

Shades of Grey

by RedOrchid

This story has been abandoned. (See A/N of last posted chapter for details)
Hermione enters a world of twisted relationships and ever-thickening plots.
Independent sequel to "Love Potion no.9."

A New Beginning

Chapter 1 of 7

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A/N: This is a sequel to my story "Love Potion no. 9," which can be found at Ashwinder. Hopefully, it stands well on its own. A summary can be found at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 1 A New Beginning

Hermione woke up slowly and reluctantly, the way people do who sense that once they open their eyes, they'll have to deal with things they'd rather forget. Her head was pounding like somebody had stuffed it full with extra information during the night and made it blow up to twice its normal size. She searched her memory for a reason. Right, the wine. Quite a lot of wine, if she remembered correctly. She probably should have paced herself better, but it had been so smooth, trickling down her throat in the most exquisite way. And it had gone so well with the food... She smiled at the memory. Dinner last night had been very nice, not only because of the food... Rolling over on her side, she propped her head up on her hand and looked at her still sleeping lover. Severus Snape, who would have thought? Amazing where botching up a potion could lead you. It was supposed to be a potion to reveal true love, a potion to get Ron to admit that he fancied her. Unfortunately (or rather, fortunately), her own hormones and a very naughty dream had transformed it into more of a lust potion, one that left her bound to her Potions professor for a week. Now the week was over. This very morning as a matter of fact. She wondered what would happen to them now.

The sensible part of her brain told her to get dressed and get gone. She had no excuse for her behaviour now that the potion had lost its effect. Guilt was quickly seeping into her mind, teamed with a heady portion of revulsion. How could she have let herself sink so low? Not only had she been shagging her professor repeatedly and without any real sense of remorse (after getting over the initial guilt, that is), but she'd treated her closest friends horribly. The potion had revealed hidden feelings not only in Ron, but in Harry and Neville as well. And she hadn't handled the situation very well, leading them on and taking advantage of their feelings, using them to hide the fact that she was seeing Snape in secret. At least that's how she felt now; her memories were still a little fuzzy from sleep and hangover.

She needed to apologise to Ron and smooth things over from their fight two days ago. Their one date and brief status as a couple had made her realise how utterly wrong they were for each other. She'd fought the realisation long enough. There was no way they'd be happy together. Fleeting, she wondered if she'd only really pursued him because she knew this on some sub-conscious level. If she'd only wanted him because of the challenge he represented. She'd tried to escape to him and away from the feelings her professor stirred up in her, not that it'd worked... She sighed. She really should end this affair, or whatever it was. If anyone found out... she shuddered to even think about it. So far, Neville was the only one who knew, and he'd taken it surprisingly well. But she'd only told him because he'd found out, having heard them through the wall of the Potions classroom. She closed her eyes in pain. She needed to do some active damage control on that front too. She'd told Neville that she was in love with

Snape for one thing. Lying here, she couldn't really understand why she'd done it. She supposed she'd reasoned that it would make Neville more forgiving than if she'd told him the truth: that she was shagging her professor simply because she lusted after him, because of the way her body responded to his, because of the way he made her lose her touch on reality with every thrust inside her...

Alright, Hermione, stop it right there.

She craved him now, wanted him constantly. It really had to end. Sitting up in bed, she started to look for her clothes. Scattered pieces of silver lace lay on the floor around the bed. She gathered them with a simple wave of her wand. She touched the material gently, smiling. It was really a wonderful gift; he could be so thoughtful sometimes...

She quickly reeled that thought back in and gave it a disapproving frown. Why was she trying to fool herself? Severus had sent her these things for his own pleasure, not hers. That she liked them also was a bonus, not his primary concern. Thoughts like this one unnerved her. To actually fall in love with her surly professor would be a disaster. Nothing good could possibly come of it he'd probably ridicule her if she told him something like that. Nervously, she searched her heart and mind, looking for signs that she was falling for him. To her relief, she found none. She desired him fervently, but she didn't love him. Not in the least. And yet, there were the dreams...

She closed her eyes in concentration, trying to remember. It seemed she'd been having the same kind of dream for the past several days now, ever since that heated (and, in retrospect, very stupid) session in the library. A memory of one of their trysts would transform itself in her dreams, turning into a very emotional affair. In her dreams, her heart would feel so full of him, and their joining would feel like coming home, or becoming whole, or something else that was equally clichéd and cheesy. In her dreams, she loved him. Desperately. And that really worried her. She should really end this and walk away. Now.

Fastening her skirt, she turned around, intending to take one last look on her sleeping professor before she left. Instead of a sleeping face, she met his black eyes. There was an expression in them she couldn't read. She wondered how long he'd been awake and what he was thinking.

"You're still here," he said, his voice raspy from sleep. The tone wasn't really annoyed, nor was it pleased, or even questioning. She couldn't place it at all.

"I was just leaving," she answered, finding her other shoe and putting it on.

"Good," she heard him mumble as she crossed the floor to the fireplace. Without looking back, she threw a pinch of glittering powder into the flames and left his bedroom.

He watched her leave and continued to stare into the flames long after the emerald colour had turned back into its usual golden red.

A week later, Hermione stood outside the door of the Potions classroom, trying to gather up enough courage to actually knock. She, Ron and Ginny had been called to Dumbledore's office a few days earlier and been told that they needed Occlumency lessons. Apparently, one of his spies had told him that Voldemort planned to go through Harry's friends to get to him, and being the people closest to him, they were all probable targets. Ron was scheduled to work with Dumbledore, and she and Ginny would be taking lessons with Professor Snape. Ron had protested, of course, asking why they couldn't all be together in this. Dumbledore's answer (that he simply didn't have the time to teach all of them and that Hermione and Ginny seemed less inclined to do severe harm to his Potions master than Ron and Harry) was reasonable, but something in the way he looked at her when he said it made Hermione feel uneasy. She wondered just where this information had come from and had a good guess. Seeing as Ginny's lessons were scheduled early in the evenings, just before her own, she suspected that having Ginny train with Snape was more of a smokescreen than anything. Question was only, who'd come up with the idea? Sometimes the seeming omniscience of the Headmaster could be very unsettling...

So, here she was. She looked at her watch and realised that she was five minutes early. She stepped close to the door, put her ear against it and tried to hear what was happening on the other side. She could hear Snape's lower voice, but not what he was saying. Ginny seemed to be quiet, except for some moans and whimpers of pain that would carry through the thick wood from time to time. *They were signs of pain, weren't they?* Opening her eyes wide, she shook her head and took a step back. Where did these thoughts come from? Snape was giving Ginny Occlumency lessons, nothing more. *Right, just like he gave you 'detentions'?* a small voice whispered at the back of her head. She shook her head again, trying to think logically. A reasonable voice told her that *of course* nothing inappropriate was going on. Their thing had started because she'd botched up a potion, and it had ended when it lost its effect. He was a professor, after all. The other little voice reminded her that the Potions master was a man and that he hadn't (to her knowledge) had sex for a week. She was in deep withdrawal herself, finding it hard to do almost anything, since as soon as she closed her eyes or let her mind wander, she'd be back in his bed, feeling him move inside her. Quite often her memories would be actually physical and she would feel his body against hers as she sat in class or tried to study in the common room. Very distracting.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the door flying open. Ginny stepped out, looking very pale. Despite herself, Hermione quickly checked her hair and clothes, looking for signs of recent physical activity. She didn't find any and breathed a small sign of relief. Not that she was jealous; the mere thought of that was ludicrous. She was just worried about Harry. Ginny was his girlfriend now, and if he found out that she was cheating on him with one of the people he hated most in the world, he'd be devastated. *A bit like Ron, your maybe-boyfriend?* the evil voice whispered in her ear. *Good thing he didn't find out about your extra-curricular activities lately.* Oh, God, this was so not what she wanted to be thinking. Ever. She'd managed to smooth things over with Ron over the past week, and even though he kept asking her to give him a second chance, they were functioning friends again. A little strained, but functioning. She desperately hoped he would never find out. She turned her attention to Ginny.

"Hi, how are..." she started.

"I don't feel like talking about it." On a closer look, she could see the traces of tears in Ginny's eyes and face. The redhead put a hand on her arm and gave her a rather forced smile. "Good luck. I'm going to bed. See you tomorrow."

And with that, she walked away, moving quickly down the corridor. Hermione drew a deep breath and walked through the door, closing it behind her.

"Miss Granger. Do come in." Snape was standing at the opposite side of the room, over by the desk. She blinked at the formal way of address, but put it aside and walked towards him. When she was in the middle of the room, Snape drew his wand and waved it a couple of times. She recognised the slurping sound of the doors being locked and warded and the wand movements of the Silencing Charm. The room was suddenly very warm.

"Why was Ginny so upset? ... Sir," she added quickly as he gave her a pointed look.

"Miss Weasley revisited a certain chamber in this castle numerous times this evening," he said simply. "The girl needs to shut out the demons of her past before she can start protecting herself against those of her future. Oh, and she's quite afraid you will come and take her *darling* Harry Potter away from her. Something about a night in the hospital wing?" His tone was low and silky, nothing out of the ordinary. Somehow, that made her feel very apprehensive.

"Oh." She didn't know what else to say. He smirked.

"Not one of your most intelligent remarks. Shall we start then?" She caught herself letting her eyes glide across his body, mentally reaching for the buttons at the top of his robes. She swallowed hard.

"Certainly, Professor. Where do you want..." She cringed at her choice of words, quickly correcting herself, "I mean, where should I stand?" His smile widened, and an almost predatory gleam crept into his eyes.

"Oh, right where you are should be fine, I think." He waved his wand, and a dozen gigantic pillows appeared around her on the stone floor. "In case you should fall," he said casually, meeting her questioning glance. "Now, let's begin. What do you know about Occlumency?"

She spent the next ten minutes repeating all the facts she'd gathered out of different books. As soon as Dumbledore had told her about the coming lessons, she'd naturally gone to the library to read up on the subject. She also included some of the information Harry had told her about his experiences. Having nothing more to say, she went silent. Snape gave her a nod and drew his wand.

"So, Miss Granger, when I break into your mind, what will I see?" She swallowed.

"The brain reacts instinctively, calling up the memories I would most like to hide from you out of fear, sir," she stated, eying him nervously.

"That does not answer my question," he said silkily. "Now, brace yourself and clear your mind."

She did her best, taking deep breaths and closing her eyes, trying to calm down. It wasn't easy though, as panic kept running through her as to what he might see. She found herself actually hoping that he'd get pictures of her breaking school rules with Harry and Ron. The theft of Boomslang skin in her second year would be nothing compared to...

"*Legilimens*," Snape said, pointing his wand at her.

She felt her head begin to spin, memories flashing before her. Images from her most secret dreams of the two of them together, him reaching out to touch her face, her whispering how much she loves him in his ear before losing herself in his touch, her heart swelling as she looks at him, the two of them making love, him telling her that this is forever... Suddenly, there was a shift in scenery, and she saw herself sitting in a dark broom closet, crying, with Neville patting her on the back. She knew what came next and knew she had to stop it before he heard the next part of her confession. Concentrating with all her might, she pushed hard.

"No!" The flashes stopped. She opened her eyes. Snape was leaning against his desk, pushing himself up on his feet. He looked at her with a curious look, raising an eyebrow.

"My, my, what interesting dreams you've been having lately, Miss Granger." She pulled up her courage and shrugged.

"They're just dreams. It doesn't mean anything." The questioning eyebrow went down, and his eyes narrowed.

"Really now? And what of the *touching* moment with Mr Longbottom? That wasn't a dream memory."

"He overheard us. I told him that I was in love with you to make him keep quiet."

"Surly a simple Memory Charm would have been more efficient?" She looked down at her feet.

"It's Neville. His parents I... I just couldn't do it. So I lied instead." She looked up at him defiantly.

"You lied?"

"Yes, of course." He looked for a moment as though he wanted to push her further, but then simply put his wand on the desk and walked closer to her.

"For a first attempt, that was quite adequate. You eventually managed to push me out, even though you wasted quite a bit of time mumbling before finally concentrating. You need to clear your mind further, to make it completely blank. Is that difficult for you?" He was standing only about ten inches away from her now, and she reflexively wet her lips, able to feel the heat coming from his body. All sorts of inappropriate ideas were flying through her mind, so yes, making her mind go blind would be rather hard at the moment.

"Yes," she murmured, not knowing exactly what she was giving the answer to, but instinctively feeling it would be the right one.

"Well, luckily for you, that is a state I believe I'm quite adept at inducing," he said with a smirk, moving his hand to gently caress the underside of her breast. She gasped at the contact.

"Severus, we shouldn't..."

"Miss Granger, you're still in class. I'm afraid I have to insist that you address me appropriately," he whispered, his other hand coming around to massage her neck. "Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir," she managed, her breath hitching in her throat as he casually circled one of her nipples. With a wide smile, he kissed her hard and pulled her down on the pillows.

"So, Miss Granger, did you manage to clear your mind properly?" They were lying sated on the floor, Hermione curled around Snape's body for warmth. She chuckled.

"Well, my mind was definitely cleared. Several times as a matter of fact. Whether it was done in a proper way or not is open for discussion." She rolled on top of him and lowered her lips to his, kissing him deeply.

"Whatever works," he smiled, rolling with her to pin her beneath him again. "And since clearing your mind is rather crucial to the practice of Occlumency, I advise you, as your well-meaning professor, to practice this skill every night when going to bed." His slight leer told her in no uncertain terms in what bed he would like for her to practice. "After all, I can't devote all our Occlumency sessions to this one basic principle now, can I?" Threatening her education melted the last of her resistance, not that there'd been much left apart from a symbolic notion after their recent activities. She wanted him, and deep down she knew that if she kept refusing to see him out of class, she'd just end up with a lot of detentions and extra Occlumency lessons. And his bed was a lot more comfortable than desks, walls and stone floors after all.

"Don't worry, sir, I always do my homework."

"Do it well and you might get extra credit." That made her laugh. Pushing him off her, she got to her feet, looking around for her scattered clothes.

"So, is the lesson over yet, professor?" she asked, putting on her robes. "I could really use some time tonight to do my homework. The essay for Professor McGonagall, that is."

"Class dismissed," he granted, standing up as well. She walked up to him, placing her hands on his chest and raising herself up on tiptoe to give him one last kiss.

"I'll see you in a few hours then... Severus." He smiled.

"I'll be waiting for you, Hermione."

He watched as she walked out the door, shaking his head slightly. There was something about this girl that appealed to him, something besides the fact that she was a great lay. He remembered more of their time together than he assumed she did. Enough to know that her "dreams" weren't actually dreams at all, but memories in disguise. He remembered the decision taken in Dumbledore's office after she and Potter had found a ritual that would technically give the boy enough power to defeat the Dark Lord. The crux was that the ritual not only involved the Boy-Who-Lived-To-Plague-Him and his new little love interest, Ginny Weasley, but also Hermione... and himself. The four of them needed to unite to wield the ancient magic.

Which meant that Albus Dumbledore had ordered Occlumency lessons. And mind control. It might seem a little exaggerated, but he actually agreed with the old man for once. Until they were all strong enough to protect the information from the Dark Lord, it would stay hidden in the dream section of their minds. Well, except for in the case of Miss Ginny Weasley, who'd simply been Obliviated along with her annoying brother...

His mind wandered back to Hermione, and the smile faded from his face. There was a second part to Dumbledore's plan, one which she'd agreed to but which she didn't remember anymore. He didn't know the details himself, but could guess most of it. It would be difficult and very dangerous. He only hoped that the chit would be strong

enough to deal with it when that moment came. One thing was certain: he wouldn't be able to dawdle with her during Occlumency lessons anymore. To make it, as a Mudblood, into the inner sphere of the Death Eaters, she had her work cut out for her. And so did he, the one who would get her there. On the other hand, corrupting sweet little Miss Granger's righteous Gryffindor mind could prove to be quite entertaining...

The smile back on his face, he cleared the classroom of pillows, put the worktables back and returned to his bedroom to read a good book until the flames in his fireplace would again turn a welcoming green.

A/N: Summary of LP9: (stop reading here if you don't want to spoil that story)

Attempting to get Ron to notice her, Hermione makes a love potion that will force him to show his true feelings. A mistake during the brewing causes the potion to affect not only Ron, but also Harry, Neville and, of course, Severus Snape, who suddenly realise that they are harbouring tender feelings for our heroine. After having received romantic gestures, sweet kisses and beautiful flower arrangements from the other three, Hermione ends up in detention because of an exploded cauldron and is promptly and passionately shagged on a desk by the sexy Potions master. This provokes yet another wacky twist as the love potion finds this to be a perfect requirement to tie the two love birds to each other for a week, forcing them to have steamy sex constantly. After going at it in the library, a pool, a broom closet and a million other places (Hermione still dating Ron, flirting with Neville and sharing soul-shattering kisses with Harry in an exercise of deep denial), Hermione falls deeply in love with Severus and jumps his bones even more frequently. In the midst of the swirling love affair, Hermione and Harry find a ritual to destroy the Dark Lord, Neville finds a way to cure his parents' insanity by means of a pretty flower and Ron is shoe-horned into the role of the villain, doomed to behave like a complete prat throughout the story. Harry and Hermione tell Dumbledore of their findings, and the truth about Hermione's extracurricular activities surfaces. Ron sees a ruffled bed and gets it all backwards, accuses Harry of sleeping with Hermione and lands himself and Ginny (who Harry was actually sleeping with) in the hospital wing, where their memories are conveniently erased by Sanpe to protect the information about the new-found ritual that will kill the Dark Lord (and to conveniently remove the annoying character called jealous!Ron from the centre of the plot). To further protect this crucial information, Snape makes a Somnium Potion, which disguises all information and all feelings relating to the ritual (which naturally feeds off the emotions of our key characters) inside the characters' minds, cunningly disguised as dreams. Severus and Hermione have one last shag, involving some ingenious charms, a few silk ropes and some see-through lingerie, and fall asleep together. The story ends with a massive cliff-hanger as Severus' answer as to whether he is, in fact, in love with Hermione is left unanswered through the sheer evilness of the writer's Orwellian ways.

All clear? Then on with the story. :-)

Making Plans

Chapter 2 of 7

This story has been abandoned. (See A/N of last posted chapter for details) Hermione enters a world of twisted relationships and ever-thickening plots. Independent sequel to "Love Potion no.9."

Chapter 2 Making Plans

The spring term seemed to fly by, weeks turning to months in a matter of seconds. There was a flurry of activities, students and teachers doing what they could to stay calm and focus on education, even though the wizarding society in general was under constant attacks from Voldemort and his Death Eaters. There were no big, open battles, but people kept disappearing, only to be found weeks later, dead, or even worse, driven insane by continuous exposure to the Cruciatus Curse. Dark creatures attacked people at regular intervals, and strange happenings had become the norm. People didn't know who to trust anymore, as an old friend could suddenly turn against you, controlled by the Imperius Curse, and put their wand to your throat. Hogwarts remained unscathed by actual attacks, but suspicion and fear weighed heavy on the castle. If the Slytherins had been disliked before, it was nothing compared to the current situation. Emotions were running high, and it was clear that things wouldn't be able to last much longer. Luckily, the summer holidays were near.

For the Golden Quartet in general, Occlumency had become the number one priority--even topping Defence Against the Dark Arts. For Hermione, it was even more than that. She knew that she was having a lot more lessons than her friends and that Snape was driving her a lot harder than he and Dumbledore drove any of the others, including Harry. She wondered about it, but didn't ask. She trusted Dumbledore, and she trusted Severus. She would be told eventually. Acting on inexplicit orders from her Potions master, she didn't tell her friends about her rigid training schedule. Just like she didn't tell them about the personal relationship that was blossoming between herself and her teacher. For once, she stayed quiet and observed rather than throwing herself into things, demanding answers.

Once she took this step, her perspective of things changed, and she saw the situation with new eyes. Things that hadn't made sense before suddenly became much clearer. She realised, for example, that Ron wasn't getting the same training as the rest of them. He and Ginny had one Occlumency lesson per week each, while Harry had three and she herself usually about four or five (although her friends only knew about the one she had directly after Ginny's lesson). Whereas Ginny would always come out of the dungeons pale as a ghost and mentally drained, Ron came out of Dumbledore's office not much worse for the wear. It seemed Dumbledore put more time on training him to withstand the Imperius Curse, rather than practicing Occlumency. She wondered why.

Her own skills in the obscure branch of magic were developing rapidly. She could soon close Snape out of her mind completely. She then went on to train with Dumbledore twice a week, while Snape went on to teach her a more subtle skill: letting oneself be read while keeping control over the memories shown to the intruder. Lessons with Dumbledore were very different from what she'd known thus far. Whereas Snape needed his wand to break into her head, Dumbledore did it with a single glance. There were no flashing memories where the Headmaster was concerned, at least not as first--as he seemed to wander through her mind on tip toe, dressed in an invisibility cloak, examining her memories and thoughts at his leisure. This was the difference between her two teachers, she realised: one was an Occlumens and the other was a

Legilimens. They complemented each other, making sure her training covered everything. She soon started to have suspicions as to why.

Severus Snape was sitting in Dumbledore's office, across the desk from the Headmaster, who eyed him with a serious look on his face. It was nearly midnight, a cool night at the end of May. The castle was silent, an owl flying past the window from time to time, leaving for its nightly hunt. Dumbledore poured two cups of tea and turned towards his Potions master.

"How are things progressing, Severus." The dark man opposite him took a sip of his tea and put down the cup.

"Which front would you like me to divulge first?" he asked, moving the spoon around in smooth circles.

"Any news about Voldemort?" Snape shook his head.

"Nothing for a while now. The last general summons came in the beginning of March, as you know. I saw Lucius on Friday, as usual. Nothing new. But then, I'm only told what the Dark Lord deems fit to tell me." Dumbledore sighed. Things were certainly locked at the moment. In a way, he was happy about it. It gave Harry some more time.

"What about Hermione, then?" he asked, taking a cookie from a jar and pushing it across the desk.

"You're the Legilimens, you tell me. I don't get through with my wand anymore, so I can't really check her abilities," Snape answered smoothly, taking a cookie as well.

"It seems that she's able to detect my intrusion about seventy percent of the time, which is a little odd, as she used to be able to achieve ninety a few weeks ago. Any theories as to this relapse?" A smile spread slowly on the Potions master's face.

"I believe so. Tell me, when you manage to break through, what do you see?" Dumbledore shifted in his chair.

"Well, that was actually one of the other things I wanted to talk to you about, Severus. I thought we'd agreed not to tell her about the planned mission until she was fully able to protect her mind," he said, his voice curious rather than accusatory. Snape's smile widened.

"What did you see?" Dumbledore looked decidedly uncomfortable. He took a long sip of his tea before finally speaking.

"I saw the two of you... in bed... talking about the war. You were discussing different ways to infiltrate the Death Eaters and how to overcome the fact that she was Muggle-born," Dumbledore said in an uneasy voice. Snape just smirked. "I must stress, Severus, how utterly depraved this situation makes me feel. Why, I can't get through a single Occlumency session without getting a very vivid reminder of how badly I'm neglecting my moral responsibilities as Headmaster of this school. I feel like the worst kind of voyeur." Snape's smile grew wider and Dumbledore shot him a reproving look. "Really, Severus, this isn't a laughing matter. I--"

"What was she wearing?" Dumbledore choked on the tea he'd just taken into his mouth.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Trust me, this is relevant. What was Hermione wearing in the memory you saw?" Dumbledore just stared at him for a few seconds, and then he started to massage his temples with one hand, seemingly thinking hard.

"I'm not entirely sure, since I do my very best not to notice what either of you are wearing--or rather not wearing--on these occasions, but I believe it was something green. A negligee of sorts perhaps?" His line of thought was interrupted as the man across from him suddenly began to laugh--a big hearty laugh that echoed against the stone walls of the round office. He hadn't heard Severus laugh like that in years, possibly decades, and his features softened. Perhaps there was a bright side to all this darkness and depravity. His Potions master was decidedly happier now than he'd been six months ago. Still, the fact that he was actually allowing a teacher/student relationship to go on in his school ate at his conscience...

Snape stopped laughing and took a sip of his tea. The smile hadn't died from his lips, however, and he looked... almost smug. This could not be good.

"Pray tell me, Severus, why would Hermione Granger's bedclothes be so very funny in this context?" he asked, hoping against hope that the answer wasn't something he really didn't want to know.

"Because," Snape's upper lip curled again and the glint in his eye came back, "that green negligee doesn't exist. It's just a figment of her imagination, a tool she uses when practicing advanced levels of Occlumency. The scene you witnessed never took place. I've not told her about your little plan, and we certainly never discussed it. Well, I guess this answers your earlier question about how much she's progressed. I must say that I'm rather proud of her."

"You don't mean to say... that instead of just closing her mind to me, she's actually letting me enter, manipulating what I see in there? How is it possible that she's already reached that level?" Snape chuckled.

"What can I say? She's a very diligent student. And obviously quite perceptive if she's managed to figure out what's in store for her all on her own." Dumbledore just nodded, lost in thought.

"Imagine what we could achieve if we could make Harry reach that level." Snape's face grew cold.

"Potter's greatest problem is that he lets his emotions run away with him. He doesn't take the subject seriously enough. Also, I'm inclined to believe that he's not naturally gifted at Occlumency."

"Harry has made great progress in little more than a year, Severus," Dumbledore said quietly. "The boy's been through a lot, we must make allowances." Snape scowled at that.

"The boy needs discipline, Albus! He needs something to work for, to *work towards*, something to take his mind off his oh-so-sad, hormonal teenage thoughts for a while." The two men eyed each other carefully, knowing how thin the ice was where they trod. Finally, Snape spoke again, "Why don't you train him?" Dumbledore looked down into his tea cup.

"I am training him."

"No, you're not, not where it matters. Forgive me for saying this, but you're only a passable Occlumens yourself. You cannot teach the boy the subtleties of that art." Snape suddenly got to his feet, anger showing on his face. "Potter has a direct magical link to the Dark Lord's mind! The possibilities are endless! He would never suspect an internal attack like that, especially after experiencing how weak the boy's mental defences were last year. Train him to be a Legilimens and start taking advantage of this position instead of seeing it as a liability only."

"It would be dangerous, I'm not sure--" Snape cut him off.

"It's all about precious Harry Potter and the precious little prophecy," he hissed, eyes flashing. "The rest of us be damned as long as he's alive and happy, isn't that so? Let me risk my life, throw Hermione into the arms of the Death Eaters. As long as Potter sits snug as a bug in Gryffindor tower eating lemon drops, things are just fine. Well, they're not. The ritual clearly dictates four participants. Hermione and I aren't disposable any more. You need us on your side." With that, he turned on his heel and walked towards the door.

"Severus, wait." He stopped in his tracks and turned around slowly. "What is it that you want?" Snape smiled; that was one of his very favourite questions.

"Hermione wants to learn wandless Legilimency. I expect you to teach her. If she's going to be thrown into the serpent's lair, she should at least be able to know what the serpents are thinking. And I want you to train Potter. It would be highly useful. I'll see him once a month to evaluate his progress. Goodnight, Dumbledore." He left the tower quickly before the Headmaster had the time to object to his demands. Watching him leave, the old man thoughtfully brought a cookie to his lips.

Severus, dear boy, he thought, *I wonder if you even realise how deep she's getting under your skin? I dearly hope that you will be able to handle it.*

Walking over to a cupboard, he pulled out his Pensieve and started the process of clearing his mind.

Hermione was waiting for him as he came back to his quarters. Curled up in a big chair in front of the fire, she had a book in her lap and seemed absorbed in her reading. He leaned against the door for a while, letting his eyes sweep over her form, from her loose, curly hair to her bare feet, which were dangling carelessly over one armrest. He felt a small spark go through him, leaving an odd happy feeling in the pit of his stomach. Normally, such a thing would have worried him, but as things were, he didn't care. He remembered the potion they'd taken, remembered brewing it, down to the last ingredient. Until such a time as the antidote made its way into their bodies (which was most probably never going to happen), they were both incapable of falling in love. Not that he *would* fall for her, mind. Every night, whatever new feeling of the more tender kind that might have been born in his heart was removed and stocked into the fuzzy part of his brain where dreams lived. Every morning he would wake up, as emotionally free as ever, and so would she. He could recall the memories of a time when she'd actually loved him (or claimed she had at least), but it was only words to him now. Accessing that part of his memory was similar to reading about it in an old journal. He could vaguely remember that he'd felt something when she'd looked at him with those deep hazel eyes and told him that she loved him. He just couldn't feel it anymore. And he wasn't really sorry about that. He liked their present situation. It was safe. No strings, no worries, and, above all, no sentimentality. They talked, they trained, they fucked. Simple as that. He hadn't felt this good in... well, ever.

"How did things go with Professor Dumbledore?" He blinked and returned to reality. Hermione had put her book down and was eyeing him with interest.

"Quite well. I believe congratulations are in order." He smirked. She moved out of the chair, slipping easily into his arms.

"Will he train me?" Her voice was almost giddy.

"Yes, he will. And you've apparently also managed to hoodwink one of the most powerful Legilimenses of our time. Tell me, do you include sexual elements to disturb him or is that your way of making sure he doesn't examine your constructions too closely?"

"Both, to be perfectly honest." She turned away and walked towards the bed, letting her clothes fall to the floor, piece by piece. "Part of me just feels angry every time he breaks into my mind, and I suppose I want to get revenge over him on some level. I know it's illogical and that he only does it to help me, but somehow, I get the feeling that he's intruding on personal things, you know?" She removed her last piece of underwear and slipped into bed. He quickly followed her example.

He slid between the crisp sheets and pulled her close. She came willingly, rolling to capture him beneath her, pinning him down with her body as best she could. They kissed languidly, taking the time to taste and tease each other before moving on to more carnal activities. The impatient and almost desperate passion that had characterised their first month or so together had deepened and grown a myriad different faces. Sometimes, like tonight, it would be achingly slow. At other times, they wouldn't even make it to his bedroom. Her skin had been scraped against rough stone more times than she would care to count. Luckily, healing potions were easy to come by in his profession.

"Severus, can I ask you something?" Hermione wondered sometime later, lifting her head slightly from where it was resting on his chest.

"I suppose you want to know the details of Dumbledore's plan, don't you?" he said, stroking her hair absentmindedly. "I must admit that I was rather impressed with how much you seem to have worked out already."

"Well, it didn't take that much to see it," she protested. "Just the fact that I got four times as many Occlumency sessions as Ron or Ginny was enough to point me in the right direction. And then I have some vague memories of a big golden light. Something you'd care to help me sort out?" He considered his options for a moment. She was strong enough to protect the information about the ritual now, he knew that. On the other hand, he was dead tired and had an early class in the morning...

"As a matter of fact, you ought to be capable of retrieving most of your hidden memories, the ones regarding information that is, on your own. It's not too different from some of the techniques you've been practicing for Occlumency and Legilimency. Clear your mind, move into your subconscious and access the dream section of your mind. The memories you're looking for will all have something in common, something to make you recognise them. It's usually an object, something small and seemingly insignificant. Once you've found the pattern, the rest should take care of itself. We can talk more about what you find, as well as Dumbledore's plan, tomorrow." She nodded her acceptance, and he closed his eyes, letting sleep overtake him.

When he awoke the following morning, she was gone. He went up, had breakfast and left to teach his third-year Ravenclaw-Hufflepuff class. He didn't see her during lunch or dinner, and when she didn't come to his chambers later, he was starting to get annoyed. He figured that she'd probably found the memories she had been looking for and needed some time to process them. Still, he didn't like to spend a whole day not touching her.

The second day, the same thing happened, and on the third, he was in a rather bad temper. He'd seen her at times, sitting in the Great Hall, walking to class with her friends, and on other similar occasions when he couldn't approach her. Fortunately, this was one of her Occlumency days, and he didn't think she'd skive off one of their lessons—especially as he'd just made sure she'd get to learn wandless Legilimency. Sure enough, on the stroke of eight, the flames in the fire in his office turned their usual green, and Hermione stepped through. She brushed some ashes from her robes before walking over to where he sat by the desk. He wrote a last comment on the essay he was correcting and then put his things away. Before either of them said anything, she put down a thick scroll of parchment in front of him. Frowning, he picked it up and unrolled it.

"What is this?" he asked, frowning as he read the first line.

"It's a list of things I've found when looking through my mind these last few days," she replied. "I would like for you to go through them and tell me which ones actually happened."

"I see..." He scanned through the scroll and then handed it back to her. "As far as I can see, these are all real memories, Hermione. It looks like you're getting to know your mind quite well." She sank down into a chair across from him and let out a small sigh.

"So, what do we do now?" she wondered, looking up at him.

"Well, I suggest that we go back to my room and discuss the matter," he said, standing up and gesturing for her to follow him.

Upon reaching his quarters, Snape started a fire and conjured two comfortable armchairs and a small table in front of it. Putting his head in the flames, he ordered some tea and late-night snacks from the kitchens, which appeared on a tray just minutes later.

"Why don't we start from the beginning?" he said, pouring the steaming liquid into two cups. "How much have you figured out about the plans Dumbledore has for you?"

"Quite a lot, I think," she answered. "But I need you to confirm my theories." He nodded. "As I've understood it, Dumbledore means for me to go undercover for the Order along with you, and that's why it's so important that I learn Occlumency."

"Correct," Snape nodded. A quick smile crossed her face.

"Yes, well, that didn't require much to figure out. What I don't see *is why*, though. I mean, what sort of information could I get that you couldn't?"

"That depends entirely on how successful you are in your endeavour," he answered. "Walk in the right direction and you'll be amazed at the amount of information you could gather... and how great your power could be." He watched her carefully as her eyes lit up at his words before they narrowed in suspicion.

"And what will I have to do to get there?" He noted the use of the future tense rather than the conditional. She'd already made up her mind.

"It's very simple. Inside each and every person, there is darkness. Some choose to let it out, others keep it in tight check. You will have to move from the second category to the first, and I highly doubt that you will find it a positive experience, at least not in the beginning."

"I can handle it."

"You might think so now, Hermione, but nobody knows how deep the chasm is until they're balancing on the edge. And then it might be too late to save yourself from falling in."

"It doesn't matter. If I can do something this important to help my best friends and the Order, I'll do it. No matter how dark things get." She looked at him with a proud glint in her eyes, and he shook his head slightly.

"That Gryffindor attitude will get you killed in an instant, which in turn will possibly mean my death since I'll be the one to introduce you. If you're set on going through with Dumbledore's plan, we have a lot to do." She smiled.

"I'm ready, Severus."

"No, you're not. But you will be."

A couple of hours later, Hermione brought up a very practical problem with Dumbledore's plan.

"Severus, how will I manage to infiltrate the Death Eaters when practically everybody knows that I'm both Muggle-born and Harry's best friend? I'm the last person they should want."

"On the contrary. Your relationship with Harry will be your ticket to the inside circle."

"You mean letting them use me to get to Harry? How do we know that Voldemort won't just chain me up and send an owl to Harry, calling him to my rescue?"

"First of all," Snape's voice had dropped to a very low tone, and ice was creeping into his black eyes. "Don't ever pronounce that name. He is the Dark Lord or your master. Nothing else." She nodded her head, a bit shaken by his demeanour. "Secondly, the answer to your other question is: no, you don't know that. You could very well be dead or taken hostage within five minutes of your arrival at your first meeting. And yes, they will try to use you. Everybody tries to use everybody else--these are the rules of engagement. You play, or you die. It's really that simple.

"What if somebody orders you to do something you aren't able to do?"

"Then you either find a way of convincing them that their course of action is ill-conceived, or... you do it anyway. Usually, the second alternative keeps you alive a lot better than the first." She flinched at that.

"So, how do we get around the fact that I'm Muggle-born?" she asked, wanting to focus on something other than the unpleasant scenarios that were forming in her head.

"We change it." She just stared at him.

"Um, I think too many people know the truth for that sort of lie to pass," she said.

"It won't be a lie. You'll be introduced to the Dark Lord as a half-blood--from one of the oldest blood lines, I might add," he stated, a slight smile on his face. Again, she found herself very confused.

"But both my parents are Muggles!"

"So people might think." An answering smile touched her mouth.

"Squibs?"

"Of course not," he scoffed. "A Squib is even worse than a Muggle in wizarding hierarchy. No, the solution I had in mind is infinitely simpler. And more believable, I might add." He leaned closer, and she found herself mirroring his movement. "You see, Hermione, your father is not your real father."

She blinked. So simple. So wonderfully simple. She felt a twinge of unease at the thought of turning her family into a web of lies, but she had to admit that the plan was brilliant, unless...

"Severus, isn't there a charm to reveal family ties? One usually used when dividing up property or the like?"

"Yes, the *Consanguine Revelare*," he confirmed, taking another sip of his tea.

"Wouldn't Vol-- the Dark Lord be aware of that and use it to see if my story is true?"

"Yes, I'm quite certain that he would." She waited for him to continue, but he just sat there, a slight smile still on his face.

"And?" she said finally. "Wouldn't that void the plan?"

"Not necessarily." She opened her mouth to protest again, but he held up a hand to stop her. "The solution is there, Hermione. I trust you to find it for yourself. Consider this a first test."

Standing up, he waved his wand to clear the table, before vanishing it with a small 'pop'. The chairs went the same way, and he moved over to stand by the enchanted window, looking out at the dark night sky. She watched him silently from over by the fireplace, letting her eyes slide across his now familiar features. She'd never quite understood the other students' revulsion when it came to his looks. Sure, his nose was very prominent and his hair was a bit greasy, but those things seemed so very insignificant to her. There was so much more to him than individual features, and she'd always found him fascinating--even, as a younger student, when she was afraid of him. He radiated something unknown, which pulled her towards him as though invisible strings were attached to her body. It gave her an odd thrill.

Slowly, she crossed the room and moved over to him. Taking his hand, she casually led him over to the bed. It was only just past midnight after all...

When she awoke the next morning, the space next to her was empty, save for a folded piece of parchment lying on the pillow. She rolled over, picked it up and unfolded it with a curious look on her face.

I, Professor Severus Snape, hereby grant Miss Hermione Granger permission to retrieve books from the Restricted Section of Hogwarts library for the remainder of the spring term.

Signed

S. Snape

A huge smile spread across her face as she carefully refolded the piece of parchment. Quickly, she got out of bed to begin her research.

A/N: I'm rewriting some details in this story as I'm reposting it. Please review, I'd love to get some comments.

What Do I Spy with My Little Eye?

Chapter 3 of 7

This story has been abandoned. (See A/N of last posted chapter for details) Hermione enters a world of twisted relationships and ever-thickening plots. Independent sequel to "Love Potion no.9."

Chapter 3 What Do I Spy with My Little Eye?

Hermione entered the library with a huge smile on her face. Since this was an almost daily occurrence, no one really paid it any attention. Some Ravenclaw third-years looked at one another and rolled their eyes as she passed them, but that was also rather standard behaviour. She had got over the fact that even the most studious people at Hogwarts thought her an over-ambitious nerd by now. She was actually kind of proud of her reputation, though she wouldn't ever admit it if any of her friends were to ask.

She decided to start at the beginning, with reading up on the *Consanguine Revelare*, before she ventured into the Restricted Section, looking for ways to counter it. She found the book--a very thick one on medieval law and property rights, which she'd taken out for a bit of bedtime reading in her fifth year--and sat down in a secluded corner, flipping through the pages. The spell was mentioned several times, but not thoroughly described. The name indicated some sort of blood-magic, and she got up and walked over to another shelf. Frowning, she went over the titles, realising that the only books on blood and blood-magic available were those on very practical uses of blood, usually animal blood and usually in potion making. There seemed to be nothing about the theory behind the obscure magical branch--even the section on Alchemy was very limited. Odd that she'd never realised it before...

She picked out a few volumes and looked at the reference pages in the back. All of them listed one *Sanguine Magic Theory and Practice* among their principal sources. This book was not on the shelf so she walked over to the counter.

"Excuse me, Madam Pince, do you know where I could find this book, please?" The severe-looking librarian looked at the title she'd scribbled down and frowned.

"That work is in the Restricted Section. You need permission from a teacher in order to retrieve it." She turned back to her filing, seemingly expecting Hermione to go away.

"I *have* a permission slip. Here." She pushed the slip of parchment across the counter. Madam Pince took it, and her eyes widened.

"This is a *general* permission slip," she said, suspicion in her voice. "And I know for a fact that Professor Snape *never* gives out anything but the ones specifying precisely which book a person is allowed to access."

"Well, he did this time," Hermione said simply. The librarian just glared at her.

"Just a minute, please. I need to verify this." She walked into her office, and Hermione felt her cheeks redden in indignation that the other woman obviously thought she was trying to deceive her. A few moments later, she was back, her lips pursed tightly together, and without a word, she gestured for Hermione to follow her. They walked into the Restricted Section, and she pointed at a dark, dusty section in the back. Then she turned abruptly and walked back to her desk.

Hermione took a couple of minutes to just enjoy the feeling of being surrounded by hundreds of new books. They were all old, exciting and possibly dangerous--she couldn't wait to get started. Reverently, she waded down the aisle to the corner indicated by Madam Pince and quickly found the volume she was looking for. Taking it from the shelf, along with some other interesting-looking titles, she brought it back to her spot in the main library.

She stayed in the library all day, reading and making notes. Ron came by at lunchtime, and Harry early in the evening, trying to convince her to come eat in the Great Hall. She refused and instead asked them to bring her something non-sticky back. They grudgingly agreed.

Hours flew by, and before she'd noticed it, darkness had fallen. At ten, Madam Pince closed the library, sending Hermione a pointed glance. Hermione indicated the Head Girl badge at the top of her robes and went back to her reading. She was happy that Dumbledore had let her keep it even though the actual Head Boy and Girl had come back from St. Mungo's. About six months earlier, the Ravenclaw couple had been severely injured during a Death Eater attack on Hogsmeade, and Hermione and Harry had been recruited to fill their positions. Now they were back, but seeing as they both had the NEWTs to prepare for and two months of classes to catch up on, Hermione and Harry retained some of their duties, as well as the badges and the private quarters. Dumbledore had said that he figured it wouldn't do them any harm to practice a bit for the following year and then given them a small wink. Back then, she'd been elated at the veiled promise of becoming the official Hogwarts Head Girl. Now, it felt more like a strain, to be perfectly honest. Between school, Occlumency and her 'relationship' with Snape, she didn't have a lot of time for other things. And patrolling the school corridors at odd hours did lose its charm after a while.

She'd just started reading a new chapter on pureblood advantages in promotion-related programs at the Ministry of Magic in *A History of Purity Politics* (and was becoming increasingly angry at the bigotry and prejudice displayed by the author), when she felt a presence in the room. She looked up from her book and smiled at the tall form leaning against one of the bookcases.

"Found anything interesting?"

"Plenty. I'm not so sure whether any of it is useful, though," she answered, gesturing at the pile of books beside her.

"What are you looking for?"

"I don't know exactly. I've found out more or less how the *Consanguine Revelare* works, I think, but I still don't know precisely *why* it works the way it does."

"Think, Hermione," he said. "Once you know the 'how', the 'why' should logically follow. Now tell me how it works." She frowned, racking her brain to put the pieces together. Not succeeding, she started talking, hoping the answer would come to her.

"The *Consanguine Revelare* is a charm invented to show family ties between people related by blood. When applied on a wizard or a witch, it reads their ancestry, displaying the result as a coloured aura around the person's head. Each magical line has its own colour matrix, and so the result is easy to read and very dependable. It's also used to establish paternity," she added as an afterthought.

"Very good. What colour indicates Muggle parentage?"

"Brown," she answered without even looking at her notes.

"Correct. Allow me to demonstrate." He pulled out his wand and pointed it at her. *Revelo Sanguinem!*

Pure silver light shot from his wand and connected with her body. She felt her head begin to spin as the magic coursed through her veins.

"Look at yourself in the window," he said, his voice cutting through the hissing sound in her ears. She turned around and looked at her reflection in the dark glass. A brown aura surrounded her head, giving the impression that her hair had grown to three times its actual volume. It looked absolutely horrific, and a small giggle escaped her.

"*Finite Incantatem,*" Snape said, and the aura disappeared, leaving her normal reflection in the glass before her. She turned back to him.

"Now, Hermione, based on your experience and what you've read tonight, how would you say that the charm reveals one's ancestry?" She thought back on the rushing sensation and suddenly, it all made sense.

"It reads my blood. *Magical blood is pure,*" she quoted, *"At a magical conception, both parents' blood is reconstructed in the offspring, leaving the lines' blood untainted and unchanged."* Suddenly, something else clicked in her head as well: *Mudblood.* Oh my God, that's what they mean?" she whispered, indicating the now normal space around her head.

"Yes," he answered, matter-of-factly. "No doubt someone thought the word play very poignant at one time."

"So all this 'pureblood', 'half-blood', 'mudblood' nonsense, it's all related to this charm?" She sounded mildly incredulous.

"Precisely, it was very popular a few hundred years ago. Still is in some circles, and it's still used in many legal matters." Hermione closed her eyes, thinking hard. There was something at the back of her brain, wanting to be brought forward, wanting to connect...

"The Basilisk!" Her eyes snapped open when the word fell from her lips. "That's how it knew which students to attack--it could see their blood aura. I always wondered..." Snape looked mildly impressed.

"That makes sense," he conceded. "So, Hermione, how could we use this to our advantage?"

"I don't know. When you first mentioned it, I thought... No."

"Go on."

"Well, I just thought that we'd pretend that I was related to you somehow. That would provide a good excuse as to why I'd approached you in the first place, say, if I were to have discovered that my real father was actually your uncle or similar, and I wanted to know more about my biological family." He smiled.

"Close, but not exactly what I had in mind." Her eyes widened.

"But, Severus, it's not possible. This charm proves that I don't have your blood."

"Not yet." She blinked, trying to make sense of what he was saying.

"But... *how?*"

"I believe that was the task I set you--to find the solution. Perhaps you should return to your studies? Unless," His voice dropped a few notes, "you'd rather continue tomorrow. It is rather late after all. Shouldn't you be in bed by now?"

"Shouldn't you?" She raised an eyebrow at him teasingly. He took a few steps closer.

"I should. Why don't I escort you to your chambers? Tuck you in? Make sure that no monsters are hiding under your bed?" She chuckled.

"Or *in* my bed, perhaps?" She looked around her, then at her pile of books, then at him. "No... I think I need to finish this, find a solution to the problem." She gave him her 'determined' look, and he smiled sardonically, turning to leave.

"Good night and good luck, then." She let him walk to the end of the aisle before calling out, just loud enough for him to hear:

"I don't believe I asked you to leave." He stopped, but didn't turn around.

"I thought you wanted to study."

"I do." She got out of the chair and walked towards him. "But to do that, I need my source material."

"Everything you need is in the Restricted Section."

"I believe you're wrong," she whispered, taking his hand and leading him back to her work station. "I think everything I need is right--" she pushed him gently into the chair, straddling him, "--here." She bent to kiss his neck.

"This is not academic research," he chided, running his hands up her back. "You're supposed to find the solution on your own."

"Oh, and I will. But you never told me what methods I could and could not use. You just asked me to find the solution, and I believe I will." Her hands deftly moved to the buttons of his robes.

"What happened to 'never again in a public place'?" he asked with a smirk, enjoying her lips as they wandered from his neck to his shoulder.

"It's one-thirty in the morning. The whole castle is asleep. And besides..." She raised her head and gave him a sassy smile. "It rather turns me on." He let out a laugh at the naughty look on her face.

"You realise that you will have to be *extremely* persuasive, don't you?" She winked at him.

"Perfectly," she answered, placing a swift kiss on his mouth. "And I've always loved a challenge."

She parted his robes and slid out of his lap, getting to her knees on the floor. Excruciatingly slowly, she removed his boxers and spread his legs, settling herself comfortably between them. Her eyes never leaving his, she stroked him lightly with her hand a few times before leaning down and running her tongue along the length of him, chuckling softly at the expression of intense desire that filled his black eyes. Lowering her eyes for a moment, she licked her lips and suckled softly at the underside, letting her tongue explore the silky skin. His breath grew faster as she tilted her head and took an inch of him inside her mouth, massaging it with her lips and tongue, sucking smoothly. She worked her way down by millimetres, taking her time, enjoying the impatient sounds he made. At one point, his hands made their way into her hair, gently urging her to go faster. With a quick flick of her wand, they were tied behind the back of the chair, and she withdrew from him, starting the whole process over. He groaned loudly, and she smiled, enjoying the power she held over him. After a while longer of slow, teasing progression, she suddenly withdrew altogether—only to plunge down the next moment and take all of him in one smooth stroke. He threw his head back and gasped, hands straining against their bonds, jerking up against her. She moaned, letting her throat vibrate softly around him. He thrust again, more violently, and she steadied his hips with her forearms, holding him in place with her body weight. He kept struggling and groaning as she firmly set the pace, sucking him deep a few times before sliding off, running her tongue from the base up a second time.

"When did you learn how to deep-throat?" his strangled-sounding voice asked from above her head.

"Oh, about a month ago," she replied nonchalantly, giving him some more evidence of her new skill, effectively shutting him up.

"And... how?" he panted after she'd released him again, his head tilted back against the top of the chair.

"I did some reading," she answered. "And... um... I might have practiced a little... with a transfigured banana."

"I'm lucky to have such a diligent student," he managed to get out, though the usual snarkiness in his voice was somewhat lacking due to heavy breathing. "How come you haven't shown me this new skill before?"

"Three words: the opportune moment," she said with a grin, placing another kiss at the crown and letting her tongue come into play once more. He opened his eyes then, and the look in them sent a jolt of heat through her. It was a look of raw desire, hypnotic, branding... She licked her lips again and ran a finger around the tip, making lazy circles. "So, *Professor*," she murmured huskily, "what do I need to do to become a Snape?"

Harry was walking along the dark corridors, moving soundlessly, careful not to break the peaceful silence in the castle. He should have made his rounds just after midnight, but Ginny had managed to keep him, well, *occupied* (he blushed slightly at the memory) for a few hours, and now he was late (ok, very late). He would gladly have skived off patrol just then, seeing as it was three in the morning and nobody was up and about, but he couldn't. The prefect system had a magical calendar attached to it, which marked a missed patrol automatically. Since neglecting his pseudo-Head Boy duties for any other reason than imminent death would bring the fury of Minerva McGonagall down on him, he'd figured a quick sweep of the castle could be managed before going to sleep. He was just passing by the library when something made him stop dead in his tracks.

Somebody was *moaning* in there.

No, wait, strike that. *Two* people were making those sounds, one higher and one lower voice mixing together.

Which logically meant that either they were getting a very advanced snog on, or they were shagging.

Great. So not what he needed.

He was tempted to just keep walking and leave the couple in peace, but somehow, his silent steps were directed towards the sounds. A righteous voice in his head was arguing that it was his duty to catch any student out of bed after curfew, but it didn't manage to convince even himself. He was curious, simple as that.

As he crept closer, he wondered idly who would have sex in the *library*. He could understand the lure of shagging in a place where people might catch you, but the library? Really? He'd entertained a few fantasies about taking Ginny to the prefects' bathroom, or perhaps the Quidditch pitch at night, but the *library*? Seriously, who could like books that much?

Dear Lord, please don't let it be Madam Pince!

But no, the feminine voice didn't sound like the shrill and raspy one of the Hogwarts librarian. It sounded soft, familiar in some way. A foggy memory began to form in his mind, some sort of forgotten dream he'd had. That moan... where had he heard that moan before? He stealthily rounded the last corner and peered into the aisle that seemed to hold the source of the disturbingly alluring noise. What he saw made him freeze. He just stood there, petrified, staring, incapable of all coherent thought as the scene played out before his eyes.

A big armchair was placed at the end of the aisle, just beneath a window overlooking the grounds. A small table stood beside it, holding a few books and a lamp which enfolded the chair and its occupants in a bubble of soft, golden light. More books and scraps of clothing lay discarded on the floor, a scarlet thong catching his attention momentarily before his eyes were forcibly drawn back to the couple in the chair.

The girl had brown hair, swept up on her head and dark with sweat where a few curls played at her neck. Her bare back was glistening in the soft light, and big hands were greedily touching her skin, running up and down in sync with her own movements. The contour of a rounded breast could be seen from where he stood, but the girl's face was protected by the shadows, as well as the identity of the man.

He watched, transfixed, as their movements became more frantic, and then he heard it... that voice...

"God, I can't believe how good you feel..."

No, no, no, bloody hell no! Not Snape?! Not the voice that used to insult him while talking about potion ingredients! No! No, no, no!

And then the other shoe dropped, hitting him square in the face, making him stagger.

"Severus... hold me... please, just a little... a little bit more... I--I... *God*... I can't... I can't... I'm... I--" The incoherent speech faded into a series of gasps and moans as the girl arched and threw her head back, an expression of rapture on her face as her lips kept moving.

Hermione. Oh, no. No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, NO!

Not possible, not possible, notfucking possible! Not Hermione! NotSnape! NOT, NOT, NOT together!!! Not shagging in the bloodylibrary! No! No, no, no, no, no, no, no...!

Movement suddenly returned to his legs, and he felt himself move backwards into the shadows, putting yard after yard of stony distance between himself and the now haunting mental pictures. *Oh, God!* He broke into a run as soon as he reached the corridor and sprinted towards Gryffindor tower, running away, far, far away, from the sounds of ecstasy that kept ringing in his ears. He took the steps up and down the many staircases two at a time, and when he finally reached his own quarters, he was sweaty and exhausted. Closing the door, he leaned against it and slid down onto the floor. Thoughts swirled in his head, and he put it in his hands, trying to force the images and all the voices to stop.

Voice number one was screaming that he had seen wrong, that it had been some other people in that chair, that it had only been a trick of the light, that he was exhausted and delusional, and so on.

Voice number two was calling voice number one a bugging fool in massive state of denial and projecting a slide show of exhibits one through infinity onto the back of his closed eyelids.

Voice number three argued that something was wrong. That Hermione was being raped and that he should run back and rescue her.

Voice number four sneered that rape victims didn't beg for more and have massive orgasms in front of his eyes.

Voice number three countered by screaming that Hermione still wasn't herself, that she must have been drugged, or controlled by the Imperius Curse, or something else evil and illegal that would be able to put his perverted professor in Azkaban ten times over.

Voice number five was shouting at everyone to get the bugging fuck out of his head and just leave him the bloody hell alone!

Harry let up a desperate groan and banged his head against the heavy wood. The pain made the progressing insanity recede somewhat.

Right, Occlumency. Clear your mind.

The problem was that thinking about Occlumency made him think about Snape, which made him think about...

Enough!

With frantic effort, he forced his thoughts to focus on Dumbledore, on the techniques he'd learnt over the past year. Taking deep breaths, he compelled his heart-rate to slow, his muscles to relax and his mind to go a blissful blank. He had to start over a dozen times as an image would flash across his mind and the anger would resurface, but an hour later, he managed to achieve the zen-like state of mental oblivion. Deciding that he would deal with everything that bothered him in the morning, he staggered over to the bed and collapsed next to Ginny's sleeping form.

The next morning, he was awakened by a tickling sensation. He opened his eyes and saw a curtain of red hair move back and forth over his chest. It felt great. He grinned and pushed the hair out of the way, finding his girlfriend's face, which was smiling mischievously. He grabbed her and rolled, managing to place a few kisses along her neck before she giggling threw him off. He pushed himself up on an elbow and looked down at her.

"Good morning."

"Good morning to you too."

"You seem to be in a good mood."

"Yeah, well, two and a half hours of snogging tends to do that to me," she said, rolling her eyes and smiling impishly. "You don't look that depressed yourself."

"I'm not complaining," Harry said, grinning. "I think your kinky mind is starting to have a bad influence on me though."

"Oh?" Ginny raised an eyebrow, eyes glittering. "Do tell." Harry threw himself back on the pillows before starting to laugh uncontrollably.

"Good God, Gin, you won't *believe* the kind of twisted dream I had last night!"

A/N: Please review! I love reviews.

Family Matters

Chapter 4 of 7

This story has been abandoned. (See A/N of last posted chapter for details) Hermione enters a world of twisted relationships and ever-thickening plots. Independent sequel to "Love Potion no.9."

A/N: Possible warning: this chapter briefly mentions occurrences of incestuous marriage. Just so you know.

Chapter 4 Family Matters

"Severus, please tell me that you are not serious."

Albus Dumbledore's eyes were far from the glittering blue he usually displayed. The look he aimed at his Potions master was more than grave—it was cold stone covering something more, something which made Severus's hairs stand on end. Power. Raw power in its most primal form—the kind that was almost impossible to access without tapping into the darker side of magic. The kind he'd always strived for. He met Dumbledore's eyes, concentrating hard not to blink.

"There is no other way, Headmaster. The Dark Lord will never suspect it, nor will any of his followers. It provides a plausible explanation as to why Hermione would waver in her conviction to fight the good fight, or at least as to why she might be interested in learning more about me and her 'real family'. My seduction of her would not be very surprising either, considering... It is the best solution. The only *real* solution. You understand this as well as I do."

Dumbledore sighed and leaned his head into his hands for a minute, visibly exercising control over his emotions. Finally, he broke the silence.

"And Hermione agrees to this solution?"

"She does."

"Even though you will have to end your... physical relationship?" Dumbledore looked slightly uncomfortable, but the look he sent across the desk told Snape in no uncertain terms that he intended his question to be an order. He sat up straighter.

"Headmaster, please reflect on this for a moment and realise how unproductive your request is—not to mention that it would entail severe suspicions with regards to my

behaviour as a Death Eater and as a member of the House of Snape. You know of our history, and you know how relations between relatives are perceived by most of the pureblood families. What reason would I possibly have to refrain from using such an effective tool as seduction to sway her loyalties?"

"You could always blame it on me."

"Not a satisfactory excuse, especially since you are supposed to be completely ignorant of this 'newfound family tie'. The Dark Lord will not consider me to have made enough of an effort to persuade you, and he will wonder why that is. The more of a claim I have on her, the safer she will be." He leaned forward, fixing Dumbledore with his best stare. "We are at war. You cannot seriously be suggesting that you would risk losing everything we have fought for for two decades because of your sense of propriety?"

He knew he'd won the second Dumbledore looked away. He waited patiently while the old man sipped his tea with a sorrowful look on his face, eyes fixed on the mountains outside the office windows. In the meantime, his mind wandered back to the conversation he'd had with Hermione earlier that day.

"Severus, there are a few things I need to ask you, concerning this ritual."

It was two days after their 'study session' in the library (during which he had succumbed to giving her a complete list of required books, down to chapters and page numbers, but had managed to refrain from actually telling her about the ritual itself), and he was sitting at his desk, correcting papers, as she asked the question.

"Did the books not provide you with all the details necessary?" he queried, raising an eyebrow in her direction. She faltered.

"Well, I did find a way... But, Severus, there is no way it could possibly work! I mean--"

"What are your objections, more precisely?" he interrupted, putting the quill down and turning to face her. "Tell me what you have found and what you find unfeasible with that particular plan." She looked like she was going to object, but then closed her mouth and walked over to the chair opposite his desk and sat down. She carefully removed a thick roll of parchment from her bag and began to go through her findings.

"The possible ritual is extremely rare and, from what I understand, it's part of a very obscure branch of magic. This would be an advantage, since not many of the Death Eaters would know of its existence. Which leads me to my first question: does Vo--" Snape's eyes narrowed, and she quickly corrected herself. "Does *the Dark Lord* know about this ritual?"

"Most likely not. It is part of the same branch of blood magic which is currently protecting Dumbledore's golden boy, but without being too closely related to it. Furthermore, it is extremely uncommon. I wouldn't be surprised if you, Dumbledore and myself were the only living people who knew about it at this date." She nodded and made a note on her parchment.

"That's fine then... OK, so the ritual itself is a kind of adoption procedure, if I have understood it correctly. Essentially, you will drain my blood and replace it with your own, reshaping my colour matrix in the process and making me part of the Snape line." She hesitated for a moment, then looked up to face him. "Forgive me for saying this, but the whole ritual strikes me as rather vampiric, not to mention dangerous."

"No need to apologise when you are perfectly correct. From what I've heard, it was greatly inspired by the vampiric siring process. Through the ritual, my blood replaces yours and will be regenerated by your body from then on. Your genetic code, as the Muggles like to call it, will remain the same, but the magic will assure the continuation of the new line. Magical blood is very powerful, as I assume you know. Since I will only be able to donate half of my blood to you, your own cells will provide the other half."

"So I will appear a half-blood?"

"Precisely."

"See, this is where I'm confused. If I receive your blood, won't my matrix then show three colours? The Snape line, the Muggle brown and whatever line your mother was part of?" Won't that be highly suspicious?"

Snape was quiet for a long while before he spoke.

"See for yourself." He stood up and indicated the wand sticking out of her bag. Totally bewildered, she just stared at him for a while before the meaning of his instruction dawned on her. Slowly, she raised her wand.

"*Revelo Sanguinem!*"

A cloud started to form around Snape's head, swirling fast before coming to a hovering state of relative stillness. The colours in it were clearly visible: a dark red, almost the colour of blood, centred in the middle, and... an all-too-familiar shade of brown circling it. She lowered her wand, noticing that her mouth had fallen open, and hurried to close it again.

"Your mother was a Muggle." She could hear the surprise in her own voice as the words seemed to fall unbidden from her lips.

"Not exactly," he replied. "Though it did become rather a hobby of my father's to 'collect' Muggle women after she died. He preferred them to witches. Easier to control, unable to fight him..." His voice faded and the look he gave her told her that that was all he intended to say on the matter. She went back to her notes, her brow furrowed.

"Then how? I don't understand... And wouldn't the ratio red/brown be askew? If I really were your..." she swallowed hard "yours/ster, wouldn't the ratio be 50/50?"

"Hermione, think," he prompted. "What makes up the colour matrix?"

"The dominant colours of your parents."

"Which are?"

"The combination of your grandparents' lines."

"Correct. It so happens that if my father were, in reality, your father, your colour matrix would be 6/8 brown and 2/8 red, whereas, through this ritual, it will become 5/8 brown and 3/8 red. Since the colour of the Snape line is concentrated at the centre of the matrix, the visual difference will be indiscernible unless thoroughly studied."

The confused look on Hermione's face deepened, and she turned her face back to the parchment, the quill in her hand performing quick calculations. When she looked back up, feelings of disbelief and shock were warring for dominance on her face.

"But... but, Severus... that would mean that..."

"That what?" he challenged.

"Um..." She looked down again, not knowing how to formulate her findings. "Um... well... it would mean that *both* your parents carried the Snape line and that your mother had it *twice*."

"And this shocks you?"

"Well, yes... since that means that your parents must have been cousins and that *her* parents must have been brother and sister!" she said, incredulity in her voice because of the pronounced casualness in his.

"My great grandfather had children by two different women," he said with a shrug of his shoulders. "Laetitia, my grandmother, was born in his marriage to Jane Lestrangle. Cornelius and Richard, my two grandfathers--brothers, as you rightly assumed--were born to his mistress, a Muggle woman named Carol Williams. He acknowledged both his sons, naturally, as they both turned out to be wizards."

The way he was describing it, as though it was perfectly normal, made Hermione's head spin. She swallowed hard and tried to think rationally. Suddenly, pictures of some of the Slytherins floated before her eyes. Could their deficits in looks and intelligence have something to do with situations such as this one? Was marriage to close relatives common in the pureblood community?

"What are the laws on marriage?" she asked instead.

"You can marry anyone who isn't your parent, child or sibling," he answered. "Half siblings, uncles, nieces, cousins and the like are completely acceptable. You should see the Crabbe and Goyle lines." He smirked, as though he had been reading her mind.

"Oh," was the only thing she could think of as a reply. She went back to her notes.

"When and where would we perform the ritual?" she asked, trying to pull her thoughts away from the twisted relationships that apparently lay at the centre of the pureblood community. "I guess the summer solstice would be the closest opportunity, but it is only a few weeks until then. Two days after the end of term if I have calculated correctly." Snape nodded.

"It is very little time in which to prepare the ritual, to be sure, but if we don't do it now, we will have to wait another year before the opportunity returns. The winter solstice is in the middle of the school year, and you will need at least a month to recover from the ordeal, perhaps two. We cannot afford to lose a whole year in that way. As for the place, there is a loch up in the Highlands which will prove very suitable, I think. The concentration of magical energy is very high in the area, and it's quite secluded as well."

"All right then." She rolled up her scroll and returned it to her bag before getting to her feet and moving to stand behind him. She slid her hands across his shoulders and down to caress his chest, leaning down to catch the skin on his neck with her lips.

He responded instantly, capturing her head with one hand and pulling her down for a kiss, which quickly grew in intensity. Her breathing was considerably faster when he let her go.

"Let's go to bed," she whispered, catching his right earlobe between her teeth and pulling carefully. "If we only have a few more weeks in which to do this, we'd better make the most of it, don't you think?"

"Most certainly," he answered blandly, taking her hand as she began to lead him towards the bedroom.

He kept silent about the fact that he had no intention of letting her out of his bed once the ritual was over. Seeing her struggle with her social morals was something he was really looking forward to. No reason to scare her away by giving her too much information too soon, however. She would become aware of his intentions soon enough. And by then she would be ready to take the fall...

A/N: There you go, the ritual is explained. As I said in the beginning, this story is called "Shades of Gray" for a reason. Poll: Do you think that it would count as incestuous for Snape and Hermione to sleep together after the ritual when they're technically brother and sister, or does the fact that they've artificially created the family bond count for something? Just curious to see what you think. Please review!

Creation

Chapter 5 of 7

This story has been abandoned. (See A/N of last posted chapter for details) Hermione enters a world of twisted relationships and ever-thickening plots. Independent sequel to "Love Potion no.9."

Chapter 5 Creation

Mist was rising from the water in the moments just before dawn. An eerie stillness filled the air, void of the smallest twitter or the slightest croak. A shadow moved over the surface of the loch, settled in the very middle and slowly lifted, bringing the water with it to create a smooth altar. A second shadow parted from the trees nearby--a hooded figure, carrying the dangling form of a naked, young woman. Gliding across the water, he came to a stop and placed the unmoving form on the altar.

The eerie silence seemed to intensify as the man drew his wand and, in two swift strokes, cut both wrists of his subject, watching her blood colour the altar a glistening red.

The water began moving, circling the scarlet fountain, creating a vortex which slowly drew the woman down towards the bottom of the lake. Flames erupted around it, burning high towards the night sky as the wind fueled them. In the middle, the hooded man withdrew four phials, raising them to the sky.

"With this sacrifice, let the waters part at my hand."

A phial was opened, and blue liquid joined the water below, spreading out like poured ink and turning it a swirling black.

"With this sacrifice, let the wind blow in the direction of my will."

Another cork dislodged, and white mist soared towards the sky, turning the mist black and enveloping the scene in darkness only broken by the furious flames.

"With this sacrifice, make mountains move."

A third phial was poured into the vortex, joining the amassing pool of blood on the muddy bed, the girl's white face standing out in sharp contrast.

"With this sacrifice, I walk through fire with the will of the flames in my fist."

With a thundering roar, the flames rose to three times the man's height, as a fourth phial of deep gold was thrown into them. The waters swirled at a furious speed, the wind reaching the force of a hurricane and the bed of the loch itself seeming to convulse around the lifeless, still bleeding woman.

"Blood of the innocent I give you!" the man roared into the raging elements. "Power, I shall have in return! Through death, a greater one will arise, and you shall be the maker!" Reaching wide, the man threw both hands into the flames, gasping in pain as the energy soared through him, as the wind filled his lungs and as water and muddy earth climbed his legs.

"Sectumsemptra!"

The man's chest was suddenly sliced open by invisible knives. Dark blood streamed down his body and splashed on the lifeless form below. Crying out in pain, he felt his life leave him, even as the dark power he'd conjured surged through his body. Letting out a searing, agonised cry, he tore his right hand from the fire's clutches and raised his wand.

"What was not, shall become.

With my blood I create thee.

Blood of my blood, life of my life,

For all time to come--family."

Red sparks shot out of the wand and hit the bleeding girl, drowning her in shimmering mist and lifting her up from the watery vortex. The body rose to meet him, hanging in the air before him as though suspended with invisible ropes. Shaking, Severus Snape took Hermione's bleeding wrists and slammed them to the pulsating welts on his chest. Fire surged through both bodies, bringing convulsions, cries and gasps as the blackness swirled and the red mist knitted their forms together.

Then, with a great crack of energy and a swooshing, sucking sound, the spell culminated, throwing the couple into the black vortex, lips coming together in a desperate kiss as the water closed around them.

And then there was again eerie stillness, as the first rays of dawn stroked the calm surface of the loch.

Hermione rose slowly to consciousness. Her face was wet. She opened her eyes and blinked as water flooded them. She felt nailed down, unable to move, as though another Basilisk had come by and turned her back into stone. Slowly, she reopened her eyes and saw darkness surrounding her. A shimmering light taunted somewhere far above, too far for her to ever reach. It was cold where she was--cold, dark and wet--and yet, she felt oddly comfortable. Something was moving inside her, filling her, creeping through every vessel and seeping into every cell in her body. She felt it, and she smiled. Strength--dark, intoxicating strength. She could not lift even a finger, but inside, she felt stronger than ever before. She caught a glimpse of her wrists, no longer bleeding but still displaying gaping wounds. Chanting an incantation in her mind, her eyes widened as the wounds began to close, seemingly of their own accord. The shock was short-lived, and her smile grew wider. Concentrating, she focused all her energy on lifting her right arm towards the light above her and felt immense pleasure when it twitched and obeyed. Not knowing how to, only that she had it in her, she raised her hand through the water and felt it part at her touch. Revelling in her new power and the fact that she was deep under water but still didn't seem to need to breathe, she rose slowly towards the light, parting the waters as she went.

Severus watched her as she broke the surface and proceeded to glide effortlessly towards the brink where he was sitting. Power seemed to emanate from her, and he got a brief flash of the first time he himself had felt immersed by the same force. The heady rush of feeling invincible. Exhilaration which, he knew, would soon give way to other impulses. He rose and walked towards her, extending a hand and letting his eyes wander appreciatively over her naked form.

"Welcome to the world, Hermione Snape." His voice was low and caressing. Her face split in a wide smile.

"Thank you, Severus. It seems a very promising one, so far."

Taking his hand, she rose from the water and followed him to a small tent nearby. The sun was setting over the trees as she stepped into a spacious suite, letting the plush carpet caress the underside of her feet. Without a word, she turned towards her hooded companion and pulled him down with her.

"You lied to me."

The remark cut through the shallow pants which filled the semi-darkness.

"I'm afraid you will have to be a bit more precise than that, Hermione," came the crisp reply. "I tell lies for a living, after all."

She turned towards him, propping her head up on one hand, and looked at him intently.

"You said that it would take me over a month to recover from this spell, but I've never felt better--or stronger. I'm ready to start working with you as a spy." She grinned and started drawing patterns on his chest with her free hand. Under her fingertips, tiny blue flames erupted, which caused him to hiss as they travelled across his newly healed skin.

"You will need the time to recover mentally," he said evenly, looking up at the ceiling. "Going back to your life to begin the operation now would get you killed in an instant."

"But..."

"I trust that you are familiar with the concept of hubris?" he asked, cutting her protest short.

"Of course I am, but--" she started again, breaking off as he rolled them over so that he was now looking down at her.

"I know what you feel, Hermione," Snape said in an almost hissing tone. "You feel invincible, elated and extremely powerful--like you have cheated Death itself and escaped unscathed. You believe that if the Dark Lord came through that door this very instant, you could take him on."

She tried to protest, and he could see anger beginning to kindle in her eyes. Without warning, he snapped his fingers, and ropes suddenly had her hands and feet fettered.

"You...!" With a simple gesture from the man, she found herself mute. A hatred stronger than she'd ever felt rose inside her, taking over her mind, making her yearn to claw at him, to hurt him, to kill him slowly and tortuously for humiliating her. She felt fire start to form in her bound hands, burning away at the ropes which held her. Soon, soon, she would have her revenge....

"Any epiphanies yet?" The short comment dripped with sarcasm, and she suddenly felt like she had been doused with cold water. The beast inside roared and fought for control, forcing her hands apart to snap her restraints, while her rational mind did its best to hold them together. *Hurt! Control!* Impulses warred inside her, and she looked at Snape in panic, even as the ropes broke and she lifted her hands towards him.

"Clear your mind, Hermione," came his voice, almost hypnotic. "Keep your emotions in check."

She breathed deeply and forced her hands down to her sides, striving for indifference as she looked up at him. Slowly, the beast receded, and she felt revulsion in its wake. She felt used, dirty, as though something had just invaded her against her will. Swallowing hard, she fought back the tears.

"You are not ready for this fight," Snape whispered coldly. *"Finite Incantatem."* He touched her lips briefly and stood, grabbed a robe from a nearby armoire and walked over to a chair by a magical window overlooking a vast ocean. She shakingly came to her feet and followed him, feeling deeply ashamed and humiliated--by her own body and mind this time. They sat in silence, side by side, following the imagined sun's descent over the charmed sky.

The Dark Arts

Chapter 6 of 7

This story has been abandoned. (See A/N of last posted chapter for details) Hermione enters a world of twisted relationships and ever-thickening plots. Independent sequel to "Love Potion no.9."

Chapter 6 The Dark Arts

"When I first experienced true power, I was sixteen years old. The Dark Lord promised me power beyond my wildest dream, and he kept his word."

His voice sounded hoarse. The night had long since fallen over the loch, and stars lit the sky in the enchanted window. No reaction came from the girl at his words, her eyes glassy and far away. Clearing his throat, he continued.

"You felt it today--that rush of infinite potential, of pure ecstasy surging through your veins. The obvious difference between us is that when I was first infused with Dark Magic, my guides had a decisively different agenda than what is planned for you. Then again..."

He turned his head and faced her, a scrutinising gleam in his eyes.

"You don't know what your true part is in the events that will follow. You undoubtedly have some misguided idea, but I would be very much surprised if you even knew what the true definition of Dark Magic is, as this is ruled by tradition rather than schooling. Your background dictates that this knowledge is to be hidden from you, unless purposely taught by a 'true' member of society. This is where much of the actual racism within our society takes place, and most Muggle-borns, and even half-bloods, never realise it."

He could tell that he had her full attention now. She was sitting ram-rod straight in the plush armchair (a quite amusing image really), giving him his best top-student look. In a way, it illustrated his point all too well.

"Though not an actual pure-blood due to my grandfather's indiscretions, I was raised according to the traditions and principals of that sphere. We weren't considered a rich family, but then the old ways and ancient traditions are not a matter of social class, per se. I grew up with Dark Magic and consequently never thought much of it before I came to Hogwarts. There, I learnt that there was a certain kind of magic which was hushed up and frowned upon by the administration--if not outright forbidden. It took me a while to fully grasp the distinction, and by the time I had, I was known throughout the school for mastering what I did. You see, Hermione..." His eyes were back on the water, as though the gently rolling waves were his only audience. "... most wizards outside of the pureblood families these days assume that the difference between Dark and Light is in the intent of the caster. The concept has been deliberately muddled by the Ministry and by the press for quite some time."

"Muddled how?"

In response, he raised his wand, twirling it gently around his fingers.

"Muddled in the way that there is no correlation between what Dark Magic actually is and how it is portrayed to the everyday wizard. The official party line is that magic is an ever-changing force and can mirror every aspect of wizardkind. It is neutral, waiting to be given life and colour by the creatures who wield it. The placement on the grey scale is determined by the intent of the person casting the spell, and the relative placement in wizarding society in general is a reflection of what intent is the most common for a certain spell. This is the official, Ministry-approved explanation."

In long, fluid motions, he withdrew a button from his pocket and transfigured it into a small frog, which croaked merrily in his hand.

"An Engorgement Charm on the entire creature would only enlarge it, whereas one focused on the heart would kill it in a manner far more painful than using Avada Kedavra. Yet the Engorgement Charm is not considered Dark Magic. The curses named 'Unforgivable' are used frequently and legally by Aurors without anyone even batting an eye, yet illegal use means a lifetime in Azkaban." He paused slightly, shaking his head slowly. "And in Azkaban, the Ministry allows--and encourages--Dark Creatures to feed off wizard souls for years on end--a treatment which addles your mind as surely as hours of suffering the Cruciatus Curse ever could."

He drew a deep breath and, with a wave of his wand, turned the frog back into a button.

"Didn't it ever strike you, Hermione, how unbalanced the rules of the Wizarding World are? How illogical and contradictory at times? How adaptable to the current holder of power? You might not fully see it yet, since you have so far, for the most time, been grossly favoured--but you will. And then you'll find it hard to keep the loyalty and faith you are so filled with now. In order to survive, my dear, you need to grasp that the capacity to understand and manipulate this is the true reason behind the Dark Lord's power."

"I'm afraid I don't fully understand."

He smiled almost gently at that, and she realised that this was probably the first time she'd admitted to such a thing in front of him.

"The truth, as the Dark Lord sees it, is that there is no good or bad, only power. To a certain extent, he is perfectly right."

He reached out and took her chin in his hand, tilting her face up to meet his gaze. Seemingly of their own accord, the chairs floated closer to one another and turned into one.

"Dark Magic has little to do with morals or intent, Hermione," he explained softly. "The Dark Arts are many, varied, ever-changing and eternal. Like a many-headed monster, they sprout a new head each time one is severed, each one fiercer and cleverer than the one before. In short, they are unfixed, mutating and indestructible. Or, from another angle, they are glorious and powerful."

She was speechless for a long time while she mulled over his words. She'd never heard him talk of anything with quite the same passion before. Something inside her mind that occupied itself with the puzzle that was Severus Snape suddenly found a piece clicking into place, and she felt a chill travel down her spine.

"You are a Dark Wizard." She was surprised at the calm quality of her voice as she uttered the words. A small smile graced his lips.

"Ten points to Gryffindor." He reached out a hand and slowly twirled a curl of her hair around his finger, letting the tension build within her when he didn't immediately elaborate. "Of course I'm a Dark Wizard. Now, in that pretty little head of yours, does that make me an evil man?"

Two conflicting responses were instantly at war within her.

"I--I don't know." Looking deeply into his eyes, she amended, "I don't exactly believe so."

"You don't exactly believe so?" he repeated mockingly. "Tell me, Hermione, in the definition I just provided you with, was there anything stated about the Dark Arts being inherently evil?"

Before she had a chance to answer, he continued to speak.

"Before there were wands, there was Wild Magic--a force manifesting itself in the elemental powers, and which could be channelled through some of the beings on this earth. Some of these beings were the first witches and wizards, and--like most magical creatures--they wielded great power because of this. Wild Magic was extremely powerful, but also unpredictable and dangerous. Fire would burn too bright, or wind would blow too strongly; water would drown and earth would suffocate. Many wizards got lost in the magic and were consumed by it, losing their minds, lives or both. Wands were developed as a means to control this pure form of magic by letting the power run through a conductor, which yielded more stable, but less powerful results. This became known as 'Civilised Magic'--in contrast to the 'pure' version which only the most powerful could hope to control. After some time, the labels shifted, and the Wild Magic gained the name of the historical period during which it was at the peak of its glory." He issued a challenging look. "Surely you don't need me to spell it out for you?"

"The Dark Ages," she half-whispered in confirmation. "How come this isn't covered in History of Magic?" She sounded indignant now, and he chuckled at her anger of having knowledge withheld from her.

"Why would it be? This is common knowledge in the pureblood families, and they are the ones who are in office at the Ministry and on the Board of Governors at Hogwarts. By keeping the knowledge of the Dark Arts in a few, select families, they ensure their own continued power. The old ways are valued and coveted because they hold infinitely more power than the foolish wand-waving most wizards praise. The Ministry rhetoric which puts 'Dark Wizard' equal to 'evil wizard' is just another tactic to keep this knowledge private. A Dark Arts practitioner is never put in Azkaban. A wizard who breaks the Ministry laws is, usually stamped with the convenient label of 'Dark Wizard' to further confuse the general public." He let these words sink in for a while before continuing. "Some of the basic principles make their way into the Hogwarts curriculum, however, though few students see them for what they really are. The study of Potions is the most obvious example."

She contemplated this for a long time. On the charmed sky that could be seen through the enchanted window, the sun was rising, setting the stars to fade and sparks of gold to shoot across the imagined waters.

"He really does trust you, doesn't he?" she asked softly, looking down at his hand where it was clasped in her own. "Dumbledore, I mean. All the rumours about his refusal to give you the Defence position because you might be tempted back into the Dark Arts are really just codswallop, aren't they?"

"Indeed. The position is actually quite literally cursed. No one has managed to stay for more than a year for several decades, and though I don't have any illusions about my place in Albus' agenda, I'm happy to say that he doesn't see me as quite that expendable. Not yet, at least."

He followed the thoughts on her face, seeing how bits and pieces connected in her mind, giving her time to put it all together. The realisation came to her gradually, as though a dimmed, inner light had been turned on and slowly raised to a burning flame.

"He trusts you because he is one too. Albus Dumbledore is a Dark Wizard."

He confirmed her thoughts by a slight nod of his head.

"Is that the only reason?"

"No," he confessed. "There is quite a bit more to it, but that is a story for another time. Now, back to the point of this lecture."

She looked back up at him, and he pushed forward.

"As you now know, the Dark Arts aren't inherently evil or even aggressive. This does not mean that they cannot be used for evil of course, and the Dark Lord has no scruples when it comes to this power. Further, they are dangerous and yield unstable results unless handled with both caution and skill. When you follow me to the Dark Lord, he will undoubtedly show you much power in an attempt to let it both seduce and control you. Before that happens, it is my responsibility to teach you enough to make it out alive and with your mind intact. Not everyone does, as Bellatrix so admirably displays." He paused again, making his gaze penetrate hers more fully. "Have no doubt, Hermione. There is only so much I can do, and only so much I can teach you without endangering us both. You will not escape unscathed."

Never losing his hold of Hermione's eyes, Snape pulled her close and kissed her. His hand tangled in her curls as he held her to him, moving over her lips with exquisite gentleness. His touch made Hermione tremble as she felt emotions rising within her. The usual feelings of desire, or even happiness, didn't surface, however, and instead she felt as though she was swimming in despair, drinking it down greedily as it emanated from every part of his body. She felt his grief and his frustration, his fears and his anger and kept kissing him, hurting everywhere but still wanting more as she began to truly understand him for the first time. After what felt like a string of forever, he slowly lifted his head and looked down into her eyes. Somehow, he seemed younger.

"Hermione..." His voice was barely a whisper. One hand rose to caress her cheek, and she thought she saw something akin to wonder in his eyes as he continued.

"You are so full of light. Seeing it pains me more than I could ever have foreseen. I never thought it would be this difficult to be the one who has to destroy it."

She felt his sorrow, ripe and scorching in her blood, but quickly put it down as trust swelled within her.

"You will protect me. No matter what they do to me, you will help me through it."

"Foolish girl." A sad smile graced the corner of his mouth as he caressingly contradicted her. "It's not what the Dark Lord will do to you, which will destroy you--it's what you will do for him."

"I don't understand."

"I know. That part of your education has been deliberately withheld up to this point."

"Will you tell me?"

The silence stretched in the darkness as he seemed to contemplate his answer. She curled up in his lap, waiting, following the sun's ascent through the charmed window.

"What actions would you be willing to take in order to ensure this society's survival, Hermione?" he finally asked. "Or the survival of your friends... your parents... not to mention yourself?"

When she didn't answer, he spoke again.

"There are rumours, I know, that the Dark Lord enjoys to punish his followers as well as people who oppose him; rumours of raids, of pointless murder, of Dark Revels, where Muggles and defiant wizards and witches are tortured and raped for sport." He turned his black eyes back to her. "Is this what you fear will happen to you? That you should be tortured and raped, perhaps even killed by the Dark Lord or his followers?"

A small nod was all she managed, though he could see the doubt in her eyes, the wheels turning behind the hazel orbs.

"You are correct to question this. The Dark Lord doesn't openly oppose his followers for no good reason. To do so would breed defiance and rebellion. He will punish those who fail him, but he doesn't abuse his servants without cause." The corners of his mouth turned slightly. "And as for the fanciful rumours of orgies and decadence, I'm sorry to report that they are just fiction. While Death Eaters in general are not known for chastity, there are few who enjoy acts of blatant exhibitionism."

She smiled thinly at that. Deeming the lesson over, he gathered her into his arms and relaxed into the silent morning.

A/N: A big thanks to Red Hen, whose theories always leave me with a sense of awe. Thanks for reading. Please review!

Lessons

Chapter 7 of 7

This story has been abandoned. (See A/N of last posted chapter for details) Hermione enters a world of twisted relationships and ever-thickening plots. Independent sequel to "Love Potion no.9."

Chapter 7 Lessons

"Again."

She raised a trembling hand and pointed her wand at him.

"*Imperio*." It came out a soft whisper. She'd long since learnt that shouting spells would only bring disdain from the man opposite her. Usually, they worked together in silence, sparks of magic flying between them without words. She was still very far from mastering this particular spell non-verbally, however. In truth, she was far from mastering it at all, judging by the way he mockingly lifted his hand in a lazy imitation of the movement she'd silently requested from his mind.

"Are you getting tired, Hermione?" he asked, shrugging slightly as though her curse was nothing more than a light blanket which he could drop at a whim.

"Yes," she admitted, albeit reluctantly. They had worked without pause for most of the day, and it hadn't been a light workout. Her robes clung to her body, damp with perspiration, and an ache was growing at the small of her back, signalling too many hours of working on her feet.

"Good," he said, a new sharpness shining from his dark eyes. "Now, again." A flash of dark purple surged towards her and she narrowly dodged, too exhausted to perform a sufficient Shield Charm. He advanced upon her as she rolled, feeling every stone in the cold floor leave their mark on her body. Swallowing hard, she focused all her strength and raised her wand.

"*Imperio!*" Frustration and exhaustion made her voice rise slightly despite her efforts to keep it calm, and she felt a pang of hopelessness go through her. This time, the command burst forth from her mind as a desperate plea, and she'd mentally acknowledged yet another failure when Severus' left arm suddenly jerked upward. Astonished, she blinked and looked back more intently. His eyes were slightly unfocused and his arm was still above his head. Swallowing, she realised that not only had she apparently managed to cast the spell successfully, but he wasn't yet fighting it. Closing her eyes, she focused inward.

"*Stand on one leg*." The silent command was issued calmly, but not immediately followed. Instead, some of the focus seemed to come back to his eyes, attention flashing momentarily across the black and white. A sense of desperation gripped her and she pushed again. This time, his leg rose gracefully from the floor. *Why?*

Looking inside herself, scanning through tome after tome in her inner library, she sought an explanation and came up empty. Ignoring the foreshadowing trembles in her body that warned her that her energy reserves were almost up, she issued a line of mental orders, watching every reaction with the outmost care. Her mind shouted, whispered, cajoled and pushed. It pleaded, threatened and made love in quick succession. When she'd seen enough, she walked close, raised a hand to his cheek and caressed him softly.

"*Come back to me.*"

The glassiness vanished, and she met the focused gaze of her Potions professor, which seemed to burn into hers. They stood frozen for a long moment before he raised his hand to hers and lowered it from his cheek, breaking contact.

"I believe you are beginning to learn," he stated, and she felt a surge of pride. "Now tell me your conclusions."

"You only obeyed me when I was desperate for you to," she answered. "When I truly *needed* you to."

"The Imperius Curse is at its strongest when applied to a person's greatest weakness, and the greater the weakness, the stronger the curse. I find it rather disconcerting that you should succeed by applying that particular emotion."

She was silent for a long while.

"I see why you would think that," she finally said, looking up at him. "But I'm not able to stop the sense of comfort I feel at the thought that you would care for me."

"Then you have to learn," he stated bluntly, causing her to flinch slightly. "Being as close as we are and working as intimately as we do, affection is a trap easily fallen into. We cannot afford this, certainly not at this stage. I had thought that the Somnium Potion would be strong enough to counter this, but my reaction to your Imperius Curse suggests that a deeper level of control is needed. We will both have to work harder on closing ourselves off from one another."

"I know." Her voice was steady, but her eyes betrayed the emotion behind it. He stepped close and grabbed her shoulders, shaking her slightly to bring back focus.

"Do you really, Hermione?" he demanded. "It is vital that you truly grasp the situation. You are in no way important enough to the Dark Lord for any stronger attachment to be allowed between us at the present time. If he sees love in you, he will use it as he would use a knife to your throat, and if he sees love in me... we are both extremely dead."

She blinked but didn't look away. He could see that she was trying hard to control herself. He pushed his point further.

"You will get to join the circle, as you know, but that is only the first step in His servitude. The first circle is only a brush on the surface, and a myriad spheres lie beneath it, each more terrible and utterly seductive than the next. You earn your descent through these spheres through faithful service, and the deeper you get, the more of a claim the Dark Lord has over you."

He paused for effect, his voice dropping a few notes as he drew her in, her attention locked to him as fully as a snake's before its charmer.

"I am the Dark Lord's most faithful servant, Hermione. I have descended to the innermost sphere, and that goes far beyond simple servitude. He owns my loyalty in every way, down to the last thought and the most ethereal shred of my soul. I have no loyalty but to Him and no love other than the love to serve. As long as He lives, my emotions are not mine to give as I am bound more firmly than any slave to his master or any priest to his God. With my body and mind, I may find pleasure where I please, but my soul--my *love*--has to belong to Him only, or my betrayal will be open and complete."

He raised his hand and touched her cheek in a soft caress, taking pleasure in the way she leaned into his touch and her lips brushed against his skin.

"You knew that this was always going to be exceptionally difficult. It is foolish of Dumbledore to insist on this plan, but insist he does. It is accurate that should you succeed in becoming a true Death Eater, you will help Potter immensely. You two discovered an ancient ritual, and one which most certainly is powerful enough to forever destroy the Dark Lord--but in order for it to fully work, you need to amass power and you need, above all, to be able to contrast Harry Potter. Where he is pure, you need to be corrupted. Where he is impetuous, you need to be calm. Where he is solid, you need to be immaterial, and where he is alive, you need to be dead." A lone tear reached his thumb, and he gently brushed it away. "You are the sacrificial lamb, Hermione, and Dumbledore will not come to your rescue. He has picked his knight, and all will be determined through one man and one prophecy. You need to accept this."

He lowered his voice to a mere whisper as he leaned in and gathered her in his arms.

"Of course, as is the case with Wizard's Chess, the pawns of the game might not move towards their doom as docilely as either master would like." A shuddering breath against his shoulder told him that she had understood, and he relaxed somewhat. He might be deadly wrong in tying this girl to his fate, but the point where this development could have been prevented had been passed several exits ago. By sharing his blood with her, they would never be completely free of each other. Hermione Snape had entered the world, and Miss Granger had forever departed. He would have to ride out the darkness, so ride it out he would. Burying his face in her hair, he easily collected her into his arms and carried her into the bedroom. The next lesson would have to wait another day.

"Prove to me that you don't love me."

It was late morning, and light was shining through the enchanted windows as they lounged together amongst ruffled sheets. She rolled over from her back to lean over him, popping her head up on one hand as she lazily drew soft spirals on his chest with the other.

"I don't love you," she said, almost conversationally.

"Prove it," he insisted.

Boldly, she looked him in the eye, inviting him to enter her mind. He raised his wand and uttered the spell, searching for a long time before drawing back.

"Well?" she asked, smiling at him.

"Top marks, Miss Granger," he retorted. "I would almost go so far as to claim to be quite proud of you. However," He sat up against the headboard, reaching for a glass of water on the bedside table. "An unguarded mind is not the only thing which can betray you."

"I suppose not," she said, thinking about his reaction to her Imperius Curse a few weeks back. He had reacted to her need for him then, which wasn't the same thing as saying that he loved her, of course, but it demonstrated a greater extent of involvement than what was prudent in their case. "What else should I practice?"

"Generally, I would advise detachment and passivity," he answered. "Torture of a suspected loved one usually has a way of coaxing the truth from people, as do situations which are set up to inspire jealousy. Now," he moved away from the bed and wrapped a robe around his body, "since I am who I am in the Dark Lord's circle, he is unlikely to torture me just to see how much leverage he can get against you through that particular technique, and jealousy is most a most unreliable emotion. His first weapon, should he want to know your heart, would undoubtedly be Legilimency. There's no real reason to fear that you will fail this test as you are now, and especially not after a few more months of Albus' tutorials, but one can always be taken by surprise." The same second he uttered these words, the room suddenly seemed to fill with dark smoke, making her eyes water. She blinked twice and opened them again, only to freeze in shock as a form materialized itself from the smoke. A man fell to the floor, blood everywhere and quite unmistakably dead. He was naked from the waist up and indescribably pale where the skin was not covered in half-dried blood. His hair was dark and caked with mud. She tried to make out his face, but it seemed oddly out of focus. Forcing the paralysing shock back, she struggled to rouse the part of her brain that was used to analysis and logical conclusions. She took a deep breath and forced herself to remain on the bed and not rush to the dead man's side. She knew where she was, and she knew the amount of protective wards that were placed on these chambers alone. Furthermore, she was inside Hogwarts castle, which provided additional security. No one could have sent a dead man into Severus' bedroom by magic without his express permission, and she was quite sure that, though this most certainly was a test, he would not go so far as to summon a dead man into his own quarters. At least, so she hoped.

In a flash, it became clear to her. The man lying dead before her was most likely a Boggart, and the test consisted in what form it would take for her. Looking more closely, she realised that the form was actually shifting slightly, seemingly having a hard time to decide whose corpse it should parade as. Concentrating hard, she shot it a panicked, pleading look and forced out a sob.

"Oh, God! Harry!" she cried, willing her mind to conjure scenarios of her friend. Cold, dead, Ginny by his side, choking back sobs, Voldemort triumphant... Immediately, the features grew more pronounced, broken glasses forming in front of the unseeing eyes.

"Try again."

She almost jumped at the sound. Severus's voice was strained, and he sounded far from pleased. Shaking herself out of the horrific visions in her mind, she refocused. The dead form twitched slightly and seemed to grow, turning into a severely mutilated Neville Longbottom. She couldn't hold back a choking sound as her mind fought with the creature, her determination and control severely damaged by the sight of a long gash across Neville's throat, blood covering most of his torso.

Bang! She didn't even realise that she had raised her wand. The form turned into Ron, red hair in horribly sharp contrast against his deathly pale skin; then Ginny, naked and twisted with long, deep claw marks running over her breasts and thighs...

"You need to focus your fear," Snape's voice came firm and demanding from somewhere outside her range of vision. "These are all useless and will only be used against you. Now, focus!"

A feeling of light panic now growing inside her, she searched her mind for something better, something stronger, delving into her deepest, darkest memories in a twisted form of Legilimency; reaching for the shadows inside her soul that she'd first felt during the ritual which opened her up to the Wild Magic of creation. Opening doors at the bottom compartments of her mind, she finally found what she was looking for and allowed the spine-crushing fear to grip her momentarily. The dead man disappeared in a wisp of smoke, and a small silver object fell to the floor. A hand mirror, small and inconspicuous, but she knew that if she took hold of it and gazed into the glass, the petrifying eyes of a gigantic snake would be the last thing she'd see before eternal darkness. She stared, horrified, as the mirror rose from the floor and slowly made its way towards her. Before it could get close, a spray of golden stars made contact, and the object vanished into a puff of smoke, which spiralled into a black box. Letting out a shaking breath, Hermione looked up and met the eyes of her professor. A small smile played on his lips.

"Very good. Now let's see your Patronus."

2008-12-08

A/N: This story has been abandoned. I'm very sorry about that to all of you who liked it and stuck with it this far. There are two reasons for this decision. Firstly, these were started in 2004 and when I went back to finish them, I realised that I wasn't the same person anymore. 2004 was a pretty dark place, and that darkness is woven so tightly into the stories, I don't really want to take them where I fear they would need to go. To be honest, I'm not entirely sure you would either. Second reason is that I've lost faith in the SS/HG pairing. I don't see it anymore. I don't believe that it could work anymore. I tried to. I really did. I joined the 2008 SS/HG exchange to sort of try to rekindle with this pairing again, but instead, it ended up being the final nail to the coffin, of sorts. (The fic that came out of it is one of my favourite pieces of fiction ever, though, and it will be posted here after the reveal, so look out for that.)

I still have the outlines little pieces of future chapters on my computer, so if anyone wants to read that in spite of this, you're very welcome to e-mail me.

Thanks again for all the comments and lovely support. Big hugs to you all. /Red