked in sections on a long, low table she'd set along one wall: Charms, Transfiguration, Herbology, Arithmancy, Potions and Defense Against the Dark Arts. The Prince family library, it seemed, didn't have many selections on Ancient Runes; however, Hermione still had all her own dictionaries stacked on the table for her use, since she'd still had those in her beaded purse.

Suddenly the small timer next to her bed chimed, and she set her books aside to tend to Snape's wound and fix him breakfast.

Snape's eyes were open when she entered the converted dining room. "Good morning," he mumbled. "So what subject did you start reading this morning?" he asked as Hermione crossed the room to fill her bowl with warm water and retrieve her flannel.

"Transfiguration," she replied. "You know, your annotations and diagrams in the margins are really incredible. Do the spells you wrote work?"

"Yes," he said. He pulled himself up to sit as she approached.

She set the bowl down and began to gently unwrap his neck. "You should really consider rewriting Terell Wertheim's book with your own stuff added in. There're a lot of good hints and suggestions, and the extra annotations are exceptional." Hermione carefully examined the bandage and his skin for signs of infection, concerned that the wound was draining again. The wound, although somewhat thinner and appeared to be closing, was unfortunately still a very dark pink, and the edges were still a grayish-white and yellowish-white in places.

His eyes narrowed into a scowl. "And why should I? Many of those spells would be considered Dark Arts if anyone knew I'd invented them. Besides, no one would take a manuscript I wrote seriously."

"Don't sell yourself short. I bet you'd make a fortune writing what you know about potions, poisons and anti-dotes, for starters," Hermione replied, retrieving his potions and salves to began carefully cleaning his neck. "I bet you could re-write the *entire set* of Potions school books, update them, improve on the basic formulas and directions. You could even become famous and get your well-deserved acknowledgement." She was thinking about Harry's copy of *Advance Potion Making* by Libatius Borage that had actually belonged to him. "I know I'd have loved to have known all those tips and techniques you've been showing me these last few days when I was in school. You've a brilliant intellect and natural instinct when it comes to potions and the interaction of ingredients."

"I'm afraid you'd be mistaken, Miss Granger. You forget that my actions and past will become common knowledge soon enough." He winced as she set the salves with the Absorption Charm. "They don't let people write books from Azkaban."

Hermione instinctively reached out and brushed his hair from his face. "You don't... I'll stand for you," she said and laid her hand on his shoulder. Snape looked up at her, baffled by the intimate touch. "I know that there will be a trial, I'm not naïve to think there won't be. But you did help to bring down Riddle, and you were on our side. That has to count for *something*."

He reached up to remove her hand from his shoulder, but he held it a moment, looking at her delicate fingers, examining her nails. "I've known all along that I'd have to stand trial, Miss Granger. Our kind isn't as forgiving as you are; my prospects are not favorable." He dropped her hand and turned to look at the wall. "I'm hungry."

Hermione looked at him a moment, but he refused to look at her. "I think you'd be surprised who will stand for you," she said as she walked to the kitchen. Snape was trying to slip from the bed when Hermione turned to carry the plates to the table. He was practically on his feet when she reached his side. He stumbled slightly before she reached out and supported him, helping him regain his balance. "*Suspendere Leviosa*," she said, quickly casting the spell to enable him to walk.

"I hate this," he said softly as he accepted her help to the table.

"I know, sir. But you *are* improving, just maybe not as quickly as you'd like." They ate in silence, Hermione giving him the option whether to converse or not. Nevertheless, she'd been pleased to see that he could almost stand up on his own, and he had much more control and strength in his arms and legs. She watched him shyly as she ate, pleased that he still had a fairly good appetite. That was another good sign of improvement.

Hermione sat at the kitchenette table while Severus was reclining slightly in his bed, reading *Snape's Guide to Advanced Transfiguration*. She was copying all of Snape's diagrams and annotations into a journal and trying to decipher the scribbling of what may have been made-up spells and incantations as well as taking notes on the spells Snape had indicated for her to learn. However, she was very interested in the spells and incantations in his tiny script, wondering if Snape created them himself.

Her coin vibrated in her pocket and she drew it out. The message read: *What's a walker? G* Hermione smiled and tapped the coin with her wand. *Ask H, he knows.* She smiled, knowing Ginny's confusion. In her latest letter to the Burrow, Hermione asked Ginny to see if Harry could get her a walker for Snape. *If he can get out of bed and stand, maybe he could start walking,* she'd surmised. *It would be good for him and help him get stronger* She had tried drawing a diagram of a walker, but the three sketches looked ridiculous. The coin vibrated and she nearly laughed at Ginny's reply. *Dad thinks he has one* The coin vibrated again. *Sending, need to enlarge. G*

An hour later, Hermione sent the folding metal stepladder back with another diagram, each part carefully labeled and a full description of what a walker was used for to the Burrow. The letter that came with the stepladder from Mrs. Weasley had been supportive, asking again who her friend was and why Hermione couldn't just come by for a visit. She mentally struggled with the idea of telling them, but knew that Harry, Ron and possibly George would have the wrong idea and think she'd been abducted. She'd written a brief reply to Mrs. Weasley and decided to write to Ginny, and tell her everything, using a Confidentiality Charm on the parchment.

Ginny had written back, alarmed and confused, saying that Harry and Ron had told her that Snape was dead. Hermione sent Ginny's owl back, with a long reply, telling her what had happened when she went back to the Shrieking Shack, pleading for Ginny to trust her and that she was fine and safe. She tried to explain everything, pleading that Ginny be very tactful when she told everyone else. It was a relief to be able to confide in her friend. Hermione hoped that she could trust Ginny to break the news to Harry, Ron and George delicately and be able to handle their outbursts.

Within an hour, Hermione had been surprised to receive letters from Ron, Harry, George, Mr. Weasley, Kingsley Shacklebolt and Professor McGonagall all wanting confirmation that she was all right. She wrote each one, trying to be as reassuring as possible that she was fine, but that a Fidelius Charm protected the house and she couldn't tell them where she was. She also mentioned in Minister Shacklebolt's note that she was helping Snape brew potions for the victims of the war, sending the potions to Master Kirkwell at St. Mungo's. She hoped that Snape wouldn't be too angry to know that she'd told him.

Two books, parchment, inkwell and quill, a potato, a shoe, a glass jar, a candle, a brush, a medium-sized rock, a rat and a squirrel all sat on the table between Hermione and Snape. He'd placed the rat and squirrel under the Imperius, much to Hermione's indignation, since it was the only way to make the small animals comply with being spell subjects. Arimus stood on his perch watching. "You learned how to Transfigure a potato into a shoe, a shoe into a flower pot and an animal into a water goblet," Snape said. "I want you to do the same spells nonverbally."

Hermione nodded and concentrated on Transfiguring the potato in front of her into a shoe. She'd done these in class, but Snape wanted her to do them in front of him and under his intense scrutiny, which didn't make the task any easier. Quite the contrary, it was unnerving and took all her concentration to keep her mind focused and not falter. Her lips moved slightly, and he scowled at her. "No, Miss Granger, not silently, nonverbally. I don't want to see your lips moving. Reverse the spell nonverbally and try again."

She exhaled and, pursing her lips, changed the shoe back into a potato. "Relax your face, please," he said as she raised her wand again. She opened her mouth to retort and he interrupted her. "No talking of any kind. Just do the spell."

Her eyes flicked from him to the potato and turned it into a shoe. *This is unnerving, having him watching so closely....* She nodded and looked down again at her potato. *Potatoes are for eating not wearing* she mentally grumbled. Still she was delighted when the potato transformed into a nice, ankle-high boot.

"Fine, now change the shoe into a vase. I'd prefer a nice crystal vase please," he instructed, his tone patient.

"A vase?" she asked. He nodded and tapped the shoe with his wand. Hermione quickly scanned her notes and found a spell to turn an animal into a vase, hoping that it would work on potatoes. What she got was a lumpy, brown cylinder.

Snape looked at her reprovingly. "That is not a crystal vase."

"I can see that," she said, mentally berating herself as she checked her notes. "Ah, crystallinum not crystallum." Hermione pointed her wand and repeated the spell thinking, '*Crystallinum*,' during the incantation. Her lumpy brown cylinder became clear, but not really all that pretty.

He flicked his wand and the vase turned back into a potato. "Very good. Try again." Hermione concentrated and cast her spell, pleased to see a reasonably clear vase appear. "Inadequate. Your lips moved, Miss Granger, and I'd hardly call that a reasonable crystal vase. I did not ask for glass, I asked for crystal. Turn it back and try again."

"We've been at this an hour..." she started to say.

"And the potion isn't going to need your attention for another hour, and after that, I will need to have my dressing changed before dinner," he said pointedly. "So, we will continue. Change the vase back into a potato, and then into a shoe and then change it again into a crystal vase."

Hermione flicked her wand, and the vase transformed back into a potato. "Not bad, at least you can reverse your spells efficiently," he said with a smirk.

*Was that an actual compliment?* Hermione took a deep breath and focused her attention on the task. She transformed the potato into boot, and then into a sparkling crystal vase. "There. How's that?"

"Acceptable. Now transfigure the squirrel into a fedora," he said, his face expressionless.

Hermione wanted to slump in defeat. "Would it hurt you to give a little encouragement now and again?"

"I thought I just did," he said flatly. Hermione scowled at him. "I did tell you it was acceptable."

"Acceptable?" she asked, wanting him to elaborate.

"Yes, acceptable," he said firmly. "Outstanding would be if you could do the Transfiguration the first time. The squirrel if you will."

Hermione checked her notes and cross-referenced the spell in the copies of *a Guide to Advanced Transfiguration* and *Theories of Transubstantial Transfiguration*, and quickly wrote down her assumption of which variation of the spells would work. She looked up at Snape hoping for validation, but he simply sat there, watching her, with his fingers laced together, resting them on table in front of him.

"Thank you," she replied. "This isn't easy, with you sitting here watching so intently, commenting on every little nuance of every movement I make."

He cocked one eyebrow and regarded her sternly. "You wanted me to instruct you, did you not?"

"Yes," she admitted.

"So, get on with it," he said firmly.

"Yes, sir."

"Nonverbally, Miss Granger, means *no talking*."

Hermione scowled at him for a second, and then quickly turned her concentration back to the squirrel. She missed the quick flicker of a smile on Snape's face when she turned the animal into a reasonable fedora.

\*

Hermione stretched and tried to fight back a yawn as she copied down Snape's annotations, diagrams and corrections from *Intermediate Potion-Making* by Libatius Borage diligently filling a magical composition book, wishing that she had Snape's *Advanced Potion-Making*. The books, *Magical Drafts and Potions* and *Magical Elixirs, Solutions and Unctions*, by Arsenius Jigger sat next to her. So far, Hermione had filled up two magical composition books from those two books. Snape's annotations fascinated her. *No wonder Harry did so well in Potions in sixth year! These comments are brilliant!* She knew that Snape had been making her use several of the techniques and variations when she brewed potions under his tutelage in the potions lab. *One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi* and *Magical Creatures Great and Small* both lay on her right, but she was getting too tired and knew that she would have to stop soon. Hermione stretched and looked at the timer by her bed. *An hour. And after I add in the newt tails and evening primrose, it will be time to change his dressing again.* Hermione stretched once more and rolled her neck to ease the strain before returning her attention back to copying down Snape's tiny writing.

~oOo~

Day 15

Ginny's owl, Portia, flew in the window at first light, landing on the carpet with a thud, tumbling over the metal frame in her claws. Even though the frame had been shrunk down to size for a very small child, the walker had been quite a load for the young barn owl. Pig flew in shortly after, flying loops around the room, screeching happily. Hermione quickly cast a Silencing Charm on him and reached up to catch the tiny owl. "Hush, you'll wake Snape!" she admonished the tiny owl. He gazed up at her petulantly. "I'm sorry! You did exceptionally well bringing me the letter, but you must be quiet!"

Portia ruffled her feathers as if offended that she wasn't complimented too. "And you, too, carrying such a heavy load. I'm impressed with you as well," Hermione amended. She untied the letter from Ron and Harry, amused that she had received more letters from her friends now in the few days that she was 'imprisoned' in Snape's house than any summer holiday since her first year. She crawled over to untie the walker from Portia's legs and noticed a letter from Mr. Weasley.

*Hermione,*

*How are you doing? I'm very sorry about the mix up with the stepladder. Your sketches looked a bit like the ladder, but Harry was able to explain what you were about. Molly's quite delighted to have it returned to her, though.*

*I found this years ago on a curb and wasn't too sure what it was, or why a Muggle would get rid of something so useful. I've been using it to hold up one side of my workbench in my shed. Ginny cleaned it up for you. Imagine, it's to help Muggles walk! Never would have guessed. Wait until I tell Javier Luga in Accidental Magic Reversal Department. He'll laugh up a whooper on that one. Mabel Youngton, in the Obliviators office, thought it was for hanging laundry on to dry knickers and jumpers. Didn't figure on that one though.*

*You'll have to enlarge it of course, but it is a sturdy thing, this walker.*

*I hope Severus isn't being too much trouble for you and that he is minding his manners. It is awfully dear of you to tend to him so. As per your last letter, Kingsley and I have consulted Albus' portrait, and Harry has shown us the memories he took from Snape the night he... Mr. Weasley had written, died, which was scratched out. Uh, was bitten. I think you should know that Harry has asked to lead up the investigation into Severus's involvement during the war. The Criminal Investigation and The Dark Years War, (that is what we're officially calling the last twenty years some are still not too keen on saying his name), Trials Committee, (made up mostly of every surviving member of the Order. We've all been requested to join quite the privilege.), have decided to consider Snape's internment under your protective services as time served while his investigation is being handled. You may inform Severus that as long as you are watching him, we see no reason to send him to Azkaban.*

*Also we at the Criminal Investigation and The Dark Years War Trials Committee have decided to credit your 'services' and make you a Protective Custody Services Monitor, and you will receive back pay from the Ministry. Congratulations on your appointment to the Criminal Investigation and The Dark Years War Trials Committee and as a Ministry employee.*

*Sincerely,*

*Arthur Wesley*

*Criminal Investigation and The Dark Years War Trials Committee*

"Well, that's interesting," she said aloud, and she smiled as she folded up the letter. She thanked Portia and removed the spell on Pig before both owls flew away. Picking up the walker, Hermione made her way into the kitchen to heat water and to fix Snape his breakfast. Snape looked asleep as she quietly placed the walker next to him and walked into the kitchen.

"What is that?" he asked sharply, nearly making Hermione jump out of her skin as she set the bowl of water beside him.

"A walker," she said casually. "Do you want to sit up for me? It makes this easier."

Snape pulled himself up, still glaring at the walker. "I know what a walker is. Why is it here?"

"To help you walk," Hermione said as she began to unwrap his neck. "The bandage looks much better this morning. I think the draining has stopped." In fact, as she gently cleaned the wound, she noticed that it looked much better. The grey and whitish discoloration was fading, although the wound and skin still looked dark pink and the yellowish-white in the wound was still there. Still, it looked better to her. "Your swelling is down too, but I think I should still use the Anti-Swelling Salve."

Snape merely grunted or made affirmative sounds to her statements, his eyes still flicking distastefully toward the walker. "Where did you get that from?"

"The walker?" she asked, then uttered the Deep Absorption Charm for the healing salves and began to apply the Anti-Swelling Salve.

Snape turned his gaze on her. "Yes, Miss Granger, the walker. Where did you get it from?"

"Mr. Weasley, of course." Hermione carried the bandage to the sink to soak.

"You told Arthur Weasley about me?"

"I wrote to Ginny and asked her if she could get you one. Apparently, her dad had it and he sent it to us," she said as she heated the muesli and sausages.

"Who else knows, Miss Granger?"

"Who else knows what, exactly?" she asked as she placed breakfast on the table and walked over to him. "Are you going to eat in bed or at the table?"

Snape tried to ease from the bed, expecting her to allow him to lean on her. "Don't get cheeky with me. I'll eat at the table, of course."

"*Suspendere Leviosa*," she said, enabling Snape to walk. Instead of standing next to him so that he could lean on her, Hermione opened up the walker.

Snape looked at the walker with disgust, watching Hermione walk away toward the kitchen. He grabbed on to the walker, testing his legs. "Who else knows about me?" he asked, scowling.

Hermione shrugged. "My friends, the members of the Order, possibly a few others."

Snape was only two steps from the table when he stopped and glared at her. "What?" he snarled. Hermione moved the chair so that he could sit down. He ignored the chair, turning to look at her. "What do you mean, 'a few others'? What do they know?"

Hermione took a deep breath. "They know you were bitten by Riddle's snake the same snake that bit Mr. Weasley. The Weasleys know that you're the friend I've been helping, and that I cannot will not leave until you're well. The Weasleys have been very supportive. I also received letters from Professor McGonagall, Minister Shacklebolt and Harry. But you know that I've been in contact with my friends."

"What exactly do they think you are doing here?"

He was angry, and Hermione wasn't sure as to why, exactly. "What has your wand in a knot? Just tell me. I know your temper, and I'd rather you simply told me what was wrong!"

"They will add abduction and kidnapping to my multiple charges! Abduction by a known Death Eater, Miss Granger. I'm a man, old enough to be your father, and you're alone with me in my *house*. They may try to accuse me if inappropriate behaviors and they *will* believe the worst. You have not left this house since..."

"Fifteen days. And I wasn't abducted exactly. I'm eighteen, sir, and not a child. I'm an adult who chose to stay and help a fellow Order member, one time professor, and friend. *They'll see it exactly for what this is!*

"I'm sure Potter is simply fuming about you being here with me." Snape made the last two steps and sat in his chair. His use of the walker was encouraging, but it obviously was still difficult for him. "I suppose he's just waiting to haul me off to Azkaban. The Chosen One captures another Death Eater."

Hermione turned on him. "*What?* Harry has actually been very supportive about this, too."

Snape snorted in derision.

"Well, he has!" She pulled out the letter from Mr. Weasley and thrust it at him. "Well, go on then read it!"

The timer went off for her potion, and Hermione quickly excused herself, eager to leave the room so that he could seethe in private. "Crush the seeds with ~~fork~~, Miss Granger. Gently blow the shucks away. *Do not* puff at them like a bellow, and then *lay* the seeds on the surface of the potion. Do not *stir* until the seeds have all sunk into the potion," he barked at her before she could leave the room.

"Yes, sir."

Hermione was still waiting for the last of the seeds to sink, leaning over the cauldron to check the progress of the potion when Snape walked into the room using his walker. "So are you now my prison guard, Miss Granger?" he asked, nearly making Hermione jump again. "I'm now under house arrest and interned under your supervision."

"I believe my title is Protective Custody Services Monitor, but *no*, I am *not* your prison guard." She grimaced, turning her attention back to her potion. The last three seeds still floated on the surface. "And if you cared to note, Harry is trying to absolve you of any crimes, not arrest you."

"Absolve me? Can you be sure about that, Miss Granger?" he said, walking over to check her progress.

Well, she couldn't, not really. She was sure that Harry had no idea where Snape's house was *Nor anyone else for that matter, or they'd have been here by now*

"The Ministry obviously cannot locate the house, so they are using you to keep me interned," he snarled. "It's the only reason I'm not in Azkaban."

"What are these memories he took from you that night? And what would Professor Dumbledore's portrait say about you?" The last three seeds sunk below the surface of the potion and Hermione began to stir the potion in a scooping motion. "Everything you did during the war was for the downfall of Riddle, wasn't it? You even said yourself..."

"Not everything, Miss Granger." He sounded weary when he spoke, although still quite angry. "I did things even you wouldn't be able to forgive me for."

"Like killing Professor Dumbledore." It slipped out too quickly, and Hermione regretted saying it the moment she did.

"Yes."

"I suppose so. Except that if you believe that, you don't know me very well." She looked up, reading the direction on the wall, memorizing the next three steps carefully, because the timing was so quick and she had to be very precise. *Four minutes...* "You must've had your reasons or things weren't as they seemed... It could have been one of the others..." She focused on quickly dicing the Lenten rose bracts, trying to keep herself from being distracted by his admission.

"This is a crucial stage, Miss Granger. Do not get distracted," he snapped.

She reached for her giant wood mites to press their excretions onto her diced bracts. Her hands shook slightly, but she quickly extracted secretions from all twenty mites, producing a large quantity of the dark, gluey gel. She scooped out the mass, careful not to touch any to her skin and let it drop into the potion, quickly adding in the Dead Sea salt. She stirred the potion three times quickly and laid the stirring rod down. The potion hissed, then changed to a deep cobalt color. Taking a deep breath, she turned to face him. "I'm sure you had a reason, or maybe Harry misinterpreted something... Maybe he missed..."

"No, I'm quite sure that he did not misinterpret what happened," he said firmly.

Hermione couldn't look at him. "He said you killed Dumbledore out of anger. That you had a look of revulsion and hatred on your face, that you simply... just... killed him..." She closed her eyes to fight back the tears.

"Is that how Potter described it to you?" His voice had a hint of remorse in the harshly spoken words.

She looked up at him and saw deep condemnation in his expression. "Then you tell me. You tell me how why...? He trusted you implicitly..."

"And that is exactly why he *insisted* that I do it. He didn't want Draco to kill him. He was dying, Miss Granger, a very slow and very painful death that I tried *and could not* stop. The curse on that ring that destroyed his hand was creeping up his arm. It had reached his shoulder and was close to reaching his heart," he said in a cold, hard

voice. Hermione gasped at what he was telling her. "I was forced into an Unbreakable Vow with Narcissa Malfoy, and Dumbledore knew of the vow, and he knew that Draco had been given orders to kill him. Draco tried, unsuccessfully, five times to kill Dumbledore."

"Five?" she asked. She knew of the poisoned wine and the opal necklace...

"Yes, *five* unsuccessful attempts. I thwarted one myself. He levitated two Acromantulas into the Headmaster's private quarters, sent poisoned wine to Slughorn, that opal necklace which cursed Miss Bell, sent Dumbledore poisoned Bubotuber puss in a letter and placed devil's snare under the Headmaster's chair in the Great Hall," he said.

Hermione gasped in shock.

"It was obvious that Draco was getting desperate. The last promise Dumbledore extracted from me, the final wish of a dying man, my friend, mentor and master was for me to kill him rather than let Draco do it. He was my *real* master, Miss Granger. I killed him because he *made* me promise. He made me *swear* to him that I would do it to save Draco's soul. That night on the tower, he *begged* me to keep my promise and kill him. I would have died from the Unbreakable Vow if I had not. Dumbledore had insisted that I keep up my pretences, keep my place in the Dark Lord's inner circle. And *yes*, I *hated* him for insisting upon it, and I was *revolted* by the fact that he *pleaded* for me to do it." Hermione was amazed at the compunction in his voice, although his face held his usual hard sneer.

"He pleaded with you, asked you to kill him and you did!" She was incensed.

"Ah, that great, noble, Gryffindor loyalty. *Yes*, Miss Granger. I *killed* the only man to *ever* really believe in me. I obeyed *his last wish* and prevented Draco from killing him. I saved *my own hide* so that I could continue as *his spy*, and continue to do what *he* desired me to do, even *after* he was dead. To protect the students of Hogwarts, and help Potter anyway I could to defeat the Dark Lord."

"But you didn't have to!" she protested.

"He was *dying*. He was nearly *dead*. There were *four* Death Eaters on that tower besides Draco and myself: Amycus and Alecto Carrow, Slajer and Rowle, and that filthy werewolf, Greyback. The one thing Dumbledore feared was that in his weakened state, *if* he faced the Dark Lord, he wouldn't have the strength to resist him, to prevent the Dark Lord from extracting his knowledge and secrets. Moreover, he was concerned about the Draco's future, his soul. He didn't want Draco to become a killer. Believe me, Dumbledore wasn't going to survive the night. I could see that as plainly as the condemnation on your face." Snape turned to leave, his movements slow. "Now lower the flame on that potion before you ruin it."

He hadn't been very communicative after that. Snape was rather indifferent toward Hermione when she did his afternoon dressing change and chose to stay in bed after lunch. She sought him out with a question regarding a charm she was having difficulty with, but he was standing next to a table of herbs in his atrium and answered her curtly. Hermione gave up trying to talk with him about his past and spent the rest of the day reviewing in the sitting room.

After dinner and his evening dressing change, Snape was at least speaking to her again, although gruffly. Hermione cleaned up the kitchen, then tended to the herbs she had growing in the bay window. As she passed his bed, she stopped to check a few of his vials to see if any of them needed refilling. In her haste, she almost knocked his book, *Tales of Wanderous Myths*, off the dish cupboard by accident, catching it before it fell.

Snape turned to her, his eyes focused on the book. "Do you want this?" she asked before setting it down.

"Yes, no..." he said quietly. Hermione turned to lay the book down. "Yes."

"Pardon?" she said, turning around again.

He sighed and tried to turn to look at her. "Yes, I'd like to have my book."

Hermione looked at him, trying to read his mood and to understand him. *I made him angry by making him talk about Dumbledore, something he obviously didn't wish to talk about, but felt compelled to tell me anyway. Why? So I'd understand him... or to push me away from him? "Would you like me to read to you for a while?"*

There was a long pause before he finally answered, "Yes, I'd appreciate it if you would."

"I'm rather surprised that you like this book so much," she said off-handedly, opening to the marker.

"A friend from my school years read this to me when I was hospitalized by two strong hexes... from both Black and Potter," he confessed softly. "This copy was her gift to me on my birthday that year."

~oOo~

Day 16

Snape was trying to rise out of bed when Hermione walked into his dining room boudoir. She immediately noticed that the spells to support him had obviously worn off, and she quickly raised her wand. "*Suspendere Leviosa*," she said. "I'm so sorry!" He glared at her as she quickly added the Spine-Locker Spell and placed the walker by his bedside, oblivious to his scowl. "What?" she asked as his expression became angry.

"I wanted to see if I could do this without magical assistance," he snapped.

"But you can't... wait a minute! You released the spells?" she asked, gobsmacked. His expression darkened. "Obviously you did... But why? You obviously still need them."

"Yes. I want to be able to walk on my own," he snapped.

"I want that, too!"

He looked at her incredulously. "Do not patronize me, Miss Granger. I know you can hardly wait to be rid of me..."

"That's not it at all!" she exclaimed. He glared down at her skeptically. "I hate seeing you like this..." She moved her hand, indicating his current state. "It's why I've stayed with you because I want you to heal. The one thing I counted on throughout this whole war was your infallibility, your strength and bravery... Knowing that you were on our side helping..."

"Really," he said superciliously.

"Yes. Really!" she exclaimed as she turned to retrieve the flannel and warm water to tend his neck. "Stop trying to push me away I'm only here to help you and I'm not going anywhere."

"That's right. You got yourself appointed as my prison guard."

At his harsh tone, Hermione turned around nearly spilling all the warm water on the floor. "I did not I am not your prison guard!"



"No, only my Protective Custody Monitor," he snarled.

Hermione approached him, setting the water down and regarding him thoughtfully. "According to the Ministry yes. However, I didn't ask for that, and I don't think you need a guard or Protective Custody Monitor. So let's redefine things our way."

"Excuse me?" he asked, his eyes narrowing.

Hermione reached up to undo his bandage and he pulled away from her. "Look, for now I'm your ex-student and Healer. When you get stronger and don't need me, I'll happily go no, not like that..." she rambled as she tended to his neck. "I mean, I'll help return your home back the way it was, collect my things and leave you. If you need me, you can owl, and I'll come back. I'll probably be at the Burrow for a while until I figure things out, unless I'm allowed to finish my year at Hogwarts... I will need to get my parents at some point and find my own place..."

He watched her, scrutinizing her every word and expression. "And if the Ministry insists?"

"Insists on what?" she asked confused, dropping the dressing in her bowl and reaching for the healing salves. "That I live here with you until your trial? Surely they wouldn't insist on that. I'd simply have to check on you from time to time, and you'll tell me if you plan on taking any long trips."

"That isn't how the Ministry works they will insist you being *here*, watching me. The Dark Years War Trials Committee has apparently decided that my *internment* under your *protective services* equates as my time served while I'm under *criminal investigation*. The one Potter is handling. As long as you're watching over me, I get to stay out of Azkaban."

Hermione listened to him as she applied the salves, realizing that his anger had everything to do with Mr. Weasley's letter *Of course...* She looked at him as she rewrapped his neck. "If they insist, I'll come back. But on mutual terms."

"Mutual terms? I have consented to having you here until I am able-bodied and don't need your assistance. Now I must concede to having you move in as my custodian. And relinquish my home to you for the duration of Potter's investigation, to be remanded to Azkaban upon its conclusion."

"Move in? Here? As in... live here? I can't do that!" she exclaimed.

Snape made a deep, humorless chuckle as he tried to rise from the bed. "You already have, my dear." He made a big sweep of his arm. "Or haven't you noticed. Fix breakfast please, Miss Granger. I'm hungry."

"This is temporary!" she exclaimed as she poured muesli into a bowl. *I can't just move in and live with him! Like... flat mates!*

"Eat quickly, you only have fifteen minutes before your potion will need attention," he snapped.

They spent the morning in the potions lab, brewing Snape's healing salves and a few potions for St. Mungo's. Snape was able to assist with the brewing as long as he stayed on the stool Hermione had conjured for him. He sat in the bend of the worktable, three cauldrons placed within easy reach while still allowing him space to prepare ingredients. He worked on the easier of the potions, but by lunch, they had managed to produce nearly nine potions, all standing on the cooling racks off to one side. The potion Hermione had been working on the last week sat on a low white flame, simmering for another hour until it would be complete. While she found working with him easier than working under his constant observation, the day had been daunting. Even if Hermione could cook more than simply sandwiches and heat soup, she doubted that she'd have the energy.

After lunch, Snape insisted that Hermione take a nap before they began to work on charms, then gave her a list of the charms he would expect her to do. So while he napped peacefully, Hermione spent the hour and a half reading and trying to memorize the charms on Snape's list. When Snape woke and called out for her, she found him waiting at the kitchenette table, ready to begin. Hermione tried to do the charms Snape commanded her to do. However, sitting across the table from him, her mind kept returning to the discussion prior to breakfast.

By dinner, Hermione was frustrated and exhausted, knowing that she'd be up for hours writing out the foot long essays Snape demanded for each spell she'd been unable to achieve.

The one thing that did lift her spirits was the fact that when she changed his dressing before dinner, the wound in his neck was finally beginning to look shades lighter in color and the greyish color had faded to white. In addition, the deep puncture wounds were more defined now that the swelling was going down, and the gash looked like it had closed up some. Hermione no longer needed to help Snape walk now that he had the walker, which made her smile, although she rather missed having him lean on her. She was careful when she checked the wound at midnight, being extra gentle when cleaning it and applying the salves, lest the wound reopen.

~o0o~

Day 17

Arimus flew into the room just about the same time as a snowy barn owl. Both owls carried letters, the one in Arimus' claws addressed to Snape. Within minutes, a Ministry owl flew in the window dropping two letters at her feet and soared out. Hermione untied the letters, from Arimus and the snow owl and carried both owls into the kitchen for treats.

Snape was wide-awake as usual, sitting on the edge of his bed. "Good morning," she said as she handed him his letters. His eyes darkened as he looked at the writing. "Bad news? Or someone you didn't want to hear from."

"The Ministry." She looked up to see him scowling at the envelope. He threw the offending letter on the dish cupboard.

"Aren't you going to open it?" she asked, reading Harry's official letter as she began to check his neck.

"No. I'm sure it's the details of my internment," he replied.

She chose to ignore his waspish comment. "Harry has some questions about what we've been doing here. How you're treating me and questions about the potions."

"Naturally," he said sarcastically. "I suppose you could tell him I've been working you like a house-elf, forcing you to tend to my every whim and brew all my requests for me." Hermione looked at him and raised one eyebrow. "I'm sure he'd love to hear how you've been spending half your days in my lab and the other half in my boudoir."

"You're in a much better mood," she replied, assuming he was joking with her.

"I actually feel better," he replied with a smirk. "He can ask Master Kirkwell about the potions."

She smirked back at him and then smiled when she uncovered his neck. "The wound looks better, too. Look." She handed him a mirror. The skin around the wound was still a rosy pink, and the gash itself still an irritated dark pink, but the overall appearance showed improvement. She finished ministering to his neck and carried the bowl back to the sink. She pulled out the last of the ham, slicing it up to reheat it for breakfast.

"So what are we going to do after breakfast?" she asked as she carried the bowls, plates of ham, muesli and milk to the table on a tray.

"I suppose you want to go shopping or possibly go outside and toss a Quaffle on broomstick," he said, walking to the kitchenette table with his walker.

"Excuse me? I think you have me confused with someone else." Hermione looked up at him in amusement. "I was thinking more along the lines of defensive spells or charms."

"Of course, I'm jesting, Miss Granger. Or don't you have a sense of humor?" His face became very serious as he read his letter. "Master Kirkwell needs more of my potions." He set the letter on the table so Hermione could see the shaky writing. "They require more of twelve we made last week, and the potion you just completed. If you're up to brewing these four, I could possibly make these," he said, pointing to the list as he spoke.

Hermione nodded. "If you think you're up to it?" He raised an eyebrow looking at her. "What about these four," she asked. "They take days to make."

"They are needed as well, so we'll brew them," he stated. He looked up at her and cocked his eyebrow. "Unless you don't think you're up to the challenge?"

*If it's like it was working with you yesterday sure, if you're going to treat me like you did ten days ago* She looked at him as she evaluated his mood. "If you can put the directions on the wall again, coordinating the introductions of the ingredients and steps with markers and arrows, count me in."

"Yes, I can do that," he agreed. "Eat up, I don't want to waste the day."

By lunch, six potions sat simmering on heat pads on the desk, Hermione's four and two of Snape's. The four potions that would take the longest to brew were in a line on the worktable. Snape was concentrating on the potion in the copper cauldron in front of him, carefully dropping in dragon tick thoraxes. Hermione had insisted that he take a break and relax after his second potion, but he'd adamantly refused, eating his sandwich at the desk, then returning to his potions. Hermione sat across the worktable from him, carefully following his directions on the wall as she re-brewed the next two potions. The one in the silver cauldron was much easier the second time around. Nevertheless, Snape still felt the tendency to snap and bark orders about her techniques and caution her occasionally during certain steps.

Just as Hermione finished the second set of potions, Snape looked up at her again. "Pour the potions into large bottles this time, Miss Granger, and send them off with Arimus."

"Sure," she said, looking around at the shelf by the sink where he kept his bottles.

"The glass jars that look like those used for jam preserves. They are quite larger than they look," he said without looking up from his potion as he added in the ground knarl quills.

She found a box of them and carried the jars to the desk. She was amazed that each jar could hold the entire amount from each cauldron. Ten potions sat nestled in the box as she carried it into the kitchen to retrieve Arimus. "I have an errand for you," she said cheerfully. Arimus stretched his wings and landed on her shoulder. "Our self-centered misanthrope wants to cure the ails of the cursed. Feel like a flight?" The owl clicked his beak in a way Hermione perceived to be owl laughter. Hermione cast a Buoyancy Charm on the box and held up the rope handle. Arimus swooped down, grabbed the rope and flew out the open window. Hermione went to the kitchen and cut up the last of the roast in small chunks, adding in vegetables, and placing it all in a pot of water to simmer until dinner.

By dinner, the four complicated potions sat simmering. Four more potions awaited Arimus' return, bottled and boxed to go. Hermione felt exhausted and couldn't wait to jump into the roasting pot tub and wash off the fumes from their busy day.

"You should take a bath," she said as she ate her stew.

"I don't want a bath," he snapped, more from exhaustion than simple irritability.

"You'll feel better," she stated. "You've just spent the entire day leaning over cauldrons! Don't you want to wash off all those fumes?"

He looked up at her, scowling. "What is it with your preoccupation with my cleanliness?"

She looked back at him, trying to mimic his expression. A slight curl of his lip told her she wasn't scowling very well. "What is it with your insistence in being gre... dirty?" she winced at her slip.

His eyes narrowed and he sat up straighter. "I'm not dirty *orgreasy*."

"I wasn't implying..." she implored. "Okay, I was. But you'll feel better."

"I don't like bathing every day." He bent down over his stew as if to end the conversation. However, with his back held straight by the Spine-Locker Spell, he couldn't lean over his food as he used to in the Great Hall.

Hermione was undaunted by his mood change. "I've noticed! I can only get you in the tub once a week."

"Every three to four days, and it's a roasting pot," he snapped. "I'm not a roast."

"It's what I've got for the time being until you can walk up the stairs to your own loo." Her eyes never left his as she took a bite of stew. After a pause, she added, "I'll wash your hair for you."

"I do not need you to bathe me like a child, Miss Granger," he stated firmly. "I can wash myself."

"I only offered to wash your hair, not your body," she said, picking up a piece of carrot with her spoon. "One would think..."

"I did not! You are not... I can wash myself, thank you!" He stopped when he saw the smirk on her face. "Unless you'd like to, Miss Granger." Her eyes grew large at his invite. "Is that why you are so instant on my taking a bath every other day?"

She dropped her spoon. "I... um... no! I just thought you'd feel better," she stammered.

"You want to have me feel better?" he asked, his voice low and deliberate.

"Disillusioned each time and you know that!" she exclaimed. "Fine! Then I'll just have a soak, and you can do whatever!"

"So, it was an invitation. I don't bathe with students, Miss Granger," he said, his dark eyes boring into her soft brown.

"I wasn't implying that you... and I... together!" Hermione could feel her cheeks burn. "I'm not your student!"

"Really? And the last four days of instruction were what? An exercise of my patience? Not to mention all the personal tutelage you've received in my potions lab. There are wizards who would pay handsomely for *that* privilege."

"Okay, yes, your student and personal slave." His eyes narrowed at her choice of words. "Privileged apprentice, Healer and maid... Still, you do need a bath, and I was only suggesting that I fill the tub for you. And all I *offered* was to wash your *hair*."

"It's a roasting pot, Miss Granger," he corrected her. "For a very large pot roast."

She couldn't help smile at his remark. "I'll take that as a yes, then. Do you want to use my bubble bath?"

"Don't get cheeky with me." He glared at her and Hermione snickered. "I don't use bubble bath."

"It'll make you feel better," she lightly teased him as she carried her bowl to the sink. "I have lavender and eucalyptus or garden botanicals?" She missed his dark scowl as she set the large kettle on to boil.

*Author's Notes:*

*This was my main gift for Shadow\_ks in the SS/HG gift exchange. I was thrilled that she liked it!*

*I have a great deal of gratitude for Ladyinthecloak and Machshefa for beta reading this for me. You ladies are great and I really appreciated you doing this. Thank you.*

## Respect and Trust

*Chapter 5 of 9*

As Snape gets better, he becomes more irritable and frustrated, wanting to do more for himself than to rely on Hermione. Not only that, but notices arrive from the Ministry and St. Mungo's that don't bode well. Nevertheless, when Hermione suggests that he may not need her any longer and insinuates that she could leave him, his reaction was not one she expected.

~oOo~

Day 18

The timers by her bed went off and Hermione dressed quickly. It was still early, as even the sun hadn't made its appearance, and the sky outside was still a soft, dusty grey. *Dawn will be here before too long*, she thought, although she doubted that she'd see anyone on the narrow street. She opened the window a bit wider and looked out at the cobbled street, wondering where this small town or village was. Rows of similar houses lined the street, although she could tell that the house Snape owned was most likely the last one on this particular street. It still didn't give her any clues as to where she was. Suddenly remembering about her potions, Hermione turned and ran to the potions lab to check on them.

The four potions that were going to take days to brew were in a row, simmering away, all the proper color and consistency. She opened a jar of peach moths, deftly pulling the legs, antennas and wings off ten, and dropped them into the waiting potion. Her next step involved adding the thoraxes of fifteen Hippogriff fleas and adding the wings to her second potion. She was stirring the potion clockwise six strokes for the fifth time when the timer for the fourth potion went off, alerting her that it was time to add the pasque flower seeds that had been soaking overnight in olive oil.

She was stirring the second and fourth potions when she heard a loud, *thump*, followed by a crash and another thump. *At least the second thump sounded like metal* Hermione couldn't abandon her potions; she had to finish eighteen strokes on one, and thirteen for the other. She carefully counted the motions of both arms, fearing what may have happened in the dining room boudoir. *Five, four, three, two, one*; she pulled out one rod while continuing to stir with the other, *five, four, three, two, one done*. She set down the stirring rods and ran from the potions lab.

"Are you all rig-g..." She slid to a halt at the doorway before quickly rushing to Snape's side. He'd tried to rise on his own, possibly reaching for the walker, slipped and sent both the walker and the bowl she used daily for his wound care to the floor with him. She quickly made a flick with her wand, repairing the shards of pottery back into a bowl, and reached down to help Snape up. He jerked away from her, crashing to his knees again. "Let me help you up!" she exclaimed, grabbing his arm. She placed her hands on his sides to help him stand back up.

"Unhand me," he snarled, irritated.

"Sure. As soon as you are standing," she replied as she steadied him to his feet *Male egos! I'm just helping you*, she chastised him silently. His head wobbled and Hermione quickly added the Spine-Locker Spell to support his neck. *What was he thinking? He's not strong enough to move about without the spells! Why does he push himself so?*

Snape glared at her, but she ignored his stare. "Where were you this morning?"

*So, he's going to be surly and cantankerous today. Cheers* Removing one hand, she aimed her wand, casting the spell to set the kettle on the stove. "Went for a jog, got the paper and picked you some wild flowers," she said, retrieving the walker from the floor.

"Don't get cheeky, Miss Granger. I called for you," he snapped angrily. "You didn't answer."

"I was in the potions lab. Where else?" she asked, hoping to appease him. "I didn't hear you call me, I'm sorry. You know I would've come to you if I'd heard you." She stood there calmly, her hands on his waist, in case he needed her support as he sat back down. "Okay. Now, shall I check your wound?" She picked up the bowl and hurried to get warm water.

Snape settled back on his bed. "You should have checked it an hour ago," he sneered.

"An hour ago I was still asleep and so were you," she said, returning with the warm water.

"Really?" he asked with one eyebrow cocked, challengingly. "Care to wager on that?"

"No. Besides, you'd win because I wouldn't be able to prove otherwise." To her relief, his expression finally softened, and she smiled at him. She carefully began to unwrap his neck, checking the back of it carefully. *The skin is still swollen, but definitely looks better* She liked the way he smelled when she had to lean close to him each time she did his treatment, although she'd never admit that to anyone.

"I can do that," he stated, breaking into her thoughts.

Hermione paused and looked at him. "I know you can. It's still easier if I do it, though." His eyes narrowed and she resumed attending to his neck. He sat with his arms crossed and his expression sullen. "Go ahead and say what's on your mind."

After a long pause, he looked up at her. "This is... frustrating."

Hermione looked at him, completely understanding what he was saying. "I know it is, but I'm trying, really trying to make things as easy on you as I can."

He uncrossed his arms and his expression became thoughtful. However, he remained silent as she cleaned the wound and began applying the healing salves. "How is it?" he finally asked.

Hermione passed him a small hand mirror and set the salves with the Deep Absorption Spell. "It looks better than before. I think the wound's stopped draining, even where the puncture marks are. It's still a dark pink and whitish, but the wound *is* closing." He thrust the mirror at her and turned to get out of bed. Hermione stood ready to help him if he needed assistance and noticed that he didn't seem to need the Support-Up Charm so much anymore. "So, how about a spot of breakfast?" He simply glared at her as he slowly walked to the kitchenette table with his walker. "I'll take that as a yes, I'd love some." He made a low rumble in his throat, almost a growl, as she scooted around him to get to the kitchen.

Following breakfast, Hermione was once again scurrying around in the potions lab, pulling out the ingredients for the two potions Snape had put up on the wall for her. He deftly made all the coordinating marks and arrows, structuring out her brewing times. "You did that nonverbally," she remarked.

"I do most of my spell work nonverbally, Miss Granger," he retorted. Hermione gave him a quizzical look, but before she could ask, he sighed and continued. "It was four against one at school. Having to shout out your curses to cast them alerts your opponent to your intent, so I learned how to do almost all of my spell work nonverbally. It was a defensive measure that has served me quite well over the years."

*I bet it has..* "Harry's dad and Sirius you mean," she said softly, nodding. "From everything I've heard, they were right prats in school." His eyes narrowed, but without the harshness the look usually had. "I remember you saying that the ability to do nonverbal spells was an advantage my sixth year in Defense."

"Yes, although in actuality not all wizards can do it," he said, looking at her intently. "It takes a greater amount of focus and determination. Most find it easier to simply match the volume of their voice with the intended strength of the spell."

She smiled, knowing that what he'd said was true. She turned to face the wall, checking the directions, marveling at how efficient it was when set up this way. "I'd really love to learn how to do this. Where did you learn it?"

"From my Potions master, during my apprenticeship." He didn't look up as he worked. They worked in silence for most of the morning. When Hermione finished her second potion, she stepped over to see his. He looked at her briefly, then turned his full attention to his preparations. "Hovering over my shoulder won't make me nervous."

"I didn't think it would," she replied. "You're really quite gifted. It's amazing to watch you work."

"Then maybe I should give you something else to do. I'm not used to being watched." He paused, then flipped a page in his book, adding first one, then another set of directions to her wall. "Master Kirkwell requested these, if you feel you can handle brewing them. The timing is tricky half way through, so I may need to help you. I should be able to coordinate my brewing time to give you assistance."

Hermione read through the directions, noting the coordination marks and arrows. "I'm surprised you feel I'm up to making them," she said, noting there were three places where the coordinations between all her potions didn't fit properly, but he'd added blue markers during those steps. She turned to look at him, confused, realizing that he'd been watching her expression carefully as she'd read the directions.

He turned his attention back to his own potion. "I'll be making the introductions at the blue markers. However, you will set out all the ingredients to have them ready for me."

"Yes, sir," she said, trying to contain her enthusiasm, realizing that he'd reached the conclusion that she'd be able to brew both potions well enough to be sent to St. Mungo's.

Hermione struggled to keep up with the timing and preparation of her ingredients, somehow managing to keep both cauldrons going while still checking on her other four. True to his word, Snape assisted her when the timing began to overlap, smirking and snapping at her when she delayed his step or when she was delayed in adding her ingredients or when her stirring times weren't exact enough.

By lunch, he gave her a break to fix sandwiches, making her eat quickly at his desk with him. She'd finished one potion an hour after the other. Nevertheless, as soon as she finished a potion, Snape erased the completed potion's directions from the wall, replacing it with another. As soon as the fourth potion for the day was set on the rack, he added a sixth, coordinating the timing out precisely, and then returned his attention to his own two cauldrons.

She had little time to gather her ingredients for the sixth potion before one of her timers went off. She was sweating, and he looked cool and composed. Still, this was a chance of a lifetime, and she wasn't about to pass it up or let him down. She was determined to show him that she could hold her own. She found a rag and wiped the perspiration from her forehead.

"It helps, Miss Granger, if you cast a Scourgify and Freshen-Up Charm occasionally," he replied off-handedly.

Hermione simply nodded, as she moved between cauldrons. The first opportunity she had she followed his advice and immediately felt better. "Thank you," she said gratefully.

"Don't mention it. Now watch that cauldron," he said, indicating one on her right. "I would *not* be pleased if you melted a cauldron in my lab."

\*

Hermione sat at the counter next to the cooling racks and ladled her potions in the jars, carefully placing the filled jars in a box. She'd finished one of the potions she'd started two days ago after Master Kirkwell had sent the letter. Two of the six she'd made that day were already bottled to be sent. Snape placed his second potion in the box and sat down on his chair, watching her, an odd, speculative look on his face. "You are actually enjoying this, aren't you," he said sharply.

"What, exactly?" she asked, careful to not spill any of the potion as she filled the jar. "Brewing potions with you? Absolutely."

"Is that so?" he asked. He sounded to her as if that wasn't the answer he'd expected.

She looked up, cast a slight smile and set the jar in the box. "Does that surprise you?" She pulled the next cauldron to her and began carefully filling another jar.

"Actually, yes. Except for a very few Slytherins, most students tended to avoid me as much as possible."

She looked up at him again. "That's because you took so many house points from everyone," she said. She dropped her attention back to the cauldron, scooping out the thick glutinous potion into the jar in her hand.

"I never got the impression that you liked my class in particular," he said softly.

Hermione smiled. "How would you have known? You could hardly stand me in school."

"I barely tolerate you now, Miss Granger." He spoke with a cool deliberate drawl that reminded her so much of the way he'd spoken to her at Hogwarts.

She looked up, her brown eyes meeting his with a calm she'd never have felt at school. "I suppose, if you like, I could cower from your stares and curt remarks, then?" she laughed, then curled her mouth into a smirk. "I'm not saying that you don't still intimidate me, but I don't fear you. Not anymore. I do and always have respected you," she

said, and he scoffed at her, "even if you don't believe me." He rolled his eyes toward the door. "I know you're being amiable simply because I'm here and refuse to leave..."

"No, Miss Granger," he said, his expression softening into a humorous smirk. His dark eyes focused intently on her own. "I'm being amiable because you're here. I could have cursed you out of my house days ago. However, your assistance is noted and... appreciated. Whatever the circumstances were that brought you here."

"And I appreciate the fact that you've managed to resist cursing me. You're welcome," she said, keeping her eyes down as she scooped out the last of her potion. "I'd really like to learn how you do that coordination thing with the directions."

"I'm not the least bit surprised," he said with a cool chuckle. "I will see if we have time tomorrow. I thought you should learn some charms tonight, after dinner. You are lacking in your skills at nonverbal spells, and that will hold you back on N.E.W.T.s."

"I thought that you were going to teach me a full curriculum, not just what I'd need to know for exams," she replied, surprised, hoping that she sounded casual.

"What gave you the idea I wasn't?" She looked up and saw his slight smile before he once again became serious. "I have worked out a list for tonight that should keep us busy until my midnight dressing change." She looked at him, stunned, and he cocked an eyebrow. "Did you think that just because we've been spending so much time in the lab I'd forgo your lessons? You did ask me to tutor you, did you not? I take such a commitment very seriously, Miss Granger."

"No, really I just didn't think we'd be up all night together... Don't you rest? You are supposed to be recovering." He scoffed at her concerns. "As long as you don't overdo it, I suppose it will be all right."

"That's very magnanimous of you," he stated, looking away from her. "I think I can assess my own limits, thank you."

"Just thinking about your well being," she said with a smirk. His eyes narrowed slightly, but she simply watched him, waiting for him to retort. Sighing, she placed the last jar in the box. "Okay then. I'll send Arimus off with these and go prepare dinner. I can check your wound while the stew heats up."

"I'll await you in my boudoir, Miss Granger," he replied with a challenging drawl.

Hermione grabbed the box and hurried from the room, laughing to herself at his remark.

"They made you my Protective Custody Services Monitor, and it could be months before my trial," she heard him grumble as he made his way from the lab behind her. "I should work you like a house-elf..."

"I thought you were," she said softly, holding up her arm for Arimus to fly to her.

"Believe me, Miss Granger, I've been lenient with you."

~oOo~

Day 19

Snape was up and in his potions lab when Hermione woke up, stirring the potion in his silver cauldron. "You're up early," she said, yawning and stretching as she entered the room.

He didn't turn around or look at her. "I'm usually up before dawn, Miss Granger."

"And to think rumors were that you are a vampire! Don't you sleep? You used to patrol the castle practically every night. It's hard to think you'd be a morning person if you're always up so late." He merely cocked an eyebrow at her comments as he diced his next ingredient. "You *can* call me Hermione, you know."

"Not under current circumstances," he said dryly.

Hermione peered into her cauldron, smiling at the soft azure color. "I'm not your student. It's all right if you call me by my name."

"I thought that Granger was your name," he said, checking his second cauldron. "Your potion needs tending to."

"I thought that you just admitted to being a morning person! Maybe you should reconsider and sleep in if it's going to make you surly every morning." Hermione missed his scowl as she pulled the timers from her pocket. Four small hourglasses hovered in a perfect square on her palm. "According to these I have fifteen minutes. Time enough to change your dressing."

He gently Repelled three small dishes to the sink. "I cannot be disturbed at this time," he said. "These are crucial steps. It will have to be done later." He Summoned two jars from his shelves. "If you feel the need to do something, you can clean Arimus' perch."

"In twenty minutes," she said, sitting down to watch him work.

He scowled briefly, and then returned to his ingredient preparations. "I'd rather you didn't hover."

"You don't like to talk while you work, do you?" she asked, pulling the Laminarium roots toward her. "Would you like me to shred these?"

He looked up, his eyes cross. She simply stared back, undaunted. "No. And yes. Make your cuts even and make sure the shreds are consistent."

"Absolutely, sir," she said, grinning. "Anything else you'd like me to do?"

He glared at her momentarily, then waved his wand, adding two potions' directions on the wall. With careful flicks, marks, arrows and step indicators appeared, coordinating the two new potions during the intermittent timing of the four that sat simmering on the worktable. "You can produce these. Follow the steps carefully and watch your timing. Now stop talking, please, and let me work."

She started pulling out the ingredients, pausing when a timer went off for one of her potions to complete the next steps, and then resumed her attention to the two potions he'd added to her morning. She kept eyeing Snape to determine when he'd be ready to pause in his work to let her tend to his neck.

Finally, when she finished one potion and was at a pause in the other, and his potions were simmering, he indicated that she could quickly minister to his wound. The wound was definitely closing. "I'll continue with the Regenerative Potion, and my healing salves, but I don't think I'll need the Swelling Salve anymore," he said, checking his neck in a mirror. "I'd like to try forgoing your Spine-Locker Cruse for a while."

"Yeah, I don't see any swelling. Fine, we'll see how you do..." Her Galleon vibrated in her pocket. "Oh, wait a moment..." Hermione pulled it from her pocket, ignoring the curious arch in Snape's eyebrow. It read: *How R U? G*

*I'm fine*, she answered through the coin, smiling.

"Playing with your money?" he asked with a smirk. "I never thought you to be so enamored over gold."

*So my coin amuses you does it?* "Sending messages." She tapped the Galleon with her wand and made the coin read *Use more ham? Fruit n veg if u can. Do you mind? Do you need money? H*. She waited a few seconds each time, giving Ginny time to read each message. *I have if tight*. She looked up at Snape as she waited for Ginny to

respond. "I made these for the D.A. club my fifth year. It has a Protean Charm on it. Several of us still carry our coins."

He tried to look at the Galleon on her palm, so she held it out for him to see. He picked up the Galleon examining both sides and handed it back. "That's most likely on your Charms N.E.W.T. It was on mine, as I recall."

"Oh, really! Nice to know," she answered as he placed the coin on her hand. "Any others I should know?"

"Yes, the entire curriculum. I won't help you cheat, Miss Granger," he stated briskly at her innuendo. "You'll learn what you need to know, not just what I think will be on the exam."

"Promise?" she asked. The coin was still abeyant on her palm. Shrugging to herself, she placed it back in her pocket. She checked her potion, introduced the last ingredient and lowered the flame.

He was still staring at her when she looked up. "Why would you choose me as your tutor? I'd have thought one subject a year, for six years as my student would have been enough for you. Why would you wish to spend six hours a day for six days a week under my tutelage?"

"I was under the impression it would be eighteen hours a day, seven days a week." He scowled at her jest. "I'm a sucker for sarcasm, dry wit and cutting remarks." He glared at her cheek. "You've a brilliant intellect and despite what you think, you're a proficient teacher. I've always learned so much from you, and you force me to do my best and excel. Although, you could be nicer. What do you want for brunch?"

"Brunch?" he asked startled. "I don't do brunch."

"We've missed breakfast, brewing potions." She said placing two cauldrons on the cooling racks. "Shall I make us some sandwiches?"

He sighed heavily. "When you move into the Burrow, please have Molly teach you how to cook."

"I'll pass on your compliment," she said, heading for the kitchen.

\*

Ginny's barn owl, Portia, flew in just before lunch, carrying another care package from Mrs. Weasley. A brief note from Ginny said that Fred, George and Bill were slipping Galleons into their parents' vault each week so that Mrs. Weasley wouldn't notice. She also said that Harry was adding to the 'Healer Granger' funds too. Hermione smiled at that.

There were several notes as well. Fred wanted to know how Snape had abducted her. Ron asked her again to come see him, and Harry sent her a short letter with updates regarding Snape's investigation and more questions. She wrote replies after she put away the food, although she wasn't too comfortable answering all of Harry's questions without Snape's consent.

That afternoon, Snape explained the Coordination Spell and showed her how to break up the potions' directions with the timing markers and arrows. "You have the introduction of the blue nipper scales at the same time as the ferndirk worms, Miss Granger, without allowing necessary time to scale the nippers. Try again," he said in his usual tutorial tones.

Hermione looked at the wall, contemplating on where she'd made her mistake. Unlike at Hogwarts, here in his lab he expected her to reason things out for herself. However, she was stumped. She concentrated on the part of the potions' directions that needed fixing and swished her wand, trying to adjust the markers. The directions of two potions he wanted her to brew that afternoon still looked like a jumbled mess and were not yet coordinated in a proficient manner.

"If I change this marker, I don't have time to add my runespoor eggs to the first potion, and it will throw off the introduction of the everbright stems into that one." She flicked her wand trying to get the coordination down. It took her several tries but she finally received his nod of approval.

"Now make them fit with the potions you've been brewing," he said, indicating the four long-term potions on the worktable.

"All four?" she asked incredulously, knowing he'd say...

"Yes, all four," he said firmly. "Do it." She tried, and the coordination was completely indecipherable. "No," he snapped, reversing it back. "Okay, do these four," he said, indicating the two afternoon potions with two of the long-term ones."

*"I'm trying! This is so much harder than he makes it appear* She tried again, trying to keep the directions clearly in her mind as she worked the spell. *"Augh! No!" Okay concentrate... I can do this...*

"You're trying too hard to *make* them fit. Relax, think of each potion and allow the spell to assist you. Don't force it," he said calmly, his arms crossed. He was watching her intently, which didn't help her ability to concentrate. He gave her a slight nod and winced since it still hurt him to move his head.

Hermione took a deep breath, closed her eyes a moment, and one of her timers went off. She set down her wand, added the magnolia flower stamens, stirring the potion only once, and then returned her attention to the directions on the wall. He'd simply waited for her patiently. "Okay, so if I shift this there, and move uh, no... there and ..."

"Can't you do this in your head?" he asked sternly. "Read the directions again, memorize them as best as you can and concentrate on all four as you say the incantation."

*So much for patience..* "And the other two?" she asked. *I can barely get these to coordinate!*

"I'll do them. You're having enough difficulty with these." He held up his hand to the wall, still watching her intently. "If you would please, try again."

*Stern and demanding, but not unreasonable... I think I'm actually beginning to understand him..* Hermione closed her eyes a moment, mentally running down the directions. She swished her wand, saying the incantation softly and the markings adjusted again, still making two impossible loops. She tried switching the arrows, making two stars fade, and creating another loop where the stars were.

"No," he said firmly. "But close. Try this." He flicked his wand, and the lines untangled, creating a perfect pattern. "I should make you keep trying until you get it right. However, you need to begin brewing the potions or you'll be up all night. Get started."

Hermione bristled at his sharpness. *What? Disappointed because I didn't get this? He must really have believed I could... or he wouldn't have wasted all this brewing time showing me.* "Yes, sir," she said, trying to memorize the changes he made. "I really want to learn this..."

"Not now, later. Get busy," he admonished. She turned to look at him and saw a slight curl to his mouth that could be interpreted as a smile.

"Promise?"

"Yes," he acquiesced. "Now get to work."

\*

She was just completing her third potion when owls screeched from the sitting room.

Arimus sat next to a large horned owl, both with large packages for Snape from apothecaries.

A ministry owl also waited impatiently on the back of a chair for Hermione to untie the letter, then took off imperiously. She scooped up the packages, allowing Arimus to alight on her shoulder, carried the mail into the kitchen to let Arimus fly to his perch and proceeded into the potions lab. Her letter was from Griselda Marchbanks. Hermione was stunned to read that although her request to return to Hogwarts to complete her seventh year and take her N.E.W.T.s was being considered, Ms. Marchbanks felt that Hermione would much prefer to take the '*continuation education classes*' for those students who had been listed on the *Muggle-born and Undesirable list*, instead. Apparently, special classes would be provided at Hogwarts for all students forced to miss the year due to *discriminatory actions by the Ministry during Dark War II*. There was a list of newly added staff, especially hired for the term, to teach a special session of classes that would begin with the reopening of Hogwarts.

"What are those?" Snape asked, not even bothering to look up from his cauldron.

"Two packages for you from the apothecary, I suppose containing your supplies, and a letter from the Ministry for me." She looked up, frowning. "I'm to enroll in the '*continuation education classes*' set up for the students that had been unable to attend school because they were listed as Muggle-born and *Undesirable*, instead of regular classes at Hogwarts."

He turned to look at her. "It's not surprising. There were a number of students barred from school this year. The attendance was nearly half or less than it should've been."

"I didn't know that!" she exclaimed, surprised by the statement. *He almost sounds disappointed...* "I knew that there were classmates of mine in hiding, but I had no idea there were so many."

"The Dark Lord had control of the school, Miss Granger. His requirement for admission stated that only purebloods or students from prominent pureblood relations and families that were three generations or greater could attend school. Students who had a parent or grandparent on either side who were half blood or less were all excluded."

*Oh, yeah, he'd have been barred as well, wouldn't he, if he'd been a student* "Well, we students listed as *Undesirables* are to be given a *self modulated curriculum based on individual evaluations*... N.E.W.T. level students, sixth year and O.W.L. students can wait to enroll in the following term in September. If a N.E.W.T. level student requires it, they may request evening tutelage to be determined by individual needs." She set her letter down and returned to her potions. "Seems like the school governors are trying to make amends."

"It would seem so."

That night after dinner, Hermione boxed up eight potions and sent Arimus off for St. Mungo's.

Having spent nearly the entire day without the assistance of the Spine-Locker Spell, Snape's neck was bothering him, and he went to bed early after she'd helped put away the supplies. Hermione offered to read to him, but he declined, so she simply spent the evening reading in the sitting room, copying down Snape's annotations into her journals and revising through his books.

~oOo~

Day 20

Severus was awake and moving about the kitchen when Hermione strolled in, stretching. "Good morning," he said, taking in her appearance with a slight smile. "Sleep well?"

"No, not particularly," she answered as she lowered herself into a chair. "But thank you for asking. You're up."

"Yes. I've been up for about two hours," he stated, levitating a large cup of tea to land in front of her. "I took the liberty of adding a muscle soother and a variation of Pepper Up Potions to your tea, Miss Granger. So, it may taste different. Drink up."

She sipped the tea, noticing a bitter aftertaste. "Thanks. How is your neck?"

"I haven't changed my dressing, since you seem to enjoy doing it so. However, the strength in my neck muscles seems to have improved. I took the liberty of taking Muscle-Strengthening Potion this morning and removed your Spine-Locker Curse. So far I'm able to hold my head up, but it still pains me to turn it to either side, more so to the left."

"And you don't need the Support-Up Charm either?" she asked. The tea was making her feel better. "This really helps, thank you."

"You're welcome," he replied as two plates of eggs, sausage and toast floated to the table, followed by cutlery. "To answer you, so far, no. I don't need the... Support-Up Charm." Hermione straightened out the place settings as a teapot landed on the table. "Is that really how you intend on designating it?"

She looked up surprised. "I hadn't really given it much thought. Does that mean that I get to name it?"

He sat down and handed her a napkin. "You invented it," he said, looking at her thoughtfully between bites. "I'd have thought that you'd have called it a Crutch-Support Charm, seeing as that was your purpose."

"I think that would sound better," she replied as she ate, still grinning at the thought. "Can I really claim credit for inventing a charm?"

"Yes, of course. And you invented three as I recall," he said, smiling at her naiveté. "I'd be happy to vouch for you, if you so choose, to have your spells published."

"Published?" Hermione asked. "Where?"

"*Challenges in Charming* would be interested. I'd expect the *Daily Prophet* and *Witch Weekly* to carry the article simply on your name recognition." He started eating, smirking at her between bites.

Hermione beamed. "So, my Perfect Posture Charm, Tapestry Levitation Charm and Crutch-Support Charm... I'd get credit for them?"

"Yes, Miss Granger, and your Spine-Locker Spell," he said, taking another bite of eggs. "Change my dressing, then write out your summaries. I'll sign and vouch for your accomplishments. Arimus can take your papers to the editor of *Challenges in Charming*."

After breakfast, he watched as Hermione Summoned her bowl, carrying it and all the breakfast dishes to the sink. "Don't ever sell yourself short, Miss Granger," he said. "Creating spells isn't just figuring out the correct Latin or phrase. You have to match intent, desire and determination with the correct wand movement. It's more than just the will and the word. Not many can achieve the necessary skill to create a spell for a specific purpose. Most new spells, especially curses, hexes and jinxes happen by accident or mispronunciation. That's why St. Mungo's has an entire floor dedicated to accidental spell damage." He watched her reaction to his statements as she carried the bowl of warm water to his bedside with amusement.

"But it seemed so easy."

He laughed at her. "It's not it's a talent. One few possess."

As usual, they spent the day in the potions lab. Hermione continued working on her four cauldrons, two of them were in an active stage while one simply had two ingredients that needed to be added, and the fourth wouldn't need anything until after dinner. And as usual, Snape gave Hermione two potions to brew in conjunction with her others. One of the morning's potions was finished by lunch while the other continued through to mid afternoon. Nevertheless, Snape still added a tricky Pain Potion after lunch, having Hermione work out the coordination between it, the one she started that morning, and one of the potions she'd started earlier that week. She tried multiple times to make the Coordination Spell work on the directions on the wall, and still had to have Snape fix two sections that wouldn't align correctly.

Just before dinner, Hermione added another finished potion to the six sitting on the cooling racks. Three of the potions she'd been working on still sat simmering over low flames on the worktable next to two potions of Snape's. Snape sat down at his desk, writing a letter, as Hermione bottled the seven potions to be sent out that night. "Sir?" she asked as she added another bottle to the box. "Is this what it would be like if I choose a career in potions?"

"Yes," he said, not bothering to look up. "Only without the assistance or constant chatter."

She smirked at him. They'd hardly spoken all day because she'd been so busy keeping up with her introduction timing and ingredient preparations. "So you are used to working alone?"

"When I brew, yes. However, I rarely had time to myself at Hogwarts." He dipped his quill, still not bothering to look at her, and continued writing. "I had to find time around my many duties and teaching requirements."

"Too many distractions?" she asked, filing the last jar.

"Yes. About a thousand of them," he said, looking up at her. The corner of his mouth curled up as if he were vaguely amused. "I generally kept my potions timed around my class schedule, Head of House duties, office hours, staff meetings, evening patrols, the Dark Lord's summons and my numerous detention obligations. In other words, in my spare evenings or early in the morning."

Hermione smiled back. "And yet you found time to brew the Wolfsbane potion and a good many of Madam Pomfrey's potions as well as those Dumbledore asked you to. How did you find the time?"

He pointed to the wall. "Really, Miss Granger, you have a tendency to ask questions you already have the answers to if you'd only stop to think. It's your most annoying trait." He stood and dropped the letter into the box. "It's time to change my dressing, if you don't mind."

"Not at all," she said, smiling up at him as she rose to her feet.

When Hermione carried Arimus to the sitting room and opened the window for him, several owls flew in tight formation dropping letters, clicking their beaks irritably and flying off with a flurry of wings. She scooped up the letters and carried them into Snape's dining room boudoir. "You have mail," she said, reading the envelopes.

He was lying down, his eyes closed, his brow creased in pain.

"Are you no you're not all right! What can I do?" she asked.

"My neck is sore, Miss Granger. I would appreciate it if you'd apply the Spine-Locker Spell and get me some Pain Potion."

Hermione quickly immobilized his neck and ran back to the potions lab to retrieve his Pain Potion. He drank the potion straight from the bottle and handed it back to her. "Thank you."

"You're welcome," she replied. "Let me see your neck." Gently she removed the dressing and checked the wound. "It looks fine; I think you just wore yourself out. You've been doing too much and..."

"Don't lecture me, Miss Granger. I'm well aware I overextended myself today." He picked up one of his letters as soon as she finished redressing his neck, handing it to her. "Would you be so kind as to read this to me?"

"It's from the Ministry," she said, unsure if she should open up the official looking letter.

Snape opened up one eye and arched his eyebrow. "I realize that. However, I would appreciate if you'd read it to me. I'm certain that it's regarding my internment, investigation or impending trial. All of which you are apparently involved, and therefore, this would not be confidential. Besides, I'd appreciate if you'd read it to me, please."

She nodded and opened up the letter, and began to read it aloud:

*Dear Severus Snape,*

*How are you?*

*I do hope you're doing much better. I was so terribly aggrieved to hear of your severe injury, (well that you'd died, actually, then thrilled that you hadn't), and I'm immensely pleased that you're recovering.*

*You do know you are currently under investigation for your activities during the period of 1970 through 1981 and 1994 through 12 May, 1997, known as the Dark Years War. I'm pleased to report that your investigation will be conducted by none other than Jr. Aurors Mr. Harry Potter and Mr. Ronald Weasley. You have been remanded to remain in your residence under the supervision of Protective Custody Services Monitor, Miss Hermione Granger. We do have on file your previous trial records regarding the periods of 1970 through 1981 at which time you were honorably absolved of Crimes to Humanity and the Wizarding world. However, due to the War Criminals Act of Dark War II, the portrait of Albus Dumbledore will not be permitted to stand on your behalf, since the actual man is deceased.*

*You may of course submit any names you feel fit to stand as witness to your character and to substantiate your actions. Deadline for submissions is to be sent within four days after the receipt of this letter. Your Arraignment date has been set for next week.*

*Sincerely,*

*Edithe Rogers*

*Order of the Phoenix*

*Criminal Investigation and The Dark Years War Trials Committee*

*p.s. I shall be removing myself from the bench on your behalf during your trial. I feel I must due to conflict of interest. I hope that you don't mind, but I owe you this much at the very least. I do truly hope all is well with you.*

She finished, scowling. "How can they try you for your activities from 1970? You didn't graduate then did you? It's inconceivable that you were a Death Eater at what... ten eleven? When did you join him?" She didn't wait for him to answer. "Besides, they cannot try you a second time for something for which you've been acquitted, can they?" She sat on the edge of his bed, still reading the notification, frowning.



Snape looked disappointed. "It's the Ministry, Miss Granger, they most certainly can. Please read the other."

Hermione opened the next envelope and read the very loopy script:

*Dear Mr. Severus Snape,*

*I do hope you are doing much better. If there is anything I may do for you, please do not hesitate to ask. Edith and I were besides ourselves with grief over your death, but I am so happy to hear that you're recovering. You must come by for dinner soon and tell us how you survived.*

*On a professional note, I am here by informing you that your Arraignment has been set for next Tuesday, the third of June, at precisely ten o'clock. Please see that Miss Hermione Granger has you at the Wizengamot at that time.*

*Sincerely,*

*Edthyl Rogers*

*Order of the Phoenix*

*Criminal Investigation and The Dark Years War Trials Committee*

*p.s. It pleases me to inform you that I have removed myself from the bench for your trial, on your behalf. I do so look forward to seeing you again*

"You have to be kidding!" Hermione exclaimed, incensed by the postscript on both letters. *These women are batty! They write as if he's a friend, but treat him so poorly* She ripped open another letter. It was her notice of the pending arraignment and requesting that she have Snape ready for Auror transport at seven-thirty a.m. "Auror transport!" she exclaimed, outraged by the letter, jumping up and turning to face him, deeply offended. "How can they insist? As if you're a criminal!" She held up the next letter. "This is from St. Mungo's." She read the letter aloud:

*Dear Master Severus Snape,*

*I am pleased to inform you that you have been recognized as being alive, despite reportings to the contrary. However, it is necessary that you sign and wand verify the subsequent forms: Acknowledgement of Life Form 1A, Death Reversal Form, Accidental Death, Dismemberment and Disappearance Form 2-A, and to sign your death certificate on the line where we have marked, 'confirmation of reporting error for life termination reporting,' to confirm your living status. Please remit these forms to St. Mungo's for a physical evaluation and examination to verify your living condition at your earliest convenience.*

*Also, we are pleased to inform you that St. Mungo's greatly appreciates your assistance with those affected by spell damage from the recent battle at Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry. Please note that we have remitted payment to your account at Gringotts at the usual rate of pay for Interim Potions Brewer, Master level, including allowances and daily expenses of necessary supplies and ingredients. However, if you could please submit an accounting of your costs it would be greatly appreciated.*

*As usual, your brewing skills are most welcome during this time of need.*

*Thank you,*

*Brennan Davies*

*Healer in Charge Spell Damage Department*

*and Board of Healers, St Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries*

"There is a second sheet here," Hermione said, sitting down on the edge of his bed again. "It's from Healer Harold Grunmaker."

*Severus,*

*As usual your willingness to assist us has been most welcome and well received. I for one am utterly grateful and in your debt. I have processed the necessary paper work and you have been given temporary Interim Potions Brewer status on the per diem staff sheets. However, I was sorry to read that you'd died. Could've smacked a bale-wallop on me for that one! Just received your box of potions when I read that announcement. Daily Prophet misses it yet again, eh, son?*

*I've included a description of a poison I cannot identify. I'm sending Jigger's with a vial. Careful with this one it eats the skin right off ya.*

*Oh, Maggie says hello.*

*Hope to hear from you soon,*

*Healer Harold Grunmaker*

*Master Brewer in Charge*

*Potions Department, St Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries*

Hermione didn't know what to think. "Are these people all daft?"

"Hardly, Miss Granger," he replied with a slight smirk. "I expected as much."

"What do I do about these?" she asked, holding up the letters. "I'm not handing you over to the Aurors, and I'm not allowing them drag you off in chains!"

"Calm yourself, Miss Granger," he said, his voice low and soft. "Tomorrow I will sign and wand verify the forms for St. Mungo's, and you'll sign as my witness. I will send a letter to Master Kirkwell and see if his lovely wife will make a house call to verify that I am, in fact, alive. As for the Ministry, surely you cannot be surprised."

"I suppose not, they tried to do the same thing to Harry during his trial." She stared at the letters again, reading them quickly. "They've set your arraignment for next Tuesday." She looked at him, worried. "That's really quick. Are you sure you're well enough to stand trial?"

"Whether I am or not, I will have to be there," he said. He looked at her and smirked. "Outraged over my mistreatment? One would think you've come to care for me."

"I'm going," Hermione said firmly, missing his statement. "I'll stand for you, and tell them that you're not a war criminal. They'll have to see the truth."

He reached out to touch her hand, making her look directly into his intense dark eyes. "I am a war criminal, Miss Granger. Only, I did my crimes for *both* sides."

~o0o~

Day 21

Hermione's timers went off well before dawn. Warily she made her way to the potions lab to tend to her potions, completing the necessary steps and setting the potions to simmer. *It's easier to brew these the second time around... and it's nice that Snape trusts me to make them* Checking her potions again to be sure that they would be all right if left simmering, she left to duck into the loo. After some much needed cold water on her face, she felt ready to talk to Snape about the Ministry letters.

Snape was up and fixing himself a pot of tea and breakfast when she entered. "How are the potions?" he asked.

"They're fine; exactly as they should be." She grabbed her bowl on her way to join him. "How's your neck? Would you like some help with that?" She watched him swish his wand, turning the bacon over and flipping the eggs.

"Better," he said, turning his head slightly to the left and right. "Still a bit sore. And no, I have nearly everything in hand."

"I can see that," she replied, smiling. "I suppose you want your dressing changed after breakfast?"

He levitated the eggs and bacon onto two plates. "As opposed to while I am eating? Yes. Please set the table, Miss Granger."

She carried the cutlery and teapot to the table, Summoning two teacups and saucers and set the table. "You know that you don't really need me as much anymore. You're starting to be able to do things for yourself. It may be time for me to go," she stated as she sat down.

"What are you talking about?" he scowled, walking over to the table, floating the two plates of food before him.

"You are using the walker well enough, and I know that you are not using my spells to assist you anymore, except the Spine-Locker Spell when your neck becomes too sore... That was our original agreement," she said. "I would stay until you could take care of yourself." She took a bite of bacon.

"And what of the Ministry?" he asked, his expression hard as he stared at her. "I'm allowed house arrest if and only *if* you remain as my warden."

Hermione looked up at him, suddenly realizing he expected her to stay. "They cannot be serious?" His expression darkened. "You're you mean they are? I am to monitor you?"

"Yes, or I'll be carted off to Azkaban." His dark eyes bored into hers, his face expressionless.

*He's serious!* Hermione gaped at him in total disbelief. "But I can't stay trapped in here until they decide to let you go!" she exclaimed.

"If they decide to let me go," he said, lowering his gaze to his food.

"They will!" she exclaimed determinedly.

He looked up at her with an amused smirk. "You're an altruist, Miss Granger. A true humanitarian," he said in a slow drawl. "You do like to take up hopeless causes, don't you?"

"It's not hopeless!" She watched him eat. "You cannot really believe you will end up in Azkaban? Not after everything you've done?"

He looked up with a smirk on his face. "Yes, that is *precisely* what I think. I think Potter would love to send me there, ~~after~~*everything* I've done."

The eggs were delicious, but she hardly noticed. "You really think Harry carries grudges like that, don't you? He can forgive, and he's fair. I don't know why you've hated each other all these years, and I'm not asking, but don't you think it's time to give him a little credit?"

"Our history goes too far back, Miss Granger." Snape pushed his food around as he scowled at her. "It's none of your business."

"It only goes back seven years!" She stared at him, not believing he still harbored some deep seeded resentment toward Harry. "And yes, it's now my business. Harry is investigating your involvement in the Order and your contribution to the war. I'm here, too, trying to help you! Even Ron's trying to help clear your name. Surely you could let go of seven years of strife between you two."

"Potter took on the case to seek revenge, and Weasley is helping him. There is no other reason for him, *a junior Auror in training* to be assigned to me. And yes, Miss Granger, this goes back farther than just simply seven years." He spoke harshly and his dark eyes flashed.

"Do you mean it's because of Harry's dad?!" she asked in total disbelief. Snape's eyes narrowed dangerously. "It is! You've got to be kidding! That would be like if I held a grudge against you because of your mum... because your mum was surly, rude and did some cruel things to me as a kid. That's ridiculous."

"Leave my mum out of this," he snapped angrily, setting his cup down so hard it cracked.

"Precisely," she said, looking at him smugly and repaired the teacup with her wand. "It would be quite immature of me, wouldn't it?"

He glared at her, his anger nearly tangible. "That's different."

"No it's not. James Potter was a complete prat to you in school. So was Sirius. I've never heard you complain about either Lupin or Pettigrew except when you mention the 'four' of them collectively so I don't know if they were horrid to you as well, but they are all dead possibly? I'm not sure about Pettigrew... However, Harry hasn't done *anything* to you." Snape's eyes narrowed. "Okay, we attacked you in the Shrieking Shack third year. I stole from you my second year, and what... what has Harry not his father *Harry* ever really done to you?" She got up and left the table. "I'm not hungry. I'll be in the lab." She quickly left the room, ignoring Snape as he yelled after her. She checked her potions and looked around the room. *Aughhhh! There isn't anything to actually do in here* She was too upset to start another potion. *And I don't want to clean cauldrons!*

She turned around and walked quickly to the sitting room, throwing open the curtains. The street was empty, and the morning sun did little to enhance the view of the small houses and dirty, cobbled street.

"I don't like waste in my house, Miss Granger. You do not storm away from the table and leave your plate for me to clean up after you."

She turned to see him in the doorway. "You make me so angry at times! Do you know that? You are ~~so~~ brilliant but you can be ~~so~~ arrogant and you hold on to grudges as if they were a lifeline. You have no reasonable reason to hate me or to hate Harry but you do. You hate me simply because I have an *insufferable desire* to learn *from you!* You've berated me for my *intolerable* questioning, my love of reading and my desire to learn. You've held that against me ever since I first met you! I hate that about you." She cut him off as he opened his mouth to respond. "And Harry. He's. Not. His. Father! You've *never* taken the time to see that. He respected you, feared you and was intimidated by you, sure we *all* were. But he's always *respected* you."

He scoffed at her. "Hardly, Miss Granger. He's intolerable, rude and disrespectful. He's a mediocre wizard, moderately talented, lazy in regards to his studies, never fully applies himself, an arrogant rule breaker, famous not for anything he actually did but what happened to him... He's an attention seeking, impertinent spoiled prat."

"He's modest, likable, loyal, brave and trustworthy." She turned around so that she did not have to look at him, preferring the sight of the dull homes and muddy street at the

moment.

"You're his friend," he snarled. "I'd expect such drivel coming from you."

"You've never given him a fair shake." She wheeled around. "Look, I don't care to discuss this with you. We may have to agree to disagree. I should tend to your neck, but after that, I wish to be left alone."

"Fine," he said, turning to go. "I'll be waiting."

Hermione followed him and tended to his neck. The wound was nearly closed. He sat quietly, looking away from her as she worked. Afterwards, she returned to the sitting room. At lunch she made sandwiches, ministered to his wound again, carefully applying the salves and rewrapping his neck. She picked up her plate and walked back to the sitting room to eat while she read by the window. Except when she needed to tend to her potions, they hardly crossed paths.

She was simply standing at the window when he came to inform her it was time for dinner.

"What are you doing?" he asked from across the room.

"Looking outside," she said, keeping her back to him. "I haven't seen sunshine for days!"

"You could've gone outside in the *sunshine* anytime you wanted to," he stated.

"And been unable to return and you'd have been left alone without anyone to take care of you," she said with a sigh, and turned to face him. "I couldn't do that."

"Take care of me?" His eyebrows arched and his lips curled into a sneer. "My personal philanthropist. You could've gone *outside* anytime you wanted."

"How? I wouldn't have been able to get back in." She lowered her head and turned back to the window, because she didn't want to argue with him. "I couldn't leave and not know you'd be all right."

"I have a back garden, Miss Granger."

It took a while for his words to sink in. Hermione turned around to look at him, surprised. "You never mentioned that."

"You've never asked me. My mum and grandma used to grow magical plants back there. The back door has a Repelling Charm on it. One must *want* to see magical plants to be able to approach the door or *want* to work in the garden. It was set up that way to protect my father. I suppose the plants are quite wild now and would have to be either killed, removed or subdued." He leaned against the doorway created by the concealed bookshelf. "I haven't been back there to properly tend to them for a while now."

"How long has it been?" she asked, curious despite herself.

"Since the twenty-fourth of August, last year," he stated. "Like I said, I don't usually have time to properly attend to them. I usually just trim them back and let them grow wild since I spent most of my year at Hogwarts."

She leaned against the bookshelf next to the window and crossed her arms. "And the plants in the atrium?"

"Cuttings." His tone was still a bit sharp, but more amiable than earlier. "I typically come home at least one day over the holidays. I was home, briefly, over Easter. Cutting plants can be therapeutic."

"Professor Snape, I am I apologize for my outburst toward you this morning. I think we really should talk about this situation, and I need to talk to you about the letters." She uncrossed her arms, but having them hang at her side suddenly felt awkward.

"I'm no longer your professor. The appellation is inappropriate." He watched her, and she knew that his dark eyes were reading her, scrutinizing her intently.

"I thought that you were my tutor?" she asked, demurely, crossing her arms with both hands on her upper arms as if cold.

"And you are my *Protective Custody Services Monitor*," he stated firmly.

She could tell that the situation they found themselves in bothered him. *I didn't ask for this and I'm only his monitor because they can't find him to arrest him and Mr. Weasley and Kingsley know I'm here. There's no other rational reason.* She looked up at him imploringly. "I didn't ask for this."

"Neither did I," he said, coolly. "Nevertheless, just as I have accepted tutoring you during your *stay*, you *have* accepted the Ministry's position. You have authority over me."

"So what do we do about that?" she asked, hoping to find an easy resolution.

He turned away, a tic in his cheek indicating that he'd clenched his jaw in irritation. "For the time being, nothing."

"Would you consider letting me help you?" she asked. He turned to her and fixed her with a hard glare. "I mean, who would I be able to contact or write to who would be able to vouch for your being on our side? There has to be someone, anyone other than Dumbledore, who knew what you were doing, maybe an Order member... Who knew you were Dumbledore's man? There has to be someone *anyone* who will vouch for you."

His eyes narrowed. "I thought that was Potter's and Weasley's job."

"Do you wish to leave it to them ... or would you like my assistance?" she offered, watching him stiffen. "I thought so. So, who should I owl to ask them to appear on your behalf?"

*Author's Notes:*

*My reasoning in regards to the Ministry owl and the owls from St. Mungo's being able to fly to Snape's house is that they are possibly outside the effects of the Fidelius Charm. Just as house-elves are able to do magic under circumstances where wizards can't like at Hogwarts.*

*It's also possible that the Ministry knows approximately where Snape lives, but cannot get in the house or find it without being let in on the secret. Like the Death Eaters knew Grimmauld Place was there, but couldn't see it. Also, the Ministry owls may have simply waited until Arimus showed up and followed him in. Okay, it's a loop hole... necessary to the story. Sorry about that.*

*The Dark Years War: Since in the Lexicon the first rise of Tom 'Voldemort' Riddle is called 'the years of terror' and the second rise is referred to as 'the Second War,' I renamed the two periods of Tom 'Voldemort' Riddle's rise to power as the Dark Lord's War. However, since no one will want to call him a 'Lord,' I settled on the Dark War I and Dark War II or the Dark Years War when referring to both periods.*

*This was my main gift for Shadow\_ks in the SS/HG Gift Exchange. I was thrilled that she liked it!*

I have a great deal of gratitude for Ladyinthecloak and Machshefa for beta reading this for me. You ladies are great and I really appreciated you doing this. Thank you.

## Investigation and Internment

Chapter 6 of 9

Hermione begins trying to get Snape to open up and give her information that will help Harry and Ron in their investigation for Snape's arraignment. Finally needing to know what is happening in regards to Snape's investigation, she goes to the Burrow for answers and is surprised to find out just how seriously both Ron and Harry are taking this.

~o0o~

Day 23

It took two days of persuasion to get Snape to relent into letting Hermione help him and to talk about whom in the Order may have known about his activities during the war. Not surprisingly, he always reported his information to Dumbledore, occasionally in the presence of other Order members. However, after Dumbledore's death, Snape used to use a dark horned owl or a very clever barn owl to send notes to either Shackbolt or Moody, up until Moody's death. Then the owls were sent to Kingsley, Arthur Weasley or Hestia Jones and occasionally to Tonks or Lupin. The problem was he'd been concerned about sending messages to Arthur Weasley or Hestia Jones, so he disguised his writing in case one of their kids ever saw the notes, and when sending messages to Tonks, so she would take his notes and warnings seriously. He'd frequently contacted Lupin as well. However, Hestia, Lupin and Tonks were dead. Snape always disguised his handwriting from the other Order members or the Auror department, certain that they wouldn't believe him if they knew he'd sent the warnings.

"But what spell did you use to conceal your messages?" she asked again over dinner, still trying to persuade him.

He looked up at her, exasperated. "Miss Granger, I used a Curiosity Spell to force the receiver to open and read the message, and a Camouflage Charm that tricks the reader from recognizing the writing. I used to use them frequently on notes in school. Both are Dark Arts spells."

"But if I knew the spells, I could..."

"I am not teaching you Dark Magic," he snapped each word irritably. "Now drop it."

So that was final.

This made her list very short, considering four of the members who'd have been able to vouch for him were dead. Not very helpful when trying to build a defense. So far she was able to learn that aside from Dumbledore, Snape didn't trust too many other people, and since the portrait wouldn't be able to testify on his behalf, Hermione was worried, although she tried very hard to hide the fact from Snape. Nevertheless, she was sure that he knew. Hermione was certain that only Kingsley and possibly Mr. Weasley would have kept the notes, and she sent the information to Harry, including the mention of Moody, Lupin, Tonks and Ms. Jones, hoping that he'd be able to track down some evidence of Snape's support of the Order. There was also a list of people that Snape had been able to save, indirectly, by sending anonymous messages to the Aurors he knew, although it was doubtful that any of these people would know that it was Snape's warning that had saved their lives.

~o0o~

Day 24

An owl arrived several hours before lunch as Hermione was hanging up the laundry in the atrium. She inadvertently set her timers for her potions down next to a monkey's paw creeper to hang up Snape's sheets when an owl started pecking on the glass window. She fought the plant to release her timers and walked to the back door to let the owl in. Hermione concentrated on one thought as she approached the door: *I want to see the magical plants... I want to see the magical plants* as she pulled the door open. The owl swooped in and flew down the hallway obviously looking for Snape.

She waited several seconds for the owl to return, letting the door close behind the bird, and went to the kitchen to prepare lunch. She nearly slipped on the parchment he'd tossed on the floor. Bending down, she retrieved the letter. "Here, I think you dropped this," she said, handing the parchment to him.

"I don't want it," he snapped curtly.

"All right," she said, setting the letter on the dish cupboard. She saw the St. Mungo's logo of a crossed wand and leg bone on the top of the parchment. "What's this about? We sent your forms in already?"

He watched her, his eyes narrowed in annoyance. "They have the audacity to demand that I go have a health and wellness physical examination," he sneered, indicating the letter. It only emphasized the fact that something in the letters had angered him.

Hermione nodded and shrugged. *At least he's not angry with me...* Hermione flicked her wand, Summoning the forms, watching as they all rose off the floor. She caught them easily. "These are the forms we signed and verified with our wands. Why are they being sent back? What is this about? I don't understand?" she asked and then raised her eyebrow when he simply glared back at her.

"They returned the forms," he said, trying to amend his tone toward her. "Read it," he said, stretching the two words with a disdainful drawl as he pointed toward the letter beside her.

Hermione picked up the letter.

Dear Master Severus Snape,

I am writing you in acknowledgement of the receipt of the required forms to reestablish your living status. However, I regret to point out that it is necessary for you to come deliver these forms in person for a health and wellness examination in order that a qualified Healer may sign off on your living status. Please contact the appointment desk to schedule your appointment at the next earliest convenience....

She lowered her hands, looking at Snape. "All right, so we go."

"No," he snapped. "I don't feel like going."

Hermione raised an eyebrow and smiled. "And if you don't have a choice?"

"I'm not going." He rolled his eyes to stare straight ahead.

Hermione leaned against the cupboard, appraising his outburst. "Okay, so if you won't go there, do you know any Healer that would come here? How about asking that friend of yours? You said that Master Kirkwell's wife might make a house call to verify that you're alive."

"She's not exactly a Healer," he stated.

Hermione cocked her head, not comprehending his remark.

Snape turned to her, his expression hard and controlled. "Henrietta's not a Healer, per se. She was the senior medi-witch for the Kenmare Kestrels."

She nodded again, understanding why he hadn't owed her. "What about Kirkwell or Healer Grunmaker..."

He moved his head very slightly to indicate no. "A Master of Potions won't qualify and Harold will be too busy. I won't impose."

*There has to be someone he knows... all those years as a Death Eater, from what Harry told me about Riddle, Snape must have been hurt sometime* "Do you know any Healer well?" she asked, trying to draw him out.

"Only Poppy," he admitted, "but she doesn't leave Hogwarts unless there isn't *anyone* living or staying on the school grounds."

"Didn't you ever go to St. Mungo's for treatment?" she asked. "Who tended to you when you were wounded or hurt?"

"Wizard medicine isn't like Muggle medicine, Miss Granger. You don't have a family Healer unless you can afford one."

"But your mum must have taken you to see someone if you were sick or seriously hurt. Right?" she asked, thinking about Dr. Andrews, her pediatrician.

"No, not since I was a child," he said. He took a deep breath to continue before she could ask him about the rest of his life. "My father usually insisted I go to a doctor. Mum only took me to St. Mungo's a few times for my childhood potions or when she didn't think my dad would find out. Poppy was the school nurse when I was a student. Before I started teaching, Lucius owed his family Healer on my behalf once but usually I just tended to myself."

Hermione shook her head, deep in thought. "All those years... You make it sound so... sad lonely. Like you couldn't or didn't turn to anyone for help. Was there really no one you turned to?"

"Don't pity me, Miss Granger. I'm usually very *self-reliant*," he stated, his expression hard at what he perceived to be pity in her eyes. "Usually I kept my own supply of potions and cured myself. If my wounds were severe, Dumbledore's phoenix, Fawkes, would cry for me or Poppy would tend to me. That was all I needed."

Hermione collected the papers and placed them neatly on the shelf in the hutch, considering what he'd just told her *It makes sense; except for Madam Pomfrey I don't know any other Healers either. I wonder how much a Healer house call is?* She stood up and walked into the kitchen to prepare lunch. "Sandwiches and soup okay?"

"Sure," he said unenthusiastically.

When she sat down to eat, Hermione looked up at Snape and pointed her spoon at him.

"No, I am not going to St. Mungo's," he snapped.

"Actually I was wondering if... never mind," she said, scooping up more soup.

"Ask," he said, modulating his tone.

"I was wondering... well, I haven't seen my friends for days, and I'd like to talk to Harry and Ron find out first-hand where they are in your investigation." She bit her lip nervously.

"You're welcome to leave anytime you wish," he stated coolly.

"You are able to get around well enough with the walker. The wound is closed, and you are getting your strength back." She set her spoon down and looked up at him hopefully. "The only problem is... Will you allow me to return?"

"I'd think you'd want to run away by now," he said surlily.

Hermione smiled. "Actually, no. We still have a tutorial arrangement I fully intend to hold you to, and my last two potions won't be done for another five days." She picked up her sandwich. "No problem, I'll just send Arimus with another letter..."

"Spinner's End."

She looked up at him, gobsmacked, certain she'd misunderstood him, in total disbelief that he'd told her what she thought he'd did.

"Close your mouth, Miss Granger," he snapped at her. "Yes, my address is thirty-nine, Spinner's End. You can Apparate from the trees near the corner of the street. When you return, turn left onto Spinner's End and walk to the end of the street. The door will only appear if you want to see 'the Prince house.' I'll fix the wards to identify your wand's signature."

"Thank you, sir." She couldn't believe it. *He trusts me.*

"How long will you be gone?" he asked, curious.

Hermione smiled. "Today, maybe tomorrow at the latest; just long enough to get Harry and Ron to tell me what's going on." She wanted to run and pack. "Oh, will you be all right if I'm gone overnight?"

"I don't need my wound tended to anymore, and yes, I can fend for myself for merely two whole days, Miss Granger," he said sarcastically.

"My potions will have two introductions tomorrow morning, one late morning, the other again in the afternoon." He tipped his head slightly, still not able to really nod his head without pain. She finished her soup quickly. "You know, you may call me Hermione."

"No," he said, frowning his brow. "Not yet."

*Well it's one victory. He's allowed me to know how to come and go from his home* "Okay, I'll set the last of the roast to simmer in water with some vegetables. That way dinner will be ready for you when you want to eat. It will be enough for two meals for you. And there is the ham."

His expression softened into an unreadable mask. "I'll be just fine."

"Hermione!"

No sooner did George open the door and pull her inside than she found herself immediately surrounded by tall, red-haired men, two of whom were trying to squeeze the air from her lungs. "Hermione!" Ron and George exclaimed, not exactly in unison.

"It's Hermione!"

"Mum, Mum, it's Hermione!" Ginny squealed from somewhere deeper in the house.

"Let the girl breathe," Mr. Weasley admonished from the general direction of the stairs.

"Hermione's here?" she heard Harry ask.

"Let go of her," Ginny admonished, squeezing her way in between her brothers and father. "Oh! It's really you!" she exclaimed, adding her arms around Hermione's middle.

"Ouch! Ron, that's my foot!" she heard George scold Ron on her other side.

"Back away and let the girl in!" Mrs. Weasley yelled. "And close the door! You were not raised in a barn."

Slowly the group began to disentangle and back off, Bill, Fred, George, Ron, Harry, and Mr. Weasley all staring at her as if they'd not seen her for years. "So, he let you go?" Ginny asked, still standing close to Hermione's side.

"I wasn't a prisoner, Ginny. But I couldn't just leave him. I had no idea where he lived, and I knew that if I left him, he'd die."

"Hermione, was he decent to you?" Mr. Weasley asked, deeply concerned. "He didn't take any... um... advantage of you?"

Hermione smiled. "Well, he's Professor Snape what do you think?" she teased.

Mr. Weasley squinted his eyes, regarding her comment critically, obviously taking her remark too seriously.

Hermione held up her hands in supplication. "He was fine. Really. He never laid a hand on me or tried *in any way* to hurt me or curse me."

"And he's at home, wandless... alone?" he asked, still unconvinced.

"Mr. Weasley, he still uses the walker to move around the house. He can only do simple spells, and it hurts him to move his head too quickly. I have his assurance that he will stay in his home, and I'm to receive an owl or his Patronus if he has need of me."

"So he's still recovering?" Ginny asked. Her voice had a hint of concern.

Hermione looked at her and nodded. "The fangs of the snake tore into his throat and very near the vertebra of his neck. That's what's taking so long. Nearly tore his artery and pierced his neck right next to the bones. I think there was some nerve damage, but that is healing. He had me make all kinds of potions for him... as well as many potions for St. Mungo's."

Harry walked around the table and sat down. Hermione sat in the chair opposite him while Ginny and Ron took both chairs on either side of her. "I was certain he was dead. I was stunned when Ginny said you were at his house, healing him." Harry looked at her as if annoyed. Mr. Weasley sat down in his chair while Fred and George sat on either side of Harry. It was as if they were all ready to sit down to dinner. Only Bill stayed standing. "Why didn't you tell me? Why did you keep it a secret?"

Hermione let out a sharp breath. "And how would you have reacted, Harry? Taken Buckbeak or a school Thestral to try and find me? Sent every Auror you know to try to find the house and what? Bring me back?"

Harry looked away and Ron looked at his hands.

"That's exactly what they did when I told them," Ginny admitted, giving Hermione a knowing smile. "And I did try to break it to them gently!"

"They went nuts when we finally heard," Fred said, pointing first at Ron, then Harry.

"Did not," Harry and Ron exclaimed.

"Tried every way we knew how to find you," George said, unintentionally cutting off Mr. Weasley.

"But you are okay, dear?" Mrs. Weasley asked.

Hermione raised her hands as she shrugged, looking at the motherly woman. "I'm fine. I've made some incredible potions under his tutelage, had hundreds of books to read on all sorts of subjects, been learning loads of nonverbal spells, and I've been studying for my N.E.W.T.s..."

"Figures," George said, laughing as Ron asked, "He's been teaching you?"

"Well, sure. I still *intend* on *taking* N.E.W.T.s, Ron, and he *is* a Hogwarts professor..." Ron and George both shook their heads while Ginny and Harry started laughing.

"Hermione," Harry said, trying to stop laughing long enough to speak. "Only you would take advantage the time you're spending healing a professor to get private lessons! But couldn't you have chosen someone more... amiable?"

Hermione chose to ignore the question. "Mrs. Weasley, would it be too presumptuous of me to ask if I could stay the night? I haven't anywhere else at the moment to go..."

"Of course, my dear," Mrs. Weasley said, smiling. "You're always welcome here. Go on up and get freshened up before dinner. You can stay in Ginny's room. Do you need anything? Clothes? Anything need cleaning? You have your toiletries?" she rattled off as Hermione nodded, shook her head, then nodded again. "Fine. Boys, I expect you to leave her alone until she's had a proper bath. Ginny, you and George pull out a cot and get some bed covers. Bill, if you'd owl Kingsley and let him know Hermione is here and well. I'll start supper."

As soon as Hermione finished her bath, she went to Ginny's room to change. All the clothes she'd laid out on Ginny's bed were missing. Hermione looked up stunned, turned around, and was about to run downstairs and hex Fred and George when the door opened.

"Mum found your clothes and has them in the wash," Ginny said, coming in the door, laughing at Hermione's expression. "I'm to give you these for you to wear in the meantime. You left them here last summer."

She lowered her wand and sat on the bed. "Thanks, Ginny. For a moment, I thought it was Fred and George. I was going to give them both a piece of my mind."

"And some antlers by the look in your eyes." Ginny sat down and averted her eyes as Hermione dressed. "How have you been? Have you been... Are you okay? I was really worried when you were suddenly gone and more so when you explained to me where you were."

"Yeah, Ginny, it's all right." Hermione pulled a few things out of her beaded bag.

Ginny stood up and pulled Hermione's trunk out from under her bed. "I kept this for you."

Hermione looked at her trunk and smiled. "Do you remember when you and I tried to make our trunks have extra compartments?" Ginny nodded. "Well, I found a book on how it's done." Both girls laughed. "Gin, look, I really don't have a lot of time. I promised that I'd be back tomorrow night. I want to talk to you, Harry and Ron... but privately... and I..."

"Aren't ready to face my parents' questions? They're both on the Dark Years War Trials Committee as are Bill, Fred, George, Harry, Ron and myself. My mum didn't want to be on the Criminal Investigation Committee because she felt she wouldn't be able to be impartial, but she was talked into it."

"Because of your brothers?" Hermione asked, trying to be sensitive to her friend. She had no idea how or if her friend was coping with Percy's death.

Ginny simply nodded, looking down at her hands. "It's... hard on Mum."

"Gin, are Harry and Ron downstairs or are they in Ron's room?"

"Downstairs," she replied, and Hermione let out an exasperated sigh. "I've got an idea," Ginny said, jumping up to her feet and heading for the door. "Come with me." She went quickly and quietly up to Ron's room and eased open the door. Pig let out a screech as soon as he saw her. Ginny quickly opened the owl's cage and sat down on Harry's bed.

Hermione shrugged and sat down too.

"I think Harry has a letter to send," Ginny said casually to the owl. Pig swooped in circles, missed the slanted ceiling, overshot his curve and flew out into the hall. Ginny immediately closed the door. "Pig will go down and get them."

Moments later Ron and Harry came back to the room, both still trying to catch Pig. "Ginny! What'd you do that for?"

"To talk to you of course," Ginny said, giggling.

Harry sat down next to Ginny and wrapped an arm around her pulling her close. "All right, you got me."

"Harry. Ron... I wanted to talk to you about the investigation for Professor Snape," Hermione said, hoping they would talk openly about it.

"Sure, Hermione," Ron answered. "You are after all his Protective Custody Services Monitor."

Harry straightened up and looked at Hermione intently. "Hermione, you *are* part of his investigation. Only we've not really been able to meet like we're supposed to. So if you'll answer some questions I've got, we'll tell you what we've got, and we'll go from there."

Hermione sighed in relief. "Okay, ask away."

Both Harry and Ron slid down on the floor to get their files from their brief-cases. "Ever since your owl, Hermione, I've been digging in the files at the office. Kingsley gave me everything he could find from the papers he kept from his old desk. The man is notoriously neat and efficient." Harry pulled out a folder and opened it up. "I've got everything here that I saw in Snape's writing."

"He told me that he disguised his writing after Dumbledore's death because he didn't think anyone would take him seriously. He said he sent some messages to Moody, up until Moody was killed. I don't think he disguised his handwriting on those but he might have. He wrote to your dad, Ron, and to Hestia Jones, but they were disguised too..." Hermione said, trying to remember everything.

"Okay, so I have to go digging in Moody's case files. That could take months!" Ron exclaimed.

"What if I help you," Ginny offered. "I know Snape's handwriting."

"That's a great idea, Gin! With the four of us, we can search through the files quicker." Harry reached into his briefcase and pulled out a form. "Ginny," Harry said, quickly filling out a directive form. "I'm going to give you this. Go to the office and tell Carol that I need all of Moody's files from Dark War I to his retirement. Then come back." He handed Ginny the form, but pulled it back before she grasped it. "Oh, and wait, and all anonymous notes and messages the office received, warning us about Death Eater attacks during Dark War II. There're several large boxes of those. If Snape didn't sign his name, used any spells or an unidentifiable signature, or even just initials, it will be in those boxes." He handed Ginny the form. "Assure Carol I'll return everything on Monday."

"That doesn't give us much time with them," Ginny said, worried.

"His arraignment is on Tuesday," Harry stated. "The way these arraignments are handled, if I can show enough proof to validate Snape's involvement for the Order, and that he was Dumbledore's man, there won't be a trial and he'll be free."

"Ginny." Hermione looked up as she rose to her feet. "Take my beaded purse. It's empty. Everything will fit inside." Ginny nodded as she ran from the room.

"If he sent messages to Lupin and Tonks, Andromeda Tonks may have some..." Ron said, taking down some notes and rising to his feet as well. "I can go there tonight and see."

"And I'll talk to Mr. Weasley," Harry stated. "Hopefully we'll get lucky."

"Harry, Ron, I have a question and I don't want you to be offended or anything..."

"Sure, Hermione," Ron said. "What?"

"I know that you've been accepted into the Auror training program, but this is a big case.... Isn't it? And..." She didn't want to sound like she wasn't grateful that her friends were helping Snape's case, *but he's right. It's odd.* "How'd you get it?"

"I told Shacklebolt about Snape's memories," Harry said. "I took him to see them, and he figured that Ron and I, we could do this. We're getting credit for handling the case. So he spoke to the training instructors."

Ron nodded. "He said that we work well together and all. Plus, since Snape gave those memories to Harry, it was kind of like he'd asked him, too. Besides, the Aurors are really busy now, chasing down all the Death Eaters who escaped. The department is stretched really thin."

"Yeah, that makes sense. In a way I'm glad it's you two. Harry, with your permission, I'd like to go to Grimmauld Place and search your library for information," Hermione asked. "Maybe I can find something..."

"Sure, Hermione, but take someone with you," Harry said, rising and offering her a hand up. "I don't want you there alone. There are too many Death Eaters still at large who'd love to hurt or kill you."

"Harry, what are his chances?" Hermione asked as they walked down the stairs.

"Hermione, I don't have much." Harry paused. "I have contacted Healer Grunmaker and Potions Master Kirkwell, and they are both willing to come and testify in regards to his assistance as an Interim Potions Brewer and to vouch that Snape was sending antidotes and curative potions for Riddle's and the Death Eaters' victims. That will help. Also, Poppy and Hagrid said they'd come." He looked at her curiously. "You like him?"

"Admire him. Yes."

\*

Bill set down another volume on a growing pile of books. "Hermione, I don't see anything that will help. Most of these are years old," he said, stretching. "Mum will be right pissed if we miss dinner."

"Yeah, I'm not finding anything here," she said, closing a thick book.

Kreacher poked his head in the doorway for the hundredth time. "Is Miss and Master done with my Master's books?"

"Yes, we are," Hermione said, stacking books to start putting them away.

"No, no, no... Miss! Kreacher put books away," the elf said, running into the room.

"I don't want to make extra work for you..." She paused as Kreacher's face contorted into a scowl. "You've done so much for us already, what with the tea, sandwiches and biscuits. But if you don't mind, I'd appreciate if you'd pack up some of your delicious biscuits so that I can take them to Harry."

Kreacher's wrinkled face stretched into a big grin. "Yes, Miss, I have biscuits for Master, I go gets them."

"Well, it's not a total loss, those biscuits are really good!" Bill exclaimed, swishing his wand, making his pile of books return to their rightful place.

"Oh, you're going to need to teach me that one," she said, smiling as Kreacher ran back into the library with a basket full to the rim with his biscuits, still hot from the oven.

\*

Hermione and Bill returned to find Ginny, Fred and George all shifting through piles of files and logs, journals and random sheets of parchment at the kitchen table. "About time you got back," Fred said cheekily. "Mum's had dinner ready for an hour."

"Is she mad?" Hermione asked.

George shook his head. "Nah, she figures this is important."

"Dad calmed her down," Fred added.

"You can eat if you're hungry," Ginny said, switching files.

"Kreacher made us sandwiches and biscuits," Bill said with a grin. "We brought back loads of biscuits."

"Cool. We've been digging through this stuff for hours," George stated.

Hermione looked at Ginny with a big smile, then over to the twins. "You're willing to help too?"

Ginny shifted a thick file aside. "I had to bribe them," she said as she placed a sheet of parchment on a pile in the center of the table. "Find anything?"

"Nothing useful." She sat down next to George. "Where do I begin?"

Fred set a thick file in front of her. "Anything in Snape's writing goes on this stack," he said, pointing to a very small pile of sheets.

"Anything that gives a warning goes in my pile, and I have to check it against the journals and logs," George added.

"Have her help you with that," Ginny piped in. "Bill, could you maybe help me sort these out?"

"Gin, I don't know his handwriting all that well," Bill said, taking a seat. "It's been a long time since I had him as a professor."

"Okay, Bill, how about if you check these against the journals," Fred stated.

George took the pile of files from Hermione and passed them to Bill. "Just check which of these warnings of Death Eater activities proved out," George stated.

Fred pointed to stack between him and George. "Ones that do are in this pile."

"Ones that aren't are put back in the folders," George added.

"Oh, one more thing... Snape said that he often used a Curiosity Charm and a Camouflage Charm on his messages, apparently Dark Arts ones..." Hermione stated as she reached for a file. "But he wouldn't tell me which ones."

"Good thing I'm a curse-breaker then, isn't it?" Bill asked as he started checking the dates on a short note. "Hand me any that seem cursed I'll check those."

"Where's Harry?" Hermione asked, grinning.

"With Dad, digging through his papers," Ginny said.

"Yeah," Fred said, "haven't seen him for hours either."

"Might have gotten lost in the shed," George stated.

"We'll send in a search party tomorrow," Fred added with a wicked grin.

George mimicked Fred's grin. "Or send Mum."

~oOo~

Day 25

The next morning, Hermione awoke to the familiar smells she always associated with her summers at the Burrow. Warm cinnamon, fresh bread, sausages, bacon and... flowers...? *Someone snuck in with flowers last night! Probably Harry, and placed them on Ginny's bedside table* She wouldn't have taken Harry for being a romantic. Ginny wasn't in the room, so she quickly dressed and ran downstairs.



"Ron hasn't been home," Ginny stated as Hermione entered the kitchen. "I think he stayed at Mrs. Tonk's." She and Bill were already at work. "Did you find anything?" she asked as Harry entered the room.

"Loads, many that Mr. Weasley said turned out to be very good tips, and many warnings that he'd had several Order members follow up on. Your dad kept notes on which were good and which weren't, so if any more came in the same handwriting, he knew to act on them right away. I have all the ones that turned out to be genuine, but not all of them are in Snape's writing." He stretched and strode to the kitchen to get a cup of breakfast tea.

"Harry, bring me a cup, will you," Bill asked. "Snape used spells to disguise his handwriting. I've pretty much got them figured out now. Let me have them and I'll check."

Harry nodded, handing Bill a mug of strong tea. "So where are we at?"

"Four piles. These are not his and need to be refilled. These are in his handwriting. Most have a Curiosity Spell and a Camouflage Charm on them that Bill was able to break through and we now know were written by Snape," Ginny explained. "This pile we don't know yet, that one Bill said have other curses on them and don't touch. He's working on them."

"I'll get all the ones I got from your dad," Harry said. "I'll start checking them against the Auror records."

Fred and George walked into the kitchen, stretching. "So are we still at it?"

"Gin, you, Ron and Harry will be spending many weekends at the shop!" Fred said with a mischievous grin.

Both Hermione and Harry turned to Ginny with very curious expressions. "What? I told you I bribed them," she said, trying to sound innocent.

"Yeah. You'll be testing out new products," George said, summoning the teapot and two mugs.

"And giving your endorsement," Fred added. "Having you three in the shop will be great for business." He sat down at the table, looking over the piles of files. "Where's Mum?"

"Mum and Dad went to Hestia Jones' place," Ginny said, obviously glad the subject had changed. "Since Dad knows what you're looking for, Harry, he figured he'd give you a hand. He may find stuff to help others as well. Hestia was trying to save Muggle-borns and Undesirables' homes by creating very complicated paper trails to cover bogus sales. Apparently, Agatha Levin, Hestia's best friend, convinced your aunt to help, Harry. Said what Voldemort was doing was very much like what Hiltar did to the Jews, and she decided to help."

"Hitler," Harry corrected her. "Aunt Petunia helped?"

"From what I heard this morning, your aunt has a real talent for real estate." Bill got up to exchange a pile of folders and files from the boxes stacked up along the sofa.

"Your uncle was thrilled and annoyed. Strange man. A woman *can* work and maintain a house... especially if you've only got one kid," Ginny added, shifting files.

"Fred, I thought Harry had two cousins?" George asked.

"Nah, George, he's just the size of two," Fred replied.

George held his hand up to his missing ear. "Ear, 'ear... I can't quite 'ear you?"

\*

"Good afternoon, Weasleys," Mr. Weasley said when he and Mrs. Weasley came home just before lunch.

"Afternoon, Dad," everyone automatically answered. Hermione looked at Harry, grinning.

"Goodness, that was a chore," Mr. Weasley said, sitting down. "How's the case going?"

Suddenly Ron appeared from the Floo, looking exhausted. "Merlin, babies are hard work!" He walked over and gave Mrs. Weasley a firm hug and a big kiss on the cheek.

"What's that for?" she asked as she cleaned him up with her wand.

"I've never really appreciated how much you've done, Mum." Ron dropped his briefcase on the edge of the table. "Oh, here're a few pictures of me and Teddy Tonks."

"Did you find anything?" Harry asked, making room for him to sit.

"Yes. Everything Lupin had was kept in a trunk and two traveling cases. Of course, they're wizard cases and hold a lot more than they look, but it was neat and extremely well organized. Found what he had easily," Ron explained as he sat down and started to scratch at some dried milk drool on his robes. Giving up, he looked over at Harry. "Tonks well... her desk looked like her klutzy, disorganized and scattered. It took me hours to figure out how she organized things. Mrs. Tonks tried to help as much as she could, between taking care of Teddy and crying. But it's all neat and organized now." He pulled his briefcase onto his lap and started to withdraw files. "You know Tonks was actually an amazing Auror and witch."

"I brought every warning of Death Eater information or activity either Tonks or Lupin received, although half aren't in Snape's writing." Ginny scowled, as Ron plopped several folders on a pile she'd been working on. "So what have we got so far?" Ron asked, oblivious to Ginny's annoyed smirk.

\*

"Mr. Weasley, do you have a moment?" Hermione asked.

He and Mrs. Weasley had been organizing Hestia's files over by the sofa. He wanted to keep them separate so as to be able to return the ones that didn't apply to Harry's and Ron's case.

"Of course, dear. Do you want me to give you a moment?" Mrs. Weasley asked.

"Hermione, sure, sit down," he said at the same time, moving a file of papers off of a chair.

"No, Mrs. Weasley, you may be able to answer this as well." Hermione looked up at them, not sure what Snape would consider personal or not. "What do you know about verifying someone's living status?"

"Some," Mr. Weasley said, his brow wrinkling in concentration. "Why?"

"Apparently Snape was declared dead. St. Mungo's sent Snape a bunch of forms. He signed them, and I signed as witness, and we both wand verified our signatures. However, the forms were returned, and apparently Snape has to go to St. Mungo's for a health and wellness physical, only he can't leave the house." Hermione looked up, watching both Mr. and Mrs. Weasley's faces become gravely serious. "That's why I went to Grimmauld Place to see if there was a way around this... What?"

"Hermione, which forms were sent to him," Mr. Weasley asked.

His tone made Hermione uncomfortable. "Acknowledgement of Life Form, a Death Reversal Form, a long form titled *Accidental Death, Dismemberment and Disappearance Form*, and his death certificate, if I'm remembering correctly."

"Did they require a Healer to sign as witness of his signature on the death certificate?" Mrs. Weasley asked.

Hermione nodded. "Yes, I think it said we needed to have a qualified Healer confirm his living status."

"Did he have to sign on the line, 'confirm the error of reported life termination,' or something like that?" Mrs. Weasley asked.

"Yes, something sort of like that," she replied. "Not exactly but really close." Hermione looked down at her hands. "He won't go. I don't know if it's his pride or because of the walker, or what? He won't go. He was going to have Mrs. Kirkwell come and verify his living status, but she's a medi-witch not a Healer." She looked up, first at Mr. Weasley then at Mrs. Weasley. "Healer Grunmaker's letter was most specific that it had to be a Healer."

"Harold Grunmaker?" Mrs. Weasley asked, surprised.

Hermione simply nodded.

"Hermione, he's fairly high up at St. Mungo's. He doesn't usually handle proof of life." Mrs. Weasley sounded astonished.

"Apparently they're friends or are at least friendly," Hermione stated. "His post script said that Maggie sent her regards."

"Well, there is your answer dear," Mrs. Weasley said, smiling. "He can write to Margareta Grunmaker. She is a Healer, retired, but qualified nonetheless. And if she's adding her regards to her husband's official notification, it's possible they're both on friendly terms with Severus."

"Hermione, I cannot stress to you enough the seriousness of this matter. Severus must be officially recognized as living, healthy and well. Otherwise, all my sons' efforts yours, and Harry's too will be in vain. The Ministry takes death notifications very seriously. If Severus isn't declared to be alive before his arraignment, he will be written off as a dead criminal and carted off to Azkaban, as an impostor or Inferi."

Hermione returned his gaze with incredulity. "This is such nonsense. How can I be appointed as his Protective Custody Services Monitor if they consider him to be dead? Why does everything the Ministry does seem so... backward?"

"It's not as bad as all that, Hermione, although it may seem some times," Mr. Weasley stated understandingly. "Especially now since there is such short notice, and this case for Severus is moving along so quickly."

"Maybe you're right," she said, her shoulders sagging a little as she looked up at him. "It just seems like it's a bureaucratic mess sometimes."

"I know, dear," Mrs. Weasley said. "Go and draft Margareta Grunmaker a note and ask her what she suggests. See if she can help you out. Then go get Portia, Errol is much too old for this flight."

"Thank you. It's not what I wanted to hear... but thanks for being honest with me." Hermione walked over to the table and placed her hand on Harry's shoulder. "Got a minute?"

"Yeah," Harry said, standing. "What's up?"

"There is a matter of Snape's living status, Harry." She held up her hand when he was about to respond. "I didn't know how serious it was. I have to go and get Snape verified as alive, and I can't do that from here."

"Yeah, sure. Hermione, that's really important I had the forms sent through St. Mungo's days ago." He turned, looking at the table.

"Harry, I'm sorry... I sent in the forms, but they were returned, and I have to find a Healer to do a house call one that Snape will let in his house!" She turned to look at everyone working at the kitchen table. "And there's so much to be done..."

"Hermione, it's okay," he said, touching her arm to get her attention. "We've got things covered here. Go take care of that. I'll owl you if anything comes up. I wish I could contact you more directly, but I doubt Snape would ever tell me where his house is."

Hermione hugged Harry briefly and turned to go send the letter. "Thanks. I'll let you know by Galleon as soon as he's officially declared alive. Oh, and tell Ginny that she can use the beaded bag to take all of the files back to the Ministry and to hold onto it for me." She ran up the stairs and quickly threw everything into her school trunk. She drafted two notes. Her first note was to Kingsley, asking if he'd get the order to have Snape transferred to the Ministry under Auror transport rescinded. She was sure that she could get him there without incident. The second was a carefully drafted request to Mrs. Margareta Grunmaker, explaining Snape's situation and his inability to go to St. Mungo's before his Arraignment date and asking if there was some way she could help.

She was just signing her name when Ron wrapped his arms around her, making her smudge the 'er' of her name. "Ron, please, not now! Oh, bloody dragons!"

"What?" he asked as if insulted. "You hugged Harry?"

"Briefly!" she said, sealing the letter. "I would've come down and said a proper good bye."

"Hermione, I've missed you," he said, reaching out to try to pull her into a hug.

"Not now, Ron," she snapped a bit too sharply. "Look, let me get these off..."

"I thought we were going to start seeing each other?" he said petulantly.

She summoned Portia over to her with her hand. "Will you take these for me?" The owl hooted and extended her leg. "You're an incredible owl, thank you." She tied the letter to Portia's leg. "Ron, please, it's not what you think."

"Explain then," he said waspishly.

Hermione released Portia out the window and turned to face Ron. "Ron, I love you, really I do. But, please understand, this whole thing... it's become personal. It'll be over soon and we'll get together, soon. I promise." She tried to lean over to kiss him on the cheek but he pulled away. "Fine, but I have to go." She levitated her trunk and followed it down the stairs.

\*

Hermione Apparated next to few straggly trees between a fence and a mass of bushes, looking down a cobbled street lined on either side by dilapidated brick houses, many with dull dirty windows, and many more having been boarded up. Facing down the street, she saw a single tall chimney from a factory of some kind. She cast a buoyancy charm on her trunk and proceeded to walk down the street, counting along with the few numbers that were still readable on the houses.

She could see that almost all the houses were a 'two-up-and-two-down' style, which was a common design for Victorian workers' housing. The neighboring houses were at some odds with what she knew of Snape's house, since his seemed to be a 'two-up-and-three-down' and were two rooms across, assuming that his house was most likely magically enhanced. *Somewhat like Grimmauld Place*. At the end of the street, she saw numbers thirty-seven and across the street thirty-eight. The house on the end didn't

look quite right. Hermione smiled. "I want to see the Prince house," she mumbled softly and a very worn wooden door appeared. She touched her wand to the latch and the door swung open.

Snape was asleep on his bed when she walked through the dining room boudoir into the kitchen to put away all of the food Mrs. Weasley had prepared for them.

"Did you have a good time?" his bored voice broke the silence.

She smiled again. "Yes. Mrs. Weasley was quite touched by your compliment. She insisted I bring you some of her onion soup and a new loaf of bread. I have enough of her cooking to last us days!"

"And?" he asked, sitting up. "How is my investigation going? Are Potter and Weasley taking it seriously or do I need to hire an advocate?"

Hermione turned around and walked over to his bedside. "I've never seen Harry doing more parchment work. In fact, Harry and Ron are both taking this case very seriously, and they have the entire Weasley household chipping in."

He snorted in derision.

"No, really. Even Ginny, Fred, George and Bill." She reached out to touch his arm, intending on checking his dressing, and he pulled away from her. "Don't be like that. Harry and Ron told me that after seeing the memories you gave Harry, they both believe you. Harry wants to set things right." His dark eyes scrutinized her face as if reading to see if she were lying to him. "Would it make you feel better to hear this from Harry? I could send him an owl and he'd come right over."

"No, I don't want him here," he said, still watching her intently. "No, Miss Granger, I believe you."

Hermione sighed with relief. "Thank you. Now please, let me see your neck."

~oOo~

Day 26

The letter arrived by owl just as Hermione was sipping on her morning tea in the sitting room. A beautiful snow-white owl swooped in through the open window, landed delicately on the armrest of the chair next to Hermione, and extended out her leg.

"Oh, thank you," she said. The owl clicked her beak and waited. "I'll take it right in, are you hungry?" she asked, holding out her arm. The owl landed gently, perched in perfect balance. "Well, you have impeccable manners." Her statement seemed to please the beautiful owl.

"You have a letter." She handed him the envelope.

He opened it and glared at her. "How could you?" he snarled as she passed by his bed.

"What?" she said, retrieving a few pieces of roast for the snowy owl.

"You had no business contacting her," he snapped back.

The owl flew over to Arimus' perch, and he scooted over to make room for her.

"Look, it was necessary," she snapped at him. Snape cocked an eyebrow. "If you're not declared *alive*, you will be charged as a *dead war* criminal and locked away, only you'll be registered as an Inferi. Is that what you want?" She walked over to him and glared back at him. "I didn't do all of *this* to have you declared an *Inferi*!"

"I don't want her here," he said, crossing his arms defiantly.

"You didn't want me here either. What is it? Why? Are you embarrassed?" His eyes narrowed dangerously at her questions. "You are! Aren't you?"

"No," he snarled angrily.

"Yes, that's it..." Hermione looked around, but her mind was picturing the street and town he lived in. "All your friends and associates have money. You but not all of the Dark Lord's followers had wealth."

"No, Miss Granger, not all of the Death Eaters had money, only a few. I don't like having people in my home." He turned to open the walker. "You had no right inviting her here. I don't want her here."

"Look, either you pick up a quill and give her the address and directions or I'm leaving," she demanded. "I won't stay and try to help a *defeatist* who's given up on himself. That's *not* the Severus Snape I know, and I don't *want* to know this one!" She turned to leave and Snape grabbed her arm in a vise like grasp.

"Do not speak to me in that tone, Miss Granger," he snarled.

"The Severus Snape I knew deserved respect. I even respected the arrogant, self-centered misanthrope *and* the tyrant Potions master. They deserved my respect but not a defeatist Inferi or someone who would cower away in his home."

"You had no right to do this," he said angrily.

"You're apparently wrong in that assumption. As your Protective Custody Services Monitor, I have every right, and as your friend a very reasonable concern for you." She turned and rolled her arm so that his hand slid down her arm, and they ended up with her actually holding his hand. "Why won't you let her come and verify your status?"

He tugged his arm and dislodged her grip, but Hermione only stepped closer and placed her hand on his arm. "Why?" she asked. "I thought she was a friend of yours, or at least friendly toward you. She's actually quite happy to do this for you."

"You read my letter?" he asked, gripping her shoulders and turning her to face him squarely. "You do not invite people to my house, Miss Granger."

His movements made her foot slip, and she placed both of her hands on his waist to catch her balance. "No, only you can. Remember the Fidelius Charm?" she looked up at him, imploringly. "I owled her and told her you were unable to come to St. Mungo's before your arraignment. That's all I said nothing too personal. I said you'd been hurt and were recovering, but unable to get around well," she tried to explain, hoping he'd understand why she did what she did. "Okay, maybe that's getting a bit personal, but she owled me back even before I'd left the Burrow so she must have responded to my letter the moment she'd received it."

His grip on her shoulders eased off, although he didn't remove his hands. "This should have been my decision, Miss Granger, not yours. I don't like that you did this, but I can't change anything about it. She says she's waiting for my owl."

Hermione looked up at him. The lines on his face had softened and the dark eyes regarded her with intelligent thought. This was Severus Snape with his guard down, no sneer and no smirks. The man without his mask and as she looked at him, he almost looked handsome to her. "Why won't you let people see the real you? What are you afraid of rejection? You are a remarkable man. Why can't you see that?"

"Not many see me that way," he said, coolly the mask slipping into place, then fading again.

She smiled, removing her hands, sliding one along his arm. "Because you don't let them."

\*

Hours later an elegantly dressed witch arrived with a large dragon skin satchel. Margaretta Grunmaker greeted Hermione warmly and followed her into the potions lab where Snape was working on one of his potions. She approached Snape, delighted to see him up and working, and greeted him like an old friend. They spoke briefly before she urged him to sit, showing great concern that he shouldn't stand unnecessarily on her account.

Mrs. Grunmaker took a moment to review his forms as she waited for Snape to finish his work long enough to let her examine him for his physical. She conversed easily with Hermione while they waited, speaking softly about Hermione's plans for the future.

As soon as Snape could set his potions aside, he approached the desk, leaning heavily on the walker. "Where would you like to do this, Margaretta," he asked politely.

"I would prefer a bed, if that's all right. I noticed that there is one set up in the kitchen," she stated with a gracious smile. "Will that be comfortable for you, Severus?"

"That would be fine. After you," he said simply, holding his hand out.

In Hermione's opinion, the physical was rather quick. Mrs. Grunmaker made a few notes and signed the forms while Hermione made tea. Afterwards they sat at the table and had a nice visit. Mrs. Grunmaker obviously respected Snape quite a bit, based on her inquiry regarding his trial and offered to appear on his behalf. "My husband and I are quite grateful for what you did for Kevin. And the potions, poisons and antidotes you sent to St. Mungo's, warning us that they might be used against unsuspecting people... Severus, you saved so many lives."

"I simply did what I could, Margaretta," he replied, sipping on his tea, his expression cool and calm.

"Oh, Severus, don't be so modest," she said, laughing. "Take credit where it's due. To many you were a lifesaver. My Kevin wouldn't be alive if it weren't for you and that antidote you sent us. Seriously, I was completely crushed when I read you'd died and never been more thrilled than when Mr. Potter requested your death certificate be reversed. Harold has your file on his desk. He wanted to handle it personally."

Hermione was surprised.

"Thank you for doing this," Snape said as he walked her to the door when it was time for Mrs. Grunmaker to go. "Tell Harold thank you as well and give my best to Kevin. He's a good kid, one of the best to come through my classes."

"I'll do that, although didn't Miss Granger tell you?" she asked. "We've been requested to appear at your trial. You'll see Harold tomorrow."

*Author's note:*

*I have a great deal of gratitude for Ladyinthecloak and Machshefa for beta reading this for me. You ladies are great and I really appreciated you doing this. Thank you.*

*I am making a variation to canon in regards to Kingsley Shacklebolt for these purposes: He obviously has some seniority in the Auror Department. He also apparently held some status with Cornelius Fudge and Rufus Scrimgeour because they both had Kingsley handle special assignments: Fudge brought him along as security when he and Umbridge tried to expel Harry from school and to apprehend Dumbledore, and Scrimgeour assigned him to protect the Muggle Prime Minister. I do not know if Kingsley was in the original Order of the Phoenix, but I'm taking a literary license and claiming that he was on the grounds that he knew James and Lily Potter and doesn't seem like the kind of wizard who wouldn't have joined if he'd heard about the group. Plus, it was crucial that he was in the Order of the Phoenix both times if my next chapter was to work out right...*

*I have tried to explain this in my story but allow me to clarify:*

- 1. It's post war the Death Eaters are still loose and causing havoc. There were heavy casualties on the 'good' side and the Aurors would have been there some may have died, such as Tonks had.*
- 2. Harry asked to stand for Snape to prove Snape was on the right side. Ron offered to assist obviously.*
- 3. Kingsley approved. He's Minister of Magic. Letting Jr. Aurors present their reportings at the arraignment frees up the other Aurors and other Law staff that have been stretched thin.*
- 4. Harry and Ron will be judged not only by the court, but also by their Auror Training wizard. They are presenting the facts of their investigation and witnesses. It expedites things.*
- 5. When Harry faced the court in OoTP, he didn't even have an advocate or an attorney so I wasn't aware that the wizarding world had barristers. Snape doesn't have to defend himself as Harry did in OoTP, chapter 8 'The Hearing.' IF Dumbledore hadn't shown up with Ms. Figg, Harry would have been standing there all by himself.*

## The Arraignment

*Chapter 7 of 9*

The day has arrived and the questions of Snape's actions during the Dark Years War, the uncertainty about his loyalties and his participation in regards to Tom 'Voldemort' Riddle's and the Death Eaters' criminal actions are questioned. It's Harry's and Ron's first big case before the Wizengamot and Snape's life is in their hands.

~o0o~

Day 27

Hermione took a few minutes to check herself in the mirror as Snape changed into his robes. Harry had sent a message on her Galleon yesterday afternoon after Margaretta Grunmaker had left, confirming the arraignment time and telling her that he couldn't change the order to have Aurors escort Snape to the Ministry. However,

Kingsley did impress to the Aurors that Snape was still recovering from 'serious injuries' and he wasn't to be chained or treated roughly. Hermione hoped that the two Aurors would remember that. Ron had sent a message saying he'd arranged for the Aurors to pick them up in a Ministry car. Hermione had smiled at her friends' arrangements, although Snape had been unhappy about it.

That wasn't all he had been unhappy about. Hermione had insisted that he wear his best robes, but Snape claimed not to have any, other than his professor's robes. To his annoyance she'd scrounged through his upstairs wardrobe and brought down the best he had, which happened to be the ones he'd worn to the Yule Ball. However, they were simply newer professor's robes just made from a nicer quality of wool, with a dark green waistcoat that had a slight sheen to the fabric, but that was so dark it might as well have been black. Still, she insisted he put them on so that he would look his best. After much debate, he finally relented to wearing the dark green waistcoat and newer frock coat under his robes. Standing in front of the mirror, he looked almost handsome, fully rested, hair clean and combed. Even his skin had lost some of its sallow appearance. With the exception of the thin line of white at his collar and sleeve cuff, he still looked like he was dressed in all black. "You look handsome," she remarked as she walked up to him.

He scowled at her. "Utter nonsense, Miss Granger. I look the same as I always do," he stated.

"Well, at least you took a bath last night," she mused as he walked slowly toward the front door.

"Only because you wouldn't let me go to sleep otherwise," he said, tucking the fifteen-inch birch and dragon heartstring wand into his sleeve. He'd been insistent on carrying this one from his school trunk instead of his fifteen-inch black walnut and dragon heartstring one that she was more familiar seeing him carry.

"What is the difference?" she'd asked when he'd insisted that she bring him this particular wand from his old school trunk.

"In case they snap it of course," he said resolutely. "This was my first wand. I don't have as many fond memories associated with it." He turned to appraise her appearance.

After the fuss she'd made over his own clothes, he'd been rather surly about the clothes she'd chosen to wear. The ones she'd worn to the Yule Ball were much too fancy and the one she'd worn to Bill and Fleur's wedding had seen better days, so she'd simply pulled out her best Muggle jumper and jeans. He scoffed at her, flat out insisting that she go to a robes shop and buy 'appropriate wizarding wear' or he'd hex her.

Hermione had told him she didn't have the money.

He'd said he'd pay for them.

She'd refused, stating that she couldn't impose on him.

He'd scoffed at her and asked her what the last month had been if not an imposition.

They'd had argued until finally Arimus, flapping his wings and screeching at them to get them to quiet down, made Snape and Hermione stop arguing. Actually, Hermione had started laughing, and Snape had stood there, leaning against the kitchen counter, watching her with a scowl. "At least allow me to buy you the robes as remittance for all the work you've done, cleaning my home and assisting me with my potions. That was above your 'duties' as my personal Healer. Would you at least accept new robes on those grounds?" he'd asked when she'd finally stopped laughing and Arimus quieted down again.

To avoid any more fighting about it, Hermione relented and went to Diagon Alley that afternoon after tea to buy new robes. At his urging to 'please choose anything other than red,' and since he'd paid for the robes, she'd asked the assistant for green ones. The shop assistant had read Snape's letter Hermione had given her, nodded with a big smile and proceeded to show her several lovely robes. In the end, the choice had been easy.

The dark forest green color of the robes she'd selected were edged in dark blue embroidery that complimented her coloring well. She'd added a simple dark blue dress to wear underneath, both the dress and the robes costing more than she would have ever spent on herself. But the new outfit looked good and made her feel pretty, and had even elicited a smile from him twice so far.

"Are we ready to go, Miss Granger?" he asked, sounding a bit hesitant himself.

"Yes," she said, biting her lip. "Kingsley said he'd send a car. Someone named Wellings and Durnike are meeting us on the street. How far do you want to walk to meet them?"

"The corner," he said, opening the door.

*As far from his house as he could go and still be on his street*"We still have half an hour," she said, stepping out into the misty morning air *I'm glad I braided my hair today, with this mist I'd look a fright in fifteen minutes.*

He looked at her and laid a hand on her arm. "No matter what happens, I know you tried. I will never forget that."

\*

Hermione walked with Snape down a long corridor, followed by Wellings and Durnike. The rough stone walls were sufficiently lit by several torches spaced evenly along the wall in brackets. It reminded her of the corridors in the dungeons at school.

Harry and Ron stood conversing softly and looked up when they approached. Both wore new robes of dark blue that looked very nice on them. Wellings and Durnike spoke to Harry a moment and moved to stand against the wall to wait.

*What? Like Snape is going to make run for it with his walker?* Hermione thought, ruefully. *He's not evil. We have to win this... we have to. He deserves more than to be treated like a war criminal. We have to win this....*

Ron walked over and hugged Hermione. "We're next; they are just finishing a case. Turned out well."

"Are you ready?" Harry asked.

Hermione nodded nervously, but Snape simply closed his eyes and grunted his assent. Harry opened up a heavy wooden doors and allowed Hermione and Snape to enter in first, followed by Ron.

Hermione gasped, although Snape was quiet and calm. She remembered that he'd been in this room before *And for the very same reason, too..* she thought and grimaced. The courtroom was huge and foreboding. The walls were dark stone, lit by torches mounted to the walls and floating glass orbs. There were rows of benches that nearly filled two full walls. Professor McGonagall, Hagrid, Madam Pomfrey, Professor Hooch and Madam Rosmerta were sitting in the rows of observers' seats. Hagrid waved at her, and Hermione waved back, just catching Professor Flitwick's waving hand from where he was sitting beside her huge friend. He was so dwarfed by both Hagrid and Professor McGonagall and her tall pointed hat that she hadn't seen him at first glance. It was encouraging to Hermione that they were all there. Margaretta Grunmaker sat with two wizards in lime green robes and a wizard in a darker green with a young witch, in St. Mungo's Healers' robes and smock. Further down the rows, in the far corner of the room she could see Neville Longbottom, sitting with Lavender Brown and nearly fifty other students, most of whom she didn't know. The only person she regretted seeing was Rita Skeeter, her quick quotes quill at the ready and scribbling away. The other reporter, quote quill in hand, sat patiently waiting, obviously here to report the proceedings as they happened, not as a gossip piece, judging by his pose.

Harry guided Hermione and Snape to the side of the room to wait. There were two tables in the middle of the floor. They faced a bench that took up most of one wall on her left. There was a woman standing between the two tables in front of a chair that had several chains attached to it, tears streaming down her face as two other wizards tried

to shake her hand. Hermione's eyes fell on the tall high-backed chair, watching the chains slide and undulate like snakes, and she knew that Snape was supposed to sit in that chair. The very thought sickened her. She looked up at Snape, but his face was a stony mask of indifference.

She turned to look at the people that were there to pass judgment on Snape. The benches reminded Hermione of Muggle court, except that there were three large chairs in the center and about fifty others spread out behind them all filled with people in purple robes. The bench took up the entire wall on that side of the courtroom. Several of the people were talking amongst themselves while others simply sat and waited, all with varying expressions of curiosity and animosity, while many looked strict or somber. A few were watching Hermione with similarly austere expressions.

Kingsley sat in the middle of the high bench, Griselda Marchbanks and Tiberius Ogden on one side of him, Sturgis Podmore and Cornelius Fudge on the other. Like the others on the bench, they all wore plum-colored robes with an elaborate silver 'W' embroidered on their chests. Kingsley, Mrs. Marchbanks and Mr. Ogden wore a type of round, purple and silver-corded hat. Among the fifty others present, she could see Mr. Weasley, Ginny Weasley, Dedalus Diggie, Bill Weasley, Amos Diggory and Charlie Weasley. The members of the Order who Hermione recognized were all in the front and to the right side of the three, slightly taller, head chairs.

Snape was stone-faced and his posture stiff as he braced himself with his walker. She knew that pose. It was his 'face-what-I-have-to' pose. Only Harry knew that he had the Crutch-Support Spell on him, which was allowing him to walk so far and stand for so long.

Aruidus Raithwright, of *Witch Weekly*, walked past Hermione, sat down next to Rita Skeeter, and pulled out a pad of parchment with his quill, ready to take dictation, too.

Finally, the witch was escorted from the room and Harry and Ron indicated that Hermione and Snape were to take their seats. Hermione flicked her wand, thickening the cushions on the high-backed chair, eliciting a snicker from someone on the bench and two people from behind her, but she didn't care. Snape gave her a small smile and a tiny shake of his head, amused by her actions and sat down gingerly. Hermione took his walker, placing it beside the chair and as out of sight as she could. She pulled out the chair Harry had indicated for her and sat down at the table on Snape's right, moving closer to him for support. He didn't acknowledge it, but looked straight ahead at the wood paneling of the bench rather than at anyone up there.

Harry and Ron stood at the larger of the tables on the other side of the chair with the magical chains, facing the raised benches. "If it pleases the court; I, Harry James Potter, as defense investigator, do request that the accused, Severus Edgar Talfryn Snape, be allowed to remain unchained due to his physical health."

Snape turned slightly at the sound of his full name, and although Hermione couldn't see his face, she was sure he was scowling.

"Do you agree?" Kingsley asked as he turned to Griselda Marchbanks and Tiberius Ogden. They both nodded. "The court will so allow the request." The chains on the chair fell to the floor, silent. "Severus Snape, you are being charged with crimes to Wizardkind, criminal association with Tom 'Voldemort' Riddle, otherwise known as the Dark Lord, the murder of Albus Dumbledore, and acts of cruelty and harm to your fellow wizards and the community at large. This hearing is to determine if these charges have any grounds. How do you plead?"

Harry and Ron both stood up and to Hermione's amazement, Harry reached out a hand, placing it on Snape's shoulder indicating that he didn't need to stand as well. "Please, Professor, be comfortable, okay?" he asked.

Snape simply glared at Harry's hand, then up at Harry, but Harry was looking up at the bench. "According to official Ministry records, Severus Snape was in fact a Death Eater. His association with Tom 'Voldemort' Riddle is a documented fact. However, these same records from Dark War I clearly indicate that Professor Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, vouched for Mr. Snape's association as a spy, giving invaluable information on Tom 'Voldemort' Riddle and his Death Eaters. He was cleared of all charges from Dark War I. Furthermore, I intend to prove that Severus Snape continued in this role as spy and informant during Dark War II as well as contributed greatly to the wizarding community over the last four years."

Shacklebolt laced his fingers together on the bench before him. "Thank you, Mr. Potter, so noted." He opened his hands and stood up. "I shall be deferring my chair to Cornelius Fudge for this case due to a conflict of interest. I believe Mistresses Edthyl and Edith Rogers, and Mr. Arthur Weasley have asked for the same indulgence." Kingsley, Mr. Weasley and two elderly witches, who almost looked like twins, all rose, exited the benches, walked across the courtroom and sat down behind Harry and Ron. Apparently, her friends expected them to. Hermione turned around and saw the two matronly women smile and wave enthusiastically at her.

"Right then, for the record," Cornelius Fudge stated formally. "I, Cornelius Oswald Fudge, Acting High Chair, acknowledge Griselda Marchbanks and Tiberius Ogden as Wizengamot Elders, and we shall be leading interrogators for this case. Court Scribe shall be Melissa Melbright." There was a murmur of assent as well as dissent from the bench. Fudge ignored the mumbled protest and continued. "Mr. Harry Potter and Mr. Ronald Weasley have presented a list of witnesses for the defense which has been approved. So, we shall proceed."

She looked over at her friends, noticing the large amount of files and folders they had both placed on their table. There were several murmurs and groans from the onlookers.

"Mr. Potter, as lead for the defense you may proceed," Fudge said.

"My first witnesses are Healer Margareta Grunmaker and Master Harold Grunmaker," Harry said, loud and clear.

Margareta Grunmaker and an elegantly dressed wizard in lime green robes came down to the floor and sat in two chairs Ron conjured, facing both the bench and the defense tables.

"Please state your names for the record," Fudge said in a ringing voice.

"I am Master Harold Grunmaker, Master Brewer in Charge, Potions Department, St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries," Mr. Grunmaker stated in a strong voice. "And this is my wife, Margareta Grunmaker, Healer from the Spell Damage Ward retired."

To Hermione's right, all three reporters' quills began making soft scratching sounds, well, Rita's had never actually been quiet since she sat down.

Snape looked briefly at the Grunmakers with an expression of respect, then lowered his gaze.

"Mr. Grunmaker, are you acquainted with Mr. Severus Snape?" Fudge asked.

"*Master* Severus Snape, and yes, I most certainly am." He looked up haughtily at the bench. "We've been acquainted for years."

"In what capacity?" Tiberius Ogden asked politely.

Master Grunmaker looked up at the bench with an air of pure confidence. "Severus has on numerous occasions assisted St. Mungo's when we encountered complicated poisonings and Dark Arts Potions our Healers couldn't identify or reverse. His expertise in the area of poisons and cursed potions has benefited my patients and staff for several years now." Hermione smiled at his statement, catching Margareta's gaze as she did so and she smiled back, giving Hermione a slight nod of acknowledgment.

"Can you elaborate, for us please," Griselda Marchbanks asked.

"Certainly," Master Grunmaker stated. "Severus frequently sent potions and antidotes of poisons He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named and his Death Eaters used to St. Mungo's during the last four years. Likewise, he was frequently a consultant for complicated poisons and Dark Arts Potions that our Healers couldn't identify. His potions and antidotes always came with proper dosing instructions and directions on how to reproduce them. I've given a list of examples to Mr. Weasley. Master Snape's continued assistance to St. Mungo's has saved many lives and eased the suffering of many more."

Ron stood up holding a long parchment. "If it pleases the court I have submitted a copy of Master Grunmaker's list in my case file."

"Yes, yes, we have it," Fudge stated, waving his hand to indicate that Ron should sit down.

Hermione was momentarily angry and embarrassed for Ron and noticed that his ears had turned pink. She looked at Snape, but he was still quietly staring at the wood paneling of the bench, although she saw a slight twitch in the corner of his mouth.

"Mrs. Grunmaker, do you have anything to add?" Harry asked politely addressing the couple.

Margaretta smiled at Harry then turned to address the bench. "I have known Severus for years. I was a Healer on the Spell Damage Ward, and Severus had on several occasions provided potions and antidotes that either reversed certain Dark Magic spell damages or helped my patients' live healthier and longer lives. Severus also saved my son, Kevin, from a terrible snakebite. I owe Severus so much for saving my son's life."

"What was this snake, do you know?" Harry asked, opening a file from his pile.

"I was told it was a cross between a cobra and a python and had venom similar to a basilisk," Margaretta said solemnly. "When Kevin woke up, after days of Severus' potions and anti-venoms... He said the snake was... He said it belonged to You-Know-Who and that Severus had done something to save him, although Kevin would never tell me what all transpired that night. I learned later that it was Severus who brought my son to St. Mungo's."

"Thank you, Mrs. Grunmaker, Master Grunmaker," Harry said. "Unless the bench has further questions, I'm finished with these witnesses and submit their statements into evidence." There was a general buzz of assent. Mr. and Mrs. Grunmaker rose, and Snape turned to look in their direction. Margaretta made a slight wave to Snape and Mr. Grunmaker nodded in his direction, which Snape returned before he straightened his head, closing his eyes for a brief second. Margaretta looked briefly at Snape, concerned, placing her hand on her husband's arm. He patted it, smiling fondly at his wife, then at Hermione and Snape, and together Mr. and Mrs. Grunmaker left the courtroom.

"My second witness is Potions Master William Egbert Kirkwell," Harry said, even before the doors closed.

Two wizards in lime green robes walked forward, one very old wizard with a cane, on the arm of a much younger witch. There was a buzz of whispers from the bench, and a few leaned down to take a closer look at the elderly wizard as he made his way slowly to the witness chair. Hermione noticed that Snape sat up straighter when the man's name was called.

"Please state your name for the record," Fudge asked, making a notation on a parchment, before Master Kirkwell even sat down.

Snape turned to watch the old wizard as he made his slow progress to the witness chairs.

"You heard the boy, it's William Kirkwell," the older wizard answered loudly, looking at the chair. "I teach Potions at St. Mungo's for the Potions segment of the Healers' training program. Used to brew potions for years; got too slow though. Severus was one of my best." He turned around, standing in front of the chair facing Snape. "Sorry to hear about your death, son. Did you get that straightened out yet?"

Snape turned slightly to Master Kirkwell. "Yes. Your wife has been most helpful in that regard, thank you."

"Can't say she did much, they disregarded her signature, son," he said to Snape, still standing next to the witness chair as if he was still considering how best to ease into it. "Wiped it clean off the death certificate... She's been a Knarl ever since." There were several snickers around the room at his comment.

"Please address all comments to the bench," Fudge admonished Master Kirkwell. Hermione's eyes narrowed at his curt tone with the elderly wizard.

The elderly wizard glared up at Fudge in a way that nearly rivaled Snape on a bad day. "You watch your manners, young man. I've known this boy since he left Hogwarts. Can't say he's always made the best choices or decisions, but in the end I know he came around. I've been right proud of him. Well, most of the time." The young Healer offered her assistance, taking Master Kirkwell's arm. "There was that one time, you know...." The young Healer finally managed to get him to sit down on his chair. "Thank you Helena. Darn it forgot..."

Hermione smiled. *This man's a hoot.* She wondered what Harry was going to ask this old wizard. *Snape obviously respects him, judging by his posture.* She couldn't see his face, but he was paying close attention to this man.

"Master Kirkwell, if you could please tell this hearing how you are associated with Severus Snape?" Harry asked with a tone of respect.

"I told ya, I've known this boy for years. Did some years apprenticeship with him," Master Kirkwell responded. "Severus sent potions and antidotes to me for years. Usually some nasty poisons, some rather nasty potions... Was right grateful for the antidotes. Brilliant intellect that boy's got. After that final battle at Hogwarts, Severus still sent potions for some of the victims we had in the Poisoning and Spell Damage Wards. He always knew what curses and Dark Magic was used. Sent me whole boxes. Even brewed a few potions we were in short supply of... let me see... there was Muscle-Strengthening Potion... that one's complicated... don't like making it myself. Healing Salve, Skin-Regenerative Salve... that yellow one... can't remember what it's called... Ah, well. There was Blood Replenishing, Skin-Regeneration tricky one that is... Skele-Gro, Tissue Rejuvenation Potion, Deep Tissue Regenerative Potion, not too many can make those well.... go wrong if you're not careful."

Hermione was gobsmacked. *I made those! Snape had me brewing many of those he just mentioned!*

"He's real good at the Re-Growth... course you gotta know which body part to re-grow. Don't want to re-grow the wrong one... Sent about eight a day recently as I recall, even though he was dead. Glad you're not, though, son." He smiled up at Snape. "Course you like the tricky ones don't you, son... always did."

"So that I may confirm your statement for the record," Harry said, grinning. "Severus Snape was still sending you much needed potions throughout Dark War II and up until recently?"

"Isn't that just what I said? He's been sending me potions every one of them I asked him too. Excellent quality, not that I'd expect less coming from him. One thing I could always count on from you, son, excellent quality and prompt. Can't see how you did it though, son. You must have had six to eight cauldrons brewing at the same time but that would be impossible, even for you. You still amaze me, son. Yep, still amaze me. Course you and I could have done that together in our younger years couldn't we?"

Harry smiled at the elderly wizard. "Thank you, Master Kirkwell, you may go. I have no more questions for this witness."

Master Kirkwell nodded at Harry and looked at the cane in his hand. The young witch stood and offered him her hand. "Hold your Hippogriff, I can't move that fast..." The young Healer waited until Master Kirkwell reached to accept her assistance. "Nice to see you, son," he said to Snape as the young Healer helped pull Master Kirkwell to his feet. "Got a list for you if you've the time.... I'll owl you...." He turned to the Healer, "I'm coming... I move slow."

"Master Brennan Davies and his wife, Leann, were unable to come today due to conflicts in their schedules," Harry said, loud and clear. "Mr. Brennan is the Healer in Charge of the Spell Damage Department and Board of Healers of St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries. I have here his wand-verified statements in regards to Severus Snape's many years of assistance to his patients on the Spell Damage wards. They agree with what Mrs. Margaretta Grunmaker testified to earlier."

Griselda Marchbanks shifted a folder in front of her. "I have that in my file. Shall we go on."

"I call Mr. Arthur Weasley," Harry said, checking his list.

Fudge held up his hand. "No need for him to testify. We have the medical report here. He was bitten by You-Know-Who's snake, am I correct?" There was a shuffling up on the bench and several soft protests.

"He saved my dad's life," Ron said, incensed. "Professor Snape made the potions that saved my dad's life when he was bitten by Tom Riddle's snake."

"Yes, that's true." Mr. Weasley stood up behind Ron. "I was in St. Mungo's a week and getting worse! With Severus' potions and salves, I was cured in eighteen days and able to go home. The healers on the Dai Llewellyn Ward for Serious Bites had a Bludger of a time finding a way to heal the wounds. We even tried stitches! I was drinking potions all day until Severus delivered ones that worked!"

"According to our records Mr. Weasley was in St. Mungo's nearly a month. Can you explain his?" Tiberius Ogden asked Snape, ignoring Fudge's glare. "Why did you delay so long in providing Arthur his potions?" There were murmurs of assent and several uttered questions wondering the same thing. Fudge had to call order so that Snape could be heard clearly.

"I had to convince the Dark Lord to allow me to milk Nagini," Snape responded his voice even and calm. Several people on the benches leaned forward to see him better. "Her venom was a rather tricky venom to counteract, and it took me several tries to obtain a viable antidote. That, and her venom eats flesh as well as acts like a neurotoxin so I had to create an antidote and Regenerative Potions that would address both issues. I was able to deliver the necessary potions by Christmas."

Hermione remembered that was when Mr. Weasley seemed to begin recovering.

"Without those potions I would have died. I owe Severus my life," Mr. Weasley stated.

Griselda Marchbanks raised her hand. "So noted, Mr. Weasley. Do you have you anything else to add?"

"Yes," Mr. Weasley stated. "I received numerous messages from Severus during the times of You-Know-Who's rise for power, both during Dark War I and Dark War II. I had even received numerous warnings and reports of Death Eater activities that usually proved to be quite accurate. Even before the night of Dumbledore's death and for several months that followed, I received warnings of attacks and several attempted poisonings and cursed artifacts being sent to Muggle-borns. These warnings of cursed artifacts often described the curse and gave directions on how to counter the curses if he knew of them. The poisons often came with antidotes or regrets that the sender couldn't make the antidote in time. There was real regret in those messages. Throughout the last eleven months, I'd received many such notes that I believe came from Severus each one providing us time to rescue the families or individuals being targeted. I've given these messages to both Harry and my son, Ronald."

Fudge glared at Mr. Weasley. "And why would he send these warnings to you and not to the Auror or Law Enforcement Departments?"

"I worked in the misuse of Muggle Artifacts office for years. I assume that these warnings were sent to me because many of the warnings I received were for Muggle-born families and Muggle-borns. Also, the Ministry was overrun with Death Eaters, and they were rounding up Muggle-borns and Muggle-born sympathizers," Mr. Weasley stated, uncomfortable with Fudge's tone. He obviously wanted to raise his voice at Fudge, but was refraining from doing so. "It is well known that I like Muggles and respect Muggle-borns. That may have been his reasoning."

Fudge looked down at Snape. "Mr. Snape, can you clarify this?"

Snape paused for a moment, then answered in a deep, even drawl. "It is as he says. He has an affinity for Muggle-borns, and I felt that he would act upon my warnings appropriately. Many of the Dark Lord's intended victims were Muggle-born or from Muggle-born families. I knew that Mr. Weasley would take my warnings seriously."

"I have over eighty messages that were on file. Warnings about attacks, all in Snape's writing," Harry stated. "Before you ask, I know his handwriting. I had him as a professor for six years." Harry picked up another very thick folder. "These notes although, many are unsigned are from him. Each one gave the Aurors plenty of warning before an attack. According to these files, this *anonymous informant* saved numerous lives, and the Aurors trusted each message that arrived, enabling them to save the intended victims and their families. I now know that Severus Snape was the author of these warnings and messages."

"I can attest to that," Kingsley stood up. "Harry, if you'll indulge me." Harry nodded, and Kingsley walked over to the witness chair. "As many know I was a confidant of Professor Dumbledore and I worked with him during both Dark War I and Dark War II to eliminate Tom 'Voldemort' Riddle as a threat to Wizarding kind. I can attest that during both wars, both times Riddle rose to power, Severus Snape did in fact act as informant and spy for Dumbledore and myself. Many of these warnings that Harry mentioned had been in fact sent to me, and I either acted on the warnings myself or passed them on to other Aurors in the department that I knew would still defend innocent lives. I'd like to also point out that Severus has never *denied* that he joined up with Riddle during his first rise to power. Nevertheless, it's public record that he turned sides, was working with Dumbledore during Dark War I, and *continued* to act as informant to both the Auror office and Dumbledore during Dark War II." Kingsley looked up at Fudge and his eyes narrowed. "You yourself are quite aware of his record and the account of his activities."

"But he killed Dumbledore," Fudge said angrily. "How can you say he was Dumbledore's man, and yet, he killed the man?"

"I have the proof of that," Harry said, addressing Fudge. "There are memories in a Pensieve on my desk that a few of you have witnessed, you, Mr. Ogden and Mrs. Marchbanks, included. Dumbledore was dying. There was a plot to make Draco Malfoy kill Dumbledore or his family would be murdered. Draco did try to kill him, but he really isn't a cold-blooded killer. I was there, on the tower that night. Draco couldn't do it. However, Severus Snape was under an Unbreakable Vow to complete the task Draco was given by Tom 'Voldemort' Riddle if Draco couldn't do it. Dumbledore knew this and had Severus Snape vow to follow through with his Unbreakable Vow if Draco failed. Dumbledore didn't want Draco to kill him, but Dumbledore was dying. He had suffered a terrible curse that was eating up his arm and that Severus Snape couldn't reverse or stop. That night, the night of Dumbledore's death, Dumbledore drank a poison. He had asked me to bring him back to the castle because he was too weak to make it on his own. He barely had enough strength to fly up to the castle from Hogsmeade. Dumbledore was dying. He would not have survived long. Possibly not even the night."

There were angry murmurs and whispers in the room from the bench and from witnesses. Tiberius Ogden addressed Snape. "I'd like to hear about this from you."

Snape took a deep breath and slowly raised his eyes to meet Mr. Ogden's. "It is how Mr. Potter said." He paused, obviously not wanting to discuss this in the courtroom.

Hermione remembered how much the memory bothered him the day they'd spoken about it.

"Dumbledore had tried unsuccessfully to break a cursed artifact. The curse was, in fact, destroying him slowly. His right hand was blackened and dead the beginning of term that year, and it was progressing faster than I could abate it. It was in fact killing him. The night on the... tower, Dumbledore was very weak. I did not know about the potion until he allowed me to see the image through Legilimency." Snape paused again, lowering his gaze to the floor and then back up to the bench. "Yes, I had made an Unbreakable Vow with Narcissa Malfoy: to protect Draco, to assist him in whatever task the Dark Lord had given him and to do this task should Draco fail to do so. It was a mother's plea for her son. I, of course, warned Dumbledore that the Dark Lord had plans to kill him that year and told him about the vow. He made me swear that I would be the one to kill him should Draco fail. I was bound by two vows that in essence held the same promise. *I was to kill him. Me.*"

The murmurs in the room escalated and Fudge was forced to demand everyone to silence. "You are saying that you killed Dumbledore because he made you vow to?"

"Yes," Snape said, his shoulders relaxing in defeat. "He was dying. He was weak. He couldn't even stand. Mr. Potter was correct, I knew that he would not have lived the night. Draco lowered his wand because he could not kill Dumbledore so I did it." There was a slight edge of revulsion in his voice.

The courtroom broke out into an uproar. "**SILENCE,**" Fudge bellowed, his voice magically enhanced. "This only proves that he killed Dumbledore to save his own hide. He can be absolved if the memories in Mr. Potter's Pensieve prove that Dumbledore himself forced you into such a vow. But this shows little that the man acted in any way other than as a Death Eater. Still his actions are nothing more than self-interest. Mr. Snape can very easily prove that he is a qualified Potions master. However, this does not answer the charges of acts against the Wizarding community in general. Did he or did he not kill others simply because He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named told him to? Did he do anything that didn't serve his own self interest?"

Ron stood up. "In answer to that question, I would like to call Edith and Edith Rogers to the stand."

Hermione recognized their names suddenly as the two Ministry witches that had written the ridiculous letters about Snape's arraignment date. The two nearly identical elderly witches who had dismissed themselves at the start of the trial immediately stood up when Ron said their names and hurried to the witness chairs, both giving little



waves toward Snape. They both obviously liked him very much.

"Please state your name for the record," Fudge said kindly to the women.

"Edthyl and Edithe Rogers," they said in unison. Hermione looked at them curiously, and one waved at her with a delighted smile.

"And how do you know Severus Snape?" Ron asked.

"He saved my family," the one on the right stated, looking up at Fudge as she spoke, then turned to smile at Severus.

The witch on the left nodded. "Got us a message in plenty of time to leave."

"Our little charges were all safe and relocated, thanks to him," the one on the right added, scrunching her shoulders like a little girl.

The witch on the left spoke up quickly. "Not once but twice."

"Helped set wards on our third location," the other finished.

"A nice Muggle camp ground," the one on the left answered as soon as her sister finished her sentence, making them seem to run together like one long sentence. It reminded Hermione of Fred and George.

The one on the left continued, interrupting Fudge. "The kids love it. It has a playground, and a pool, and a lake... and boats! The cabins don't leak when it rains like the first house did."

"No, that place was a mess, but Severus came and helped us move the kids to that... mobile home?" the one sister asked, moving her finger in a circle while looking at Snape.

"Kids like the camp much better. We still live there," the witch on the right said, gazing at Snape.

"Got all those kids to care for until they can go to Hogwarts," the witch on the left said as her sister nodded.

"Thanks to Severus," they both said in unison again, looking at Snape as if he were a saint.

"Thank you ladies," Ron said, smiling at them fondly. "This testimony clearly shows that Severus Snape was not acting like a self-interested misanthrope, but evidently for the benefit of these kids and these two ladies. I have their wand verified report as to the day Severus Snape entered their house, issuing warnings that a Death Eater attack was imminent and provided assistance in quickly Apparating the entire family to safety. According to Ms. Edithe Rogers, she was just being removed by Severus Snape when the attack began. Is that right, Edithe?"

"Yes, It was awful!" the witch on the right said, shivering.

"He just burst in on us as we were settling the kids down for their bedtime story," Edthyl, the witch on the left, added.

Edithe looked up at Ron, tears in her eyes. "Didn't even have time to pack a thing."

"But I went back months later to get our family album," Edthyl stated, placing a reassuring hand on her sister's arm. "The house was a shambles. I packed what I could and slipped out."

"Mostly wanted the children's clothes and toys." Edithe looked up at Mrs. Marchbanks. "Children need their clothes."

"So, Mr. Fudge, their testimony has nothing to do with self interest at all," Ron said, before turning his attention back to the sisters, "and yet, Severus Snape saved, how many kids, Edthyl?"

"We now have twelve," Edthyl said.

Edithe quickly counted on her fingers. "But at the time we only had six."

"No, I believe it was eight," her sister corrected her.

"That's right, the Devlon kids," she said, looking up at Ron. "Severus brought those two during our second move."

"Right, they're two Muggle-born kids... vanished during an attack," Ron said. "Miss Skeeter wrote an article about their disappearance and then reported that they showed up mysteriously at your place. Yeah, here's the article. Nicely done by the way."

"Thank you," Rita piped up from her chair. "My readers of the *Daily Prophet* really liked that piece. Of course I'll have to update it now that the truth is out." Her quill scribbled away frantically.

Hermione cringed, wondering how the woman was going to twist this story. *Poor Snape!*

"But there were people you are accused of killing or allowing to die," Fudge argued. "Explain that."

"Sometimes I was unable to give advance warning in a timely manner," Snape stated. He was starting to perspire and Hermione quickly did a Scourgify and Freshen-Up Charm on him secretly from under the table. He gave her a subtle look of gratitude before continuing. "Frequently, the Dark Lord planned things out in advance but did not always tell me or inform me ahead of time. It was regrettable and unavoidable."

"And yet you came through this war unscathed," Fudge challenged.

"Hardly," Hermione exclaimed, her attention riveted to Fudge. "He's hardly come through this unscathed! He nearly died!"

"As a traitor." Fudge looked down at her in annoyance, and then looked back at Snape. "There is evidence that you were in Tom Riddle's inner circle. You were named as one of his favorites. You must have been working for him."

"He was a spy for the Order of the Phoenix. I can vouch for that. He spied on Voldemort and the Death Eaters at great personal risk to himself." Shackbolt stated loudly.

"Great personal risk, and yet you managed to spy unharmed for several years," Fudge said sarcastically.

"I hardly came through unscathed. Each time the Dark Lord's plans failed, someone paid dearly. He used the Cruciatus Curse on us frequently. Occasionally he would get creative. Fawkes, Dumbledore's familiar, used to heal me," Snape said wearily.

Harry looked at Snape with an odd expression, half gobsmacked and half elated. "Can you elaborate on that?"

Snape turned to Harry, but when spoke his voice carried a quiet resolve. "When I'd Apparate to the forest to return to the castle, or use a Portkey to return to Dumbledore's office, hurt or cut, his phoenix would heal me, either with his song or with his tears. Phoenix song has remarkable recovery powers for the Cruciatus Curse. On more than

one occasion, I'd send a signal and Hagrid would come and assist me to the castle."

"Who knew that Fawkes would fly to you?" Harry asked, his expression becoming extremely expectant.

"Hagrid, Poppy Pomfrey... Fawkes came to me on occasion in the hospital wing," Snape stated, and Harry smiled.

"My second year Fawkes came to me and cured me from a basilisk fang," Harry said, addressing the entire bench. "Dumbledore was very pleased that Fawkes flew down to me and assisted me in the Chamber of Secrets. He said that, and I quote him; 'I must have shown him *real loyalty* down in the chamber, for only that would have called Fawkes to me.' If Fawkes came to assist Snape, he *must have* been loyal to Dumbledore. Fawkes would only come to the aid of those who were *loyal to Dumbledore*."

"Harry's right!" Hermione looked up at Mrs. Marchbanks and then over at Mr. Ogden, avoiding Fudge's eyes. "According to *Magical Creature of Mythology*, the Phoenix rarely attaches itself to an individual as a familiar. When they do, they are immensely loyal. Loyalty is a trait of the bird. It will only heal a person that is loyal to the witch or wizard they have bonded to. I think that I also read somewhere that a phoenix can be 'called' to someone in time of need if that person makes a declaration of loyalty or has proven to be loyal to their familiar witch or wizard. *All Magical Creatures Great and Small*, I believe... Yes, it's in there. Also according to *Great Creatures of the Ages*, a phoenix rarely heals humans unless they are truly remorseful or are injured during an act of bravery. It also said that phoenix song could give persons who are weakened renewed strength..." She turned to Harry, and said softly, "I read that in your books, at your house."

Fudge shuffled his papers. "But we only have his account that Dumbledore's Phoenix did these things."

"Then I ask Rubeus Hagrid and Madam Pomfrey to give testimony," Harry said, turning to them. Hagrid stood, nearly knocking the people in the chairs behind him off their own chairs as he did so. Madam Pomfrey rose gracefully and walked past Professor McGonagall. They both walked over to the witness chairs and sat down. Hagrid looked really nervous and toyed with a handkerchief in his hands.

"Please both state your names for the record," Fudge said, his voice loud and clear.

"Rubeus Hagrid," Hagrid nearly shouted in his nervousness, drowning out Madam Pomfrey as she said, "Healer Poppy Pomfrey."

"Oh, sorry about 'tha' you go firs' please," he said to Madam Pomfrey, blushing.

She gently patted his hand. "It's all right. I expect you're a touch nervous." She looked up at Fudge calmly. "Healer Poppy Pomfrey."

"Thank you both, for coming," Harry said. "Hagrid, let's start with you?"

Hagrid nodded, still looking up at Fudge. "All right if yeh wan', Harry."

Harry stood and turned to Hagrid, "If it will be easier, Hagrid, you can address me." Fudge bristled at the suggestion, but Harry simply continued. "Hagrid, it's been said that Snape did all his spying without any risk. What do you think?"

Hagrid looked at Harry, then Snape and back to Harry. "Yer know wha' he's like, Harry. He's was a mean, evil wizard, You-Know-Who was. Ah, heard stories, sure, we all had. Even you said You-Know-Who was cursin' his own followers. Said so yerself, fourth year as I recall could've been yer fifth.... Yeh, I think with all Snape' did to throw off You-Know-Who's plans, he'd have done somethin' to him. There were plenty o' times he came back ter the castle barely able ter walk. Knew somethin' was up."

Hermione was stunned to hear Hagrid admit this. She'd always seen Snape standing firmly and proud, tall and strong, his black robes billowing behind him as he walked. Hurt and staggering wasn't a picture she'd ever considered. There were whispers along the bench and a few from behind her.

"Did you ever ask him what happened to him, Hagrid?" Harry asked.

Hagrid shrugged. "Never questioned 'em, about' it. I suppose he would've told me if 'in he wanted to." Hagrid looked over at Snape and seemed to relax a little.

Harry smiled, opened a file and then looked back at Hagrid. "And Severus Snape would have you help him to the castle when he'd return from meeting with Tom 'Voldemort' Riddle?"

"Ah, Harry don't say his name, would yeh. Call him You-Know-Who, all right?" Hagrid asked, still ill at ease when hearing the name. A few people chuckled at Hagrid's discomfort. Harry smiled at Hagrid and he continued. "Dumbledore would ask me ter keep an ear out for him. So I'd open me back door. Snape used the 'ole wood cutter's trail ter Apparate when he needed, just down behind me house. He'd come back from You-Know-Who hurt sometimes, that's right', he would. Sometimes You-Know-Who would really do him one. He could hardly walk. It wasn't so much as I seen him cut or anythin' just he'd come back all weak like an' Fawkes would come down from the Headmaster's window an' sing for him. Make him stronger an' he'd walk with me up ter the castle. I suppose jus' hearin' it really made him stronger."

"And you actually saw Dumbledore's phoenix fly out to Severus Snape?" Harry asked, turning a page in his file.

"Sure I seen him, like I said. Hard ter miss tha' bird. Real pretty like. Not tha' you can confuse him with no other bird." Hagrid looked over at Snape again with a little smile. "I kinda liked haven' 'ole Fawkes singing softly on me shoulder as we walked up ter the castle together."

"Thank you, Hagrid." Harry looked over to Madam Pomfrey. "Madam Pomfrey, can you add to what Hagrid has stated. Have you ever seen Dumbledore's phoenix, Fawkes, come to Severus Snape's aid?"

Madame Pomfrey sat up straight and looked Severus in the eye. "You know I never divulge my patients' trust. I take the Healer patient confidentiality seriously."

"It's all right, Poppy," Snape said softly.

Fudge looked greatly annoyed. "You shall answer the questions that are put to you. We don't want to be all day about this."

Madam Pomfrey looked at Severus, and Hermione noted a slight nod of his head. "Yes, Severus would come to my hospital wing on evenings when You-Know-Who had summoned him. Yes, occasionally Dumbledore's familiar, Fawkes, would fly in and either cry for Snape and heal cuts and wounds with his tears or he'd sit and sing. I truly loved that bird; such a beautiful sound, phoenix song."

"So, Dumbledore would send Fawkes to the hospital wing to assist Severus Snape?" Fudge asked, twisting her words.

Hermione bristled, angry at how he was conducting Snape's arraignment.

Harry crossed his arms regarding Madam Pomfrey. "How do you know that Dumbledore didn't send Fawkes to assist Snape, or does he fly in on a regular basis to heal students and staff?"

Hermione stifled a giggle. *Harry had spent so much time in the hospital wing he'd know that Fawkes didn't just fly down there whenever he felt like it... In fact, no one ever mentioned seeing Dumbledore's phoenix in the hospital wing!*

Madam Pomfrey smoothed out her robes across her lap in irritation of Harry's question. However, her voice was polite and professional when she answered him. "Headmaster Dumbledore was quite confident in my abilities, as you very well know, Mr. Potter, since you were a frequent patient yourself. However, Headmaster Dumbledore, on the occasions that Severus was unable to go to his office directly, would come down to my hospital wing and meet with Severus there. His look of surprise at seeing his phoenix perched at the foot of Severus's bed singing was priceless."

"So, Mr. Fudge, Madam Marchbanks and Mr. Ogden, it is quite clear that Fawkes, Dumbledore's phoenix, came to Severus Snape of his own accord, according to my witnesses. It would be clear to anyone who is familiar with phoenixes that Severus Snape must have shown true loyalty to Albus Dumbledore in order for the phoenix to recognize him and willingly fly to his assistance."

There was a rumbling from the bench. "Besides the testimony today, I have many messages and warnings sent to Ministry personnel *warning us* about Death Eater activities and the plans of Tom 'Voldemort' Riddle. Most are clearly in his handwriting and would be easily recognized by *anyone* who had Professor Snape as a teacher. While I am in no way denying that Severus Snape *was* a Death Eater, his subsequent actions clearly indicate that *he was* Dumbledore's spy and his loyalties were to Dumbledore. He *did* agree to do *whatever* Dumbledore asked of him even the request of a dying man to spare him a long painful death and to kill him. I, for one, was furious at Severus Snape for killing Dumbledore, but I cannot deny the fact that Dumbledore was dying that night. Dumbledore knew of the plot against him, knew that he would not live out the year... he even told me so although I didn't want to hear it."

Harry turned to Severus Snape. "I have never really liked you in a friendly way. However, I have respected you. I may not have always trusted you when I was a kid, although now I do understand the role you played and how you tried to save my parents' lives by telling Dumbledore about the plans to kill them."

Harry turned to face the bench again. "If you still need proof that Severus Snape was carrying out Dumbledore's plans even after his death, I'd like you to recall that during his term as Headmaster, Severus Snape was able to keep the Carrows, known Death Eaters, from doing any torture or harm to his students while he was Headmaster of Hogwarts."

Harry turned back to Snape. "Isn't it true that the vow you and Professor Dumbledore had not only specified that he *wanted you* to kill him instead of Draco Malfoy, but that he *wanted you* to return to Hogwarts to try and protect the students from the Death Eaters, Dumbledore knew Tom 'Voldemort' Riddle would place in the castle?"

"In a matter of speaking, yes, he did," Snape said, refusing to look Harry in the eye. "More than once."

"Explain, then, what was the vow you had with Dumbledore," Harry said.

Snape raised his eyes to the bench, sweeping his gaze at those sitting there, and then turned back to Harry. "Dumbledore knew that if the Ministry fell to the Dark Lord, he would place the Carrows and possibly others in the castle in order to control the school. Dumbledore told me that *if* Draco managed to do what he had been instructed to do, breach the castle and find a way for the Death Eaters to enter if that happened, I was to keep Draco from committing murder. By killing Dumbledore, the Dark Lord would want to reward me which he did. I was offered my choice of assignment, whichever I desired exactly as Dumbledore predicted. Dumbledore bade me to take his place, to become Headmaster of Hogwarts. There were things in his office, objects he did not want the Carrows to have. And I was to protect the students from harm. He wanted me at Hogwarts to protect the students he loved and to try and assist you, Mr. Potter, in any way I could."

Ron looked at Snape, smiling. "By giving us Godric Gryffindor's sword?"

"Seeing that the sword fell into your hands, yes," Snape said to Ron. "I was also to give you the Sorting Hat or access to the Pensieve and to provide what you would need when the time came."

Harry stood for a moment, looking at Snape as if they were sharing something, possibly using Legilimency on each other. Finally Harry nodded and turned back to the bench. "As proof of these statements I can call each and every one of these students, and question them about the detentions Severus Snape assigned them." He pointed behind him where Neville, Lavender and about fifty or so other students sat together, all looking at him, bewildered. "Many of these students were given detentions and a few of them multiple detentions during the school year. I have each of their detention cards here, thanks to Headmistress Minerva McGonagall. On each card a more severe punishment had been noted as being their due, crossed out and reassigned by Severus Snape." Harry pulled out a detention card. "Shall I begin with Neville Longbottom?"

Neville suddenly looked very nervous. Apparently, he wasn't aware of what Harry had planned. Several of the students were squirming and whispering loudly as were several members of the Wizengamot. "Neville Longbottom, Gryffindor. It reads *for defacement of school property. Writing 'Dumbledore's Army' on the wall, first corridor near the stairs flogging, thirty lashes...* the flogging was crossed off and in Severus Snape's writing it reads: *Detention with Hagrid, ground keeping duties* Here is another *incitement of a fight flogging, forty lashes*. Again, flogging is crossed off and the card reads: *Detention with Hagrid, ground keeping duties* Not the kind of punishments a Death Eater would have assigned. I have about a two dozen cards for Neville Longbottom alone. Nearly nine for Miss Lavender Brown, Gryffindor, six for a Miss Jamie Waters of Ravenclaw, twenty cards for Miss Ginny Weasley, Gryffindor, sixteen for Mr. Dennis Marchbanks, Hufflepuff, seventeen for Mr. Seamus Finnigan, Gryffindor..." Harry was drowned out as the noise level in the room escalated.

Hermione turned around, Neville looked gobsmacked. The other students were all talking about their detentions, she supposed, since she couldn't hear them talking through the conversations coming from the bench. Griselda Marchbanks, Tiberius Ogden, Sturgis Podmore, and Cornelius Fudge were all arguing. Fudge looked adamant, but Mr. Ogden was pointing his finger in his face clearly emphasizing his opinion. Mrs. Marchbanks was nodding and shaking her head so fast, Hermione couldn't tell if she agreed with Mr. Ogden or Fudge. Sturgis kept trying to add his own comments, his face getting red.

Hermione looked at Snape. He was sweating again and Hermione cooled him off with the Scourgify and Freshen-Up Charms and conjured him a glass of water. He simply shook his head. "Thank you, no, Miss Granger."

Finally Kingsley stood up and pointed his wand at his throat. *SILENCE! PLEASE COME TO ORDER!* The room fell silent. He stood looking at Fudge. "As Minister of Magic I put forth the following question. Will the respected members of the Wizengamot please indicate by a show of hands? If there is reasonable doubt that this man was in fact guilty of all charges, and acted solely as Tom 'Voldemort' Riddle's man and loyal follower, please indicate by raising your hand."

Several hands went up in the air.

"Thank you. If there is reasonable doubt or belief that this man was Dumbledore's man and acted as spy and informant to help bring down Tom 'Voldemort' Riddle and his Death Eaters and should be acquitted of all charges, please raise your hand." Griselda Marchbanks, Tiberius Ogden, Sturgis Podmore, nearly every member of the Order still on the bench and many others raised their hands.

Fudge looked up and down his bench at all those who had chosen to acquit Snape. "Fine, all right. Severus Snape, you are hereby acquitted of all charges of murder, crimes to Wizardkind, criminal association with Tom 'Voldemort' Riddle otherwise known as the Dark Lord, and acts of cruelty and harm to your fellow wizards and the community at large. This hearing is now over, you are free to go. Congratulations."

"YES!" Hermione screamed, jumping up.

Severus Snape turned to look at her and cocked his eyebrow.

Harry turned to Snape and extended his hand. "Congratulations, sir."

Snape looked at Harry's hand, accepting it, then looked up at his face. "Thank you, Harry Potter."

"You're welcome," Harry replied just before Hermione flung herself into his arms, hugging him. "You did it! He's free!"

*Author's note:*

*I have a great deal of gratitude for Ladyinthecloak and Machshefa for beta reading this for me. You ladies are great and I really appreciated you doing this. Thank you.*

# Requests

## Chapter 8 of 9

A lot of changes happen in Hermione's life. Lucius Malfoy targets Hermione one last time, and the Ministry is slowly changing for the better.

~oOo~

When Hermione and Snape came back from the trial, Snape was actually leaning on her for support. He was very pale, sweaty, and he was shaking. Hermione knew he was exhausted and helped him to his bed, then assisted him in changing out of his robes and boots. "Do you want anything?" she asked, trying to mask the concern in her voice.

"Your concern is touching," he said, sounding slightly grumpy. "I'm sure you would rather be at the Burrow congratulating Potter and Weasley on their success."

Hermione was used to his surliness. "I already did thank them, twice. I know you'd prefer Mrs. Weasley's roast dinner... You know, if you want to rest a bit, we could still attend," she suggested.

His eyebrow rose, but his eyes remained closed. "I don't feel up to going."

She tenderly brushed his hair off his face, smiling at him with a joy she hadn't felt since watching Sirius fly off on Buckbeak. In fact, that was exactly how she felt at the moment. "For a wizard who's just won his freedom, you sure seem reserved." He opened one eye, looked at her then closed it again. "I suppose the trial really wore you out."

"I just need to lie here a moment, that's all," he replied softly. "Why don't you go?"

"I'll go later. I'd rather like to be with you a while, if that's okay?" she asked, sitting next to him on the bed. She wanted to do something for him to make him happier but wasn't sure what he'd like for her to do.

"Do what you like," he stated. "Don't you want to be with your friends? You don't have to stay here any longer. You don't need to attend to me, I can manage on my own, and you no longer need to supervise me."

"You really are a git," she said, laughing at him. His eyes snapped open and he scowled at her. "Now don't get your wand in a knot, I mean that in an endearing way. You just won your freedom; you have your life back: no masters, no overlords, no supervising monitors, no Azkaban, and you're scowling. I'd be ecstatic and happy blimey, I'm ecstatic for you! But I think you should rest awhile and then come with me to the Burrow. Mrs. Weasley is cooking a feast, and I know everyone wants to congratulate you and celebrate your victory."

"I'm not in the celebratory mood, I'm tired," he said, then sighed. "Fine, I'll rest, and then we'll go see your friends." Hermione nodded and stood to go, but he reached out and caught her hand. "Would you maybe read to me a while?" he asked.

Hermione swelled with happiness at the request. "Sure, I'll just go get a book. Do you have any one in mind or should I choose this time?"

He smiled and shook his head. "A novel or poems, no spells books," he said with a grin. He held her hand for a few seconds, his thumb caressing her palm before he released her. She stood, watching him, amazed that such a simple gesture could make her feel so warm inside.

Hermione hurried to the sitting room to scan the shelves for a book they might both like and settled on a book by Jeffrey Archer *Not A Penny More, Not A Penny Less*. When Hermione returned to the Snape's boudoir, he was sound asleep.

~oOo~

Five Days Later

Snape and Hermione had fallen into a comfortable routine. They discussed which potions they would brew at dinner, Hermione checking the supplies to make sure the ingredients were on hand and fresh enough. The rest of the evening was spent reading or discussing magical theory of the spells she'd read. Mornings they brewed the bases needed for the potions; afternoons were spent on academic study and the practical application of spells, helping her to perfect her nonverbal skills. He was a firm taskmaster. It was amazing to her how competent a teacher he really was. She had already gone through his seventh-year schoolbooks, the ones he still had, and even many of the spell books in his sitting room. He flat out refused to teach her any Dark Arts spells, though, except those that were not originally thought of as such. This morning Snape entered the sitting room stopping short when he saw Hermione sitting cross-legged on her cot, reading a journal she'd found on a lower corner shelf. "Why are you still reading that book? I thought I made it quite clear that I was not going to teach you the spells in that book," he said curtly.

He hadn't been nearly as snarly as he'd been at school, however, the scowl on his face indicated to her that she might have crossed the line again. "Yes, well, you said you weren't going to show me..."

"And yet you persist on reading that book when I specifically asked you to leave it alone."

Hermione looked up, forcing down the feeling of intimidation, and met his glare. "I recognize some of these spells, they are different, but the Latin is easy enough to translate and know what the spell does." She still wanted his tutoring for her N.E.W.T.s and had been ravenously reading every book on his shelves that she could before he asked her to leave, but he'd been adamant against teaching her any spells from this particular journal without explaining why. "*laculorari* does the same as *lactus*, I think, and *Contorqueo* and *Contorque* have the same meanings... so does *Detortum* and *Detoquere*, somewhat. So why am I allowed to learn how to use *lactus* but you refuse to teach me *laculorari*, and I can do *Contorqueo* but not *Contorque*? Likewise you let me do *Abrumpere Diremptum* but you will not allow me to try *Abrupi Deicio*?" Hermione asked as she dropped the journal on her lap.

Snape sighed even as his scowl deepened. "As you well know, spells change, wizards twist the intent of a spell for causing more harm, to hurt or destroy," he said, trying to rein in his temper at her impertinence. "Yes, Miss Granger, these spells were used in the war, but not all of them are socially acceptable or necessary. As you know *lactus* is used to cast or throw an object, and the desired force can be controlled by the intent. However *Jaculorari* is use to hurl something with great force, but the force is inert to the spell and can't be controlled by intent. The object is thrown with such force as to kill, maim and destroy the target object. It's a Dark Arts spell, and *lactus* can be used for the same effect without killing. The same goes for *Contorqueo* and *Contorque*. *Contorque* the force of the spell is inert to the spell, used to violently twist or

contort the target object with extreme force. *Contorqueo* does the same action but the caster is able to control the effect by their intent, while the witch or wizard who uses *Contorqueo* cannot."

Hermione thought carefully about what he said. "So, *Detortum*, which will bend, distort an object or it twist out of shape, is very much the same as *Detorqueo*, however, *Detorqueo* is an uncontrollable spell, the strength of its force is extreme... But why can't they be controlled?"

"Think, rationalize it out," Snape said, crossing his arms, watching her speculatively.

She stared at the journal, reading the round, feminine lettering, as she tried to rationalize the reason the spell couldn't be controlled. Suddenly, Hermione recalled how the *Levicorpus* and *Sectumsempra* spells worked. "Because the spell has its own strength, which is simply released against the target, it's not reliant on the strength of the wizard nor their ability. The concentration of the spell isn't in the action as much as in the direction, aiming. While the caster can learn to control their aim and the direction, the actual strength of the spell is constant. But then *Detorqueo* would be an easier version... No, because it would rely on intent to do harm like the *Cruciatus*, the wizard would have to mean to cause harm, desire the effect. *Detortum*, however, the wizard has to determine not only the strength but the aim, they have to concentrate on the force of the cast as well as the object... it requires more skill."

Snape nodded, with a look of approval. "This is Bellatrix Lestrange's journal. Think of the witch who wrote this," he said with a sly grin. "She liked taking general spells and twisting their intent and effects into a Dark Art, making the strength of the spell inert to the spell itself. Only the direction is controlled, the intended target. It's why the Dark Lord favored her so, or one reason at least; she *liked* hurting, killing and maiming others."

"How did you get her journal?" Hermione asked, feeling sickened by the identity of the author. Now that she knew whose journal she'd found, the book felt dirty to her.

"I knew of her journals, as did many of the Death Eaters. When she was captured, she didn't want them taken by the Aurors. I knew where they were, and I took them before anyone else got to them. I lied to her and said that they were missing. She never believed me," he explained. "Most all her entries are spells she twisted into Dark Arts."

"Then why did you want me to read this?" she asked, disgusted.

"Why else?" he asked, and waited for her to reply. When she didn't, he sighed and looked disappointed. "Bella used these during the war, and she taught them to others, such as Crabbe, Goyle and Malfoy for example. I wouldn't be surprised if these spells are someday used again. So what I want from you is not only a comparative essay of each spell but also which spell you think Bella used to create them. We've already discussed these three; so you can skip them. But I do want you to write down examples of which defensive spells you would use in order to defend yourself, and which would be most effective against all of them."

Hermione nodded and rose to get her parchment and quills.

\*

Hermione stood at the sink after breakfast, tending to the small potted herbs that were growing on the shelves in the bay window. She was wondering how long Snape would allow her to stay, if at all. Snape was finally able to move around on his own, nearly fully recovered from Nagini's bite. She watched him in the reflection of the window as he sat reading in his bed behind her. "You know, you're able to get around much better now," she said, trying to sound casual, belying the sudden lump that she felt in her gut.

"What are you suggesting?" he asked, turning the page.

Hermione turned to face him. "I think it is time you move up to your bedroom upstairs."

"And give up my boudoir in the dining room?" he asked, turning the page again.

"I just thought you'd like to have your home returned to normal," she said off-handedly. "I mean, you were so adamant about it being temporary when I made the changes, I just assumed you'd want it changed back."

He set the book aside and rose off the bed, looking at the room with a critical eye. "Yes, I suppose it's time," he said.

Hermione thought that she almost detected a hint of wistfulness in his tone. "If you'd rather not, or wait until you feel stronger, I'd understand."

"No, now is as good as any." He crossed his arms, considering the bed and furnishings in the dining room and kitchenette. "Well, get on with it." Smiling, Hermione washed her hands and started reversing the transformation of his bedding back into chairs and a sturdy table, hoping she got the design right of the furniture. "Close enough," he said with a smirk. "My roasting pot," he said, pointing to the kitchen. He stood directly behind her as she transfigured his roasting pot tub back to its original size. "You can reorganize my kitchen back the way it was later," he said, heading out the door. Hermione followed, grabbing the bedding and clothes she'd taken from upstairs.

He stopped abruptly and Hermione bumped into his back. "I thought you'd use the master suite?" she asked.

He looked at her, his expression turning stony. "I do," he said, crossing his arms. "If you like you may sleep in my old room."

"You mean I can stay here?" she asked, gobsmacked.

"And where else would you go? The Burrow? Your parents' home was sold, and you are not returning to the castle... What are your options?" He looked at her but his expression was unreadable. "You may stay here until you take your N.E.W.T.s and can find your own place."

"Thank you. I'll just help you make your bed and bring my stuff up later," she offered.

"That won't be necessary," he said curtly.

"Really, it's no problem, I'll just make the bed and put away your clothes in the wardrobe," she insisted. Her suggestion nearly caused him to get into a row with her. Hermione just couldn't understand why he was so reluctant to let her see the master's suite, it was his house after all, and the room was the largest bedroom. "Please, move aside and let me past," she said, forcing her way by him and dumping the bedding on the bed. She turned to start placing his clothes in his wardrobe and he stopped her. "What?"

"It's my house. I can do this myself," he snapped. "You shouldn't be in here."

Hermione could only stare at him in dumbfounded confusion. "You're embarrassed to have me in here, aren't you? What's wrong? Is it the room? Are you embarrassed to have me in your room?"

"No, of course not. I just... It's inappropriate to have you in here." Snape paused as looked at her confused expression and his expression softened. "I don't like this room, never have. It reminds me too much of him... it's my parents' room," he finally stated.

Hermione realized exactly what he was saying, and it astounded her. "The Muggle clothes in the wardrobe... they were your father's?" She looked around, realizing that except for a few additions, the room did still reflect someone else. "So what, it's now your house, it's technically your room now, not his. You can do with it anything you want." She swished her wand making the bedcovers lie properly and tucked in the corners with a flick of her wrist. "You know, you'd probably like the room more if you changed the colors, Transfigured the furniture a bit, maybe change the rug..."

"There is no reason to do so," he started to say.

"The only reason you haven't is because you lived at the castle?" Hermione finished for him. "It's like the whole house, the only rooms that even reflect you is the lab and the sitting room. The rest of the house is, well, dour. Lighten it up, change it to something you like and make it your own." She promptly turned everything pink, just to prove her point that it could be changed to reflect anything he wanted.

"Change it back," he demanded, scowling. "I will not have my parents' bedroom pink!"

"No, change it to something that suits *you*, it's *your* bedroom now," she stated as he deftly changed the room back to its dour browns. "You have to be kidding? You can change it any way you want to, in any color you want, and you want *brown*?" She made the bedposts thicker like the ones that were used at school, then changed the bed hangings, rug and drapes to a bright burgundy red to resemble the ones in her old Gryffindor dormitory. "At least pick a cheerful color and not something so dull!"

"Absolutely not!" he growled, changing the rug, drapes and bedcovers to black. "I like black."

"You wear enough black, you don't have to make the room black. How about yellow?" Hermione swished and flicked her wand, changing the black to yellow. "Or blue, blue would be nice." With another flick and swish, the room was now a rich, royal blue, then she changed the room to purple with a grin.

"No," he growled, "I'm not a..." he started to say as Hermione changed the colors to orange. "Miss Granger, this is unacceptable!" He flicked his wand the same time Hermione did and the spells must have collided: red, orange and chartreuse mixed on the bed covers with a lime and forest greens that clashed horribly.

Hermione grinned, changing the drapes to chartreuse to match. Snape growled, changing the bedcovers to green just as Hermione added a lace valance over the windows. "Well, it is more cheerful. How about changing the bed?" She aimed her wand, changing the huge four poster into a huge, white bed with lathe turned details, complete with a white ruffled canopy the same time Snape changed the drapes and bed covers back to black, and she quickly added a white lace bed skirt. The delicate white bed frame and white, ruffled lace wasn't too terrible against the stark black covers. "Maybe with white sheets?"

"I will not have it looking like a little girl's boudoir!" he snapped.

"You must have seen a bed somewhere you liked? Make the bed resemble that one," Hermione said, trying to make it sound like a challenge. In his anger, Snape transfigured the bed back, this time with well-proportioned posts decorated with tasteful carvings in a rich wood tone.

"That's terrific!" she exclaimed as Snape snarled, "Better?"

Hermione turned to face him, beaming. "So other than black, do you actually *have* a favorite color?"

"I like black," he said with a snarl.

"How about navy and white, purple and gold or blue and cream... You don't like burgundy. How about sienna and russet, or a green we could do it in greens?" Hermione rambled, changing the bed covers with each suggestion. "Do you like green?" she asked undaunted.

"I think I've had enough of green," he said. "The blue and cream wasn't to bad. I don't like white."

Hermione tried several variations with the blue tones, settling for a dark blue comforter, ivory sheets and dark blue shams, matching the drapes with sheer ivory and heavy navy damask drapes. "Now what else reminds you of your dad?"

Snape relented into Transfiguring the rest of the furniture: the wardrobe, twin bedside tables and two chairs into something that would suit his personality and erase his parents' style. After several changes, rearranging the room slightly, they ended up with a room that Hermione was certain was similar to his rooms at Hogwarts, although in dark blues. There wasn't a snake anywhere in the decor.

"So if you are done rearranging my bedroom, would you like to see the other? I'd like to have my sitting room back."

"Sure," she replied, following him into the small room across the hall, smiling. It took a while to fix up Severus's old bedroom, magically cleaning up the shelves, repairing the small desk, enlarging and cleaning out the wardrobe and fixing the small bed into a more comfortable size.

By dinner, Hermione and Severus had changed sitting room boudoir back into simply a sitting room, and Hermione finished straightening up the dining room with everything in its proper place, although the pantry remained engorged slightly. During her stay, the kitchen and dining room had been both tenaciously scrubbed and magically cleaned as well as the sitting room, potions lab and downstairs loo. It looked so much better than when she'd first moved in here, so now that the house was back to the way he wanted, it was in a much more livable condition than when she'd first arrived.

She'd even managed to talk Severus into magically refreshing the paint on the walls. The only room left untouched was the third bedroom, which Snape insisted be left as it was. Hermione had strong suspicions the room had been used by either his mum, which was doubtful, or by his grandma, which was more likely, considering the portraits that adorned the dresser and walls.

~o0o~

Five Weeks Later

Severus had been very gracious to Hermione since the trial. Well, as gracious as he could be. They still had their battle of wits, arguments and discussions; however, she discovered that she understood Severus much better lately. He'd even begun using her first name, unless he was upset about something. She found he had a dry wit and sarcastic sense of humor and could be quite amiable when he wanted. Still, he had offered to let her stay with him, continued tutoring her and still had her help him brew potions. Her N.E.W.T.s were only a few days away, but Hermione found that she was feeling restless.

She wanted to bring her parents home, find them a house and reestablish a dental practice but had no idea how she'd be able to do all that. She was starting to feel guilty about what she'd done to protect her parents, and the sooner she got them home, the better she'd feel. She only hoped that they would forgive her.

~o0o~

Lucius Malfoy made a surprise visit one afternoon. "Miss Granger?" he asked smoothly when Hermione answered the knock at the door.

"Mr. Malfoy, is Severus expecting you?" she asked, keeping the door open enough to take in the appearance of the wizard before her. "I don't believe he mentioned your visit?"

"Open the door, girl, and let me in," he said coolly, trying to push the door open with his cane.

Hermione smiled, knowing that one of Severus' protective wards on the door would only allow it to open to permit people to enter who were actually properly admitted. She waited several seconds before feigning a look of incredulity. "Oh, I'm sorry, where are my manners? By all means, do come in. I shall let Severus know you are here." Hermione stood back to let him in, and Lucius eyes narrowed as he entered, swinging his cane. "If you'd please have a seat, I'll let him know you're here."

"Well, well, well, so the rumors are true, you are staying here. Playing house, are we?" His snide question couldn't hide the surprise he obviously felt upon finding Hermione in Snape's home.

Hermione smiled. "I thought you knew that I was his Protective Custody Services Monitor?"

Lucius raised an eyebrow as he surveyed the books lying about the room. "Indeed. You've made yourself right at home, nevertheless, I see."

"I've been helping Severus recover from Nagini's bite, and in turn he has been assisting me with my N.E.W.T. studies. Please excuse my mess," she said, indicating the books piled on the coffee table and sofa. "I had no idea Severus was expecting anyone."

"I would hardly have thought that Severus would have tolerated having mud someone like you in his home." Lucius picked up one of the books, examining the title. "Don't expect it to last," Lucius said as Hermione pushed open the hidden door. "He'll come to his senses."

"I'm quite certain he will," she said smugly. Severus met her on the stairs with a questioning look. "Mr. Malfoy is here to see you," she replied, turning to back down the stairs.

She was about to disappear into the kitchen, when Severus pulled her to follow him into the sitting room. "Don't hide, Hermione. Never show a Slytherin he made you back down, especially Lucius. Now is the time for you to stand up to him."

Hermione looked at Severus, her mouth agape. "How did you know..."

"I know him," Severus said smoothly. "You are here because I've given consent for you to be."

"Severus, old chap!" Lucius said as soon as Severus entered the room, however, his eyes narrowed slightly as Hermione approached and stood calmly by Severus' side.

Severus gave no outward sign that anything was remiss. "Good to see you, Lucius."

"I came to see if you were all right. We haven't spoken in a while." Turning to Hermione, Lucius added, "You will excuse us, won't you, my dear?"

"Actually, may I offer you a drink, Mr. Malfoy?" Hermione asked, and Lucius' eyebrow rose in reaction to her polite offer. "Tea, perhaps?"

"Tea would be lovely," he said, trying to mask the coolness in his tone. As soon as Hermione slipped from the door, she heard him ask Severus, "Tea, at this hour? Hardly what I'm usually offered in your home?"

When Hermione was returning, balancing the tea tray and trying to open the door at the same time, she overheard Lucius saying, "Nonsense! It must be rather droll, living with *her* day in and day out."

"You'd be surprised. I'm starting to enjoy her company. She's really quite intriguing and amiable, actually, and she's been rather helpful. She's quite the little witch."

"Is she really? So, you've been keeping up with her lessons, how droll." Lucius chuckled. "Do you really mean to tell me you've been spending your time with her, brewing potions and holding conversations on Charms and Transfigurations. I thought once you were free of the burdens that the Dark Lord set on you, you'd have had enough with teaching. Still, if you were to have that girl living with you, you'd have to do *something* to pass the time with the her. I'm sure you've found ways to keep her occupied, and from what I can see, she's quite the domestic. Your sitting room has never looked cleaner. Still, I can't imagine why you couldn't be attracted to someone more, *pure*?"

"Unlike most, I prefer intelligence and skill to blood," Severus stated smoothly.

Hermione felt a rush of pride at his statement as his words *intelligence and skill* echoed in her thoughts.

"Yes, you always have," Lucius stated drolly.

"I like her, Lucius," Severus warned his friend.

Hermione was stunned. *He likes me?*

There was a pause of silence, and Hermione almost pulled the door open before she heard Lucius' voice again. "Does she feel the same way about you?" he asked followed by another pause. "You don't know, do you? You haven't... of course not, she's still your student, isn't she?"

Feeling guilty for listening, Hermione pulled open the door and carried the tea tray in. "I took the liberty of making sandwiches. We don't have any cake, presently," she said, setting the tray down on the coffee table between the books. Severus quickly assisted her in stacking her books aside as Hermione poured the tea, serving Severus first. "Mr. Malfoy, I'm not sure how you take yours," she said as politely as she could feign.

"Cream, no sugar," he stated as Hermione offered Severus a plate of tiny sandwiches. Hermione fixed Lucius' tea and passed him a plate as well, then prepared her cup the way Severus preferred his tea. From the corner of her eye she saw that the gesture wasn't lost on Lucius. "So, you intend to take your N.E.W.T.s? Were you not offered jobs with the Ministry, Hermione?" Lucius asked amicably.

Hermione smiled as she sipped her tea, fighting back the urge to grimace from the lack of sugar. "I was offered honorary N.E.W.T.s as well as my Order of Merlin. However, I prefer to earn my marks, Mr. Malfoy. And since Severus has so graciously agreed to tutor me in exchange for my assistance in his potions lab, I could hardly refuse such an offer. He's a brilliant professor, and I'm honored to be given the privilege. By the way, may I congratulate you on the outcome of your own trial? Have you chosen where you intend to do your community service?"

Lucius sat up straighter, his grey eyes flashing in annoyance. "I have yet to select a worthy cause."

"So, you've decided not to work in the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures or the Department of Muggle-Relations?" she asked, watching as Severus tried to hide the fact he nearly choked on his tea. "I was under the impression that Mr. Weasley approved your assignment to the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office."

"You are very well informed," Lucius stated coolly.

"I've many friends in the Ministry, Mr. Malfoy," Hermione replied.

"How is it, Severus, that you managed to escape serving community service?" Lucius asked, redirecting the conversation. "According to the new issues from the Criminal Investigation and The Dark Years War Trials Committee, everyone with the Dark Mark, acquitted or not, must serve atonement to the Wizarding community?"

Severus grinned over his cup. "I've been doing my part Lucius," he stated, smoothly.

"You're being modest!" Hermione exclaimed.

"How so?" Lucius asked, pointedly keeping his eyes on Severus.

"I've been assisting St. Mungo's," Severus stated.

Lucius waited, obviously expecting Severus to elaborate.

Hermione wanted to laugh as she watched the two men. "Severus is still providing much needed potions for victims of the war: antivenins, antidotes and restorative potions. There are several people who are alive because of his efforts," she stated proudly, and Severus gave her a warning look. "Stop being so modest, you're still contributing a valuable service to the wizarding world. I know your efforts are being acknowledged both at St. Mungo's and at the Ministry. Even Minister Shackbolt has

motioned your continued support."

"Indeed," Lucius drawled out slowly. "The next thing you'll be telling me is that Severus will be receiving an Order of Merlin."

Hermione already knew that was in the works. Kingsley and Arthur both told her Severus was up for the honor, the only discussion being which class. The members of the Criminal Investigation and The Dark Years War Trials Committee wanted to give him a first class ward, but the members of the Wizengamot were still debating giving him a second class status. Hermione knew that in the end Severus would get the higher classification if Kingsley had his way. She couldn't help but smile, and Lucius stared at her suspiciously.

"So, Lucius, I understand that Narcissa is up for trial next week," Severus asked, changing the subject. "I understand that Harry Potter is on the list of witnesses. How did she manage to gain his support?"

~oOo~

Two Weeks Later

Hermione had received her N.E.W.T.s scores and was gobsmacked by her Outstandings, even the Outstanding in Defense Against the Dark Arts. Severus wasn't the least bit surprised, but to help her celebrate, offered to take her out to dinner in London rather than be subjected to another rousing dinner display at the Burrow. The elegant restaurant he took her to was lovely and the dinner superb. Severus gave her a teardrop pendant in a beautiful green stone as a graduation gift that literally made Hermione's eyes tear up with happiness, much to Severus' confusion over her reaction.

Severus had even helped Hermione retrieve her parents from Australia. Kingsley Shacklebolt, who'd approved Ministry assistance, personally helped relocate Mr. and Mrs. Granger in their home and reestablish their practice. Anna Maria Fierro of the Accidental Magical Reversal Department had restored both her parents' memories, and Healer Stephen Schnall was able to assure Hermione that the Grangers had not had any lasting damage to their minds. At first the Grangers were furious and hurt by Hermione's actions, and the relationship was strained, but Severus made a visit to the Grangers and explained the danger they had been in and that what Hermione had done had definitely saved their lives. Mrs. Granger took the news only slightly better than Mr. Granger, but after reading all the past *Daily Prophet* editions Severus had brought for them, they finally realized just how much their daughter had done, not only for them and the Wizarding world but for the Muggle world as well. Hermione knew that it would take time for her relationship with her parents to fully mend, but they were extremely proud of her, and very accepting of Severus, even if they didn't like her living arrangement with him, who they assumed was Hermione's boyfriend.

Hermione had also accepted a position at the Ministry of Magic in the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. The head of the department had died in Azkaban before all the Muggle-borns and those arrested for being undesirable had been released. Hermione had been alarmed at how many people of her department had been arrested on all types of charges; mostly anyone who had stood against Umbridge and any segregation or termination legislation against goblins and centaurs. Kingsley had brought back Newt Scamander as acting Head of the department, and Hermione had been assigned to him as an assistant. Their directions were quite clear. They were to evaluate and reorganize the department under the Ministry of Magic's new guidelines, evaluate all staff and reassign appointments as they saw fit.

Hermione liked working with Newt. She'd spent hours on a new department organizational tree, which Newt loved and immediately approved, but the reorganization was taking some time. That and many of the current laws needed to be changed.

Also, since several properties had been confiscated during some of the war trials and there had been several families who had been murdered and their homes simply destroyed for not siding with Tom 'Voldemort' Riddle, there were numerous house-elves that suddenly found that they didn't have a 'house' or a 'family' anymore. Newt spent much of his time in the House-elf Relocations Office, trying to find suitable homes for the homeless and orphaned house-elves. Much to her dismay, Hermione suddenly found she'd been designated as a reasonable recipient for a homeless house-elf and now had two house-elves, even though she technically didn't even have a house. This amused her friends and annoyed Severus greatly, since he didn't like house-elves touching anything in his potions lab.

People walked the street with confidence again, feeling secure and safe to be out in public. Shoppers strolled around, looking in windows and selecting their purchases without bothering to look behind them or between the shops and alleyways. It was safe now that Tom 'Voldemort' Riddle was dead. Or so the delusional thought. Many of the Death Eaters had scattered, still causing trouble occasionally, and Harry and Ron had been quite busy, trying to help round them all up. Severus met with Kingsley, Harry and Ron in private, giving them names or descriptions of the Death Eaters he knew about, and confirming which of those on the Auror list he knew had been active followers and which had been Imperiused.

Ginny had accepted a part-time job, working in Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes until school started in September.

Aruidus Raithwright of *Witch Weekly* had sent several owls requesting an interview, which Severus sent back after cursing the parchment. Hermione wrote a note each time, telling him how to shrink or straighten his nose, just in case he didn't know the counter spells.

News was that Rita Skeeter was writing a book about Severus' life, *Severus Snape: Scoundrel or Saint*, and she had owled Severus numerous times, requesting interviews. Hermione tried to warn him she'd invent all kinds of nonsense if he ignored her, but he was furious at her over her article, *Death Eater Potions Master Let Off*, and refused to even allow Hermione to speak her name in his house. There was a not-too-subtle curse that clamped her lips together each time she mentioned the woman, so Hermione had eventually given up.

She had also started looking for a house. Hermione was considering a quaint cottage on Mariner's Lane in a quiet wizard seaside village near the Pembroke coast or a small Tudor outside of Canterbury. Severus was surprisingly quiet on the subject of Hermione's house hunt, often becoming withdrawn whenever she even mentioned house hunting or specific properties she saw.

~oOo~

Hermione stood off to the side of the great room, watching the couples dance. Narcissa and another tall brunette were talking and laughing to Severus across the room from her. His expression was calm and indifferent. Hermione couldn't believe he'd talked her into coming to the Malfoys' formal acquittal party. Narcissa and Draco were both acquitted on the grounds that they had turned, changed sides before the final battle and made several attempts at fighting against the Death Eaters. Actually, Narcissa severely hexed several Death Eaters for aiming at Draco during the battle, and Draco was credited by Harry as helping him and the Order from inside the castle. Lucius' trial was the more complicated, since he actually had attacked Harry and his friends in the Ministry itself, but his money and remorseful pleas finally won out, and he was given conditional probation and hundreds of community service hours to complete. He'd be working for Arthur Weasley in the Department of Muggle-Relations for nearly three years.

*Severus stood in Hermione's doorway, watching her brush out her hair. "It is just a party, Hermione. They are my friends."*

*"He doesn't even like me," she argued. "No one in the family likes me. I don't really understand why they'd invite me." Her hair was so much more manageable now that she'd been using Severus' shampoo and conditioner.*

*Penny, one of her new house-elves, stood next to her, choosing a hair clip in case Hermione changed her mind and would let the elf put her hair up.*

*Crookshanks, her large, ginger-haired cat was sitting at Severus' feet, and he looked up at him and mewed in agreement.*

*Hermione laughed at her cat, looking up at Severus' reflection in the mirror in amusement. "See, even Crookshanks agrees with me."*

*"Hardly an impartial advocate; he's your cat," Severus stated, smirking at her. Crookshanks purred at him, and began to rub against his leg. "Great, cat hairs. Have you any idea how much you shed?" he said, looking down at the half Kneazle. "Finish your hair and let's go. You look lovely by the way."*



Her eyes snapped back to look at his reflection in the mirror in reaction to his compliment, but he was gone. Stunned, Hermione picked up her new black cloak and followed Crookshanks down the hall.

"Hello, Granger," Draco's familiar drawl broke into her reverie.

She turned around, warily. "Hello, Draco. Lovely party."

"My family's parties always are." He sipped on his champagne. "Bet you never thought that you'd be back here, did you?"

"No," she said, finishing her glass. Immediately a house-elf came and replaced it with a new one. "Still, it was very kind of your parents to invite me."

Draco laughed softly. "They didn't. I did." Hermione looked at him, stunned, and he smiled at her amusedly. "Look, you, Potter and Weasley saved my life and then stood up for me during my trial. I wanted to say 'thank you.' Potter and Weasley turned me down. I'm surprised that you didn't."

Hermione's lips curled up a bit at his admission. "You're welcome. Severus asked me to come as well. His invite read 'and guest,' which he said meant me. He argued that I'd been invited twice... Now the second invitation makes sense." She sipped her drink, and the silence between them stretched.

"Would you consider dancing with an old adversary?" he asked teasingly.

Hermione laughed. "Why, Mr. Malfoy, I'd be delighted."

"Draco, Hermione. Mr. Malfoy is my father tonight."

He led her out to the dance floor and nodded to her before he began to lead her in the measured waltz. He was an amazing dancer, but nevertheless, Hermione still tripped twice. "Not used to this style of dancing?" Hermione shook her head, blushing, and he pulled her closer. "Trust me, relax and just let me lead you. If you just let yourself go and trust me, you'll do just fine."

In the middle of the second song, Hermione finally relaxed enough to enjoy dancing with him. When the tune ended, Draco led her to the edge of the dance floor and kissed her hand. "Thank you," he said, bowing slightly and walked away.

Cardyn Warrington was standing next to Hermione when she turned around. "May I," he asked. He wasn't as smooth a dancer as Draco, but he was a strong lead. After two dances, she was ready to call it quits.

Hermione excused herself, finding a quiet niche next to a marble column. Immediately a house-elf gave her another glass of champagne.

"Are you having a good time, Miss Granger?" Lucius Malfoy asked.

Hermione had just sipped her drink and nearly choked, so she simply nodded. He laughed softly, exchanging her glass for another. "Here, try this one," he said. "Its flavor may suit your taste better." The champagne had a slightly pink blush to it and a different taste, which was both pleasing and refreshing. "May I have the next dance?"

"Um... sure," she said, taking a larger drink from her glass, nearly emptying the contents. Mr. Malfoy smiled and then took her glass from her, capturing her hand. Like his son, he was an excellent dancer, but she had the feeling the dance was for 'show' the way he led her around the floor. When he returned her to her niche, he handed her another flute of the blush-pink champagne and walked off.

Hermione finished her glass, enjoying the refreshing drink, and another house-elf appeared, his big, pale blue eyes looking up at her curiously. "Do miss want another?"

Hermione handed the elf her glass, accepting another with the same pale blush. "Thank you."

"Hermione," Severus said, suddenly beside her. The elf handed him a glass and he accepted it. "Are you enjoying yourself?" he asked, sipping on the champagne.

"Very much so," she replied automatically.

"Liar," he said with an amused smirk. "Come dance with me." He downed his champagne and took her hand. Hermione quickly finished hers; nearly dropping it on the floor, but the elf caught the glass in time and scurried away. Severus was every bit as accomplished a dancer as either Lucius or Draco, and his style was fluid and smooth. They danced several songs before Hermione begged to go out on the terrace for some air.

Lucius gave Severus an odd smile and a nod from where he stood near the open doors. Severus returned the gesture, eyeing Lucius speculatively as he led Hermione past him and outside.

Another elf appeared and gave them both fresh glasses. Hermione crinkled her nose after tasting the champagne. This one wasn't as sweet or refreshing as the other one Lucius had given her. *Maybe I just imagined it had tasted different... but the glass the elf had given me tasted the same as the ones he'd given me... Maybe there are two types being served tonight.* "How much longer do you wish to stay?" she asked.

"People are already leaving," he stated. "We can go whenever you want."

"I'd like to go now, if you don't mind," she asked. The cool breeze felt good on her skin where the formal robes exposed her neck and shoulders, but she was slightly dizzy and lightheaded. Severus took her hand, guiding her back into the room. They made their farewells to Lucius and Narcissa, and Hermione let him guide her to the front door and out past the garden gate.

Severus pulled her to him, wrapping his arm around her to Apparate them to his home, since she couldn't Apparate directly into the house alone. She rested her head on his shoulder, taking in his scent. The squeezing sensation of Apparation lasted only seconds until they reappeared in his sitting room. "Hermione, are you all right?" he asked after a few minutes when she still hadn't released him.

She mumbled assent, nodding her head, and he tipped her face up, his dark eyes looking into hers with mild concern. The harsh lines of his face were gone. He looked like he did when his mask was down and it was all the invitation she needed. She reached up and kissed him, sliding one hand along his arm and into his hair.

He tried to push away once, but her fingers tightened, trying to draw him to her. Her cloak fell to the floor, followed by his as his arms encircled her momentarily, then slid up to grasp her arms as he tried to push her away from him. "Hermione?"

"Yes," was all she could think to say. She was breathless, her head swimming; she looked up at him, wanting nothing more than to continue kissing him.

After several pounding heart beats, he pulled her into his arms again, and Hermione lifted up onto her tiptoes to kiss him. His responding kiss was ardent and passionate, matching hers with his own pent-up desire. She tightened her arms around him, melding into his kiss, and suddenly felt crushed by the quick feeling of Apparation, finding herself suddenly in the upstairs hallway.

She felt as if she was falling and floating as he kissed her. She ran her hands over his back under his frock coat, wishing the coat and waistcoat would vanish. His arms slid from her waist and back and his hands began to roam freely along her body. Suddenly she felt the wall at her back. His kisses became firm and demanding, and Hermione clung to him, giving in to his demands. He suddenly stopped, panting next to her ear. "We shouldn't," he said, his voice hoarse and uncertain. "You don't want me."

"Severus, yes. I've yes, I do," she replied, kissing him again. "I want you...." He tried to push away, but she followed him, pressing her body against his. "I've wanted you since the first time you let your guard down with me." He took another step back and she matched him as if they were dancing. "Somehow this feels right." She swayed on

her heels as she tried to kiss him.

"You're drunk," he accused, almost sounding like pleading. She stumbled and his arm went around her waist to steady her.

They were now leaning against the other wall. "I don't care," she said in his ear in a deep purr.

"I do," he groaned.

She leaned back to look him in the eye. "You don't want me?" She was hurt and confused. She wanted him so much and couldn't understand how he could kiss her like he did, and then push her away.

'Merlin's beard, girl, I want you,' he said, claiming her mouth again, needy and demanding. She felt him unzip her robe, and she let it fall to her feet. He groaned in her hair when his hands landed on her bare flesh, sliding up from her knickers to her strapless bra. He pushed her away again, and she was about to seriously protest, when he swept her up into his arms and carried her to his bed. He practically ripped off his coat and waistcoat as he leaned down to kiss her.

Hermione quickly reached for his shirt, trying to unbutton it, and he laughed at her, pulling it free and over his head. She immediately grabbed for his belt. "Slow down, girl," he hissed, when her fingernails scratched him.

"I don't want to," she said with a throaty purr. "I want you."

He let his pants fall, kicking his feet free before crawling onto the bed, pushing her down to lie beneath him with a hungry kiss.

Hermione raised her head and shoulders, returning his kiss as he pressed her back down on the bed. Again he stopped, his eyes dark with lust and his breathing heavy. His fingers slid down her skin as his gaze swept down her body. She groaned, with both desire and pleasure, her frustration growing.

"Hermione, have you?" he asked, looking at her intently, his dark eyes still showing his desire for her. "Have you... ever before?" he asked between her kisses.

"Please, I want you..." she pleaded, shaking her head slightly, still trying to kiss him. "I want to feel you..."

He pulled away again. "Are you sure?" His mouth lowered so that it hovered just above hers. "Hermione, is this what you want?"

She pulled him down to her. "Yes," she nearly growled lustily...

*Author's note:*

*I have a great deal of gratitude for Ladyinthecloak and Machshefa for beta reading this for me. You ladies are great and I really appreciated you doing this. Thank you.*

*The Latin words used are from: <http://www.archives.nd.edu/cgi-bin/lookdown.pl>*

*Contorqueo, contorquere: twist, whirl, turn violently, contort; to whirl.*

*Abruptere, abrupti: to break off, sever; to remove, dissociate; to break off prematurely, destroy.*

*Deicio: to throw, cast, hurl down, fell, to kill, bring down*

*Diremptum: to temporarily or permanently part, separate, divide, to break off, interrupt, stop*

*Detorqueo, detorque: (1) to turn away, bend aside. (2) to twist out of shape, distort.*

*Iaculorari: to throw a javelin; to shoot at a target; to throw, cast, hurl a missile*

*lactus: cast, throw*

## Stubborn and In Love

### Chapter 9 of 9

Hermione focuses on her life, career and friends. The Ministry is slowly changing for the better, but Hermione buries her troubles behind her work. However, there is a small matter that Hermione needs to deal with, only she's not too sure whom to turn to.

~o0o~

The next morning Hermione awoke with her head on Severus' shoulder, their arms intertwined. She was still a bit sore from their lovemaking the night before, but oddly content and deeply satisfied, even though her head hurt, and the soft light coming streaming through the bed hangings bothered her eyes.

Severus was shifting a lock of her hair from her face. He rolled her to her back, rising up on an elbow, looking at her with an odd expression that was both curious and concerned. "Are you all right?" he asked softly.

She scrunched the blankets tightly to her chest. "Did we?" she asked and berated herself. The evening was slowly piecing itself back together in her mind around the throbbing in her head. "I mean, I'm sorry if I, um..." He crinkled his brow, and she took a deep breath letting it out slowly. "Of course we did..."

His hand fell to the blankets over her stomach. "I'm sorry, I should have recognized the effects," he said. "Hermione, I I'm sorry."

"Should have recognized what exactly?" she asked, confused. "If I remember right, I practically attacked you."

His lips curled in to an amused smirk. "Yes, you did, although I didn't do anything to stop you," he said, then smiled. "The first time."

She looked at his chest. "I think you did, once in the sitting room... and in the hallway and again... You asked me if I was sure, then..." Her eyes returned to his face. "The first time? This was our first time... Oh! Each part was a time?" He nodded and she blushed.

"So how are you feeling?" he asked, concerned.

"Odd... I woke up feeling content... surprised, but satisfied... but my head hurts, and I'm glad the drapes are drawn," she stammered. "I'm not sure what came over me to behave like I did."

"I should get you a Hangover Potion? Are you sore?" he asked tenderly.

"Severus?"

"Yes?"

"I don't know how to say this..." she stammered, her eyes diverted from his face. *How do you tell someone that what happened...? That you think you did something you didn't mean to?* She stared at his hand as he moved his arm to rest it on his side. "Please don't hate me, but I think we were slipped something at the party."

"Yes. I'm sure of it. I don't think it was a love potion not Lucius' style. I think it was a lust potion."

"A lust potion? How dare he how could he the champagne! He didn't!" she looked at him aghast.

She could read regret in his eyes, and she felt hurt by the expression. "Yes, Hermione, he dares, he could, and I'm quite certain he did. I don't know which one, so I'll need your morning urine to find out."

"Mine?"

"Yes, yours. Both of ours, but yours would be best. You were affected more strongly than I was," he explained before she could protest. "Oh, I was under the influence, too, but you obviously had more of the potion. You were insatiable last night."

"I thought that champagne tasted different. Sweeter, more refreshing, pleasing... So he gave it to me so that I'd...?" She could feel her cheeks burn. "I need to get up." She suddenly realized she had to walk across the room to get to the loo, and she was still naked. "Will you... do you mind turning your head?"

"Leave your urine in a cup on the counter. It's important, Hermione. If this is a simple lust potion, we are through it. If there is something else, I need to know in case I need to make an antidote."

She looked up at him, gobsmacked. "What you're saying is that it could be permanent?"

He sighed. "If it's a lust potion, no, it will fade. But the Malfoy library is extensive, and not all his books are kept out in plain view. If Lucius gave us a lust potion, there could very well be something more to it. I won't know until I can analyze your urine."

\*

Hermione was watching Severus intently during breakfast: the way he held his fork, the way he held his cup... the way he sipped his tea. She noticed that for some reason she was far too preoccupied with his hands to look at him when he asked her a question. *A lust potion... I just spent the night in his bed making love and it was nothing more than a lust potion...* She couldn't stop thinking about the fact that her first time was with Severus *But he wanted me, too... I think he did. He's never given any indication to me that he felt anything like this... So the only reason he did was because of a potion?* The thought was disturbing to her. Still, each time she did look him in the face this morning, her eyes immediately fell to his mouth.

"I tried to do a contraception charm, but I'd fallen asleep at one point. I... Hermione, do you take a contraception potion?"

"Huh?" she asked, forcing her attention away from his lips.

He set down his fork. "Hermione, have you even heard one word I've spoken?"

"Yes! You asked if I wanted to help you with the antidote, then told me it may be better if I did something else, like work in your garden. You were telling me about which plants I should be careful of and which to just cut back. I think you said that I should save any of the night-briar berries since you wanted to keep them and not to hack the fanged ivy too much. Then I think you said I should... um... take a potion..." She had to shake her head to think as he took another bite of eggs.

"Hermione, it's disconcerting having someone stare at you while you're eating."

"Huh?" she asked again, shaking her head.

"If we are together, this whatever this is will grow stronger. It may take me a week to brew the antidote, therefore, it might be best if you go to the Burrow for a while. If you stay here, we will have sex again."

The determined tone of his voice both thrilled and surprised her. "You mean you want to with me again?"

"Hermione, I'm a man. We always want to. But I don't like the idea of taking advantage of you or being under the influence of a potion." She looked up at him, unsure how she felt at the news. "The contentedly satisfied feeling you are feeling will fade within hours, or by nightfall, depending on the potion and you we'll driven to copulate again." His words sunk in, and she looked down, embarrassed. "I'd rather you have a clear head to think about this before I we if we do... Please, look at me when I'm talking to you."

~o0o~

Finally Alone

The silence around him became uncomfortably heavy, like humidity on a muggy day. He picked up a book, hoping that he could alleviate the quiet with the comfort of the written word while the potion he'd been brewing simmered. He dismissed the unease he felt, not willing to admit that it was too quiet with her gone. When he opened the book to the marker, he realized that it wasn't his, it was hers. Irritably, he removed the slip of parchment about to crumple it when he recognized her tiny, delicate script.

Severus,

*I never got the opportunity to thank you for your personal tutelage.*

*It was an honor and privilege to be able to work so closely with you.*

*You are a remarkable man, incredible proficient and extremely knowledgeable.*

*I can only hope that someday I can be worthy enough to call you friend.*

*Please don't harbor any regret about last night. I don't.*

*I don't regret any of it,*

*Hermione Granger*

Severus read and re-read the note in disbelief, fingering the delicate piece of parchment, then simply stared at it for a moment, contemplating her words. He placed the note between the pages of his book further toward the end and began to read from where he'd left off. The subtle hint of a smile curled one side of his mouth as he read.

~o0o~

Requests

Hermione paced around Percy's old room as she considered the request Amos Diggory had given her. It helped to concentrate on work, to keep her mind off Severus. Nevertheless, he haunted her dreams each night and filled her mind whenever she closed her eyes.

As usual, Amos was being a bit too stern in his decisions, and his proposal was a bit overzealous. He was obviously not too happy with the idea of having goblins actually working in the Goblin Liaison Office and not too happy with her choice of Hagrid as Centaur Liaison officer since the centaurs would not come to the Ministry. Besides the Centaur Liaison officer had very little to do since the centaurs very rarely, if ever, used the services of the office, so Hagrid could keep his job at Hogwarts and easily do both. He only had to come in to the Ministry for monthly staff report meetings. In addition, Cuthbert Mockridge, who was head of the Goblin Liaison Office, didn't seem to mind having two goblins in his office as it made his job easier. Still, the new reorganization of the department was taking some getting used to. Not that she blamed them. Change was difficult. Then there was her proposal to have Danny Fitzgerald and Gaven Dougherty both working in the newly organized Werewolf Liaison Office. She easily convinced both Newt and Kingsley of her idea, and Danny and Gaven were hired that same day. The problem was that no one else wanted a werewolf actually working at the Ministry, let alone two.

A horned owl landed in her open window, holding his leg out to her. She thanked the bird, giving it a treat and opened her letter. A pretty green vial rolled into her hand.

*Dear Hermione,*

*The potion Lucius gave us is not as strong as I'd thought. It's not one that creates lust it enhances feelings that are there if they are there. However, if, and I emphasize 'if, the persons act on the 'lust,' it can make it so that they won't be able to deny it and will be eventually consumed by it. Lucius was thrilled when I confronted him. Personal payback between friends, and I'm sorry to say that you had to pay the price. I hope someday you'll forgive me my indiscretion.*

*I have sent the antidote and suggest you take it. If our feelings are genuine, the antidote will simply allow us to make up our own minds without the potion's influence. If they were brought on by the alcohol in the champagne in combination with the lust potion, the effects will fade immediately. I'm sorry if you hold any regrets.*

SS

Hermione read and re-read the note several times, lifting the parchment up to her nose, and was just able to make out the subtle scent of herbs and smoke that she associated with him. She felt a deep pang of regret at the remorseful tone of the letter. She sat down on the bed to analyze exactly what he'd written. *His indiscretion... He blames himself? The potion enhances... I didn't lust after him, did I? He said that the potion doesn't create lust.* Nevertheless, she knew that she'd been lusting after Severus Snape ever since that morning. Hermione swallowed the potion in the vial and waited for the potion to affect her. She didn't feel any different.

Hermione rose and walked back to the window, reading the message again. She could imagine him leaning over his desk as he wrote out the tiny script, the ends of his black hair sweeping the parchment. She wondered if he was still taking baths every other day and smiled, remembering the first time she bathed him in his engorged roasting pot. *Had I known how incredible you'd feel making love to me, I wouldn't have disillusioned you* She wondered how he would have reacted if she'd been brazen enough to touch him, caress him in the soapy water. *He'd have shoved me away, or worse, tried to hex me* But the thought of washing him again, rubbing her hands on his skin in his bath wouldn't leave her. Everything reminded her of him, the green in the trees, the soft wafting breeze carrying in the scents of the herbs and flowers from Mrs. Weasley's garden, Percy's school banner on the wall, the green and blue rug on the floor, the scent of her shampoo she still used his formula... *Oh, this is madness. I need to concentrate on work and how Newt and I are going to thwart Amos from undoing the progress we've made with Goblin relations!*

\*

Hermione crossed the street, quickly heading to the small café that she liked, simply because they made the best soups. She had just opened her menu when several sheaves of parchment landed on the menu in front of her.

*Dear Master Snape,*

*I was most elated when word reached me at Dust and Mildew that you are considering submitting a manuscript for a Potions book and that you want to publish your versions of the Potions books currently used by the students attending Hogwarts. Miss Hermione Granger informs me that...*

The second one read:

*Dear Master Snape,*

*We at Hardincot and Waverly are delighted to hear that you are considering writing a Potions book and may be considering revising the existing books used at Hogwarts. I would be favorable to meeting with you at your...*

She picked up the third letter on the pile.

*Dear Master Snape,*

*I would like to inform you that we at Obscurus Book would be most interested in reviewing your manuscript for your Potions book*

"How could you invade my privacy and expose my personal information to these people, not to mention that you broke my confidence in you by doing so against my expressed wishes that you not tell anyone about my annotations and personal notations in my school books," he snarled before she could read the fourth or the fifth letters.

"I didn't!" she said, looking up at an irate Severus Snape. "I merely inquired if there would be an interest in any transcript that you might write in the field of Potions. I assure you I broke no confidences..."

"Then explain these letters!" he said coolly as he sat down. "If you did not break my confidence and mention my annotations, how did they know..."

"All right!" she dropped her menu on the table and handed him back his letters. "I wrote to these publishing offices and asked if there might be an interest. I said that the existing Potions books were outdated and that you'd be able to update them and in many instances *improve* the potions' directions. That's all. I promise."

He sat, staring at her as if deciding whether he believed her.

The noise of the street didn't dim the silence that stretched between them.

"I've missed you," she said demurely, finally ending the silence. "How have you been? You never return my owls anymore..." She paused when the waiter showed up. She ordered the mahi mahi sandwich and soup of the day, and he smirked in amusement at her choice. "Do you want anything?"

"I'll have the same," he replied and crossed his arms as he leaned back in his chair. "Why?"

The waiter nodded and took the menu away.

"Why, what?"

"Why did you do this?" he asked, indicating the letters.

Hermione stared at the letters. "Tell me that you can't rewrite the school's Potions books, improve and update the directions and not only make the directions better, but easier to follow, improving the quality of the potions, and I'll apologize." He looked at her with a contemplative stare and Hermione smiled. "See, you can't. I know you too well. You were surprised by the requests, flattered momentarily, your ego was sufficiently stroked, and then you became angry because you'd thought I'd expressed more than I did." She watched his eyes narrow as he considered what she said. "The truth is that I've seen your *Advanced Potion Making*, and your annotations were brilliant. Harry never did better in Potions before." She ignored his raised eyebrow. "You'd make a fortune, become famous for something positive, and you could move from your father's house, *which you love so much*, and possibly receive another award for your bookshelves."

He scowled at her last comment.

Lunch arrived. "So, tell me, what have you been doing with yourself?" she asked.

"Brewing potions and reading," he said, smirking at her.

She smiled as she sipped her soup. "I miss those times with you."

"Do you," he said, placing his napkin on his lap.

Hermione smiled and quickly placed hers on her lap, knowing that he preferred proper table manners. "Yes, I really do."

\*

Hermione came back to her quaint, two-story Tudor cottage carrying a new book, having had just had dinner with Severus again. He'd given her a signed copy of his *Beginning Magical Potions*, which he said he'd been very surprised to receive back with such an enthusiastic response from his publisher. So, he told her that he'd submitted his revised version of *Magical Drafts and Potions* to his publisher earlier that week. Hermione had asked him how he was able to write the draft so quickly, and he'd smiled, opening up the book to the credits, and she saw her name listed as a research assistant. "You did most of the preliminary work copying my annotations into your journals," he'd replied. "So I gave you credit for your assistance."

She'd stared at her name in print with an odd sense of gratitude, lovingly caressing the page. She'd been delighted to know that he'd accepted an offer to publish his books and was amazed that he'd gift her with a first print of his book. That alone had meant the world to her.

Hermione carried the book to her sitting room, placing the book on her shelves and stood back, still staring at Severus' gift. She finally picked up her new copy of Jeffery Archer's *Not A Penny More, Not A Penny Less* and curled up in her favorite chair by the fireplace to read.

\*

Severus sat casually in the booth of the bistro, his fingers caressing the coffee cup in front of him. He'd listened to Hermione talk about her work, discussing his views on the changes she'd implemented during the light dinner. They were there actually to celebrate the Order of Merlin, First Class, that Kingsley had awarded Severus earlier that day in a small hors d'oeuvres reception that had been held in his honor, but the evening had grown into much more than that and it was now really late. Hermione never really realized just how much she had missed just being able to talk to this man.

When the waiter brought them dessert, Severus pulled a wrapped package out of his pocket. "I have something for you."

"For me?" Hermione asked, taking the offered gift. She knew immediately that it was a book. "What...?"

"Open it," he said, smiling.

"We came here to celebrate your achievement; I should be giving you the gifts not the other way around." She untied the ribbon and unwrapped his newest Potions book, *Magical Drafts and Potions*, fresh off the presses and signed by the author. "It's out already? Oh, Severus, this is wonderful. Thank you!"

"I'm glad you approve," he replied. "I think you should know I pulled Potter aside to demand the return of my *Advanced Potions* book."

Hermione nearly choked on her tea. "You didn't! What did he say? He treasures that book."

"I got the impression he was rather miffed that I insisted to have it returned to me," Severus said smoothly. "Do you know that the insufferable boy had the audacity to refuse? He didn't want to relinquish the book to me unless I promised that he'd get a copy of the new book when it came out."

"Severus, the reason he doesn't want to give the book up is because of all your annotations and the spells you wrote in the book," she admitted. "Still, I could probably get the book from him if you'd like."

"Yes, Hermione, I definitely want my book back." He paused, sipping his coffee. "If Potter wanted to copy my annotations, I cannot stop him, but yes, please see if he will relinquish it to you. I suppose you can tell him I will get him a copy of my book after it's published."

"So, you're going to rewrite *Advanced Potion Making*?" she asked, tasting the cheesecake he'd ordered for them.

Severus took a forkful of the cheesecake before answering. "Yes, I'm taking the advice of a remarkable witch and improving and updating the directions of the school's Potions books. As you so delicately pointed out, not only can I make the potions better by improving the directions and filling in the missing steps, but I made the directions easier to follow. Although, there are still those incompetent dunderheads who will still melt cauldrons and explode even the simplest of potions."

When the check arrived, Severus laid the appropriate amount of coins on the table and rose. He assisted Hermione with her coat, keeping his hand on the small of her back as he escorted her from the restaurant to the Apparation site. "Severus, the dinner was delightful, and I love my book. Thank you."

"It's my pleasure," he said as he kissed her hand before he stood back to watch her Apparate home.

\*

Several weeks later at another dinner date, he gave her a signed copy of *Intermediate Potions and Draughts*, which was his O.W.L. level book. Hermione already knew

that his publisher was thrilled and had expressed his delight that Severus' books were on the Hogwarts book list for the upcoming year.

Severus told her that his manuscript for his revised *Advanced Potion Making* for N.E.W.T. students was nearly complete and that he would submit it for publication by the end of the week. He walked her to her door, pausing to face her in the dim light of her porch light. "Hermione, the annual dinner of the Most Extraordinary Society of Potioneers is going to be next week, and I'd like to have you attend with me. I have been informed that I'm to receive the Hector Dagworth-Granger award for my contributions during the war, and it would mean a lot if you'd be there."

"Oh, my gosh, Severus, that's wonderful! I'd love to go!" she said, clutching her new book to her chest.

Severus placed his hand on her cheek as he stepped closer to her. "Thank you. Having you with me, by my side, will be an honor." He placed a feather light kiss on her lips before he bade her goodnight, waiting until she closed her door before he walked to her garden gate and Disapparated.

\*

Hermione emerged from the Ministry, carrying a large leather Muggle briefcase and a large leather tote in the other hand. She crossed the street, heading to the quaint small café that had recently opened up in Hogsmeade. Shortly after sitting at a table on the outside patio, the waiter walked over and asked how her day was going, leaving three menus on the table and three cups for tea. She'd sent an owl to Headmistress McGonagall, requesting that Ginny be allowed to meet with her to discuss something important, not really alluding to what that actually was. She'd been delighted to have her request approved.

*All right, Ginny or Harry will be arriving soon. No Harry is in Exeter today, chasing down a lead on that Death Eater, Jiggers. But Ginny is due here any minute.* Ginny had said that both she and Harry liked the food here and the service was fast. Hermione only had half an hour to eat anyway. She looked up from rummaging in her briefcase for a file. Ginny Weasley had just appeared on the street next to the café, right as the waiter brought the pot of tea. *Oh, thank Merlin.* No sooner had Ginny sat down than Mr. Weasley joined them.

"Ginny, Hermione, are you all right?" Mr. Weasley asked, placing an affectionate arm on Ginny's shoulder in a quick hug and taking a seat. "Thank you for inviting me. What's good here?"

Hermione was surprised to see him. As Head of the Muggle-Relations Department, which included the Muggle-born Liaison Office and oversaw the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office, he'd been really busy as of late, so having him join them for lunch was really unexpected. Mr. Weasley had also implemented a new Muggle-born Misuse of Magic Office, which monitored and handled all actions regarding under-age magic in Muggle homes that had underage wizard children, which had been created during the reorganization of the Ministry of Magic. Harry had bemoaned that such an office would have been right useful to him growing up and would have solved half of his Ministry problems when he'd been living with the Dursleys.

"I... um," Hermione said, then saw Ginny mouth, *I asked him!*

"Right," Hermione replied, smiling.

Ginny smiled with relief. "Nearly everything is, Dad, although if you order the house salad, ask them to go light on the pepper."

Arthur looked at each girl in turn. "So, Ginny, how's school?"

Ginny tried to tell him it was fine while not choking on her tea.

"Fine, then," he said turning quickly to Hermione. "Hermione, do you like working at the Ministry? I know you had your heart set on going back to school full time."

She had just taken a drink of her tea and it scalded her tongue. "No, it's fine. I was able to take my N.E.W.T.s, and Severus practically taught me everything I'd have had in school anyway. I've been able to continue on my own well enough. I don't feel like I've missed out on too much."

"So. How is the job? I hear that Newt practically has you running the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures?" Ginny added, to give her a moment to swallow. "I read every day about your changes and reorganization. I actually approve, by the way, of how you re-organized the Werewolf Liaison Offices."

"Yes, Newt and I redefined the Being and Beast Departments by creature or being and placed all the Beings under one large Magical Brethren Relations Department, and moved the Werewolf Registry Office into the Werewolf Liaison Office, although the Werewolf Capture Unit was reallocated to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement." Hermione sighed heavily, shaking her head, and then smiled. "Newt liked my idea of appointing Amos Diggory as head of the Magical Brethren Relations Department," she stated. "We have two house-elf matriarchs working in the House-elf Liaison Office, and Bane requested that Hagrid be appointed as Liaison Officer for them in the Centaur Liaison Office. Hagrid doesn't have to do much but owl in the centaur herds' responses and grievances as well as their replies to inquiries. Makes him feel good to do something for them, though."

"I know about that; he couldn't wait to tell me when I got to Hogwarts," Ginny said, smiling.

"I heard that you also have two goblins on the Goblin Liaison Office?" Mr. Weasley asked. "Mockridge, I believe, told me. Amos was flustered when last I saw him."

"Yes, having the goblins at the Ministry caused a bit of a turmoil until Kingsley and Harry sent out their memos of support. I'm actually getting to know the goblins better. Of course, Bill is a huge help in that arena, and Amos Diggory is all right about it now."

Ginny laughed. "Bill said that the goblins at the bank are thrilled."

Mr. Weasley looked over to Hermione, his face very serious. "I've been hearing your name a lot in Magical Law Enforcement. The old Hit Squad crew and apparently the Werewolf Capture Unit have all been angry about something and have started a petition."

Hermione smiled. "I'm not surprised. I just got Kingsley's support on regulations that prohibit unauthorized attacks on registered werewolves unless it is during a full moon, and even then it is preferable to subdue and capture the werewolves rather than kill them. All the hit squads must report any complaints to the Liaison Office heads before attacking any creature or being supported by a Liaison Office, unless it's an emergency situation. That includes werewolves that have complied with the Liaison Offices Ordinance to secure themselves during a full moon and to have their compliance verified by a member of the office. St. Mungo's has a new clinic that offers the afflicted a safe place to change each month and provides them the Wolfsbane Potion, although they are still waiting for Ministry sanction."

"Just be careful, Hermione," Mr. Weasley warned. "I know that there are a lot of us that support all these new changes you, Harry, Kingsley, Wilkins, Davidson and Roberts are making... But still, wizardkind doesn't take to change quickly. There have been many radical changes lately, and a few are restless, even if the changes are for the better."

"I know that my new divisions in my department have made a big difference in Magical Brethren Relations," she said. "But, I'll keep your fatherly advice in mind, I promise. Oh, there is to be a new statue in the atrium by the wall. Although, the commissioned artist has stated that she wants each member of the Magical Brethren to be represented fairly, and each Liaison Office in my department has to approve of her model before she will start. She also wants to have a member of each group select someone to represent them. The centaurs have already selected Firenze."

"Who's that?" Ginny asked, curious, then laughed. "I mean who's the artist?"

Hermione laughed. "Luna Lovegood. Did you know she was an artist? Painter and sculptress. She says she wants to portray the Members of the Magical Brethren life size and realistically."

Ginny smiled. "I know Luna can paint really well. I've seen saw her bedroom. She had each of us: you, me, Harry, Neville and Ron. She painted all of us on her ceiling, larger than life and realistic enough that you'd think our faces could talk."

"I remember, it was eerie seeing our faces looking down on us, but it's also flattering I suppose." Hermione looked at her watch. "Oh, I have to go! I have an appointment with Kingsley regarding the department monthly reports and a possible appointment with the Wizengamot." She pulled out some money to leave on the table. "Ginny, if you can... can I see you soon? I really need to talk to you... about something personal."

Ginny, scrunched her face in confusion. "Sure, how about we meet next Hogsmeade weekend?"

"Perfect," she replied, hurrying from the table, "owl me and let me know when it will be but please I want to talk with you soon."

\*

It was a few weeks later at another dinner date when Severus handed Hermione a signed copy of *Advanced Potions Making*. "Oh, my goodness, you're done with it already?" she asked, flipping through the pages of the book, admiring the detailed illustrations on the margins of the pages. The plants looked so lifelike, Hermione was surprised she couldn't smell them.

He leaned back in his chair, watching her face with a casual ease. "Yes, I finished it. The work on this book went much faster than I anticipated. My publisher is amazed at how quickly I'm turning in my manuscripts, but I have to admit that the journals you wrote out while you were living in my house are really the reason why. You were very thorough. I have of course given you acknowledgement for your contribution as my assistant." Hermione blushed when she saw her name listed in the credits again, then looked up at him, feeling extremely flattered. Severus smiled smugly, clearly amused. "I'm also currently working on my own potions books, a personal project. I should have two more books done soon," he continued.

"So you are becoming quite the proficient author," she said, feeling so proud of his success.

"I've always been a proficient at everything I do," he said smoothly and Hermione blushed. "Even when teaching, I was doing my own work on the side. I do have to admit, though, I do like receiving credit for the years of research and work I've done in potions, although you're the only one I've ever confessed it to."

"I was reading the latest in the monthly journal for the Most Extraordinary Society of Potioneers. I was furious with Wendell Wainwrite for saying that you were simply riding on Jigger's coattails. I thought that most unfair." Hermione paused as the waiter brought a slice of cheesecake to the table. "I'm glad you've been publishing your books. Ginny said that Professor Helmenstine is already using your books for her lessons."

"Yes, she requested copies of each of my books and has a standing order at Flourish and Blotts to receive each one as soon as they are released," he said, taking a bite of the decadent dessert. "Jullianette Helmenstine is an accomplished Potioneer. Hogwarts was lucky to procure her."

"Rita Skeeter's book has recently come out. Have you seen it?" Hermione was so glad he was finally receiving the credit he so richly deserved, but smiled, knowing how tightly Severus guarded his private life from everyone. Years of spying still left a cautious and secretive nature to his personality she knew would never go away. "You must be so flattered," she teased him.

Severus raised his eyebrow at her comment, obviously not sure if she was jesting with him or not. "It's trivial nonsense and speculation, and nothing but unadulterated rumors."

"It's a best seller," she said grinning. "It's making you a household name."

He snorted in derision. "I was a professor for twenty years and highly active in the war. Thanks to the *Daily Prophet's* articles during my trial, I hardly needed her insipid book for wizards and witches to remember my name."

Hermione couldn't help smiling all through dessert. "I'm still surprised you didn't want to return to Hogwarts."

"No, I want a quiet life, Hermione." He looked at her and tilted his head, his eyes narrowing with mirth. "It's nice to not have masters, overlords, supervising monitors and the responsibility of dunderhead students demanding my every waking hour. Or having the threat of Azkaban hanging over my head. As you once said, I won my freedom, I have my life back, and I'd like to live it my way for a change."

"I think you deserve it," she said, meaning every word. He'd changed so much in the last few months she'd known him. There was a calmness about him now, although he was still very much in control of his emotions and expressions and still surly and cantankerous occasionally, though not as frequently.

He walked her to her door and kissed her tenderly when they said good night. He waited until she closed her door before he turned and walked to her garden gate. Hermione watched him from her window as he stood, looking at the house for a few minutes before he Disapparated. She wondered what he'd been looking for or if he'd been checking the wards on her house. He'd insisted on setting the protective wards on her home, refusing to believe she had set plenty herself. His caring thoughtfulness toward her safety made her smile.

Hermione turned and carried her new book to her favorite chair to read before bed. Crookshanks mewed to be picked up as soon as she sat down, and he curled gingerly in her lap, laying his head and one paw on her stomach, looking up at her. She stroked his fur, thinking back on the conversation that evening. She felt uneasy and not a bit guilty, berating herself for not telling him what she had been putting off telling him. She'd had a good time with Severus, but she'd avoided asking him what she'd intended to once again.

\*

It was nearly the middle of October when Hermione entered the door of her cottage, smiling from another date with Severus, carrying his two new books *Creating Solutions, Salves and Unctions*, and *Basic Healing Potions*. Severus had mentioned her in the dedication of *Basic Healing Potions*, which had stunned Hermione so that her eyes had even begun to tear up. "In case I need a personal Healer again," he'd said with his usual dry wit, which had made her laugh.

Still, that night when Hermione curled up on her favorite chair, she felt uneasy. Dinner and the walk along the seaside cliff had been lovely. She had told him about accepting the position on the Wizengamot and of course how things were going in her Department. Her promotion to department head hadn't surprised him at all, and he'd been very proud of her. They discussed the latest developments of the Spattergroit Potion and Whymemerger Draught. They even discussed the new werewolf clinic and how Severus' community service was going at St. Mungo's. Hermione had been pleased to hear that Master Harold Grunmaker had been giving Severus a free hand in the Potions Department, allowing him to do research on any case he chose. Severus admitted that he didn't mind the terms Master Grunmaker had set for him. It was more like being an employee than serving a probationary period, and his friend was counting any time he spent in his own lab as hours served as well, which would shorten his time considerably. He even confessed that he might continue the position after his probation was concluded if Master Grunmaker would accept continuing with the current arrangements.

Severus' kiss at her door was warmer and more passionate than on previous nights, making Hermione's toes curl in her boots. "Do you want to come in?" she asked, as she slowly opened her eyes.

His dark eyes seemed to penetrate her soul as he watched her face. "Yes, I want to, but it's late. Another time, perhaps."

Hermione had a hard time controlling the sense of disappointment at his words. "Okay. I had a lovely time tonight."

"As did I," he said, kissing her cheek and walking away. It was the first time he hadn't waited until she was inside before he walked to her garden gate.

He stopped and turned, waiting next to the lilacs and climbing roses. Hermione waved and turned to go inside, hearing the crack of his Disapparation as she closed the door.

The evening had been perfect, the food, the conversation, even the sunset before dinner and the walk along the cliffs after. Nevertheless, she'd allowed him to lead the conversation, avoiding the one subject she'd told herself that she would have with him. Hermione was quite frustrated with herself as she plopped down in her favorite chair. Even Crookshanks, curled up in her lap with his head and paw on her stomach, purring as she stroked his fur, couldn't soothe away her anxiety. *Oh, why didn't I just pluck up the nerve and tell him?* The truth was, she'd lost her nerve. *Well, I'll be seeing Ginny in a week or two..* But at this point, Hermione just wanted the comfort of her friend more than anything else.

\*

Hermione had been avoiding everyone. She was worried. The wine and cheese sat on her coffee table, and there was a pitcher of pumpkin juice as well. Ron was due any minute, and she wasn't sure what to say. Nevertheless, her mind was made up, and they needed to talk if they were going to salvage their friendship. If he avoided her again, she was going to ask Harry and Ginny or Fred and George to intervene. The knock on the door made her nearly jump out of her skin.

It wasn't Ron.

"Flowers," the man said, behind a huge bouquet of roses, lilies, orchids, Delphinium Belladonna, lisianthus and sweet stock. "Please sign here."

"Thank you," she said, taking the bouquet and closing the door. *Damn. They aren't from Ron, that's for sure* The card simply read: *To someone lovely.*

\*

Severus' *The Anthology of Venoms and Poisons in Potions* was due to come out, and already there was a waiting list. His *Antidotes of the Dark Potions of the Dark Arts* and *To Reverse the Most Potent of Potions and Poisons* was released on Halloween weekend, listing all the antidotes and counter-reactive potions Severus had provided during his years under Albus Dumbledore, as well as many of the potions and poisons the Dark Lord and Death Eaters used. Basically, it amounted to twenty-two years of his life, seventeen of which he had served as Potions master and Head of Slytherin House at Hogwarts. Her copies of the three books, signed of course, were sitting beside her, tied up in a black ribbon.

Ironically, Hermione knew from their date that Severus had started these three books the year Albus made him Defense Against the Dark Arts professor. The book reviews said that his books were hard to read, the directions blunt and straightforward, and many of the potions and antidotes that were listed were very difficult and complicated. However, he'd told Hermione over dinner that his publisher said that every Healer and Potions Brewer or Master of Potions in three countries seemed to have ordered copies. His three books were estimated to become the must-have books for all medical and potions practitioners. He'd sent a copy of each to Professor Helmenstine and two copies of each to Minerva as a gift for the Restricted Section of the new library. Madam Pince had been thrilled.

On a wet evening, Hermione met Severus for dinner, carrying with her a copy of an article praising her new appointment to the Wizengamot and promotion to Head of the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures since she'd been acting as department head under Newt since her hire. He gave her a copy of his newest book, *Effusions, Essences and Extracts, the Basics of Bases*, which he warned wasn't so basic and was well above O.W.L. level. They talked amiably about everything. Hermione sipped her water as Severus sipped his wine, commenting that he doubted that the proprietor had added any potions to the wine. She'd just bit her lip, blushing and laughed at his comment.

"So, Hermione," he said, his finger tracing the rim of his glass. "When were you going to tell me?"

"Tell you what?" she asked, looking at him confused.

"About the baby."

*He can't know!* She nearly choked on her water. "What...? How...?" *I'm just starting to... No, that's not true... However, it's not that obvious under robes!*

He simply arched an eyebrow and waited for her to tell him.

"When did you find out?" she asked. *I'm not showing that obviously yet how'd he know?*

He cocked his eyebrow again. "Tell me honestly, did you or did you not take the Contraception Potion I gave you?"

"I couldn't. I don't know why, but I simply couldn't." Hermione had to pull her eyes away from watching his finger slide along the rim of his glass. "I don't know what made me do it. I know it was foolish, but I just couldn't bring myself to drink it. I know it would have aborted the baby if I'd conceived, and I really just couldn't do that. I'm sorry. I poured it down the drain." His expression told her that he'd expected as much, and she dropped her gaze to her hands that lay folded on her lap.

"And the antidote, did you take that?"

Hermione nodded, still refusing to look him in the eye.

He was silent of a long while. "Hermione, look at me." She lifted her chin and looked at his dark eyes, meeting his scrutinizing stare. "Did you?"

She nodded and looked away. "It made no difference at all. I couldn't help thinking about you. Ron and I are... well, we'll only ever be friends."

"I came tonight to tell you I've moved," he said, and she could feel his stare even without turning to look. "However, there is something more important that you and I obviously need to discuss."

\*

"His name is going to be Hugh Severus," she said, taking the baby from the Midwitch.

"No, Hermione, I don't think so," Severus said, laughing from the doorway. "Severus? I always hated the name as a child." He walked in and stood by her bedside.

Mrs. Weasley gently took the baby from Hermione and turned to allow Severus to hold his son while the Midwitch cleaned Hermione up. "Go on, don't you want to hold your son?" Mrs. Weasley asked. Severus cocked his eyebrow at her and Mrs. Weasley laughed. "Go on, it's easy... just support his bottom and his head."

"So, you're going to use your grandfather's name for him then?" he asked, staring at Hugh's tiny face, checking out the infant's nose and mop of dark curly hair. "If you are insistent on choosing one of my names, my maternal grandfather's name was Talfryn. I'd rather not use Severus or Eugene."

Hermione and Mrs. Weasley smiled, watching Severus examine his son as if looking for defects. "Hugh was my mother's father, too," Hermione said. "I'll name him Hugh Talfryn, then." Hermione smiled as the quill hovering over the birth record recorded the names.

"Snape," Severus said authoritatively.

"Pardon?" the Midwitch asked. "Miss?"

"Snape," he repeated firmly. "He's mine, Hermione, he will have my name."



"Yes, dear, you're the father," Hermione said, grinning as the quill added *Snape* to Hugh's record. "Or so you have reminded everyone here, numerous times."

"Yes, Mrs. Snape, I have," he said, placing the small infant in her arms and kissing her forehead.

"I'm still only your fiancée, Severus," she reminded him cheekily.

"Only for the next two months," he said with an amused smirk. "You are my witch none the less, and he's my son."

Hermione smiled as she adjusted Hugh at her breast and looked up at Severus, still beaming. "Yes, we are."

*~Fin~*

*Author's note:*

*Hats off to my betas. I have a great deal of gratitude for Ladyinthecloak and Machshefa for beta reading this for me. Thank you so very much for all your help. You ladies are great and I really appreciated you doing this. Thank you.*

*Okay, I know that I completely tossed out the entire epilogue and changed who lived and who died. In truth I hated the epilogue. For anyone who wishes to point out that Hugo (which I changed to Hugh), wasn't Hermione's first child, maybe Rose was Ron's kid and Severus wasn't available to take Hugh to the train that morning... or he was waiting in Hogsmeade. Who knows? Anyway, I hope you enjoyed my version of the missing months following the final battle of Dark War II.*

*Thus concludes my gift for Shadow\_ks from the SS/HG gift exchange. I was thrilled that she liked it! Thank you to everyone who left a review. Your kind words are more loved than you could know.*