

Require Your Assistance

by irishredlass

The Final Battle has been fought and won. Hermione is trying to get her life in order when she receives a mysterious letter.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 14

The Final Battle has been fought and won. Hermione is trying to get her life in order when she receives a mysterious letter.

Chapter 1

Disclaimer: The world of Harry Potter belongs to JKR; I am only trying to have a little fun.

A/N: My undying gratitude to my betas Lariope and Ladyinthecloak who whipped this into shape finding error galore. That said if you find a mistake it is all MINE. This is my first multi-chapter attempt at fan-fiction, and reviews would be most appreciated and gloated over.

* * *

Flopping on her bed, in utter frustration, Hermione ran her hands through her bushy mane of hair. 'Now what do I do?' Many months had passed since the final battle, and life was confusing as ever. *I thought life was supposed to get easier*, she thought to herself...

Hermione's primary goal since second year, though she had not told Ron or Harry, had been to apprentice with Professor Snape and become a Potions mistress. This plan had faltered at the end of sixth year. One could not very well apprentice with a murderer. Her soul had shattered when Harry told her that her secret desire had murdered Headmaster Albus Dumbledore. In despair, her heart had wanted this to be impossible, but no-one could deny that Headmaster Dumbledore was gone, dead, and Harry the eyewitness.

Trying to keep Harry on track to find the Horcruxes, when everyone knew he really wanted Professor Snape's soul, had been a nightmare. Who could blame him? The man had killed his mentor and was by proxy, at least in Harry's mind, responsible for the deaths of his parents and Sirius. Not to mention the six years of torment they had all endured as Professor Snape's students.

They were all shocked to view the Pensieve memories left behind by both Professor Snape and Headmaster Dumbledore. Hermione was also relieved. Professor Snape had not betrayed the Light. Albus Dumbledore had been already dying, thanks to the ring that had been Salazar Slytherin's and later a Horcrux to Lord Voldemort. When they knew that Professor Snape had never betrayed anyone, they returned to the Shrieking Shack. He deserved to be buried alongside all those they had lost to save the wizarding world. They were all puzzled when his body was gone. In fact, there was no sign that he had ever visited the Shrieking Shack, except for the perfect outline of his body in the dust on the floor.

The Aurors were brought in. They found nothing. No trace remained of his corporeal body or his magic. After weeks of searching, it was assumed that some renegade Death Eaters had taken the body. There was a monument erected, next to the white marble tomb that was the home of the most loved headmaster in Hogwarts's history, honoring Professor Snape's contribution to the war. Posthumously, he had been awarded the Order of Merlin, First Class. It was there on the monument for all to see. Yet, all had not been forgiven.

A wizard's life is long, as is his memory, and there were many who refused to believe that Severus Snape had renounced the Dark long ago and gave his life so that Harry could defeat Voldemort, Harry being one of them. Between Harry and Ron, Professor Snape's name would live on in infamy.

Hermione, though, was relieved to know that Professor Snape was innocent and continued to defend him whenever the boys proceeded to get wound up. It was not the only rift in the trio's friendship though. After the final battle, things had begun to settle down. And Hermione had come to the conclusion that she and Ron were not meant to be as a couple. This decision was not well accepted by the Weasley family and most who knew the couple. Only Ginny Weasley seemed to understand.

As Ginny tried to explain to Harry, Ron and Hermione were just too different. "Harry, think about it, Ron loves Quidditch, partying and hanging out with his friends," Ginny snarled in exasperation. "Hermione," she continued, "wants to carry on with her studies. When was the last time you saw Ron open a book without coercion?" Ginny was right; they would have killed each other inside of a year if they had continued to try to make being a couple work. It was better to remain friends. If only Mrs. Weasley would accept the facts; she and Ron were trying to move on, but Molly was still giving her the cold shoulder and filling Ron's head with rubbish. This left things on tenterhooks between all three friends.

No one realized that Hermione had a new goal. Whilst organizing Professor Snape's effects, for the Order, she had discovered that he had been researching a cure for Lycanthropy. Hermione wanted to continue his work. It would be an excellent way to honor Professor Snape's memory. Both Harry and Ron were baffled by her desire to continue her studies. (Really how could studying be fun?) First, she had to find a Potions Master to apprentice her. This was what she was currently doing, going over her options. She did not want to leave Britain, but it seemed she might have no choice. She was just readying her CV to be sent off to three possible masters when she was disturbed by a rapping at the window. It was an owl she did not recognize. After checking the scroll for Dark spells, she tapped it with her wand to read.

Miss Granger,

I require your assistance...

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 14

Hermione receives a shock when she follows the instructions found in a mysterious letter.

Disclaimer: Do you think if I were JK Rowling I would be sitting at home playing on my laptop on a Friday night? All things you recognize are hers, and all things crazy are mine.

CHAPTER TWO

Hermione spent all of Saturday in a controlled state of anxiety. She did not want to draw the attention of her two best mates. They would undoubtedly pester her, wanting to know what was amiss. She was not completely successful, but managed to parry their curiosity with the offhand excuse that she was anxious to find a Master to apprentice under. Fortunately, this seemed to appease them and no more questions were asked.

Later that evening, she made a show of being tired and headed to bed for an early night. Though it was only eight o'clock, Hermione could not sit around any longer. Entering the room, she warded the door so that neither of the boys would attempt to disturb her and then made her way out the of bedroom window. Chuckling to herself, as she had never had the need to do so before and it would become one more memory to store, she Apparated as soon as she was outside the perimeter of Grimmauld Place. Glancing around to make sure she was not noticed by any nosy Muggles, she quickly cast a Disillusionment Charm on herself and walked toward the house that she had called home for all of her life.

Hermione carefully checked that all of the wards she had placed when she moved to Order headquarters were intact. Entering the back door, she lit her wand with a softly spoken *Lumos* to light her way. Thankfully, she had opted to keep the electricity connected, not knowing if living in the same house with Harry *and* Ron would be possible. As she entered the house, she was flooded with memories.

Though Hermione had loving parents, one could not say that her childhood had been happy. She had spent many afternoons sitting at the kitchen table in tears after a day of being mocked by her peers. After all, her know-it-all status had not been anything new when she entered Hogwarts. Hermione, as a young girl, had always been drawn toward knowledge, books and learning. Being the teacher's pet never earned one many friends. Combine that with her overly large teeth (*thank you, Madam Pomfrey, for taking care of that*) and her bushy hair, and she was the outcast of her primary school. Her parents tried to compensate and perhaps had spoiled her to make up for her lack of friends, but it was not the same.

She had been sitting at this very table the day Headmaster Dumbledore and Professor Snape had come to call and offer her a chance to go to Hogwarts. Hermione had felt as if a light had suddenly clicked on inside. That light was hope that she could finally belong somewhere. It had taken a considerable amount of conversation on the part of the two wizards for her parents to agree. Hermione was their only child, and they were loath to send her away. They also understood, though, that she was not, had never been and would never be like other children. They hoped, too, that maybe at this wizarding school, their little girl could finally be happy.

Hermione jumped with a start when her wards alerted her to someone Apparating into the back garden. Hermione had not realized how long she had been sitting there, lost in memories. It was now just two minutes before midnight. Moving cautiously to the side of the door, she held her wand ready for attack. Moments later, there was a brisk knock on the door. Not knowing what else to do, she fell back on the Order's old secret code to determine friend from foe.

She spoke, "When darkness comes, and pain is all around." Then she waited, holding her breath for the reply. The words were from a Muggle song that the Order had taken as a kind of theme song. Only another member of the Order of the Phoenix would know the appropriate response.

A hushed deep baritone replied, "Like a bridge over troubled waters, I will lay me down."

As she heard the end of the reply, Hermione began taking down the wards as she repeated, "Like a bridge over troubled waters, I will lay me down," and opened the door to reveal a man that she had thought dead since the final battle.

He looked weary and aged. He was wearing the same robes that he had been wearing when he had been left for dead. Though she had her suspicions and thought she knew whom she would be meeting, Hermione was still shocked speechless.

Quietly, the man moved inside the door and began an intricate set of wards to prevent detection, though he had hopes they would not be remaining here long, this time. He

then turned to speak to the bane of his teaching career.

"Well, Miss Granger, I never thought I would see you speechless," he spoke in his most sardonic tone.

That alone started Hermione off. "But how? You were dead. We saw you die."

"Yes, I knew you would have questions," he replied gruffly, "but I do not wish to remain here to answer them." With that, he grasped Hermione's arm and Apparated before she could react.

Moments later, Hermione found herself standing in a rundown sitting room she did not recognize. She jumped, turning with her wand out when someone coughed behind her. She was once again struck speechless. It couldn't be. It was impossible--she had seen his body wrapped in cloth and enclosed in a white marble tomb. In fact, she had just visited it yesterday when she was leaving the school grounds. Albus Dumbledore was dead, killed by Severus Snape because of an Unbreakable Vow that Dumbledore had made him take. Yet, here he was, sitting in a chair by the fire, eyes twinkling.

"Ah, Miss Granger," the Dumbledore double spoke, "it is so good to see you again. Won't you please sit down? I am sure that you have had a terrible shock." Not knowing what else to do, Hermione slid bonelessly into a chair across from the man who looked and sounded like her late Headmaster. "Severus, you really should have prepared the poor girl."

"Well, pardon me," replied a very much alive Severus Snape, "I did not want to risk bloody boy wonder popping out and hexing my balls off!"

Talk of Harry hexing Professor Snape's balls seemed to bring Hermione out of her catatonic state. She started stuttering, "But how? Why? When?"

The Dumbledore double held up a hand to quiet the both of them. Looking at Hermione, he suddenly seemed very old and very tired as he spoke, "We will answer your questions, dear girl, as we are in need of your help." He then began a tale too fantastic to be anything but the truth.

A/N: I know, dear readers, that this can be termed nothing less than an evil cliffy, but alas that could not be helped. I am very much enjoying writing my first multi-chapter fan fic.

I could not have accomplished this without the wonderful guidance and encouragement of Ladyinthecloak, beta extraordinaire, friend and mentor. Thank you, dear Lady! Also I must thank Lariope for her hard work in finding all those pesky commas... I knew they were hiding somewhere.

The Lyrics mentioned belong to Simon and Garfunkel's song Bridge Over Troubled Waters.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 14

Hermione's world continues to be turned upside down when she welcomes Professor Snape and a visibly ill Headmaster into her parents' home.

CHAPTER 3

Disclaimer: I am not JKR. I only wanted to play with Severus for a while.

A/N: I would be remiss if I did not extend multitudes of thanks and praise to my two wonderful betas Lariope and Ladyinthecloak. It is their skill that makes my humble efforts readable.

Why could life not be simple?

Yanking her hand through her hair, she tried again, "Harry, you have to understand I need to be able to study." Pacing, she continued, "My parents' house is perfect, I can set up a lab for experimenting."

"You could do that here," Harry interrupted, "I just don't want you to be alone there."

Hermione hugged Harry. "I love you for the offer, I really do, but this is for the best."

"Is it because of Ron?" he queried

Well, that is as good of an excuse as any, thought Hermione. "Harry, you know that things have been tense. I don't want to lose you *or Ron* as friends. Let's just give this a try, at least until things get back to normal. Okay?" Hermione said with a shaky smile.

Lying to her best friends was not what she wanted to do, but she really had no choice. Telling them the truth just was not possible, at least not yet.

Monday morning, Hermione found herself in Diagon Alley with a shopping list that filled two feet of parchment. Cauldrons and potions ingredients weren't the half of it. Her parents' home had not been lived in for over a year. Basic household supplies had to be purchased. First stop: Flourish and Blott's.

Even being a witch, able to shrink down purchases, Hermione felt weighted down when she returned home. She shuddered to think how many Galleons she had spent. Maybe some items weren't absolutely necessary, but the new edition of *Hogwarts: a History* would surely become a collector's item.

It was late into the night by the time Hermione crawled between the crisp new sheets of her childhood bed and drifted off to sleep. All was ready. Hopefully, she would be as well.

Hermione was on her second cup of tea and just finishing the Daily Prophet when the wards alerted her that someone was Apparating into the back garden. Moments later, she was admitting both Professor Snape and Headmaster Dumbldore into the kitchen. It still felt rather surreal to be conversing with two men she had thought were dead. "Professor, Headmaster, please take a seat. Would you care for some tea?" Hermione offered tentatively.

"Splendid, splendid," replied Dumbledore with a twinkle, "and you must call me Albus."

Smiling, Hermione poured the tea. "And you must call me Hermione." She held the pot over the cup in front of Professor Snape. With a subtle nod and a quirk of his brow, he accepted her offer of tea. It seemed polite conversation was still not a strong suit of the professor's.

Hermione began to babble under his daunting stare, "I have a basement that can be converted into a Potions lab and I thought you, Headmaster, could take my parents' room. Oh and there is another room..."

"Enough," interrupted Professor Snape. "We are not here for a bloody slumber party! Did you get the ingredients I requested? We haven't much time before the full moon."

"You want me to what?" shrieked Hermione.

Professor Snape and Hermione had gone down to the basement after making sure that Albus was comfortable on the upper level of the house. He really did look quite tired and even ill.

"Miss Granger, I am quite sure there is no need for me to repeat myself," Professor Snape stated flatly. "Listening and comprehension have never been your weaknesses."

Was that just a compliment? Coupled with his request, Hermione mused, it had to be. But in six years as his pupil she had never heard him compliment *anyone*. Even the praise offered his Slytherins could always be found to carry an insult. Yet now, Professor Snape was asking her to brew the base of the Wolfsbane Potion.

"I do not understand; you have never held any respect for my abilities in the past," Hermione puzzled. "Why would you want me to brew such a temperamental base?"

Professor Snape responded by conjuring a Patronus to send a message and gripping Hermione by her arm, Disapparating from the workroom.

When she had gained her balance, Hermione whirled on him, furious. "Look, I am getting really tired of you just popping me around at your convenience!" Drawing a breath to continue, she stopped when she saw Professor Snape sitting on a worn settee holding his head in his hands. He looked so dejected and her heart stilled.

"Professor Snape," called Hermione softly as she crossed the room. When he did not respond, she reached out her hand, gently touching his shoulder. "Severus? What is it? Would you please talk to me?"

Startled by the touch, Severus looked up into her warm brown eyes, his own shattered. "It appears that you do not understand, Miss Granger; this is my fault," Snape responded, without acknowledging that she had used his given name. "He is dying. If Albus had not left the safe house to ensure my survival, none of this would be necessary."

"You mustn't think like that. The Headmaster would never have sacrificed your life if it could be prevented," she vehemently replied.

"Nonetheless he is dying. No one afflicted has ever lived to his advanced age," Severus stated. "Each month, he grows weaker. I do not know how much longer he can survive."

Since the end of the Golden Trio's sixth year, Severus Snape had been reviled for the death of his friend and mentor. What no one knew was that he was innocent, quite simply because the Headmaster lived hidden in a safe house under the Fidelius Charm. Professor Dumbledore lived on, secretly engineering the fall of the Dark Lord. The only one who knew was Severus Snape. After Draco had, thankfully, failed in the task set him by Lord Voldemort, everything had snowballed.

If it had not been for the Unbreakable Vow that Narcissa begged for, Tom Riddle might still have been alive or worse, and the Wizarding World would be ruled in darkness. Dumbledore's supposed death had given Harry the focus he needed to fulfill the thrice-damned Prophecy.

It had taken months of planning. Severus had managed to cure the Headmaster of the curse, inflicted by the ring, over the Christmas Holidays that year. After, Headmaster Dumbledore had used a modified Glamour to make his hand appear blackened and dead as well as making it seem like he was weakening. In truth, he was as hale and healthy as Boy Wonder himself. Then, there was the actual Killing Curse. Not knowing who would actually bear witness to the act, it had to look convincing. Though all *heard* Avada Kedavra, the spell was actually a nonverbal levitation charm with a bit of foolish wand waving for color and effect. It was a true testament of the stupidity of most of the Death Eaters that no questions were asked. In all of the times that Severus had truly cast the Killing Curse, he had never once seen it levitate a person over a railing, especially when the victim was slumped against the wall. They had not considered the complication of the poison that had hidden the locket. In fact, Albus had almost died that night by Severus' hand as he was the one to have brewed the poison.

What the Dark Lord did not know was that for every vile concoction Snape was forced to create, there was an antidote hidden at Spinner's End. After Snape had levitated the Headmaster over the railing, Fawkes had come to the rescue, transporting the Headmaster to safety. What Hagrid had carried to that marble tomb was one of Fawkes' feathers that Dumbledore himself had transfigured into his own lifeless body. And now he would surely die.

There was no magical antidote to be retrieved. Severus needed to find a cure, but he reluctantly admitted he could not do it alone. Potter may have cleared his name--how he hated owing another Potter--but a dead man did not go shopping for ingredients, and he needed his research notes. He did not have time to recreate years of testing and experimentation. He knew that he was close. He just hoped that he could find the answers before Albus really did die.

After Professor Snape's pronouncement of not knowing how long the Headmaster would live, he seemed to drift off into his own thoughts and memories still sitting with his head in his hands, as if the weight of his thoughts made his head too heavy for his neck to support.

Hermione did not want to disturb what she felt must be troubling thoughts, so she did what came naturally, what her own parents had done when she felt the weight of the world. She had not moved her hand from the professor's shoulder when he had spoken, so she maintained the contact and gently seated herself on the settee. As he continued to be lost in thought, she softly began slowly rubbing her hand across his shoulders. Hermione could feel the tension that he radiated throughout his body. *Is it any wonder his facial expression always seems to reflect pain?* she mused. *He probably has a permanent headache.*

Always starved for knowledge, Hermione had studied massage between her fifth and sixth years. She firmly believed in that the human touch had healing powers that most never consciously discovered. Careful not to change rhythm or lose contact with Severus, Hermione repositioned herself so that she was mostly behind the professor, who was sitting to the front edge of the cushion. She then, gently at first, began massaging the tension in his shoulders. When he did not startle or jump, she continued with increased pressure. Slowly, she worked the knots from his shoulders and neck. After about thirty minutes, Hermione, who had been lost in her own thoughts, found Severus staring up at her as his head rested against her upper chest and shoulder while she massaged his temples.

The strain had vanished from his face, and he looked younger than she had ever seen him with his face void of tension. With a guilty half smile, her hands stilled. Bewildered, Severus again sat forward as Hermione removed herself from behind him. As he continued to watch her every movement, Hermione hastened to apologize, "Professor, I am so sorry, I had no right..."

"Miss Granger, if anyone should apologize, it is I."

"Not at all," she stated. "I am the one who invaded your personal space."

"That is true, but I believe I am the one who was using you for a pillow," he stated.

At that pronouncement they both paused, looking at each other with shocked expressions. A faint blush heightened the coloring in both faces as eyes averted to safer scenery, neither wanting to know what the other was thinking.

Finally, Professor Snape broke the awkward silence. "Miss Granger, I am sure that you have an understanding of what we are up against. As I stated before, I need your

assistance if we are to succeed. The Wolfsbane must be brewed, Albus will need tending and a cure must be found. Are you willing to help?"

"Yes, of course I am," she replied. "Where are we, may I ask?"

"This is Spinner's End, my family home; I have some supplies in my lab I must retrieve." With this, he exited behind a bookcase and left Hermione to her own devices.

She wandered about, looking at a room full of books. It was a testament to how distracted she had been that she had not even noticed the bookcases until Professor Snape had opened the passage way behind them. What had she been thinking? Massaging the most unapproachable professor in her Hogwarts career? But he hadn't seemed unapproachable then, and he really hadn't seemed to even object. If anything, he had melted into her touch.

Severus was castigating himself. How could he have let his guard down like that? Anyone could have walked into the house and killed them both before he could have reached his wand. But for the first time in days...no, to be honest, months...he was headache free. Her touch had been so soothing. He could not remember the last time anyone had voluntarily touched him, much less out of kindness. He had to remember that kindness was all it was. After all, this is the girl who tried to free all the house-elves at Hogwarts. She probably pitied him. With that thought, a knot lodged in his stomach. Severus could not abide being pitied.

It was once again a foul-tempered Professor Snape who returned to the sitting room.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 14

The full moon comes to the Granger house.

Chapter 4

A/N: I checked all through my thesaurus and I could not find a single word that would accurately express my gratitude, to you--the reader. I am humbled by your praise and encouragement. In addition, I will forever be grateful to Lariope and Ladyinthecloak for their patience and support. Not to mention their amazing grasp of fanfiction and the English Language; without them you would never see this story. Irish

Disclaimer: The world of Harry Potter belongs to J.K. Rowling. I simply take them out to play. I promise that I will return them in like new condition.

Two days later, Hermione again found herself lost in thought...

What had happened when they were in Severus'—no, Professor Snape's, she must think of him as such—sitting room? It was dangerous to think of him as Severus. If she was not careful, she would slip and call him Severus in casual conversation. What would Harry and Ron think?

Hermione had not confided in her two best mates that she was harboring a known criminal and a dead man. It had been difficult to keep this information from the boys when she had visited at Grimmauld Place, but it was a necessity. No one must know until they found a cure. She was beginning to feel as if she was being torn into pieces.

Upon returning from his private lab, Professor Snape had been as acerbic as ever. "I presume you have had enough time to invade my privacy. Shall we return?" he had snarled.

But before, it had been as if he were a different person, not softer, yet more approachable. When he looked at her with those bottomless dark eyes, she had almost kissed him! Ever since, she had been wondering what it would have been like. Would those thin lips, which were so often drawn into a sneer, soften under her own fuller lips?

Most likely he would have pushed her away with some scathing remark about her impetuosity. Honestly, Hermione counted herself lucky. Professor Snape had had little to say to her that did not revolve around their brewing.

You have no business lusting after a child, Severus castigated himself again. Ever since that encounter in the sitting room as Spinner's End, he had caught himself watching her. He knew that she had almost kissed him. He wished that she had.

Fortunately, the necessity of brewing kept them from voicing their personal internal wars.

Dumbledore watched in silent approval as his two former pupils danced around each other. He hoped that both would lose their internal battles, so they could win the war. Having Hermione's input and assistance with the potion would be invaluable, but what she could do for Severus, the man, had the potential of a lifetime.

Severus was justified in his concern. If a cure was not found soon, Dumbledore knew the end would come. The monthly transformations he had endured since the end of the war were taxing even for young wizards, and he had seen more than a century of life. He did not fear his own death. Like his friend, Nicholas Flamel, he looked upon it as the beginning of the next great adventure. What he feared was how Severus would handle it. Would he blame himself as he did now? Or would he be able to let go and go on with life? He hoped that the budding friendship and—dare he hope romance?—between Severus and Miss Granger would help the younger man, should his death be inevitable.

The Potions master was the son that he never had, and he loved him as such. He did not want his death to haunt the younger man throughout his life. Dumbledore felt it was a rather fortuitous turn of events when Severus relented to contacting Miss Granger. If anyone could help the young man, Dumbledore believed it was this bright young witch.

Hermione posed the same drive and thirst for knowledge that Dumbledore remembered of the young Severus, who used to haunt Hogwart's library. Yes, there would be spirited discussions and opinions that did not always match. This was to be expected when two formidable and intelligent people communicated. Oh, how he would love to watch them grow together.

Severus gazed upon the near-full celestial body glowing luminously in the sky. He had always found beauty and peace in gazing upon the night sky. Now, as the dimmer lights of the stars faded next to the brilliance of a near-full moon, he felt that an ax was hanging over his neck. This would be the first Transformation since they had taken up residence in the Granger house. The first time that Hermione—no, Miss Granger—would witness the progression of his crimes. Why had Albus not just left him to die?

"Professor, come quick!" Hermione's shout brought him out of his thoughts. Swearing, he hurried into the kitchen to find Albus unconscious on the floor, and a frantic Hermione trying to revive him. With a flick of his wand, he levitated the Headmaster's near lifeless body up the stairs to the room that he now occupied. Settling him on the bed, where he looked more dead than alive, he summoned a phial from the basement potions lab.

"Miss Granger, if you would elevate his head, he needs to ingest this draught."

Hermione moved to the head of the bed and, with surprising ease, lifted the frail man's head and shoulders to rest upon her own upper body.

With his left hand, Severus gently opened the older man's jaw, tipping the contents into his mouth as he massaged his throat, to induce swallowing.

When the task was completed, Hermione resettled the Headmaster, and they both left the room.

Silently, they descended the stairs, both lost in thought, and returned to the kitchen. Hermione automatically began to brew tea as the somber professor sat at the table with his head in his hands. Setting a cup before the still-silent professor, she stated softly, "I think you need to tell me what to expect."

"Isn't it apparent?" he snapped. "He is dying." There was no response, so he continued. "The Headmaster is not a young man; each transformation is taxing his magical and physical energy more and more. He never seems to fully recover from one month to the next. The potion I just administered will keep him asleep until the change is complete tomorrow night." He continued in his best lecturing voice, "Once he has changed, I will give him the first dose of a modified, Wolfsbane. The new version uses Ginkgo Biloba to enhance mental clarity. He will be quite lucid in his werewolf form and even able to communicate."

"But that is amazing!" Hermione interrupted.

"It is not enough," he cut her off. "We have to be able to stop the Transformations completely, or he will die."

"You can do this—we can do this! You are so close," she stated emphatically. "You have already found a way to maintain mental clarity."

A/N: I know this chapter is quite short. It is more of a transition. I promise more to come soon. Irish

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 of 14

Conversation with werewolves are not always what they seem. Dumbledore gives Hermione even more to think about.

Chapter 5

A/N: Again, my undying gratitude to my betas Lariope and Ladyinthecloak. I do not think I will ever look upon the word "that" in the same light. You are both totally awesome. I must also continue to thank everyone who has read and left reviews. This has been a fabulous experience because of you. Irish

Hermione made her way up the staircase to what used to be her parents' bedroom, her arms laden with the servicing tray her mother had used when she was ill as a child and restricted to bed. This time she was not the one in need of nourishment, but the one to provide it. She viewed the tray skeptically. *Just what does one feed a Headmaster who was currently in the form of a werewolf?* Hopeful her selection of a rare steak was acceptable, she shifted the tray, knocked on the door and peered around the doorjamb. The site of a wolf wearing a flannel nightshirt suddenly had her chuckling out loud as she was greeted with large twinkling blue eyes. She could not help but say aloud to herself, "What big eyes you have, Professor," thinking back to one of her favorite childhood fairy tales.

The twinkling of Professor Dumbledore, the werewolf's, eyes increased, and a sound that might have been a chuckle, had it not sounded suspiciously like a growl, met her ears. Hermione stepped through the door and took stock of the room. Her parents' room had always brought her comfort with its pale-papery walls and old, cherry-wood furniture. Many mornings she had crept into this room to awaken her parents with all the questions that had plagued her inquisitive mind as she had settled to sleep the night before. In retrospect, many of those questions had reflected the world she now found herself living in. The witches and werewolves from her bedtime stories were now a part of her reality.

"Is that meat I smell?" A voice that sounded like the Headmaster's echoed in her head. With a gasp, Hermione's eyes shifted to the bed. "Yes, Miss Granger, I thought Severus had explained to you that I was still able to communicate."

"Well, yes, he said you were able to communicate," Hermione stammered, "but never actually explained, and I just assumed..." She trailed off.

"You naturally assumed I would converse with you as we normally do," Dumbledore's voice in her head replied. That would be more convenient; however, the anatomical structure of a werewolf does not lend itself to verbal communication. I am able to communicate with you because I am using Legilimency," the voice supplied. "I apologize for having startled you."

"No, it is I who should apologize, sir. Had I thought, I would have realized you would need a different way to communicate," Hermione stated abashedly. "In answer to your question," she continued, "yes, it is meat you smell. I brought you a steak. I hope that is all right."

"It smells most delightful and was a very wise choice," she heard Dumbledore's voice in her head as she moved forward with the tray. "I know this can be a most disconcerting way to communicate, Hermione, but would you mind humoring an old man and keeping me company while I dine? I promise to try not to offend you with my less than acceptable table manners in this state," the voice in her head stated wryly.

Hermione chuckled and sat in the overstuffed armchair her father used to sit in every morning while he dressed for work. The chair was always her favorite and provided her with a small measure of comfort in what were, most assuredly, strange times. "Sir, was there something particular you wished to discuss with me?"

The blue-eyed werewolf looked up at her. "There is, but first, you did agree to call me Albus, and I must insist you do so, as I am afraid I will never be Headmaster again."

There seemed to almost be wistfulness to the tone of Albus' voice in her head.

"I will try, Albus."

"Very well; I wish to ask how you and Severus are progressing."

"We have acquired all of the needed ingredients and equipment to continue Professor Snape's experimentation on the Wolfsbane Potion. I am honored he is allowing me to assist him. The work he is doing is positively revolutionary in the field of Potions," Hermione began, almost tumbling over her words in her excitement.

"Yes, Severus is the most talented potioneer of the age, and I am sure you are of great assistance to him," Dumbledore interrupted. "However, I was wondering if he had confided in you how this circumstance came to be?"

Hermione's face flushed at the memory of her time in Professor Snape's sitting room.

"Yes?"

"Well, ss... Albus," she stammered, "he has not really said how it happened, but I do gather he finds himself to blame."

The werewolf's nostrils flared at this pronouncement. "Whatever else, you must believe, Hermione, I do not blame Severus for my condition, and I would, in fact, be dead if it were not for his quick action and continued care."

After Harry, Ron and Hermione had exited the Shrieking Shack to view the memories the dying Professor had provided, Headmaster Dumbledore had removed his Concealment Charm, hoping he was not too late. Nagini's venom had been particularly dreadful and could cause irreparable nerve damage within minutes. He crouched beside the man he had always considered a son, and he had gently lifted his head to administer the antivenin. Dumbledore knew they had to be quick; straggling Death Eaters could be upon them at any moment. Just as Severus had begun to show signs of the potion taking effect, Dumbledore had noticed a movement out of the corner of his eye. He was knocked over, losing his wand in the scuffle. Greyback had pounced with a vengeance and was out for blood. At no other time had the Headmaster actually thought he would lose his life in the battle against the Dark than at that particular moment. Then, suddenly, Greyback had fallen over, stiff on the wooden planked floor. Dumbledore looked up and saw Severus with his wand in his hand, blood running down his robes, on his knees.

Severus had crawled across the floor and over the Petrified werewolf to get to the injured Headmaster. He wrapped his arms around the aged wizard and Disapparated them both from the haunted building.

Neither wizard had realized how serious the situation was until they looked out at the night sky. The moon was full and bright. Though night had not yet fallen when Greyback attacked the Headmaster, because it was the day of the full moon, the infection had been complete.

"Severus cared for me and nursed me. He has risked capture many times over in the last few months to provide me with a chance to live. He must not blame himself if a cure is not found in time. I am asking you, Hermione, to look beyond the man he has been forced to portray for the last seven years and save him from himself. No one deserves to live life free of guilt more than Severus. For years he has sought to right the wrongs that came of one mistake in his youth. I implore you to think of all he has done for our world. He has already punished himself more than any court could ever conceive." The voice inside Hermione's head had gone from wistful to pleading.

Looking at the Headmaster with tears in her eyes, all she could do was nod her head in acknowledgment as she removed the now-empty tray from the werewolf's lap.

Hermione spent the next several hours in quiet thought. She had seen the haunted look in Severus' eyes that day at Spinner's End and wondered about it and his almost manic compulsion to find a cure. It all made sense now why he would be so driven to find a cure for Lycanthropy in the coming month when he had been researching for years. Yes, he had made advancements, but would they be able to find a cure? She did not know. And what did Albus mean when he asked her to save Severus from himself? Did he think he was suicidal? Would he take his own life if he failed?

It was with a heavy heart and mind that Hermione made her way down to the basement potions lab.

The conversation she had had with Albus played through Hermione's mind for the next several days. She found herself watching Severus as they worked (fortunately, he had relented, and they could now address each other more casually). His intensity had not wavered; if anything, it had grown more so as the days passed. She began to notice tell-tale signs of the pressure he was placing himself under. Frequently, she saw him pinching the bridge of his nose as if to relieve pressure, and his eyes had dark circles indicating if not sleepless, then restless nights. It was now just shy of one in the morning, and Hermione was babysitting their latest attempt to modify the Wolfsbane Potion. It was in a tricky phase requiring six counter-clockwise stirs every sixty-six minutes. She had just finished the last rotation when she heard footsteps on the stairs to the basement. Looking up, she saw Severus in the doorway and greeted him. "Could you not sleep?"

With a glare, Severus moved to the workbench not currently in use and sat on the stool, resting his head in his hands. Checking that the timer was set, Hermione sat next to him at the workbench. She had not been this close to him since they had been in his home, though they were living in the same house. Deciding to take a chance, Hermione placed her hand on his upper arm. "Severus, will you not tell me what is bothering you? You cannot continue in this manner."

Startling, Severus gave her a look reminiscent of how he would look at Neville when he had melted yet another cauldron, and Hermione removed her hand, but did not move away. "Miss Granger." At the arch look she gave him, Severus corrected, "Hermione, do you still not understand the ramifications of every failure? Each time we fail Albus is one step closer to death." With this, he jerked up from the table, running his hands through his hair in frustration.

She countered, "With each failure we are also one step closer to success!"

Completely enraged by what he saw as her inability to comprehend, Severus knocked the workbench over and continued to pace in the lab like a caged animal.

Fearful he might accidentally disturb the now-simmering potion that showed promise, Hermione surreptitiously cast a Stabilizing Charm on the other workbench as he continued to pace, growing more agitated by the moment. "Stop!" she shouted, to gain his attention. "If you are not more careful, you will ruin this latest batch with your temper tantrums!"

Shocked at her impertinence, Severus turned to go back up the stairs, away from her infernal good cheer, as he saw it. He had only made it two steps when she grabbed him by the arm, spinning him around with his own momentum. The air almost crackled with the pent-up magical energy being released.

"Miss Granger, if you will kindly release my arm," Professor Snape growled.

"No, I will not! You are going to calm down, and we are going to discuss this like the rational adults we are!" The voice in Hermione's head was now all her own, calling her seven kinds of fool. *Am I trying to get myself hexed into oblivion? Wouldn't it be best to allow him to storm off and brood until he was calmer and they could talk rationally?*

Glaring the whole time, Severus yanked his arm from her grasp and proceeded to right the bench he had knocked over in his fit of temper. Seating himself on the bench, he raised an eyebrow as if to say, *I am waiting.*

Hesitating only slightly, Hermione retrieved the other stool and purposefully placed it next to his and sat.

At this action, his other eyebrow raised to join the first.

After a tense few moments, Hermione realized if they were going to discuss anything, she was going to have to be the one to start. Clearing her throat, she grasped for where to begin. "Severus, I do realize how important this potion is and, more importantly, why it is so important to you, but..."

"Do not presume to understand my motives, Miss Granger," the Potion Master snarled. "You have no..."

Interrupting, herself, Hermione continued, "Yes, I do, and I also know if you continue to go on this way, we will fail!" At this, she once again placed her hand on his arm, almost as if she were pleading for him to listen to her words. "I can brew, I can research, I can prepare ingredients, but I am not a Potions master; it is your knowledge and intuition we need."

Again, Severus reached up to pinch the bridge of his nose. It was obvious to Hermione he must be suffering from a vicious headache brought on by all of the tension, both natural and self-inflicted. Standing, but not removing her hand from his arm, she moved behind where he was sitting. Cautiously, she raised her other hand to his shoulder. As soon as she made contact, he jerked as if to move away from her touch.

"Relax, I am not going to hurt you," she huffed. "I am only trying to help," she stated as she began to firmly knead the tense muscles in his neck.

"I do not need your pity," Severus snarled, though he did not make to move away from her ministrations.

"That is a good thing, because it is not pity I have for you," Hermione replied.

"Why are you doing this?" he asked.

"Why? Because it is obvious you are in pain!" she stated. "I cannot abide anyone suffering when there is a way to prevent it." With that said, she continued with the impromptu massage in silence.

Gradually, under her skilled hands, Severus began to relax. He still could not understand what her motivations were, but could not deny the press and release of the muscles, in his neck, was relieving the pressure that had been building for weeks. Between the worry over Albus, the potion, and not being able to forget that stolen moment in his sitting room, Severus had had little more than a couple of hours rest a night. He was never a kind man and even worse when tired, yet Hermione never shied away from his forbidding temper. Severus had come to enjoy the fact that she would go toe to toe with him.

Eventually, he was slumped over the workbench, his head resting on the pillow of his arms, asleep. When Hermione knew it was almost time for the final six counter-clockwise stirs before the potion could safely be left to simmer, she began to lessen the pressure she was using so as to not disturb the now-sleeping man.

After completing the next steps in the potion, Hermione placed a Stasis Charm on it and looked over at the sleeping man across the room. She still could not understand why she suddenly felt so drawn to him. He was rude, surly and most often a right bastard, but when he was at rest, she could see his potential. Even in repose, his face held lines reflective of the harsh life he had led, though they did soften some. He was not attractive in the normal sense, but still she found herself attracted. In all honesty, she had had a crush on him during her sixth year after she had discovered all he had done to see her and her friends safe. That was why she had been so bitterly disappointed to think he had betrayed the Light by killing the Headmaster. Along with confusion, she had experienced a deep sense of relief to know all was not as it had appeared.

Thinking it might not be wise to touch him while he slept, Hermione softly called his name as she made her way across the room. Her assumption proved correct when he jumped and reached for his wand on full alert. "Severus, it is only me, Hermione; you drifted off." His shoulders immediately sagged into a more relaxed posture. She continued, "The potion is in stasis for the night; shall we head upstairs?"

Severus pushed himself to his feet yet appeared to be a little unsteady as if still half asleep. Hermione stepped up to him, placing her arm around his waist. With only a moment's hesitation, he haltingly allowed his arm to rest about her shoulders. Walking side by side, they ascended the stairs. Passing through the kitchen, Hermione automatically headed toward the guest room Severus occupied on the main floor. When they reached his door, Hermione looked up at him and asked, "Will you be able to get back to sleep?"

Shrugging his shoulders and rubbing his hands over his face, Severus just looked at her; his eyes were flat, void of emotion, but she could see the tension creeping back into the muscles surrounding them.

"I think I can answer that question for myself," she half-chuckled. "Will you let me help?"

"What did you have in mind, Miss Granger, reading me a bedtime story?" The Potions master sneered.

"Must you always be so sarcastic?" replied Hermione with a huff. "Just get ready for bed, and I will check the rest of the house and make sure all is locked up for the night. I will be back in a few minutes." With that, she turned and left the befuddled Potions master to stare after her.

Not knowing why he was doing her bidding, Severus made ready for bed and had just settled the comforter to his waist, preparing to read for the rest of the night when she returned to the door way.

Hermione hoped her face did not give away her trepidation or surprise at finding Severus bare from the waist up. *Who knew he was hiding such a toned physique under all those proper layers*, she mused to herself. "I am glad this will not become another shouting match. Now, if you will please turn over on your stomach and lie flat," she stated in the most controlled tone she could manage.

"And just why would I do that, Miss Granger, when I intend on reading to research the next phase of the potion?" Severus could not keep all of the curiosity from his voice.

"Not tonight; tonight you are going to get a decent night's rest, and in answer to your question...so I can continue the massage I started earlier in a position more conducive to your being able to relax and sleep," Hermione stated boldly with her arms crossed as if she would brook no argument.

To her amazement, Severus remained silent, but complied with her direction. Turning over, he once again pillowed his head on his folded arms. As she watched him settle in, she uncrossed her arms and made her way over to the side of the bed. Sitting on the edge of the bed, her hip brushed his side causing him to shift over slightly to make a space between the two of them. She once again started at his neck and shoulders, kneading away tension that had already reaccumulated. Hermione worked her way down his back, rhythmically pressing and releasing to relieve the knots in his back. From his deep breathing, she could tell Severus had once again drifted into sleep. After about ten minutes, he rolled to his side, facing her, but his face reflected he had only shifted in his sleep, so she continued working her way back up his exposed arm.

She was leaning over slightly to massage his face and temples when the shifting of his arm knocked her off balance, and she found herself lying next to him, his arm pulling her against him on the bed. Looking at his face, she searched his profile for any indication he was awake. She could see he was still asleep as she gently brushed the hair from his face and cupped the back of his head, lightly massaging his scalp until she, too, drifted off, still in his arms.

Chapter 6

CHAPTER 6

A/N: Once again I find myself at a loss for words...my undying gratitude will forever go to Ladyinthecloak and Lariope who have given many hours of their time to this story. They are the best betas a newbie author could ask for, thank you, ladies!

Severus knew he was dreaming. He had had variations of this same dream almost every time he managed to sleep deeply enough to dream, without a potion, since the day in his sitting room. Hermione was spooned up against him, but this time she was wearing her robes, though they were riding up on her hips. He could feel his morning erection pressed into her lush backside. Enjoying the sensation, he rocked gently as he hardened even more. Severus could almost smell her scent, a mixture of sandalwood and vanilla, twitching at his nose. He let his hand drift up under her robes to cup her smooth, round breasts as he continued to gently rock; Hermione turned toward him, running her hands down his back. He was now rock-hard, pressing into the soft swell of her abdomen. He could feel her nails raking down his back and clutching rhythmically on his arse. Then she reached around to stroke his now straining member. This was nearly his undoing. It had been so long since he had lain with a willing witch.

Though he sought self-gratification on occasion, nothing could replace the feeling of having a woman's soft hand stroking that particular part of his anatomy. Tilting his head, he began to kiss her face everywhere but the lips, until she reached up and, holding his head, guided his lips to hers. The kiss soon overpowered both of them. They were straining to meet each other in a duel of tongues, teeth and lips. Severus blindly reached beneath her robes, pushing them over her head as he suckled her flesh. He could feel her welcoming warmth now teasing his near-painful erection. Her hands were everywhere, running over his back and arse as she rocked up in an attempt to draw him into her warmth. At last, with a flexing of his hips, he was sheathed within her hot, tight body. They both groaned in unison as black eyes met brown. It was then Severus realized this was not a dream.

He made to pull away, but Hermione would have nothing of it; as she cupped his arse, she pulled him in until he was consumed. There was no turning back as his hips began to thrust of their own accord. Hermione met him thrust for thrust, her eyes never leaving his face. Her nails raking his back, scoring his flesh, almost drawing blood in her heated passion for him only pressed him on to greater need. He could feel the tremors in her thighs as her desire built to match his own. As she pulsed around him in orgasm, he was lost, finding his own release. Too sated to do anything else, he collapsed on top of Hermione as she threaded her fingers through his hair, and they both attempted to catch their breath. Neither had uttered a word. When he had control of his limbs, he rolled off her sitting up, facing the wall.

Hermione watched as Severus sat head in his hands on the edge of the bed. She could feel the remorse pouring off of him. "Severus, please do not regret this; I don't." Hermione whispered.

"Don't regret it? How could you not regret it? I just raped you, woman! You had no choice! No say!" he shouted.

"How can you say that? Was I fighting you? Did I scream? I wanted this. I wanted you!" Hermione shouted back.

"I am supposed to think you wanted to shag your greasy bat of a teacher? Give me some credit--I know what people think of me," Severus snarled in reply.

"I have never called you that or any other derogatory name! I have only ever tried to show you respect and kindness."

"Respect, like you have shown every authority figure throughout your life. That only makes this worse," he sneered as he stormed out of the room.

Hermione's mind traveled over the events of the morning as she set about making some homemade ice cream in the kitchen. The Headmaster seemed to be going through an inordinate amount of it, and she was now trying her hand at lemon drop-flavored.

Hermione had not been able to locate Severus in the house since he had stormed out of the guest bedroom. Circumstances could have been better, yet she did not regret what had happened during the morning hours...but obviously, he did. Hermione remembered lying in the bed next to him after he had toppled her off balance, and massaging his scalp. She must have fallen asleep. She had not intended to spend the night in his bed and most certainly had not planned the interlude. It had begun as a wonderfully erotic dream. She woke to him kissing her face and had acted reflexively, so aroused she might have hexed him if he had made to stop. It was only when he entered her that she realized he, too, must have been dreaming. When he had opened his eyes, they had gone from glazed over passion to horror. She had never experienced a climax so intense, and then he had the gall to say he had raped her. He would have pulled away when he had awoken had she not held him in place, but she refused to feel guilty.

"Severus, would you please sit down and tell me what is bothering you?" Albus asked for what must have been the tenth time in as many minutes. "There must be something you can tell me; is it the potion?"

"The potion is progressing adequately enough, Albus." Severus replied in a somewhat pensive manner. "I feel as though we may be on the verge of a breakthrough; only one element remains elusive."

"Then what, or should I say who, has you prowling my chambers as if you were doomed to death?" Albus inquired with an annoying twinkle in his eye as Severus continued to pace the length of the room with his robes billowing in his wake.

Turning abruptly to face the Headmaster, Severus sneered, "Surely, you are not implying that that insufferable girl would be reason for me to impose on your gracious nature?"

Albus chuckled softly as he replied, "Severus, I am not implying anything of the sort; I am only concerned, as you seem to be on edge."

"I apologize deeply, Albus. Of course, I might have known you would discern my mood very easily by my retreat from my usual, cheerful disposition. You *concernis* very touching," Snape hissed in a condescending tone.

"My boy, how many times do I have to tell you? You need to speak your mind. You've so much bottled up inside, you will explode if you do not release the pressure." Albus, too, was growing frustrated with his young friend's continued denial. He did not miss the jerking of Severus' head at the word *explode*, but he continued on. "Severus, tell me, how are you and Hermione getting along?"

"Getting along absolutely smashingly," he mocked.

"Really, Severus, must you be so sarcastic?" the Headmaster sighed.

"Must you be so bloody inquisitive?"

"I am merely asking if there are any difficulties. Miss Granger has been most hospitable and kind in her attentions to our comforts while we are staying here," the Headmaster replied in all innocence. "Do you not feel the same?"

"Of course she's been hospitable, more than expected, but the troubling aspect is why?" Severus relented.

"Are you asking why she is being kind and caring, or why it is troubling? Those are two very disparate questions and one, I fear, Severus, only you can answer."

"You grow annoyingly more cryptic with age," Severus snarled in frustration as he once again continued to pace the room.

"Well, what would you want me to say? Miss Granger is a compassionate person, and it is in her nature to treat people accordingly. I cannot answer why this is troubling to you; only you hold the answers to that riddle," Albus replied, twinkling all the more.

The room was once again cloaked in silence until the Potions master bade his leave to check on the potions brewing in the basement lab.

Though seemingly unsatisfactory, the conversation with the Headmaster did leave Severus much to remunerate upon. Why was it that he was so disconcerted with Hermione's care and concern? He should have expected no less from her, as she was always the one to express compassion for others, even the lowliest of creatures. This did not explain the interlude in his chambers. Even Miss Granger would not stoop to the level of offering her body out of pity. Why had she said she did not feel remorse...that she'd *wanted me*? It was this question keeping Severus on edge all morning, pacing the Headmaster's chambers. How could she want *him*? Had he not made her life at school a living hell? Granted, he had been exonerated of his sins, but this did not remove the acts themselves.

"Why?"

Severus had managed successfully to avoid Hermione since his disturbing visit with Albus, but as luck would have it, she was in the lab, when he went down to check on the potion, left brewing. Steeling himself for an emotional confrontation, he was taken aback when he was met with a neutral Hermione. She did not rail at him or try to poke at his lack of communication *Just what is the witch thinking?*

"It should be just about time to add the Boomslang Skins," Hermione stated, as if she might have been discussing the weather.

"Indeed, though I do not know why we bother; until we have found a way to counteract the lunar influence and stop the transformation, this potion will be the same as all of the others." Severus countered, quite disgusted with the lack of progress.

"I have an idea on that."

"And do you care to enlighten me on this untold brainstorm?" he asked drolly. Not wanting to give away, he was actually desperate enough to listen to the nattering of a mere schoolgirl.

"Well, I have been thinking," Hermione hesitated, not at all certain how he would respond to her bringing a non-magical solution to the table, "in the Muggle world there is a condition called Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD."

Severus simply quirked his eyebrow at her, indicating she should continue with her explanation.

"SAD affects Muggles who are sensitive to a lack of sunlight. In the winter months when there are less daylight hours, they actually become depressed and suffer other physical ailments. It is as if they become different people, almost like a *transformation*."

He was beginning to feel as though he were pulling teeth. *What is the matter with the girl...couldn't she just get to the point?*"And how, Miss Granger, is this of import to our endeavors?" Severus sneered.

"I suppose the disorder is not overly important, but the treatment, I think, could be the key," she continued, finally showing the light in her eyes that always shown brightest when she thought she had solved a great mystery. "You see, to counteract the lack of sunlight, they use artificial lights to trick their bodies into responding as if they were in the sunlight. This increases the production of Vitamin D."

"Miss Granger, fascinating as all of this is, I still do not see how it can possibly pertain to stopping a werewolf from transforming," the Potions master once again interrupted.

"The Headmaster has been craving dairy products right before the full moon. One of the key nutrients in dairy products is Vitamin D." She finished by asking, "What if we infused the Wolfsbane with Vitamin D to counteract the lunar influence?"

As preposterous as it sounds, this may just have merit, thought Severus. The one thing he had been struggling with in his research had been a way to counteract the lunar influence in transformation. The sun's energy in the form of Vitamin D might just be the ingredient he had been seeking. It would not be easy to extract this substance from the raw material of something such as milk, but it might be worth a try. "Miss Granger, I believe your hypothesis may have merit; we will need to extract the Vitamin D from the dairy products..."

At this Hermione began to laugh.

"I fail to see what is so humorous."

"Severus, we do not need to extract the Vitamin D from the milk ourselves." She continued to chuckle.

"Then just how do you suppose we would add this element to the potion?" he sneered.

"There is no need to be snide. Muggles have all sorts of vitamin supplements that are already in their pure form. We simply need to determine how much we need to add to the potion." With this, she produced a bottle of vitamin D she had already acquired from a Muggle natural food store that did not use additives.

They had worked steadily for days, experimenting and calculating the appropriate amount of Vitamin D to add to the potion and at which stage it needed to be added to gain the most efficiency. Now, the first batch was simmering and would need to be watched and stirred at regular intervals, six counter-clockwise stirs every sixty-six minutes for the next six hours and thirty-six minutes. Neither was willing to leave the potions lab during this critical time.

Nothing had been said about what Hermione now thought of as *thedream incident*. She was currently sitting at one workbench, going over their calculations, while Severus had settled at the opposite end of the other workbench. Looking up, Hermione noticed that he was, once again, rubbing his hands over the back of his neck to ease the tension created, no doubt, from standing over a hot cauldron, stirring and chopping ingredients.

Snape looked up and caught her eyes on him, and she hastily looked away just as the timer signaled that it was time, yet again, to stir the potion. Hermione walked over to the simmering cauldron, as they had been taking rotation on who would tend to the potion. She slowly stirred the six counter-clockwise stirs and lifted the stir stick, so as to prevent any continuing rotation of the slightly thick substance. As she was returning to her work, she again glanced over to see Severus still watching her every movement. Feeling as if she were approaching a wild animal, she altered her course to go over to his workbench. He continued to watch her every step, his eyes shuttered from emotion or thought. Hermione stood before him, waiting for him to say or do anything.

"Miss Granger is there something you require?" he inquired, his voice lacking the venom she had grown accustomed to over the last couple of days.

Taking a deep breath, she stated boldly, "Actually, yes, I require your assistance," She knew he was once again riddled with tension, both mental and physical, and if it took a bold-faced lie to help him, then so be it.

"And how is it you *require my assistance?*" he asked, his voice lacking any derision.

"I was hoping you would allow me to borrow your neck and shoulders for a few moments," she rushed on hurriedly. "You see, being a massage therapist, my hands are accustomed to a certain type of exercise, and chopping potion ingredients just does not provide me with the proper form of exercise."

His eyes widened briefly in surprise and then quickly became shuttered. "I am sure you can find some other means to accomplish your goal rather than accosting my person," he sneered in his best Potions master voice.

"No, truly, I would appreciate your help; normally, I do physiotherapy for Harry and Ron after Quidditch practice to keep my hands limber," she answered brightly. "Since I have not been around them, I fear my hands will lose their strength."

Severus stared at her without seeing and only vaguely heard her ramblings. His mind had traveled back to remembering the feel of her hands on his neck and shoulders, relieving the tension that seemed to plague him night and day. Finally, after a long awkward silence, he sighed, a sigh of the long suffering and highly imposed upon. "If you must..."

Hermione wasted no time in moving behind him. "If you will just try to relax and rest your arms on the workbench," she stated.

"I will consent to this only if you hold your tongue," Severus snarled.

Silence reined in the potions lab as Hermione set about her task. This was the first time he had allowed her to come within arm's reach of him since *that morning*. Hermione always seemed to gain as much from giving a massage as those she gave them to. It was a very relaxing and soothing process. If she were able, she would have some soothing music such as Brahms playing in the background, and she would be using some of the aromatherapy oils she brewed for massage. She had missed the feel of his body, of his muscles and skin moving beneath her hands as she soothed away the aches of his body.

Against his better judgment, Severus found himself once again under the spell of Hermione's talented hands. The woman was definitely a witch. How was it she knew just where to press and where to soothe? Gradually, he began to place more of the weight of his upper body on his arms as they rested on the workbench; it could not be helped. His head and neck hung down, and he could not stifle the soft moan that escaped his lips as her agile fingers threaded through his hair to massage the base of his scalp. The sensation was hypnotic. Belatedly, he realized another head was also responding to her ministrations. *Who would have thought a scalp massage could be erotic?* Yet, he could not deny the arousal making itself known, as he now strained against his once comfortably fitting trousers.

Slowly, Hermione worked her way from his scalp down his shoulders to his back and further down to the expanse of his lower back, now exposed, as his shirt came untucked. At the contact of skin on skin, she found that she had to bite back a moan threatening her own lips. Never before had she become aroused while giving a massage, but the sight of her lightly tanned hands against his paler flesh sent shivers down her spine as another moan escaped Severus' throat.

Without lifting his head from the pillow of his arms, he almost sighed, "What are you doing to me?"

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 of 14

When Remus enters the picture, there are more questions than answers.

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A/N: Many thanks to my wonderful betas Lariope and Ladyinthecloak.

CHAPTER 7

"I could ask you the same question," Hermione sighed as she removed her hands from his bare flesh and sat next to him on the workbench.

Without lifting his head, Severus turned his pillowed head to look at her with obsidian eyes too tired, at this moment, to hide the emotions that were swirling in their black depths. He quirked one eyebrow, in inquiry to her statement, encouraging her to continue her train of thought.

"Never did I ever imagine that I would be sitting in my parents' basement brewing potions with Severus Snape, one of the most accomplished Potions masters in Great Britain." She shook her head in confusion as she continued. "Two months ago I thought you and the Headmaster were both dead and now..." She trailed off, not knowing what to say.

Severus shifted in his seat, finally raising his head to look her in the eye. "And now?"

"And now so much has changed."

"Hermione, can you tell me why you agreed to this, why you agreed to help the Headmaster and me of all people?" Severus asked.

"Well, isn't it obvious?" she asked in exasperation. *Did he really not understand what had really changed?*

"One would assume it is your natural Gryffindor instincts that have lead you down this path," he drawled in his best Professor Snape sneering tones. "Yet, that truly does not explain why we find ourselves in our current situation." Severus could not bring himself to outright say, *that doesn't explain why I find myself wanting you and to be touched by you on more than a physical level*, which is what he was thinking. To say so would be just too Gryffindor to bear. He hoped that he could lead her to revealing what her motivations were, but the girl...no, woman...had become much more contained than he remembered from the days she had spent in his classroom. No longer was she the hand-waving little girl, seeking approval from all authority figures. She had matured, and Severus was very much drawn to the woman she had become.

In exasperation, Hermione stood from the bench and began pacing the room. Severus' eyes tracked her progress. Finally, she stopped whirling to face him. "This has

nothing to do with house loyalties or characteristics! This goes beyond who is going to win the bloody House cup!" Sitting back down beside him, she tried to calm her emotions to continue. "Haven't we gotten beyond the 'you scary Potions professor, me the know-it-all with all the answers' thing? I don't have all of the answers. Merlin, I don't even know all of the questions!"

Severus had never seen the Gryffindor so unsettled, and with a sigh he relented, "I do not have the answers either, and what concerns me is I want to find out what they are."

Hermione realized this was the closest he would come to admitting an interest, but she could not resist pushing the point, "We are not talking about potions, are we?"

Leaning forward, Severus gently grasped her head between his hands, her curls twinning themselves about his fingers, and softly laid his lips upon hers, hesitating only slightly in case she were to pull away. She did not. Gradually, he felt her lips softening to his own, encouraging him to deepen the kiss. In relief, he felt her arms come up to wrap around his shoulders as his tongue sought entry. It was surreal; neither attempted to over-power the other. Instead, it was a languid exploration. When air became a necessity, they pulled back from one another, both wearing matching expressions of awareness. Not wanting the moment to end, but knowing the potion needed tending, Severus took Hermione's hand in his, helping her up so they could get back to work.

They had reached a stumbling block. Severus had every confidence that the alterations made to the Wolfsbane Potion would be successful. After years of brewing, he had developed an instinct where potions and innovation were concerned, but he did not want to risk the Headmaster's life on the chance that this time he could be wrong. The law of averages was against them. What they needed was another werewolf to test the potion on first. Severus did not like the idea of having Albus endure another transformation, but he liked even less the thought that a flaw in his and Hermione's experimentation could cause his death. He brought this thought to Hermione's attention, "I wish that we knew of another werewolf that would be willing to be a test subject; if only Lupin had survived the war."

Startled, Hermione looked up, "What do you mean, if only he had survived the war?"

"Well, with his affection for Albus and his own affliction, I am sure that he would have been willing to test the potion first, obviously." Severus sneered. They had been getting on rather well, and he did not wish to cause an argument, but he thought sometimes for someone so bright she was rather dense. *Must be all the time spent with dunderheads like Potter and Weasley*, Severus thought to himself.

"But, Severus, Remus did not die in the war. He is alive and well, living in Godric's Hollows with Tonks and Teddy," Hermione stated, rather surprised he did not know this already.

"What? I read in the *Prophet* that both he and Tonks had perished," Severus replied with a look of incredulity on his face.

"Well, there is your answer." If it were not so sad, Hermione would have laughed. "Since when do you believe everything that rag prints? In truth, the Light lost very few to the Dark Lord and his minions."

"I think that, perhaps, you, Albus and I should have a talk about the results of the war. We both thought Remus had been lost," Severus whispered; the tone of relief in his voice could not be mistaken. "Do you think that he would be willing to come here?"

"I am not sure; he has kept pretty much to himself since the end of the war, but it is worth a try." Hermione thought aloud, "I think it would be best if I go in person and alone, but I am going to have to tell him what has been going on, and I have not even mentioned anything to Harry and Ron."

It was a reflection of how anxious Severus was to have the potion tested that he did not even argue with Hermione's assessment of the situation. An owl was sent and plans were made for Hermione to Apparate to Godric's Hollow in the morning. They both decided it would be best not to mention anything to the Headmaster until it was determined whether or not Remus would be willing to participate in the testing of the potion. For this reason, they held off their discussion of the war.

A soft pop announced Hermione's arrival at the cemetery where Harry's parents were buried. It was only a short walk from the Potter mansion and the only place she could think of to have Remus meet her. She wanted to be able to talk to him privately before bringing Tonks into the mix--if Remus agreed. She looked at the marble monument Harry had commissioned when the war was over. He had wanted to honor the sacrifice his parents both had made in saving him and ultimately the whole of the Wizarding world. It read, **In Loving Memory of James and Lily Potter; You Did Not Die In Vain**; below each name was the year of birth and death. Harry had made both her and Ron promise, before the final confrontation, if anything happened to him he would be laid to rest here with his parents. She was sure this would still be his wish, but was glad she was not looking at the resting place of her friend, now.

"Hermione, what is so secretive that you could not just come to the house?" Remus startled Hermione with his arrival, as she was lost in thought.

Whirling around reflexively at the first sound, wand drawn, Hermione dropped her arm to her side when she saw Remus' arms up in a posture of peace, chuckling, "Sorry about that...reflex."

"No need to apologize." Remus used his raised arms to give Hermione a hug of welcome, which she readily reciprocated; anything to collect her thoughts on how she was going to ask Remus for his help and deliver him the shock of a lifetime.

Stepping back, Hermione began to wring her hands in agitation. *Just how do you tell someone that their mentor is alive, a werewolf, and dying, but you may have found the cure by working with the man that had supposedly killed him?*

"Remus, I do apologize for the secrecy, but what I have to tell you must be handled delicately and with caution." Hermione continued to hedge as she struggled to find the words to tell him of the Headmaster's plight. Would it be best to just blurt it out? Or would it be better to build up to it gradually? From the look on her former professor and friend's face, she decided to just leap in with both feet. "I need you to come with me; I think it would be best to show you rather than to try and explain."

"Can you at least tell me where we will be going?" Remus questioned. It was not that he did not trust Hermione, but her nervousness was disconcerting.

"It really would be easier to explain once we get there. Would you mind allowing me to Side-Along Apparate us?" Hermione requested with a pleading tone to her voice.

A bemused expression on his face, Remus held out his arm in acceptance. She would Apparate them to wherever they would be going.

With a grateful smile, Hermione linked her arm with his to Disapparate them to the back garden of her parents' home. Once there, she turned to him, again apprehensive of what she would be revealing to Remus. "I hope that you can keep an open mind about what you are about to learn." With no further hesitation, Hermione led him into the kitchen where Severus was sitting at the table drinking a cup of tea.

"Severus! Is it really you? How did you survive?" The apparent joy in Remus' voice caught both Hermione and Severus by surprise.

At the first sound of his name, the former Death Eater turned spy had jolted to his feet, wand ready to defend. Realizing there was no threat, Severus lowered his wand.

"Lupin, I take it Miss Granger has informed you of our research and the need of your assistance," Severus began.

"Actually, no, Severus, I decided it would be better if I brought Remus here to explain things," interrupted Hermione.

Raising his brow, Severus once again graced the werewolf with his piercing gaze, not willing to admit to his curiosity as to why the man was so pleased to see him if he did

not know of the potential of a cure.

Seeming to understand both Hermione and Severus must be puzzled by his exuberance where the survival of his supposed sworn enemy's survival was concerned, Remus decided to explain. "I know you think I would have wished you dead, Severus, but you are not the only one to whom Albus confided. I know he had hopes you would survive the war, and I know he made you vow to protect Draco's soul," Remus explained. "I do not hold you responsible for his death. It was cruel of him to ask such a thing of you."

Realizing the Headmaster had once again laid the groundwork to protect him from Azkaban should anything go wrong, Severus was relieved by the old man's forethought. This would make things easier to explain. "Indeed, I am relieved you are aware of the Headmaster's plan; however, I believe he left out a few details."

It was at this moment the Headmaster decided to make an appearance in the kitchen. "Remus, it is so good to see you!" Albus greeted the man he considered: friend, colleague, and now, *kindred spirit*.

Stunned, speechless, the former Defense Against the Dark Arts professor appeared to have been struck by Petrificus Totalus.

At the man's stunned expression, Albus turned to the room's other two inhabitants. "Severus, Hermione, did you not tell him I live?"

There was nothing else to be done; at this befuddled pronouncement by the Headmaster, both the taciturn man and the nervous girl burst out in laughter, falling into each other's arms. It was many minutes before calm once again reigned in the kitchen, and all could be discussed rationally.

"If I understand correctly, you want me to test the modified Wolfsbane Potion for ill effect before it is administered to Albus," Remus summarized once he had been briefed on all that had transpired since the fateful night at Hogwarts. "I would be honored."

"No, absolutely not; I will not allow you to put Remus' life in jeopardy," the Headmaster interjected.

"Albus, this is not up for discussion," snarled the Potions master. "Either you allow someone else to test the potion first, or it will not be used at all! Lupin is the only reasonable option, as he is a member of the Order."

"You would allow me to die rather than test the potion myself?"

"I will not have innocent hands sullied with your death. If I prevent you from ingesting the cure, then, yes, you will eventually die. I do not wish this to happen, Albus, you know, but I cannot permit the chance your unwitting death would cause harm to another's soul."

It finally dawned on Hermione why Severus did not want Albus to test the potion. It was because she had helped to brew it. More, it was her theory they were testing. Did Severus really think it would matter if it were the Headmaster or Remus? If either man perished from this potion, her soul, as he put it, would be impacted. So would his own. Hermione knew there was no love lost between the two younger wizards, but she did not believe Severus would be unaffected should anything happen to Remus. She wondered, though, if Albus were to perish from the potion would he blame her? It was this thought that brought Hermione back to the conversation.

"Headmaster, I think Professor Snape has a point. Remus has suffered much longer with Lycanthropy and would be better able to evaluate the effects of the potion," Hermione interjected into the argument in full swing.

Severus looked at her with gratitude in his eyes. This was one argument Albus could not refute. Scientifically, it was more appropriate for Lupin to test the potion. "I have to agree, Albus; Remus will be able to provide us with his impressions as to whether the potion requires any adjustments." Severus hastened to support Hermione's theorem before the older wizard could speak.

"I agree as well, Albus; who better to test this than a werewolf who has been transforming monthly for over three decades?" Remus reiterated.

With the majority vote in, there was nothing to be said. Dumbledore knew Severus would not back down. He would simply destroy the potion and never try again. As much as he did not wish to jeopardize anyone else's life, Albus knew the potion would free many to a better life if they were successful. "Very well, I cannot fight all of you. Remus will test the potion."

It was easier than anyone anticipated for Remus to be at the Granger house for the full moon. Since he and Tonks had settled at Godric's Hollow, he had left each month before the full moon and returned after. He would not place his family in jeopardy, and since Severus' death, he had not found anyone he trusted to brew the Wolfsbane Potion for him. Each month he had suffered through the transformation, warded inside the Shrieking Shack. If he arrived early, he was able to ward the building himself and un-ward it when he returned to himself. Silently, Remus prayed to every deity he knew for this potion to be successful. He knew if anyone were capable of finding the cure, it would be Severus Snape, but he could not help but wonder why Hermione supported his testing of the potion over the Headmaster's.

On the eve of the full moon, Severus approached Remus in the master bedroom he was sharing with Albus. The Grangers' house was not overly large, and this was the best accommodation available both in space and the ability to monitor the werewolves during transformation.

"Lupin, Albus will be in a dreamless sleep from this evening through the transformation. Upon waking, he will have transformed, but will be able to communicate through a form of Legilimency. He actually projects his thoughts into the minds of those with whom he wishes to communicate," Severus explained.

Nodding, Remus acknowledged the information, but he was lost in his own thoughts. He had spent the better part of the afternoon with Albus and was already aware of what to expect. What he had not anticipated was the information the Headmaster felt compelled to share regarding the relationship between the acerbic Potions master and Miss Hermione Granger. Apparently, they were much more than student and teacher or research partners. According to Albus, he had observed them on more than one occasion sharing confidences and affectionate touches. The Headmaster felt certain there had been at least one instance of a physical intimacy. This knowledge disturbed Remus more than he was willing to admit. It was not as if he felt anything for Hermione other than friendship, but she was his friend, and he did not want to see the young woman hurt. A relationship with Snape could only mean pain. Hadn't he already watched Lily suffer? He could not sit back and allow the same fate for Hermione.

"Severus, what is going on between you and young Miss Granger?"

At the Gryffindor's blunt question, Severus visibly straightened and his eyes narrowed. "I do not see as if this is any of your business; suffice it to say we have collaborated on the potion you will be taking this evening."

"She is my friend, and I do not wish to see her hurt, no offense."

"Why would you presume that I would or could hurt Miss Granger?"

"Your track record speaks for itself. I watched you hurt Lily, and she never would have married James had you not turned her away with your cruelty. I will not see you do the same to Hermione and have you dispose of her when she no longer suits your purpose."

Severus' in-drawn breath was audible as his nostrils flared in anger. *How dare the werewolf and his impertinence?* "I did not force Lily to choose Potter! You know not of what you speak, you and your interfering friends. Do you know why I joined the Dark Lord? As for Miss Granger, you will not speak of her again!" With a billowing of his robes, Severus left Lupin, shocked to the core.

Had the school-boy pranks of their youth truly led Severus to Voldemort? He had always been a nasty piece of work in school, but honestly, he had been provoked time and time again. Remus had a lot to think about.

Severus was in the lab when Hermione returned from purchasing the supplies they would need during the full-moon cycle. It was not practical for either of them to be absent during and directly following the transformations. He was not, as she had anticipated, though, going over the calculations for the potions. Instead, she found him sitting in the dark. "What is going on, Severus? Why are you down here in the dark? Has something happened to the Headmaster?" Hermione asked as she crossed the room to stand before him.

"No, Albus is fine and resting peacefully."

"Then, I must ask again what has drawn you down to your *dungeons*?"

"Is it too much that I may seek some peace and quiet from the ever present Gryffindors in this house?" Severus snarled.

Hermione was taken aback by his venomous response. It had been weeks since he had turned on her so. They had been getting along, finding joy in each other's company, and she did not know what to make of the sudden shift in his mood toward her. "Very well; I will be in the kitchen if you wish to work." She turned to leave the way she had come.

"Hermione, stop," Severus held out his hand for hers. "Please do not go. I should not have snapped at you. I am out of sorts. Lupin and I had a confrontation earlier, and he made me realize some things I did not wish to face."

The desolation in Severus' voice stopped Hermione more than the words themselves. He sounded so tired and weary; her heart already belonged to him, and she could not hurt him further by leaving him when he was so vulnerable. Though their relationship had progressed, it was not common for him to reveal so much through words, actions or tone. She turned back to where he still sat in the corner of darkness, approaching him as one might a wounded animal, with caution and care. When Hermione reached his side, she gently placed her hand upon his shoulder, always rigid with pride; he now sat with his shoulders hunched as if protecting himself from the next blow.

When he felt her hand upon his shoulder, he sagged in relief. She had not left him. His hateful words had not driven her away, as they had another. He turned into her warmth, burying his head against her stomach, his arms holding her like a vice.

Hermione might not have understood what had driven Severus to hold her as if he feared her leaving, but instinctively, she sought to comfort. She gently stroked his head, shoulders and back as if he were a small child, and gradually, the tension left his body. Though he did not let go, the desperation seemed to abate, and Hermione could once again draw breath comfortably. She murmured softly, "What is it, Severus? What has you in such a state?"

He answered her question with one of his own. "Why are you here?"

"I assume you mean with you, not in the literal sense of my location or working with you on the potion?" Hermione asked as she continued to stroke his hair.

Severus nodded his head against her body, afraid his voice may reveal the fear he felt at her answer.

"Before I answer you, and make no mistake I will, I wish for you to look at me." With these words Hermione extricated herself from Severus' arms, holding his hands in her own as she sat down beside him.

Severus reluctantly raised his head, though he allowed his hair to curtain his features from her view. Gently, Hermione brushed the hair back from his face, holding his cheek in her palm. "Do you trust in me enough to know I will tell you the truth, or do you wish for me to take Veritaserum?"

Wide eyed at her offer to lay her soul bare to him, Severus found his voice, "That is not necessary."

"I am glad to hear that, though I would have done so if you requested because I want no misunderstandings," Hermione stated matter-of-factly. "I am here, sitting in the dark, on the basement floor for one reason, and one reason only... I love you."

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 of 14

Hermione has her say regarding well intentioned meddling.

Disclaimer: JKR is a genius, I am not. Therefore, the world is hers. I only play in it.

A/N: Without the grace of the wonderful ladyinthecloak and Lariope, you would not be reading this story, so, all please bow down and send your thanks. I know I do!

CHAPTER 8

Severus' startled indrawn breath was the only sound to be heard in the silent basement laboratory. Words and thoughts escaped him as he stared into the honey brown eyes which haunted his dreams. They had not been together since the morning he awoke to find himself already beyond reason, buried in her sweet flesh. It had taken time for him to come to accept that Hermione had truly wished to share herself with him, and a part of him still could not believe. He was not an attractive man nor was he kind. His one redeeming quality, in his mind, was intelligence. Severus knew that Hermione would not be drawn to a dunderhead... She was far too bright. However, one did not gaze upon another's mind in rapt appreciation. How could she desire to wake up next to the visage he was greeted by in the mirror each morning?

Hermione was concerned by Severus' silence. Had she gone too far, too soon? She had come to terms with her feelings for this irascible man after she woke to ecstasy in his arms. Granted, his picture would never grace the cover of *Witch Weekly*, and he would never win any congeniality awards, but neither would she. They were alike in many ways: intelligent, knowledge-thirsty and loyal. Though Severus might scoff at her for it, she also believed them to both be shy and insecure. She knew she was, herself, and it was not a hard stretch to see these characteristics in the harsh, defensive Potions master.

After staring into her eyes for a time, Severus simply cupped her face in his hands and gently pressed his lips to hers. The kiss was not as passionate as those they had shared in his bedroom. It was seeking and searching. Tentatively, his tongue caressed her full bottom lip and, on a moan, she opened for him. As their mouths continued to communicate what could not be said with words, Hermione wrapped her arms around his neck, bringing her body flush with his. She laced her fingers through the silky,

not greasy, hair that brushed his shoulders, enjoying the texture of it in contrast to the warm, moist feel of his mouth. When air became a necessity, they broke apart, though their arms stayed wrapped around one another.

Severus bowed his head to rest on Hermione's forehead, playfully rubbing his nose on hers. His voice was warm velvet when he finally spoke. "Hermione, you must know how you affect me." With this, he rocked his hips against her abdomen. His arousal was evident. "You are a beautiful, desirable, intelligent woman, but I am no good for you. Remus made me see, quite clearly, what happens to those I love and who are foolish enough to return the sentiment."

At his words, Hermione pushed from his arms, anger tinting her cheeks when only moments before they had been flushed with desire. Tired of hearing everyone else's opinion on whom she should love, Hermione left the basement laboratory in a flurry of robes which would have made the Potions master proud, had he been watching her exit.

Instead, Severus was facing the hard stone wall of the basement, his hands, resting shoulder-high, being the only thing keeping him from falling face first into said wall. When Hermione had given voice to her love, his heart had beaten soundly in his chest, as if bursting through the walls of muscle and bone, protecting it. Severus had loved before, and he never expected to love again. It was fear that enabled him to turn Hermione away. As he slowly turned and sank down the wall, memories he had barred from his mind overtook him...

When he had first laid eyes on Lily Evans, she was a little girl with freckles, straggly red hair and beautiful emerald green eyes. Severus had always been a scrawny child, and the neglect ever present in his home made it impossible for him to be anything but skinny. His hair was greasy and his clothing threadbare. He had been the perfect target for ridicule.

Lily and he had both shown an affinity for learning and Potions in particular. When they had been paired as partners in Potions, a friendship had blossomed between the two outcasts. He had confided in Lily as he had no other then or since. She, in turn, had told him of her Muggle life and the torment she endured when she went home from her sister Petunia. Stilted conversations had gradually progressed into walks around the grounds where they discussed everything from lunch to philosophy. It had not been uncommon to find them studying in the back corner of the library well into the night, sometimes forgetting curfew.

They had found solace in their friendship, and romance had blossomed. But Lily did not remain an outcast. As she had matured, she had grown quite beautiful and drew the attention of others in her own house, namely James Potter and company.

It had become a war of sorts; Potter could not understand what Lily had seen in the greasy git of a Slytherin and, to be honest, neither could Severus. It had all come to a head after they had completed their OWLs. Potter had hexed him, turning him upside down, displaying his grayed and frayed shorts, the evidence of how little anyone cared for him, to his enemies, and worse, to Lily. When Lily had attempted to defend him, he had broken, feeling as though she pitied him, and he had lashed out at the one friend he had, the one person to have loved him; he had called her a Mudblood.

He had tried to apologize, had asked her to meet him in their secret spot, on the edge of the lake. When he had arrived, he had seen her in the arms of his nemesis, James Potter. She was laughing and happy. So, he had left well enough alone and had never spoken to her again unless it was in insult. Each barb he had thrown her way had shredded another piece of his heart away. Until he had been sure there was nothing left.

He had been a prime target for the Dark Lord and had joined readily enough. The Dark Lord had seen his weaknesses and exploited them at will. A young man who had never known acceptance was offered a place of prestige to brew for one of the most powerful wizards of the age. To further entice, he was promised those that had tormented him would pay. He had soon realized he too would pay.

Severus had spent the next twenty years of his life atoning for his sins, but he knew that Remus was right. He had no business loving Hermione and/or allowing her to love him. It would only end up with him hurting her. He could not stop his own feelings, for they had grown a mind of their own, but he could stop her from loving him. It would not be pleasant, but it had to be done, if only to protect her from himself.

Fuming, Hermione ascended the stairs to the master bedroom. She knew whatever Remus had said to Severus was at the root of his rejecting her love, and she was going to get to the bottom of it. Even if it meant hexing their only test subject, potion be damned. Wand drawn, Hermione entered the room with a bang of the door as it hit the adjacent wall. This startled Remus out of his own thoughts as he peered out the window, awaiting sunset and the testing of a potion that could change his life forever.

"How dare you?" Hermione roared as sparks flew from her wand in anger. "You have no right interfering in my life!"

Remus turned a startled gaze upon Hermione. He could see that the young witch was in danger of producing uncontrolled magic and hastened to calm her so that he could find out what he had said or done to place her in such a state. Steadily, the werewolf maintained eye contact with Hermione as he slowly walked toward her. In a voice barely above a whisper, he asked, "Hermione, please lower your wand, before you cause injury to yourself."

"I am not the one who is going to be injured. I could hex you into next week. What did you say to Severus?" She screamed as she paced the room; though she had lowered her wand, sparks continued to scorch the soft rose carpeting covering the floor.

Realization dawned on Remus' face. *This has to have something to do with the conversation I had with Severus about his feelings for Hermione.* He felt a twinge of guilt as he watched Hermione storm the room. *She must care about him. What have I done?*

"Don't just stand there like a gaping fish! What did you say to Severus to have him rejecting me when I know he cares?" she asked as her wand finally stopped emitting angry red sparks.

"Perhaps, you had better tell me what happened so that I can better understand?" Remus hedged; he did not want to reveal too much and make matters worse.

Briefly, Hermione gave Remus a sketch of what had transpired since she had received the mysterious letter more than a month ago. She did not go into great detail, but left no question of the fact she loved the dour man who had made her life at Hogwarts a living hell and that she wanted a future with him.

When she had finished, she saw Remus had sunk into her father's over-stuffed armchair and, with his head in his hands, was muttering, "What have I done?"

"That is precisely what I would like to know!" she stated, once again agitated, as she was certain Remus had said something to Severus to cause his reaction.

With a great sigh, Remus articulated what had transpired between himself and the Potions master, explaining how he had blamed him for Lily Evans' marriage to James Potter and her subsequent death. Further, how he had just come to understand how the taunting actions of the four young men, known as the Marauders, was what had most likely lead to Severus pledging himself to Voldemort and a life of hell. When he had finished, the hour was growing late.

Hermione knew she had to speak with Severus to try and straighten out this well-intentioned mess, but first they had to attend to the final stage of the potion so that it could be tested this night.

She made her way down to the lab, not knowing what frame of mind she would find the austere man in; she chose to proceed as if nothing had happened for the time being. There would be time enough after the potion was finished.

Severus had apparently been reading her mind, as the Muggles would say; he, too, was all business. Upon her entry into the potions lab, they set to work as though

nothing had transpired. Yet, everything was different. It could not be denied there was a formality between the two as they worked, something that had been absent for the last couple of weeks. Hermione mourned the loss of, if not easy companionship, at least the beginnings of it, and she vowed to restore it at the earliest possible opportunity. She would not let Remus' well intentioned, if unnecessary, protection of her destroy the future she had come to dream of.

Likewise, Severus was relieved to not have to deal with a hysterical or hostile witch. The last stage of brewing was intensive and quickly timed. They had only a short amount of time before the sun would set and no time to start over if a mistake were made. He knew that he should not have worried. *Hermione was the most level-headed witch that he knew, and she would not jeopardize the potion no matter how she felt.* Admittedly, Severus was a little irked at her cool detachment. *Perhaps he should have insisted on the Veritaserum.* If she loved him, as she professed, why was she so calm?

At last, aligned on the counter were twelve phials of golden opalescent potion. Remus would only need to take one tonight before sunset and another after moonrise, if all went well. Severus pocketed two phials and looked over at Hermione, who was cleaning up the residue from the final brewing. "I am going to take this up to Remus. I will stay with him for at least an hour to gauge any reactions. If all is well, he will be able to take the second phial on his own."

Hermione looked up as he spoke. "Do you think it wise that we have him in the same room as the Headmaster? What if something goes wrong?"

"I have considered that and thought I would have him move to my quarters, just to be cautious, though I do not doubt the efficacy of the potion," the Potions master replied with all alacrity.

Remus entered the room Severus had been staying in since coming to the Granger house. It was modestly decorated in a neutral pallet of earth tones with dark blue and green for accent; it gave off a feeling of cozy comfort. The room was both inviting and sterile; in there were no personal effects of the man who had resided in it for more than a month. Severus seated himself in one of the two armchairs flanking the unlit fireplace.

Remus followed suit, though his sense of smell, made sensitive from Lycanthropy, detected the traces of passion. It was old, but still evident to his heightened senses. Not for the first time, he wondered about what damage he might have caused by not keeping his own council. He could tell by Hermione's reaction that she loved this reserved man, but did he love her in return?

"You will need to take the first dose after sunset but before moonrise." Severus interrupted Remus' train of thought.

"As the sun is just setting, do you prefer that I take it now or wait?"

"I should think within the next twenty minutes would be adequate." The sneer in Snape's voice could not be missed.

Taking the phial in hand, Remus opened it and downed the contents in one go. It was not as vile tasting as the Wolfsbane he had swallowed more times than he could count. "Do I detect a hint of lemon?" he asked.

"Hermione's idea...she knows of Albus' obsession with lemon drops and wanted to make it palatable for him," Severus replied without inflection, though to Remus this was very telling.

Since when had Snape ever allowed anyone to add to or change a potion without absolute necessity? Many of the more commonly used potions could be made more palatable with a flavoring additive, but never had the Potions master done so. Yet, an experimental potion with such a critical outcome, he flavored at a woman's whim. Again, Remus hoped he had not ruined things for the two of them. He was now convinced they loved mutually.

"Severus, I owe you an apology."

At Remus' words, Severus arched one brow in inquiry.

"I should never have blamed you for Lily's fate." There was nothing more Remus could say.

Severus continued to look at the werewolf with fathomless black eyes. "Yet, had I not called her a Mudblood and turned her away, would she have married Potter, would she have given birth to a son she died protecting?"

Hands held in the air in a sign of surrender, Remus replied, "I do not know and neither do you. James had set his cap on her, and there is every possibility he would have ensnared her without involving you... I just want to say I am sorry."

"Sorry for what? Sorry for humiliating me in my youth? Sorry for the words you spoke earlier? What is it you have to atone for?" Severus sneered.

"All of it and more. If it is any consolation, Hermione has already taken me to task. I believe she cares very much for you," Remus wearily replied. "I think I may have destroyed any continuing friendship with her by my actions, well intended or not."

Severus turned his back on the werewolf; he did not want the hope he suddenly felt at Remus' words to show on his face, but hope he did. If Hermione had rowed with Remus over their conversation, then there had to be a chance. "I would not worry overly much about Miss Granger's temper. If you recall from her school days, she is quick to anger but also quick to forgive. Take the other dose after moonrise. I will set a monitoring charm on the room and ward the doors just to be cautious." With these words, the dour wizard left to find his witch.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 of 14

Potions and confessions.

Disclaimer: The Harry Potter universe belongs to J K Rowling.

A/N: Thank yous and truck loads of dark chocolate to my betas Lariope and ladyinthecloak.

Chapter 9

It was still early, and Severus knew he had some time before he was to meet Hermione in the sitting room. They had much to discuss, yet he was at a loss as to where to begin. Did he love her? He did not recall feeling this way when he had been in love with Lily, but he was a lot older now and had seen and done things no sane man would admit to. Had he really loved Lily? From a young boy's perspective he thought he had, but with age comes wisdom. He could not imagine sending Hermione from his life and, in fact, had stopped her when he thought she would go this afternoon. Yet, with Lily it had been so easy to have the cruel word "Mudblood" fall from his tongue laced with sarcasm and hate. He had tried to apologize, as was only appropriate. Yet, it had been almost easy to continue on without Lily's presence in his life. Hermione, though, had become a part of his life without invitation and without his realization. He woke each morning looking forward to the day and the time spent on research in the lab with her. More time than he would like to admit he found himself thinking about the morning in his chambers. Could it be possible what he felt or what he thought he felt for Lily all of those years was not true love?

Hermione settled on the settee in the sitting room with a book to pass the time until Severus had finished getting Remus settled for the night, but her mind was not on the latest tome discussing rain-forest plants and their uses in potion making. She found herself thinking back over the last month and a half, and its culmination of her falling in love with the most unlovable professor of her Hogwarts years.

Admittedly, she had had a crush on him during her fifth year. What girl didn't go through the bad boy phase? He was dark and broody, and one couldn't get any more "bad boy" than a Death Eater, but she thought she had gotten over that infatuation. Hermione was astute enough to know what she was feeling now went beyond infatuation and girlhood fantasies. She wanted to comfort him and care for him in a way that she never wanted to comfort or care for Ron. Something about Severus Snape pulled at her heart. Would it be foolish to explore these feelings and try to build a relationship with the irascible man?

Hermione was startled out of her thoughts by the sound of Severus entering the sitting room with a tray of tea. "How is Remus? Has he taken the first dose of the potion?"

Feeling awkward himself, Severus was grateful for the diversion presented in discussing the potion. "Yes, all appears to be well. Remus took the first phial about an hour ago and should take the second just after moonrise. I have placed a monitoring spell on the room, so we will know if intervention is necessary."

"Are you sure it is safe to have him more or less unconfined?" Hermione asked as she worried her lower lip.

Severus' eyes were unaccountably drawn to the damage she was doing to her lower lip. As she raked her teeth over it, bringing blood to the surface, it plumped and appeared as if she had been well and soundly kissed. Tormenting his mind with the memories of the kiss they had shared just before he tried to let her go. *How could I think I could let her go?*

"Hermione..."

"Severus..."

They both spoke at once.

Severus continued, "I know it is only polite to ask you to continue, but if you would not mind there is something I wish to say... something I must tell you."

Surprised Severus was desirous of speaking, Hermione hastened for him to continue. She settled, once again, upon the settee to give him her full attention. To her continued surprise, Severus seated himself next to her...taking her hand in his.

Looking into her eyes, Severus began to speak. "Earlier today, I had every intention of running you off for your own good. No one ever finds happiness when they are involved in my life. I am a hard and bitter man, Hermione."

At this proclamation Hermione could remain silent no longer. "Just what do you mean? You intended to run me off? I am a sentient being, Severus, able to think for myself," she ranted as she pulled her hand from his and began to pace the length of the room.

"Hermione, will you please just listen to what I have to say? This is not easy for me," he pleaded with both his words and his eyes.

"I will listen, but know that no one...not you, Remus, or anyone else has the right to determine my future for me," Hermione stated in a tone that would brook no arguments.

Nodding his understanding, it was now Severus who paced the floor. For a man who had always had the words to save his life when facing the Dark Lord, he was lost at what to say to this young woman, who now held his future in her hands. He thought back to the joy he had felt when she first told him of her love for him. *Had it only been this afternoon?* In less than twenty-four hours, this beautiful young woman had turned his world upside down. "Hermione, do you remember the conversation we had in the lab? The one where you offered to take Veritaserum...?"

Her eyes flew to his face, the color draining from her own as she searched his for any sign to tell her what he was thinking; she nodded her understanding. Was he going to tell her she was a fool? That he could never love her? She felt her heart beat in her chest, amazed it did not just leap out to flop about the floor.

In an uncharacteristic sign of frustration, Severus raked his hands through his hair, pulling on the lank strands to the point of pain. "Maybe I am the one who needs to take Veritaserum," he muttered to himself. "It might make all of this easier." Not realizing he had spoken aloud, he was startled to hear Hermione's throaty chuckle. "I hardly find this situation humorous, Miss Granger," he snarled. This only exacerbated Hermione's mirthful response.

She was now laughing so hard she had to hold her sides with her arms wrapped around her midriff, as it dawned on her why he was so out of sorts. "Oh, you dear man, this is funny...ridiculously so!" She continued to chuckle. "Here I sit afraid you are trying to let me down easy, and all of the time you are trying to tell me you love me!" With these words, Severus found himself with his arms full of the happy witch and being kissed soundly so there was no hope of him responding.

Severus took the opportunity to tell her, in the only way he could, that he did indeed love her. When the two broke apart, both were breathless. In awe of all that had transpired, without a word being spoken, they continued to hold each other in fear of breaking the spell surrounding them. Some moments later, in the quiet of the evening, Severus whispered into her hair, "I do love you, Hermione Granger."

The calm surrounding the two was broken by a magnified moaning sound coming from Severus' chambers. Both tensed. Had the potion failed? Were they now faced with a virtually unconfined werewolf capable of killing them both? Severus gently guided Hermione to the settee. "Hermione, please stay here while I go check on Remus. Until we know the situation, it is not wise for both of us to be in jeopardy."

"No..."

"Hermione," Severus very nearly growled himself. "We cannot risk Remus being unconfined if he has transformed."

"I know...just please be careful," she whispered, the fear evident in her eyes.

Severus gently brushed her cheek with the tips of his fingers as he turned toward his chambers. The moaning had continued, but sounded no more violent in nature than someone who had had too many pints and no hangover potion. Still cautious, Severus gently palmed the door, checking the wards he had placed earlier in the evening.

The moon had risen while he and Hermione had been speaking; yet, this was the first sound to have come from the room where Remus was contained. Had he transformed, would they not have heard the disturbance? Werewolf transformation was not known to be a peaceful process. With his wand drawn, Severus lowered only the wards necessary to allow him entry into the room.

The room was dim, lit only by the light of the full moon framed in the window looking out to the back garden. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, the Potions master's eyes darted about the room searching for the source of the moaning he could now hear without aid of the magnification charm he had cancelled upon entering the room. There was no sign of a violent transformation; everything appeared the same as it had when Severus had exited the room before moonrise.

Finally, Severus' eyes located the source of the plaintive moaning in the form of Remus, who was lying on the bed. Not Remus the werewolf, but the man. There was no sign of transformation in his appearance though he continued to moan... in his sleep. He was asleep and moaning as if he were dreaming! Severus could not hold back the laughter that emitted from his throat in pure relief.

The sound of his laughter woke the dreaming man from his slumber. "Severus, what is so funny to have you laughing like a hyena?" Remus asked as he rubbed the sleep from his eyes, moaning once again.

The sounds of Severus' laughter had brought Hermione to the doorway. "Severus, Remus, what is going on?"

With the first genuine smile to grace his face in two decades, the dour Potions master pulled her into a rib-cracking hug as he continued to laugh his relief. Some moments later, he was able to collect himself and explain the moaning they had heard was Remus dreaming.

As Remus sat up in bed, his eyes drifted to the window looking out upon the luminous full moon gracing the starless sky. With a gasp he bolted from the bed, still transfixed by the orb in the sky. "It has been more than twenty-five years since I have gazed upon such a beautiful sight." He sighed. As tears tracked his face, he began to sob uncontrollably. In an instant, Hermione was holding the man as he laughed, cried, and laughed some more into her hair as he allowed himself to be consoled.

It was soon discovered that not all the moaning was dream induced. Remus was indeed suffering muscle spasms as his body resisted its natural inclination to transform. Severus provided another dose of the potion, and soon he was comfortable enough to converse with the pair. They continued their conversation long into the night. Remus detailed how he had felt prior to moonrise.

The potion had effectively allowed him to remain cognitively aware of his surroundings, though he had felt some minor muscle contractions. After taking the second dose, he had waited with bated breath, lying on the duvet...sure he would soon experience the horrors and pain of transformation. As he waited, he must have drifted off. It was close to four in the morning when his moaning had alerted Hermione and Severus to his distress. The third dose consumed shortly past four alleviated the residual muscle spasms and the *werewolf* appeared healthy and less haggard than he had in years at this time of the month. All were greatly relieved that the trial, for all intents and purposes, had been a success. A slight modification to the dosing would eliminate the need for a third dose, but they had prevented a werewolf from transforming.

In mid-sentence, Hermione struggled to contain a yawn, covering her mouth when her efforts were unsuccessful.

"To bed for you, Miss Granger," the Potions master decreed when yet a second yawn followed the first.

"I must say, I agree; we have been up all night. You must be exhausted as well, Professor." Hermione sighed through another yawn.

"This is not the first night in which sleep has eluded me," Severus stated blandly. He did not want to dwell on all of the nights he had lain awake fearing for Albus' life in the past months.

"Hermione is right, Severus," Remus interjected. "There is no need to stay with me now that the sun is on the rise, and you both could use some rest before we inform the Headmaster of your success."

Severus hesitated; it was true that Lupin would not need to be monitored any longer, but he did not wish to retire alone to the settee in the sitting room.

Remus could see the discomfiture on the Potions master's face. "Off you go, the both of you, I intend on catching a bit more rest myself."

Hermione was already headed out the door, intent on her bed, yet still waiting to see what Severus would do. She desperately wanted him to follow her. After the revelations of their long conversation during the night, she wished for nothing more than to lie next to him in his arms as she drifted off to sleep. Yet, she did not know how he would react to such a suggestion; everything was still so fresh, new and uncertain between them. "I am so knackered I would not be surprised if I fell asleep on the way to my bed." She yawned again on her way out the door.

"Perhaps I should escort you, Miss Granger; we would not want you to fall asleep on the stairs and cause yourself injury," Severus stated in his most bored professor voice.

Hermione felt the shiver his voice induced course down her spine and settle in the pit of her stomach as he offered his arm to her in a formal manner.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 of 14

Rest for the well deserving.

Chapter 10

The world of Harry Potter belongs to JK Rowling. I just like to play with the characters.

A/N: As always, my undying gratitude to ladyinthecloak and Lariope, without whose beta skills Require Your Assistance would never be seen.

Severus and Hermione made their way up the stairs without a word spoken between the two. It seemed everything had already been said, but neither knew where the other stood so both were lost in sleepy thought.

Severus wondered if he had spoken too soon or if he should have spoken at all. Lupin was right; he was a blight on humanity. Everyone he expressed care or affection for, or who cared for him, was doomed to tragedy. Just looking at Albus...had he not thought of Severus' well being, he would not, at this very moment, be a werewolf; and

dear, sweet Lily...had he not loved her, she would have lived. Yet, Hermione was sunlight; her mind, body, and soul had captivated him. He felt if he pushed her away, he would die himself.

Hermione stole a secretive glance at Severus. What was he thinking? He looked so fierce! All she wanted to do at this moment was drop off into blissful oblivion, wrapped in his arms. *He loves me, he loves me.* This silly little chant carried her up the stairs to her childhood bedroom as if she floated on air. So enraptured she was, she did not realize they had reached the doorway until their steps had drawn to a halt. Glancing up into his obsidian eyes, she wished once again that she had mastered the skill of Legilimency.

"Hermione..."

"Severus..."

Once again, they had both spoken at the same time.

"Severus, I believe it is my turn to go first," Hermione began again, "if you do not mind?"

"Of course, please, continue," Severus demurred.

Hermione nodded in acknowledgment. Now that she had his permission to speak, her courage seemed to fail. Taking a deep breath, she braced herself for the rejection to come.

"We have both been up all night, and the settee is rather short for your frame. Why don't you stay in here?" the young witch rattled out before her courage could fail her.

At Hermione's invitation Severus could not prevent his eyebrows from raising in surprise *Has she really just invited me to share her bed?* he thought in wonder. *There has to be some mistake.*

Watching the flashes of thought cross the silent man's face, Hermione berated herself for her stupidity. *Silly girl, of course he is not going to want to stay in your room, really. He has barely admitted his feelings. Must you always rush into things head long like a hippogriff on the loose?* The longer Severus remained silent, the more apprehensive she became.

"Miss Gr... Hermione," Severus corrected himself. "Are you sure of what you ask? If I step through this door with you, I fear I will not be able to contain myself to merely holding you in your sleep."

Hermione blushed furiously at his pronouncement. All the fatigue of the night's labors, worries and stress vanished under the penetrating gaze he leveled upon her face. She knew this would be the defining moment of the future. If she told him now to go, he would, but what would happen in the future? Would such a decision ruin whatever chance she had to make a life with this man? If she asked him to stay, would he be disappointed? The last time they had loved one another, it had happened because they were both sleeping and dreaming. To think of making love with him from start to finish was a daunting thought.

Taking a deep breath, Hermione decided to let the future take care of itself. She was pleased to see her hand did not shake, though her heart raced as she reached out and took Severus' hand in her own, leading him into the bedroom of her childhood. With a flick of her wand, she Transfigured the single bed into one more appropriate for two. Next, she banished the frilly bedclothes of girlhood to those more befitting a young woman. The soft mauve duvet was plain, but elegant in its simplicity.

Severus watched silently as she changed the room to suit her purpose. His hooded eyes never left her form as she set about her task. He felt his desire for her burn through his veins.

At last, she turned to face him with a bundle of clothing in her hands. "I am going to go freshen up in the downstairs bathroom." With these words, she was gone from the room, and Severus was startled out of his reverie. He would do well to attend to certain matters himself. As Hermione had stated her intent to go downstairs, Severus decided to use the master bath off of Dumbledore's room.

As Hermione stood under the spray of the showerhead with water turned as hot as her skin could tolerate, she pondered the ramifications of her actions and what she had set in motion. *I just invited Severus Snape into my bed. What must he be thinking?* Uncertainty pulsed through her veins as the water spray beat upon her skin. She had little experience as a lover; in fact, the only other experience she had was Ron's fumbling attempts the night after the final battle. They had both had too much to drink, and all she remembered was the pain of losing her maidenhead. The morning she had shared with Severus eclipsed any memory of pleasure she may have experienced during that drunken mistake.

Shaking her head as she toweled off and rubbed her skin with lotion, she chastised herself *Where is all that Gryffindor courage? This is the man you love. Get back there before he thinks you have taken off for the hills.*

Having used the loo and prepared to retire for the evening, Severus had returned to the Transfigured bedroom to find it empty. Severus was indeed beginning to think that Hermione had had a change of heart. *Why would she want to share a bed with you? All you are is her bat of a teacher.* Having convinced himself that Hermione had taken off for parts unknown, he was just opening the door to return to the cramped confines of the sitting room settee when she came through the door.

His heart stilled when he saw her standing in the doorway. She had not left, as he had feared, but stood before him a vision of loveliness, her breath coming out in shallow puffs, as though she had run up the stairs. And her cheeks heightened with color. Her hair was still damp from bathing, and her skin smelled of sandalwood and vanilla... a most intoxicating aroma. She was clad in a night dress that barely reached her knees, and though it was opaque, its shimmering flesh toned color made it appear as though she was wrapped in a Cloaking spell rather than clothing. He had never seen anything more lovely in his life.

Slowly, gently, as though he feared he might startle her or the vision before his eyes might vanish, he raised his hand to her cheek and, with his long, elegant fingers, brushed the hair behind her ear. At the touch of flesh to flesh, they both gasped as if shocked by electricity. His touch was all it took to draw Hermione into the room. His fingers continued their path down her hair, caressing her shoulders and back through the silky film covering her flesh.

When Hermione opened the door to find Severus on the other side, she had been transfixed by the enormity of what she was doing and could only look upon him with doe colored eyes. This was the man she had feared for most of her schooling. The same man she had worked with, trying to find a cure for lycanthropy. But, he was more than just a Potions master, more than a professor, more than a spy; he was the man she had come to love. This thought, more than anything else, propelled her into the room and into his arms as he caressed her shoulders through her nightdress. With a shuddering sigh, she raised her arms, wrapping them about his neck, pressing her body into his as his arms came about her waist, holding her tight to his form.

With gentle touches and soft sighs, they explored one another. Now, that the moment was here and the sun had begun to glimmer through the gossamer window coverings, it was as if they had all night. It was a different kind of passion fueling their interactions. Instead of the flash and fire one often reads of, it was the steady heat of a candle flame...the longer one held a hand over it the warmer it gradually grew.

Severus' tongue gently brushed along her lower lip, seeking entry. On a soft sigh, she opened to his entreaty. As their tongues gently danced, blending the taste of toothpaste, hers mint and his cinnamon, Hermione's hands sought purchase in the hair at the nape of his neck, gently tugging, without eliciting pain, yet inciting passion. Soon, he was backing his way to the bed...the bed she had Transfigured for this night from frilly girlhood to the elegance of the woman he held in his arms.

As they lay upon the duvet, their legs intertwining like the vines of the Whomping Willow, their hands sought and explored one another, their lips parting only to draw a ragged breath before joining once again. As Severus' fingers brushed her already hardened nipples through the sheer material of her nightie, Hermione felt the jolt of electricity all through her body. She wrapped her legs around his waist and rolled so she was on top, straddling his hips, and she could feel his hardness through the black silk lounging pants he wore.

At the contact of Hermione's warm moist center settling above him, Severus instinctively rolled his hips to increase the pressure, causing them both to moan in pleasure. Without losing the contact of their lower bodies, Hermione kissed her way down the side of his face and neck leaving a warm moist trail that cooled, leaving gooseflesh in her wake as she moved further down his body to his chest. Hermione's lips gently caressed and then settled around the flat disc of one of his nipples. Her tongue lightly stroked it, and she gently grazed it with her teeth. Then she moved to pay homage to the other sensitive disc on his chest.

This had Severus increasing the rhythm of his hips and growling from the back of his throat. His eyes were black and unfocused as he stared up, lost in sensation after sensation as Hermione continue the sweet torment of his body. The blood pounded through his veins, yet he was at her mercy, unable to move except for the grinding of his hips against her center as his chest heaved in an attempt to draw oxygen into his body. He was in heaven, and he was in hell as he felt her hair brush against his chest and her tongue dart into his navel just above the waist band of his pants, which elicited another moan from his tortured soul.

Then her fingers were gently caressing him through the silk of his pants. This had him sitting up trying to pull her to the side as he attempted to rid himself of the now offensive clothing. Hermione was insistent as she brushed his hands away and divested him herself. Without hesitation, she gently but firmly encircled him with her small hand, her fingers barely meeting, and she began to stoke his hardness. The torturous growl that he emitted had Hermione purring as she closed her lips over his tip, which was gently weeping. He tasted slightly bitter but not unpleasant, like that first sip of the first cup of coffee in the morning. Hermione could feel her own release building and knew Severus, too, was close. She reveled in the power she held over this tightly contained man. Gently taking him in hand, she guided his length to where she most desired. She had settled no more than half way down his length when she felt her muscles begin to clench in her ultimate release. Sitting up, she took him all the way into her warm depths and began to ride him through her climax. Just as she felt herself cresting the top, Severus stiffened below her, almost bending in two as he shattered within her.

Seeing Hermione raised above him had been Severus' undoing: Her body still covered in the sensual flesh-colored silk, her arms raised, holding up the cascade of her riotous curls, had sent him over the edge. She looked to him, at that moment, like a goddess lost in her own pleasure.

Spent, Hermione collapsed upon his chest. Both were too satiated to do any more than pull the duvet over the top of their cooling bodies before they drifted off into sleep.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 of 14

The morning after...

CHAPTER 11

Disclaimer: Mine... in my dreams, maybe.

A/N: Ladyinthecloak and Lariope are the best betas an author could ask for. They have my undying gratitude, as always.

The late afternoon sun was shining through the gossamer shades, which is what ultimately woke Hermione. Rolling over to find a comfortable position in which to drift back off to sleep...she had been having the most fabulous dream...she encountered a body next to her in the bed. Cautiously opening her eyes, she found herself staring into the black depths of none other than Severus Snape's eyes. *Hmm... maybe it wasn't all a dream.* Smiling, she brushed hair that she had no hopes of controlling out of her face. "Good morning," she mumbled, hoping to block the worst of her breath.

"Afternoon, or perhaps evening, might be a more appropriate greeting given the position of the sun," he replied with a trace of a smile gracing his lips and eyes.

Hermione could not ever recall seeing Severus so... well, mellow was the only word for it. "Indeed, we seemed to have slept the day away."

"Mmmm... I can think of what I would like to do with the evening," he replied as he leaned over, giving her a lingering kiss.

All it took was the brush of his lips on hers to awaken her passion as she returned the kiss in kind.

Severus continued his exploration of her mouth and continued to her jaw, finding a particularly sensitive spot just behind her earlobe.

"If you continue like this, you are going to have me howling at the moon," she sighed.

At the words *howling at the moon*, Severus paused in mid nibble on her earlobe. They both jumped out of bed as though they had been burned.

How could I have forgotten Remus and the potion? Hermione thought to herself as she rummaged through her closet for clothing to throw on. When she caught a glimpse of Severus hastily buttoning the shirt he had worn the night before, she realized just how she could have forgotten. *Who would have thought he had been hiding that body beneath all those layers?* she thought on a sigh.

Severus, too, was berating himself; he had meant to check on Albus after making sure the potion had prevented Lupin from transforming. *How could I have been so absent minded?* Just then he saw Hermione bend over to place one leg into a pair of black lacy knickers. *How indeed? She is positively lovely.*

In only moments both were headed down the stairs. Both stopped in their tracks when they heard voices from the kitchen. The house was not under the Fidelius Charm, so both drew their wands, not knowing who was in the kitchen.

Hermione was the first to recognize Remus' chuckling and then... was that the Headmaster?

With his wand still drawn, Severus pushed open the swinging door to the kitchen, keeping Hermione shielded with his body. When he saw Lupin and Albus sitting at the table over a pot of tea, he visibly relaxed and entered...Hermione close behind him. Both casually stowed their wands before either of the other men had noticed their presence.

At the sound of the door swinging closed, Remus looked up, noticing the pair in the doorway. "Ahhh... I see the two of you managed to get some rest; settle in for a cuppa," he stated, flicking his wand, which had been lying on the counter, to bring two more cups to the table.

Albus, too, looked over at the pair, his eyes twinkling madly as he noticed both seemed more disheveled than one would expect after a night of rest. "Severus, Remus tells me the potion was a complete success."

Caught off guard by the two men, Severus replied in his typical brusque fashion, "I would not go so far as to say a complete success, as he did require an additional dosing in the early morning hours, but transformation was prevented."

"Come now, Severus," chided Albus. "You must be quite pleased. I know I, for one, am looking forward to not having to endure another full moon in the manner of the last few months."

Severus could not deny he, too, was looking forward to being able to prevent the transformations Albus had endured. Being able to prevent the monthly transformation, he hoped, would buy him the time to find an actual cure for lycanthropy. The potion was, in his mind, merely a stopgap, but indeed an important step toward his ultimate goal of an actual cure.

It was early evening, and the four were just finishing a late supper around the kitchen table when a jet black owl tapped on the kitchen window.

"Oh, it's Prince!" exclaimed Hermione. "I wonder what Harry is wanting?"

"Prince?" Severus queried with a raised eyebrow.

"Well... yes." She appeared to stall.

How was she to tell him that though Harry still disliked the man for all he had done in school, he had felt honor-bound to name his new familiar after him? Harry had searched for more than a month before finding an owl that was pure black. It wasn't until he had found the owl and purchased it that he confided in Ron and herself his intent to honor the Potions master's memory by naming the bird after him. Hermione found it rather endearing, but was not sure how Severus would feel about it.

"You see, after Hedwig was killed, Harry needed a new owl, and, well..." Hermione trailed off again as the Headmaster began to chuckle.

"It appears, Severus, you have been given a great honor." Albus chuckled as he realized what Harry had done. "Harry Potter, The Boy Who Lived, if you will, has named his new familiar after you posthumously."

At Dumbledore's jovial pronouncement, Hermione's cheeks flushed as she nodded her confirmation, for she, too, was now laughing and unable to respond otherwise.

When realization hit the other two men at the table, Remus, too, burst out in laughter as Severus sputtered with indignation.

When quiet once more graced the kitchen, Severus drawlingly inquired, "Why would I consider this to be an honor?" And laughter burst forth once more in the kitchen. After so many stress-filled weeks, it felt good to laugh amongst friends.

When all was once again calm, the Headmaster collected himself to address the delicate matter of himself and Severus reentering the wizarding world. "Now that a cure has been found, I do believe it is time we look toward letting others know we are alive and hale," Albus stated without a twinkle present in his crystal blue eyes.

This brought the other occupants of the dimly-lit kitchen to attention. It appeared no one had thought ahead to the future and what it would mean once a cure had been found.

Albus would most assuredly wish to return to Hogwarts, and Severus...what would he wish to do now that he was free with no master to answer to? Hermione thought to herself. Would he wish to remain at Hogwarts as well or strike out on his own? He had certainly never appeared happy to be a teacher.

As no one else appeared to be ready to voice an opinion, Hermione took a shuddering breath. "I think perhaps it would be best to get the Order together first. This way we will have collective support. Severus' name was cleared after his death, but there is no telling what the reaction will be once people find out he is alive."

"Too true, Miss Granger," Albus agreed. "It is one thing to proclaim a man a hero in death, but that same man could be persecuted for the same actions in life."

"Professor," Remus hesitated as he glanced toward Albus, "Headmistress McGonagall, I think, would be the best place to start. She would be able to contact the others."

Deciding they would surely over-think themselves, Hermione decided on the spot to contact the Headmistress immediately. Glancing at the clock, she saw it was just shy of nine and knew the Headmistress would not have retired for the evening. "I think I should pop over to Hogwarts immediately and bring her here."

After a bit of arguing, the men agreed it would indeed be best to get the ball rolling, and Minerva would be the best person to know how to announce to all there were two fewer losses on the side of the Light.

Hermione stood and walked to Severus' side. She refused to be ashamed of her love for this man and thus would not hide it from her friends...and leaned over to kiss him farewell.

Taken by surprise, the embarrassed man could do nothing but succumb to the kiss as a healthy color rose to his face. It was not as passionate as those they had shared the night before, or rather that morning; yet, it still left no doubt in the other men's eyes as to the nature of their relationship.

With a beaming smile, Hermione turned on the spot to Apparate to the gates of Hogwarts.

Once outside the gates of Hogwarts, Hermione cast her Patronus to send a message to the Headmistress. She was not surprised to note her Patronus had changed shape from the gamboling otter of her school days, but she crafted her message to Minerva with care, as she was sure there would be many questions forthcoming.

In no time at all, Hermione saw a lantern bobbing its way across the grounds, held aloft by Professor McGonagall.

"Miss Granger, to what do I owe this late-night visit? Why has your Patronus changed?" Minerva asked in rapid fire as she stowed her wand, once she ascertained it was indeed Hermione at the front gates.

"I am sorry for the late hour, Professor, but all will be explained," Hermione apologized, not addressing the latter question directly. "Did you come prepared to Apparate as I asked?"

"I have advised Professor Flitwick I will be away from the grounds, but I must ask what this is all about," the Headmistress stated in frustration.

"Professor, I know this all seems rather peculiar, and I would like nothing more than to be able to explain it, but if you will please just trust me...seeing is definitely easier to believe." Hermione implored her former Head of House.

"Very well, Miss Granger," Professor McGonagall sighed. "I trust you will be Apparating the both of us to this mystery location."

"Yes, madam," Hermione replied and did not waste another moment reaching out to take the older witch's arm to side-along-Apparate.

Remus Lupin met the two ladies in the back garden and led them to the house.

The Headmistress was surprised to see Remus, as she was well aware of his habit of secluding himself during the full moon phase. The older woman looked to the sky and noted she had not been mistaken. The full moon had been the night before, and Lupin should have been sleeping off the after effects of a brutal transformation without Wolfsbane.

"Remus, how can this be?"

With a quick glance, Lupin chastised the younger witch for not preparing the older witch as he reached out to steady her steps in her shock.

"Minerva, I apologize; I thought you would have at least been told of my presence," the wizard replied as he continued to look at Hermione.

Hermione shrugged her shoulders. "One explanation would have only led to more questions. I thought it best to bring everything out at once."

Now, seeing the Headmistress' shock, she remembered the four Stunners she had suffered at the end of Hermione's fifth year and wondered if she had been correct.

Remus, thinking the same thing, took Minerva's arm as they walked up to the house. "Minerva, please, prepare yourself for a shock."

Looking between her two former students, she knew their thoughts. She may have been hit with four Stunners, but she was not a Pygmy Puff and refused to be coddled. "As long as you do not intend to tell me Lord Voldemort is once again resurrected, I shall survive," she huffed as she shook off Remus' hand and entered the dimly-lit kitchen.

A startled gasp and a thump were the next things to be heard.

Hermione and Remus entered the kitchen to find Severus already at the Headmistress' side, checking her over before casting Rennervate. He glared sharply up at the both of them.

"Severus, we tried to warn her..." Hermione began, only to be interrupted by a moan as Minerva regained consciousness.

"Explain yourselves this instant...all of you!" Minerva shouted as she brushed herself off, looking around the room to see not only her deceased colleague, but the man whose shoes she felt she would never adequately fill.

Several hours later, Hermione and Severus were walking up to her Transfigured bedroom.

"I know it was a shock to her, but honestly, Severus, I could not find the words to tell her. Especially after my Patronus had changed," Hermione implored him to understand.

"Your Patronus changed?" He quirked his eyebrow at her. "You did not mention this."

"Well, yes, instead of the otter, when I cast the spell, a panther appeared," Hermione explained.

"Do you know why your Patronus has changed form?"

"I remember Tonks' changed when she accepted her love for Remus, but I still am not sure why mine was a panther. Your Patronus was a doe..." She replied, trailing off.

"Yes, the Patronus I sent to Potter in the Forest of Dean was a doe, but when I first learned to cast the Patronus Charm, my original form was a panther," Severus explained.

At this remark, Hermione started to giggle.

"What do you find so amusing?"

"Severus, do you truly and honestly love me?" Hermione asked between fits of giggles.

At this question, he gathered the young woman in his arms and kissed her with all of the passion he had held in check throughout the evening. With his arms wrapped around her, he silently cast his Patronus and spelled his message to the ghostly figure.

"You know that I do."

As his lips were busy, at the moment, it startled Hermione to hear her lover's voice from behind her. Turning around, she saw a gamboling otter floating above the carpet.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 of 14

Albus and Severus are revealed to the Order and Severus gets his reward.

CHAPTER 12

Disclaimer: I own nothing from the world of Harry Potter. I just like to take them out and get them into trouble.

A/N: Buckets and buckets of dark chocolate to Lariope and ladyinthecloak for their endless help, advice, encouragement and beta-ing skills.

Almost four weeks had passed since the night Minerva McGonagall had been informed that Severus Snape and Albus Dumbledore were alive and Remus Lupin could live

his life relatively normally, as long as he took the potion created by Hermione Granger and the Potions master. At first, she had been furious with all of them for keeping her in the dark. Then, once she had had time to reflect, she had come to understand their motives.

Though Severus had been cleared of all charges after his death, it would have been quite difficult for him to reenter active wizarding life while trying to research and find a cure for Lycanthropy. It had always been one of his pet research projects, but given the added impact of Albus now being afflicted, it had become imperative he find a cure. Albus was not a young man and would not have survived long with his body and magic being weakened by each successive transformation. She knew Severus did not consider the potion a cure, as it would need to be taken monthly, but without transforming, both Remus and Albus would be able to lead normal lives, as would all witches and wizards who had been subjected to the half-life of Lycanthropy. Minerva would always be grateful to both Severus and Hermione.

Thinking of Hermione's part in all that had happened reminded Minerva of yet another surprise she had learned that night. It seemed the dreaded bat of the dungeons and the insufferable know-it-all had fallen in love. This would be one more shock for the wizarding world and perhaps, more importantly, the Order to absorb. It had been decided that night to wait until the day after the next full moon to reveal everything to the rest of the Order members. This had been Albus' wish, as he wanted to first experience the full moon without transformation before announcing to the rest what had taken place the night of the final battle. Though it was hardest on Remus, who wished to share the news with his wife and family, all had agreed. There would be a barbecue get-together at Miss Granger's home tonight. Apparently, there was some American Muggle tradition to cook food over an open grill on this particular weekend to celebrate some holiday called Labor Day. The full moon conveniently coincided with this weekend and would be the perfect opportunity to reveal everything to the group that would be invited.

"No, Severus, I am not going to uninvite Harry and Ron; it is only two hours before everyone is due to arrive, and I am going to have enough trouble from them for not telling them before the rest of the Order," Hermione fumed at her lover as she continued making a salad.

Severus knew it was futile to try and convince Hermione not to invite her two best friends, but he was not looking forward to the evening, and having to interact with Dumb and Dumber was just going to make matters worse in his opinion.

Hermione walked over to the glowering man sitting at the table. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she whispered in his ear, "I promise I will make it up to you when they are all gone."

He leaned back into her embrace. It always gave him a start when Hermione so casually expressed her affections, but it was getting easier for him to believe in his good fortune. Morning was the hardest when they woke spooned together in the Transfigured bed that had remained a permanent fixture in her... *their* room. He enjoyed it best when he woke before her and was able to just watch her as she slept. He could absorb, once again, that he was not dreaming and this beautiful witch was really his. Then, slowly, awareness would come over her, and a smile would curve her full lips before her eyes even opened. Of course, Severus had no complaints when she woke before him. This morning, she had found a most delightful way of waking him. He subtly shifted his legs to make room as other parts of his body remembered waking up as well.

Severus turned his head toward hers and raked his teeth lightly along her earlobe and growled into her ear, "Better yet, why don't you start making it up to me now."

"Hmmm, I would love to, love, but there just is not time..."

The rest of what Hermione was going to say was cut off by Severus' talented tongue. Over the last month, she had discovered he could do much more with that particular muscle than cut into recalcitrant dunderheads. What he was doing to the side of her neck and behind her ear was literally making her speechless. She turned her head toward his, capturing his lips with her own. The pair was breathless when they were startled apart by someone clearing their throat.

Looking up, Hermione saw Remus leaning against the doorframe. "If the two of you do not wish to start a third war, I suggest you move to opposite sides of the table, or better yet, Severus, you can come out and help me figure out what to do with this Muggle contraption we are supposed to be cooking the meat on."

This brought Hermione back to her senses. "Yes, Severus, why don't you help Remus, and I can finish in here."

Severus glared at the man who had interrupted his plot to distract his witch. "Have you forgotten how to *cast* *incendio*?"

Remus simply chuckled at the Potions master's cutting remark. The last month of watching Severus and Hermione together had forever ruined the other man's evil bat-of-the-dungeons persona in his eyes. Not to mention that he owed him his new lease on life, and had he been in Severus' place, he would not have been pleased with the interruption either.

"No, Severus, I have not forgotten, but I do not believe our goal is to set the whole thing on fire...only the coal inside of it. I think we will need to do this the Muggle way," Remus explained as he led the man out to the back patio.

Hermione stopped them as they were headed out the door. "Here, use these under the coals and light them first; this will help the coal to catch." She handed the now frowning Potions master a half dozen chunks of dried wood.

The coals were graying nicely, and everything was in place when Minerva arrived. It had been decided that Dumbledore and Professor Snape would remain out of sight until all of the guests had arrived. The fewer times they had to explain everything, the better.

Harry, Ron and Ginny were the next to arrive. Ginny had convinced the two young men to dress in Muggle summer attire. It was rather amusing to see Ron's white, freckled, knobby-kneed legs partially covered by a pair of chartreuse Bermuda shorts. Not wanting to hurt her friends' feelings, Hermione attempted to cover her laughter with a cough. "Ron, where did you ever find that outfit?" The shirt was no better, in the same shade of chartreuse with bright yellow and orange Hawaiian flowers.

"You like it?" Ron beamed. "Dad and I found it at a Muggle emporium in downtown London." It was obvious Ron had no clue just how ridiculous he looked and was actually quite pleased with the clothing, which would be more fitting on an overweight, vacationing psychologist than the young wizard.

Within twenty minutes, all of the guests had arrived and were gathered in the back garden of the house. Remus had been delegated to grill the steaks as everyone was settling in with Butterbeer and chilled bottles of Gillywater.

It was not until Harry was talking to Remus that he realized this was the day after the full moon, and his second godfather should have been recuperating in the Shrieking Shack rather than grilling steaks at a cookout. Looking the werewolf over, Harry realized he looked better than he had since the time he had been the Defense against the Dark Arts professor at Hogwarts. "Err... Remus, I do not mean to be rude, but you are either looking really good for this time of the month, or I hallucinated the full moon last night."

Remus chuckled; he had wondered how long it would take Harry to realize what time of the month it was. "All will be explained as soon as I get these steaks on a platter and we sit down to eat. How about you go find out what Hermione wants to serve them on?"

The werewolf did not want to give his godson the opportunity to continue questioning his apparent good health and had grasped on to the only excuse he could find to distract him.

"Oy, Hermione, there are two extra seats at the table; are we missing someone?" Ron asked as he looked about the table.

There were Remus and Tonks with little Teddy between them. Harry and Ginny; his mum and dad; Headmistress McGonagall and Hagrid, who took up one end of the picnic style table himself; Bill and Fleur with their daughter; even Charlie had come over from Romania, and George had closed the joke shop. It seemed all had been

accounted for.

Ron's question was the perfect prompt for the Headmaster and Professor Snape, who exited from the kitchen door just as everyone was looking about the table, taking their own attendance.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Weasley, Professor Snape and I were unavoidably detained," the Headmaster replied for Hermione. "We do apologize for the inconvenience," he continued as his eyes twinkled merrily.

Faster than one could say Quidditch, every wand at the table save three were pointed at the pair. Harry was the first to speak, "Drop your wands, both of you! And identify yourselves."

Both men had anticipated this reaction and readily showed their intent of peace by dropping their wands to the ground, at arm's length from their bodies.

"Harry, I am Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, former Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, but then, you do not believe that, do you?" Dumbledore replied calmly.

Harry kept his wand trained on the both of them as he stepped forward slightly from the rest of those who had come to their feet. "Headmaster Dumbledore is dead. I saw him killed with my own eyes. If you are really him, tell me something only the two of us would know."

Dumbledore raised his hand to stroke his long grey beard with the hand that, at his death, had looked black, withered and dead, but now appeared as healthy as the other. Harry's eyes fixed on the hand as the old wizard continued to think. "Ahh, yes, I believe you will remember this: when Tom Riddle was a boy at the orphanage, he kept a treasure box of sorts that contained among other things a mouth organ. Does that suffice?"

Hermione watched closely as Harry's wand trembled slightly and his green eyes grew wide with shock before he turned his wand on Severus without saying a word.

Severus, too, knew this moment had to be played out, and there was only one thing he could tell the boy that, amazingly, he had kept to himself since his relationship with Lily had become common knowledge. "Mr. Potter, during your fifth year you witnessed a private memory in my Pensieve. In which your father performed Levicorpus on me, displaying my undershorts to all present on the grounds of the school." The Potions master sneered.

There was a soft, collective gasp as Harry dropped his wand arm to his side. "But how? When? We thought you were dead?" Harry's eyes were not focused on the Headmaster, but Professor Snape with a look of wonder and...could it be?...joy.

Severus thought to himself, *Could it be the boy is actually pleased I'm alive?*

Everyone was talking as Harry continued to stare silently at the dour man who he had thought had given his life because of the memory of his mother.

Dumbledore raised his hands in an attempt to calm everyone. "Yes, yes, I understand there are many questions that require answers; if we could all sit down and enjoy this marvelous feast, I will attempt to explain." This said, the Headmaster walked over to the table, taking the seat at the head of the table while Severus escorted Hermione back to the table where they sat side by side.

It was well past pudding, and the guests had begun to thin out when Harry approached the Potions master. "Sir, if I could have a word, please?"

Severus had been talking quietly with Hermione when Harry approached, and she reached out and squeezed his hand beseeching him with her eyes to be polite.

He returned the gesture as he released her hand and turned to the young man with Lily's eyes. Eyes that no longer haunted him, but simply reminded him fondly of a woman he had loved.

"Yes, Mr. Potter," Snape replied as he motioned that they should walk to the quieter corner of the garden.

"Professor, I do not know what to say..." the young wizard trailed off.

He had spent much of the evening knowing he needed to speak with Professor Snape, to thank him, and to apologize, but the words seemed to be lost to him.

"Mr. Potter... *Harry*, neither of us has a desire to rehash all that has transpired, so I would appreciate it if we could move on from today," Severus interjected.

"No," Harry started. "Well, yes, I would like that, but I have to say, I am... well... sorry for all that I did... and, for not trusting you... not believing..."

"If you did not believe and did not trust, then this means I did my job well. I, too, am sorry for being the reason you did not know your mother and, yes, even your father," Severus replied softly.

Harry's eyes moved to meet the dour man's. "You mean that?"

Severus let out a long sigh. "Yes, I do."

"Do you think maybe sometime..."

"Do you wish to know of your parents from me?" the Potions master asked incredulously.

"Well... actually, I... yes, to hear Remus tell it, my dad could walk on water. I want to know what they were really like." Harry trailed off again. A part of him could not believe he was asking the greasy bat of the dungeons to tell him about his parents.

Snape, too, could not believe what he was hearing. For years, he had hoarded his memories of Lily like a treasure, yet he felt something swell within his chest when he thought of sharing the young girl he had known with her son.

"I think I would like that as well," he whispered softly as he turned to walk away.

The rest of the guests had left. Remus returned home with his wife and child, and Albus was going to stay in the guest suite off of the Headmistress' quarters. Severus and Hermione were alone for the first time. It had been a long day, fraught with tension and too many questions. He was looking forward to relaxing this evening with just Hermione. Severus entered the kitchen, expecting to find Hermione waiting with yet more questions about what he and The-Boy-Who-Lived had spoken of. Instead, the room was empty, and leaning against the flower vase, on the table, was a piece of parchment with his name on it in Hermione's distinctive script.

My Love,

If you wish to collect your well-deserved reward for a job well done, meet me upstairs.

Love,

H

With a smile upon his lips, Severus did not hesitate to make his way upstairs. He could not imagine what the young witch had in mind, but he knew he was sure to enjoy it.

When Severus opened the door to their room, he found it dimly lit by candlelight and Hermione, once again, clad in the sheer, flesh colored gown she had worn the first night they had shared the room.

Taking his hand, Hermione led him to the side of the bed. Turning to him, she ran her hands up his arms to wrap her arms around his neck, enveloping him in a slow, luxurious kiss. As she continued to explore his mouth, her hand began the odious task of unbuttoning all of the small buttons that ran the length of his frock coat. They continued in this manner through each successive layer of his clothing until he felt her hands upon the waist of his trousers. As his stomach muscles tightened, he let out a low moan of pleasure as he tried to turn her to lower her to the bed.

This brought Hermione to her senses. She had plans for this evening, and it would not do to lose her focus...no matter how intoxicating his mouth was. Breaking the kiss, she again rotated their position, pushing him to sit on the bed. "Not tonight, love; you have a reward coming. Finish stripping, and lie face down on the bed, if you please." Her whispered words sent a shiver down his spine.

While Severus divested himself of the rest of his clothing, Hermione collected a bottle of Sandalwood massage oil she had warming in a water bath. Warming charms were good for some things, but this way she could rely on the pre-charmed water bath to keep the oil at the right temperature and not have to bother with her wand.

She let her eyes roam over the man who lay on the bed. Yes, he was thin, but not in a skinny sort of way. More like a runner or a swimmer who had toned, lithe muscles...in all the right places.

Hermione coated her hands in oil and began with his left foot. She gradually worked her way up his body, pressing and kneading the muscles beneath her hands. She listened with her hands and her ears, responding to the clues his body gave her skilled hands as well as the moans of appreciation that found their way from the depths of his soul. When she had finished with his scalp, she indicated without a sound that he should turn over, and she worked her way down the front of his body as meticulously as she had the back. The only area she skipped was his groin. It was obvious her ministrations were having not only a relaxing, but a stimulating effect on his body. His penis stood erect, hot, flushed and pulsing. Finally, with an oil slicked hand, she encircled his shaft, twisting her wrist as she stroked down to his body.

Severus was so relaxed and aroused by the attention she was paying his body that he almost lost control at first contact. It was all he could do to not come all over her hand as his body arched into the motion. She continued to gently stroke his shaft, increasing the pressure as she reached the fullest point, mimicking the sensation he felt when he thrust into her tight depths. She touched no other part of his body. It was so erotic, it was almost unbearable. He was lost to the feel of her small hand pumping and stroking his aching cock.

With his eyes closed to absorb all the tactile enjoyment he could, he was once again caught unawares when her teeth gently scraped over his erect nipple, sending another shudder through his body. He could take no more and levered himself over, trapping his enchantress beneath him; he savagely captured her mouth with his own as his hand ran the length of her body. Snaking under the hem of her gown, his hand cupped her mound as one long finger slipped effortlessly between her lips. She was so hot and so wet he could feel the tremors in her body signaling she was as close to the edge as he was.

Severus continued to push her gown up the length of her torso, his lips brushing each inch of exposed skin. Now Hermione was the one moaning, as he again captured her lips with his, once the flesh silk had been removed from around her neck and she had opened her hips wider in invitation. Severus continued to kiss her as he slid home.

They both paused to gain some small measure of control, having driven each other to the brink of insanity. Then, once he knew he could move without embarrassing himself, Severus began to gently thrust in and out of her tight channel, Hermione thrusting up to meet him until they found a rhythm that satisfied them both.

Bending his head, Severus took one rosy bud in his mouth. Just the contact of his warm mouth had Hermione spiraling over the top. Rhythm lost, Severus began to frantically thrust as her muscles clenched around him; he thrust one last time and lost himself as he whispered, "Mine," into her hair.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 of 14

Reflections on revelations of the living.

CHAPTER 13

A/N: Many thanks and apologies to all who have followed and waited for this update. As always, my gratitude to ladyinthecloak and lariope whose beta skills make this story readable.

CHAPTER 13

Hermione was grateful to see Harry, the last of their guests, Disapparate from the back garden. It had been a long and stress-filled day, preceded by almost three months of subterfuge on her part. She was amazed Severus had stayed sane having to lie to Voldemort, the members of the Order and, yes, even the Headmaster, on occasion; all in the name of saving the wizarding world from the rule of Lord Voldemort himself. He definitely deserved a reward, not just for how well he managed to handle himself with Harry and Ron this evening, but for all he had done past and present. Though he had been cleared of all the charges in relationship to the war and killing the Headmaster, Hermione knew he would still be considered a pariah of society. Forgiven he was, but people would always remember what he had done...forced or not. The thought lay heavy on her mind.

It was a pensive pair who entered the kitchen at Grimmauld Place. "She really seems to care for him." Ron broke the silence with a near whisper. He had already accepted the fact that he and Hermione would never be together, but he was shocked to find the only emotion he felt when thinking of his best friend...for Hermione was his best friend...was bemused surprise.

Running his hands through his perpetually mussed hair, Harry looked over at Ron, grateful to see his mate did not appear overly hurt by the realization. "Yeah, and you know something, I think he cares about her too."

"It just seems weird to think...the greasy git has a heart," Ron replied.

Harry paused as he thought about this. For years they had all thought Snape was the most heartless person alive, and then he had seen the memories of his mother. Not all the memories Snape had given him had been necessary to winning the war, but Harry was glad he had seen them. He did not have much experience in relationships, but he understood the look in his mother's eye when she had looked at Snape in those memories. She had loved him, and had his father not been the git and humiliated the young Severus Snape...life would have been very different, and Harry understood this now.

"I don't know, mate; I think maybe he always has but..." Harry trailed off not knowing how to complete the thought still circling in his mind. He still could not believe Snape was willing to tell him about his mother, Lily Evans. Many people were willing to share their thoughts about the man who had sired him, but few said much about his mother and made it seem as though his father could do no wrong. Harry still remembered the Pensieve memory he had seen in his fifth year, and he knew there was much about his parents he did not know.

"Dora, what are you on about?" Remus asked, completely bemused as to why his wife was stomping about the house, her hair a fire engine red...a sure sign she was royally pissed about something. He had thought she would be happy, thrilled, and ecstatic to know he would no longer be a danger to their family.

Whirling on her husband, wand out and tears in her eyes, Tonks slumped in defeat. "Oh, Remmy, don't you understand? First, you go off by yourself instead of taking a potion, and now I find you have been holed up with another woman."

As she thought about it, her anger returned. "Not just another woman but, a younger, prettier, smarter witch, and she's the one who got to share this with you! You have known for a month, a whole bleeding month!" Her anger exhausted, Tonks slumped onto the sofa in front of the window.

Recognition finally dawned in Remus' soft brown eyes as he knelt before his wife. "Dora, how could you think I would look at another witch? You are my light!" Rising to his feet, he drew her to his side. "Come here; I want to do something," he said, and he led her to the back garden, lit only by the moonlight. With a flick of his wand, a soft waltz began to play. "Because of Severus and Hermione, I can finally hold you in my arms and dance with you in the light of a full moon. I wanted so badly to tell you, but I also owed them my silence as they gave me a new life."

As Tonks leaned into her husband's chest, she enjoyed the moment of being held by the man she loved. "Are you sure you do not find her more attractive?" she whispered her insecurity.

A low rumbling chuckle from deep in Remus' chest had her looking up into his eyes.

"Even if I were to agree that Hermione is all you claim, I value my life too much to even voice that opinion in front of Severus," Remus explained.

"Severus?" The puzzled look on the Metamorphagus' face confirmed she had been too wrapped up in her own turmoil to notice the budding relationship between the acerbic Potions master and the pride of Gryffindor.

"Yes, Severus," he replied.

Pushing away from her husband's chest, Tonks looked at him in wonder. "Tell me!"

Albus settled into the armchair before the fireplace in the Headmaster's office with a contented sigh. Things seemed to be working out better than even he had hoped. Severus, with Miss Granger's help, had managed to find if not a cure then a stop gap to a cure for Lycanthropy. He was alive and would live a good many years, as would many of the members of the Order of the Phoenix, and his *son* was in love. Albus thoroughly approved of Miss Granger and felt she would make an ideal mate for the cantankerous Potions master.

"Albus!"

Lost in thought, he jumped as Minerva called his name.

"Yes, my dear?" he inquired somewhat absent-mindedly.

"Are you certain? How could you possibly believe that sweet young girl would be happy with Severus?" she demanded pensively.

"Minerva, my love, I am as certain of their love as I am of the love I hold for you," he replied as he pulled her into his arms. It had been a long time since he had held the witch.

It was a little known fact that Professor McGonagall was really Professor McGonagall-Dumbledore. They had not wanted to publicize their union should it make her more of a target, a way to get to the Headmaster through those he loved.

"But really, Albus, how can she survive his sarcasm?" Minerva continued, undeterred by the kisses he was bestowing on her throat.

"How, dear Minerva, have you survived my love of sweets, eternal optimism and foolhardy scheming for the last fifty years?" Albus asked in all seriousness.

With a dawning expression on her stern features, the Transfiguration mistress gave in and rested her head upon her husband's chest. *How did I survive and endure what he named as some of his most annoying qualities?* she thought. The answer was simple...she loved him, and if Hermione loved Severus as she loved Albus, then all would be well.

It was in ignorant bliss that the Potions master ventured up the stairs to what had become *their* bedroom. He was intrigued by the note he had found on the kitchen table.

"My darling Severus, For your just rewards please meet me where the light of the moon meets heaven's journey. Love, Hermione"*What could she possibly have in mind, and what did she mean by the light of the moon and heaven's journey?* Severus pondered as he ascended the stairs.

When he opened the bedroom door, he was met with complete darkness save the moon filtering in through the gossamer window hangings. Before he could utter *Lumos*, he was distracted by the vision of loveliness gracing the bed. There she lay, the goddess of his dreams, the only decoration to her body the silver light of the moon. Her hair spread upon the pillows in a dark cascade of riotous curls. As his vision adjusted to the dim lighting, his eyes fed on the glorious sight before him as she lay, posed in wanton abandonment.

As though he were under an Imperius Curse, his feet carried him onward into the room. When he reached the side of the bed, she, this goddess of the moonlight, held out her hands to him, drawing him down to her side.

As Severus lay beside her, Hermione slowly began to explore his countenance; without a single word, her fingertips mapped the plains and valleys of his face. It was a most erotic sensation to be so lightly touched, yet so thoroughly explored. Her hands continued down his chest; as those nimble fingers opened each button, they continued to explore the flesh revealed. By the time she reached the top of his trousers, his belly was aquiver with desire, but he was loath to move a muscle for fear of breaking the spell she wove. This was different than any of their previous encounters. Always in the past, Hermione had sought to arouse him through relaxation...almost timidly. This

time she skipped the massaging ministrations to his body and instead set him aflame by her soft and gentle touch. No inch of flesh bared was denied the grace of her fingers and only her fingers. She mapped his body as a blind person might explore a topographical map, as a sculptor molds clay, as the soft mist of a London rain coats one's skin. Severus' fists were clenched in the duvet covering the bed, to prevent grasping hold of her and taking what his body craved, because he did not want to miss a moment of the sweet torment she had planned.

Hermione was amazed at the control Severus was exhibiting. It did not pass her notice when his breath grew shallow and his muscles quivered under her touch. In the past, she had always chosen to arouse him through massage because she feared he would reject her otherwise. In the weeks since they had first tested the modified Wolfsbane potion, she had let him take the lead whenever they made love, but tonight she wanted to be the one to drive him mad with passion. *He has such a beautiful body,* she mused. *All lean and strong.* When she had the last button on the front of his trousers undone, his manhood pulsed, rippling under the boxers which could not hide the strength of his arousal. Gracefully, she shed him of both trousers and boxers. Looking down on him from her kneeling position on the bed, he looked like a Grecian God. His cock stood straight up from a patch of dark curls at the juncture of his thighs; the only clothing he wore was a white linen shirt unbuttoned to reveal his pale, lightly-haired chest, and his eyes were hooded pools of black onyx. Hermione caught her breath as her own body echoed the desire she read in his eyes and lowered herself to begin her journey up from the soles of his feet...this time with her tongue.

Blanketed in lust, Severus could not prevent the moan that rumbled from his chest when he felt her soft, moist tongue brush the very curve in the arch of his foot. *Sweet Nimue,* he thought as another moan escaped his tortured lungs. *Who would have thought feet could be so sensitive to arousal?*

Enjoying the power she elicited over her lover, though she knew the tables could turn at any time, Hermione continued her way up the writhing man's body. She alternated back and forth between his legs, leaving not an inch of skin neglected.

When her tongue brushed lightly over the crinkled skin of his scrotum, Severus could not contain himself; as his seed pulsed out of his throbbing member, his back arched off the bed, he shouted, "Hermione! My love!" He tumbled them over, reversing their positions as his cock continued to throb, sinking into her hot, moist depths.

Hermione was so aroused by what she had done to the controlled man that it only took a few thrusts for him to send her over the edge, and she screamed her own release scattered with words of love. So lost was she in her own passion, she was not sure she heard the last words Severus whispered as he drifted off, spent from his climax, his head cushioned on her breasts.

"Marry me..."

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 of 14

Quibbler article and ramifications.

CHAPTER 14

A/N: Dear readers, I cannot believe the time has come: This is the final chapter of Require Your Assistance. I came to the world of fan fiction skeptical and unsure of what I would find, and now I will never leave. I have found entertainment, fulfillment and most importantly, friendship. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to two of those friends, Lariopie and Ladyinthecloak, for giving their time and encouragement to this story. The mistakes are all mine. And finally thank you to notsosaintly, southernwitch69 and all the admins at TPP. Without you none of us would be here today. Irish

Disclaimer: The world of Harry Potter is the property of JKR ... I wonder if she would sell Severus.

THE QUIBBLER

THE FINAL BATTLE AND WHAT REALLY HAPPENED ON THE TOWER

Exclusive Interview

Luna Lovegood Longbottom, editor

"Almost eighteen months ago, the students and staff of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry (and the entire wizarding world) were knocked off their brooms when it was reported that Severus Snape, Potions master, had murdered longtime Headmaster Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, during an invasion of Death Eaters at the school. We later learned from Harry Potter that Professor Snape was acting on Headmaster Dumbledore's orders, which Snape revealed in a dying confession given to Mr. Potter moments before the Potions master succumbed to the venom from a fatal snake bite inflicted by Lord Voldemort's familiar, Nagini. Professor Snape was then awarded the Order of Merlin, First Class, posthumously, at his memorial service. You will remember his body was never recovered, though a monument was erected in his honor on Hogwarts grounds.

"It has recently come to our attention why Professor Severus Snape's body was never recovered. He is alive! What follows is an exclusive interview provided by members of the inner circle of the Order of the Phoenix, founded by Albus Dumbledore in an attempt to prevent Lord Voldemort's take-over of the wizarding world."

LLL: "Professor Snape, you must realize it is a great shock to all of us that you are alive. Can you finally tell us what happened and how you survived?"

SS: "Miss... pardon me, Madam Longbottom, I realize you are hoping for the story of the century, but as I told you, I will not be a party to this spectacle."

LLL: "Thank you, Professor. Perhaps Miss Granger would be willing to enlighten us?"

HG: "Luna, as you know, we all thought the professor to be dead from Nagani's bite, and I really do not think I am the one who can answer that question. Perhaps you had better ask the man who saved him... Headmaster?"

[Editor's note] The photographer, Colin Creevey, just managed to catch the young editor as she fainted. She later attributed this to pregnancy fatigue, but there is thought it may have been shock due to the former Headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, entering the room.

AD (exasperated): "Hermione, Severus, must you always do this to people?"

LLL: "Headmaster, I apologize; how truly unprofessional of me!"

AD: "Nonesense, Madam Longbottom, it is I who should apologize for startling you. Now, what was the question?"

LLL: "Yes, yes, well, there seems to be an even more important question, sir. How is *you* are alive?"

Hermione chuckled to herself as she read the note Luna had attached with the advance copy of *The Quibbler*.

Entering from the adjoining bath, one towel wrapped about his lean hips and another rubbing the moisture from his inky hair, Severus quirked an eyebrow at his fiancé.

"What is so amusing in that rag?" he sneered, afraid he already knew the answer.

"Oh, Severus, I didn't hear you." Hermione flushed as she noticed his state of dress, or rather, undress. The sight of him never failed to send her blood racing. Though currently she was just a little concerned about how he would take the article Luna had published; honestly, it was the best way to get everything out to the public at once.

Severus stormed through the room, paper in hand, as he quoted the article, "Professor Snape has always been the unsung hero of the war. I am grateful he is alive and honored to call him a friend... Harry Potter." Throwing the paper to the table, Severus sneered, to no one and everyone in general. "Call me friend? Since when have I ever been a friend to the boy-who-lived-to-make-my-life-a-living-hell?"

Hermione sighed as she wrapped her arms around the raging wizard. "You did offer to tell him of his parents and you are an unsung hero."

In frustration, Severus pinched the bridge of his nose as he absorbed the comfort of her arms. "I know... I just despise being indebted to the little twerp."

"Love, if anyone is indebted, it is the entire wizarding world to you. I know it is *difficult* to accept Harry's endorsement, but you know it will smooth many paths," Hermione consoled as she brushed kisses across his rigid back and her hands flattened to rub enticingly over his bare nipples.

Severus growled in response, "Are you trying to distract me, witch?"

"Hmm, maybe... Is it working?" she asked as she added her laving tongue to the kisses bestowed on his back.

As disgusted as the Potions master may have been by the flowing and overly effusive praise in the *Quibbler* article, he could not dispute the facts: there had been a trial, but he had been cleared within fifteen minutes; he had his job back with a pay raise, and the modified Wolfsbane looked to only add to his coffers.

Hermione and he were engaged, but for propriety sake, they had separate quarters at the school. No one need know of the connecting doors to their shared bath or that they never slept apart. As long as she had her own quarters, no one would cry foul when she passed her apprenticeship with flying colors. They had both agreed to wait until she had finished her schooling to wed.

It still baffled him that he was happy. Happy and Severus Snape were not words one often associated with one another. To be honest, Severus was often disconcerted with the knowledge that he was indeed happy, not just happy, but on occasion euphoric.

Severus still had his dark moments when he was brewing potions alone. He would look at his life thinking it all had to be a mistake. Part of him wanted to withdraw and wait for the other Quaffle to fall. When those times came, he simply needed to gaze upon Hermione's bushy head bent over a book, and love would swell in his chest. He knew life was not going to be a bed of roses. He and Hermione were both far too opinionated for there not to be disagreements, but those heated exchanges only seemed to fuel their love.

The next three years would prove to be very interesting indeed.

~Finis~

A/N: If anyone is interested in how Severus felt on the morning of their marriage I encourage you to check out my story *Contemplations* here on TPP.