

Hurt

by livvy6

A story in three parts, of three decades, and of three women. Inspired by Johnny Cash's rendition of Trent Reznor's "Hurt".

Part 1 - Chapter 1 - Claudia

Chapter 1 of 15

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Claudia Fairfax

What have I become?

My sweetest friend?

Everyone I know

Goes away in the end

And you could have it all

My empire of dirt

I will let you down

I will make you hurt...

Hurt Johnny Cash

Spring, 1976

Claudia walked back to her common room feeling very weighed down. Her third year was not going as planned. Always a top student, she effortlessly excelled in all her studies. She was a very determined young girl, bent on making her mark in the world once she grew up. She was a focused, no-nonsense kind of person. Being bookish, her fellow Slytherins called her the "know-it-all" behind her back. She was the one who always had an answer, forever jutting her hand up in the air in class to answer

every question before any of her classmates could. She wasn't popular...popularity in Slytherin came when a girl was older. But others sought her out whenever they needed help writing essays, copying notes, or needed a question answered.

She didn't mind being a bookworm; she didn't mind being called a know-it-all...well, sometimes it did hurt. But this year she found herself on the other side of academia. *She* was the one flagging behind...in Potions. *She* needed help. She also knew who the best Potions student was at Hogwarts, but he was two years ahead of her and the coldest boy she had ever met. He didn't like anyone talking to him except for his small group of Slytherins who spent their spare time dabbling in dark magic. And their clique only contained boys. He seemed to not like girls coming near him at all, well, except for Lily Evans, she figured, since that was the only girl she had ever seen with him...

Claudia, although intimidated, decided she was going to just do it. Her final examinations were right around the corner, and she was desperate. She decided she would walk right up to him in the common room and plead her case. *Surely, he will have pity on a fellow Slytherin, right?* She sat with her work, her books scattered about, and worked so intently she missed dinner entirely, and when the students came back from the Great Hall, she was seated at the round table with her legs cross-legged in her chair. Her brown wavy hair was messy from where she had pulled on it and ran her hands through it absent-mindedly in her frustration. She had an ink spot on her nose and ink stains on her fingers. She was so focused she failed to notice the upper classmen walk in. They were messing about as usual, talking loudly, except for *him*, the surly dark-haired boy who wore a permanent scowl on his face. He noticed Claudia scribbling furiously on her parchment, and he considered the intense look on her face.

It was not the first time he had noticed the young girl. She had a reputation just as he did for being the "go-to" person for help with various class projects or needing an answer to an obscure factoid. As he joined his friends on the couches, he tried not to look directly at her, but deep down he respected her work ethic. She didn't seem to be like the other silly girls who were constantly throwing themselves at his friends. No one threw themselves at him! Not that he minded a lot. He had one desire, for Lily Evans. But he wished sometimes he could have someone flirt with him or kiss him. Lily was never going to love him. He knew that now. He would always love her, but she was distancing herself from him even though they had been best friends since they were seven years old. But he still had feelings and desires, although no one around him thought he did. His reserved nature had earned him the reputation of a being a human icicle. But he wanted to feel wanted, even if for a time. So, he considered Claudia. Yes, he knew Claudia, the eager to please know-it-all third-year.

Thirty minutes later, Claudia stopped writing and stretched her back and arms. She noticed he was there. Her heart jumped in her throat as she picked up her Potions book and slowly made her way over to the group of boys.

She stood there for a minute. She didn't know what to say. Finally, one of the boys spoke up.

"Something you want, little girl?" he said deviously. The other boys sniggered at the comment, except for the brooding dark-haired boy.

She looked over to him and said timidly, "Hi. I'm Claudia. I wanted to know if I could ask you for help with my Potions work for my final."

He stared at her with disdain and suspicion.

"What makes you think I could possibly be of any assistance to you?"

Claudia swallowed and said, "I was told you are the best at Potions here at school and you and I are both Slytherins... so... I..." she trailed off.

"What year are you?" he snapped as he crossed his arms in front of his chest.

"Third year."

"Go find another third year to help you. I'm not about to waste my time on know-it-alls," he sneered. He was so embarrassed she had approached him in front of his friends!

The other Slytherins laughed and leered at her while they continued to poke fun at her expense. The boy sat perfectly still and stared at her with calculating eyes that gave off no emotion. Claudia wanted to sink into the floor, but instead she became angry and snapped back at him.

"I thought Slytherins were supposed to watch out and help each other! Obviously, I must have been mistaken. And for your information, Severus Snape, I happen to be at the top of my class, but I won't remain at the top if my Potions grade keeps slipping. The girl who is right behind me in 2nd place is a Gryffindor. So, I guess if you don't care about house pride, well then you and your friends are a bunch of hypocrites!" she yelled.

With that, she whipped around and went to her table to gather her books, parchment, and ink to leave. She was shaking as she packed up her belongings. She never acted like that! The boys still sniggered and laughed about her, but the "little Miss know-it-all" impressed Severus Snape. Oh, yes, he knew all about her. She was a superior student, but was just doing abysmal work in Potions.

Oh, well, he thought. She'll have to get her temper and tongue in check if she ever expects me to help her, the little chit

"Claudia."

She turned around and Severus was standing directly behind her.

"Ohhh!" she exclaimed in frustration. "You scared me! Don't do that!" she snapped irritably.

He smirked. "You have ink on your nose," he whispered before he turned away on his heel.

"James Potter, you let him down!"

Claudia walked around a corner and faced a crowd of people. Hoisted up in the air was Severus Snape. She smiled wickedly, watching the spectacle from a comfortable distance. He had on very "interesting" underwear.

"I will if you'll go out with me, Evans. Go out with me, and I'll never touch old Snively again!" baited James Potter.

Claudia couldn't hear distinctly what all was said. Snape was back down on the ground, but she couldn't see over the heads of the bigger kids. The crowd was laughing and then there were gasps and shouts. Then she watched Lily Evans stalk off angrily, her girlfriends joining her. She looked like she was crying now.

She whipped her head back to where the crowd was whooping and catcalling. She watched in wide-eyed horror as James Potter jerked Snape back into the air and started to take off his underwear in front of everyone. She turned around; she would not watch him in his disgrace. Then she heard Professor McGonagall barking orders at everyone to disperse and for Potter to let Snape down.

She sprinted off after that.

The next day...

"Don't walk down that hall," Kathy warned Claudia through gritted teeth as she grabbed her arm.

"Why?" Claudia whispered as she allowed herself to be dragged away. They went a safe spot around the corner and Kathy said, "They are dueling again."

Claudia rolled her eyes. "You are a prefect! Do something!" she said in frustration.

Kathy furrowed her brow. "Hey! I just saved you from walking into a hornet's nest! You and I damn well know when those berks start going at it, no one can stop them! And I'm not about to get my arse disfigured for sticking my nose into their business!"

"All three this time?" Claudia asked.

Kathy peered around the corner and swiftly crouched back as a red flame blasted past her and hit the wall. They both hit the floor. *Son-of-a-bitch!* Kathy swore. "No, it's just Black and Potter."

The two girls sat and waited until the danger passed. When there was silence, Kathy stuck her head around the corner again. She turned back and chuckled.

"What?" Claudia hissed.

"Potter and Black have been Petrified, and they're both naked!" She laughed aloud and shut her mouth suddenly as a black-clad figure came around the corner. They looked up at an angry Severus Snape. He gave a stiff nod and mumbled to Kathy, "Thanks for keeping out of it." He glanced at Claudia and stalked off. He was hurt. He had some gashes on his arms and back.

Claudia worried her bottom lip. "What was that?" she said.

"Look, Claudia, you are a good girl, you keep your nose out of trouble, your grades are brilliant, and one day you'll be a prefect, I'm certain. Hell, you may end up being Head Girl. Even better, being from an old, wealthy pure-blood family, you'll probably be Lady Slytherin. But there's one thing you must remember: we're Slytherins. We look out for our own, and we don't get another Slytherin into trouble. We watch each other's backs. Even though I'm a prefect, I don't forget that as rule number one!"

"Yeah, like Lupin!" Claudia said with exasperation.

"Ruddy Lupin, that pillock! You know the only reason he got the Gryffindor prefect position was because Dumbledore thought he would be a good influence on those blighters!" She snorted derisively at the thought. "At least I don't hang about and sit there in front of everyone and bury my nose in a book like its not happening! What an idiot!" she sneered.

"Why didn't you fight *with* Snape?" asked Claudia.

She barked out a laugh as she stood up. She put her arm around the younger girl. "Claudia," she said shaking her head. "No one fights *with* Snape. He does his own fighting alone, thank you very much!"

"Why does the Headmaster let all this fighting continue? I mean, ever since I came here it's been like this, and they are getting vicious!"

"That's nothing compared to the rumor I heard," Kathy mumbled quietly.

"What?" Claudia asked.

Kathy turned on her. "Look, you are only a third-year. I'm in the same class with these prats, and they have been at each other's throats ever since day one. And I daresay it won't stop until they graduate...or kill each other...which may not be too far off the mark."

She sighed and said, "I have no idea why the Headmaster lets those toerags get away with all the shite they do, but he's a Gryffindor too, so, I say, sod the Headmaster! I don't care! If they want to kill each other, I'm going to just make sure no one gets in their way so no one gets hurt. Also, I do watch out for Snape's back. There have been a couple of times I've hidden myself from sight and flung a couple of hexes to minimize the damage. But Snape never knew about it...he'd probably kill me for interfering...but it's the right thing to do! Remember, protect those in your house, Claudia!" she warned.

She walked away then and Claudia stood there thinking. *Look out for your house? Then why didn't that arse help me with Potions?* she grumbled to herself.

Later that evening, she came back to the common room in time for curfew. She had spent the whole evening trying to study in the library. Damn Potions! If things didn't get better, she was going to end up with an awful grade for the year. She rubbed her left temple and didn't see the figure seated at the table as she walked past.

"Fairfax," someone said deeply.

She stopped and turned. There was Severus Snape sitting there alone, looking at her in a very curious fashion.

"Snape," she acknowledged curtly.

"I appreciated your show of discretion today," he said softly. "I normally don't associate myself with younger classmen, but I believe that I could not bear a bloody Gryffindor outdoing one of my own in Potions. I'm rather partial to the subject. You showed a courtesy to me, and I have decided to return the favor."

Claudia's eyes widened. "So, you'll help me study for my final in Potions?" she blurted eagerly.

He gave her a sour look. "Don't get too excited yet, Miss Fairfax. I will first ascertain what your abilities are. I do not intend to waste my time on silly little know-it-alls who like to talk more than learn! Now, sit!" he hissed pointing to the chair across from him.

Claudia sat and watched as he raked his eyes over her.

"I will expect a type of re-payment in the future of course," he said with glittering eyes. "Of course, not now, but in a couple years, I think," he said softly *Yes, I think in a couple years, once she's more filled out, I will then collect from her what is due me.*

Claudia frowned. "What are you on about?" she demanded.

"I am not a nice person. And I do not do things for altruistic reasons. Now do you wish to receive top marks for your Potions grade this year, or no? It all rests on you, Miss Fairfax."

"Okay," she said. *After all, in two years, he won't give two figs about me, and by that time I won't need his help anymore*

"Fine," he said cordially as he stood up. "We begin tomorrow. You will meet me in the Potions lab precisely at 7:00 p.m."

"We're going to work in the lab?" she asked incredulously

He looked at her as if she were an imbecile. "Of course, you silly girl! What did you expect? Do you think you can learn potion making through reading your stupid books?"

She lowered her gaze to her lap.

He laughed derisively at her. "You have, haven't you? Oh, you are *avery* stupid girl."

She snapped her head up in anger. How dare he call her stupid! "I'm not stupid!" she snapped at him.

He leaned in to her and said, "Yes, you are stupid. I know how intelligent you really are, but you refuse to expand that talented brain of yours. That is why I call you stupid! Anyone who *chooses* to squander his or her talent is stupid! Practical application, Miss Fairfax, it is essential. You must learn the subtlety of potion making, and that requires a hands-on approach." He stopped speaking abruptly and looked her over again in distaste.

"Don't make me regret this," he said as he stalked off.

Claudia arrived five minutes late to her first meeting. She dashed into the room out of breath. She was immediately faced with a very angry Snape.

"Miss Fairfax, I require people that I am helping to be on time," he said coldly. "I'm sure a little know-it-all like yourself needn't have that pointed out for you."

"I'm sorry, Snape. It won't happen again," she whispered humbly.

"That will be Mr. Snape, Miss Fairfax. You and I don't know each other that well."

"You called me Claudia the other night!" she said cheekily.

He fixed his stare on her and shifted closer to her. He towered over her and used his full height to look down on her. She was fixated by his black eyes and she felt her mind wander. It was as if his eyes were almost dead. He was tall, but so painfully thin. He had yet to grow into his harsh features. Perhaps when he was older, he would be easier on the eyes, but never handsome. "Oh, but you liked it, didn't you," he whispered seductively. "I could see the pink in your cheeks and the coloring deep on your lips." *Let's see if she's a hormonal twit as well*

Claudia shook herself from her haze and narrowed her eyes at him. *Oh, so typical! Boys, they are all so alike. They think they are all hot stuff*

"I'm not here for anything of *that* sort, Mr. Snape," she said nervously. "Let's get to work."

He backed away from her and smiled a wicked smile. "Excellent, Miss Fairfax. That was the correct response required."

Another grueling session in the potions lab the next evening had left Severus in a terrible temper. According to him, she had "botched one of the most simplest of potions." He yelled at her and made her cry. That irritated him further. He hated sniveling girls!

"Miss Fairfax, I insist you stop your dramatics at once and focus!"

Claudia got herself under control and listened to his direction.

"The art and science of potion-making is a subtle one. You seem to possess all the subtlety of a Manticore! You do know the saying, do you not? 'The devil is in the details'? Well, that is precisely where you veer off track every time."

Now he was browbeating her with her own strengths!

"You take the written word far too close to heart. You must try to find where exacting measures need to be observed and where discovering your own unique touch can lead you to creating a potion that is above par. You must not continue to be afraid!" he seethed.

But, Borage says in the textbook..." she began.

Snape cut her off and swiped the book from her hands, slamming it down on the table angrily. "Not all the answers can be found in your precious books! Trial and error, learn to heart the basics, and then experiment with the knowledge you've learned. Filling your head with ideas and quotes from books and then regurgitating it back either written or orally will impress no one, Miss Fairfax! You will only continue to come across as annoying and pedantic!"

"Now, let's try this again! I want you to cut these daisy roots *inequal* portions!"

Snape was tough on Claudia, to be sure, but during the next week she started to ingest the basics of potion making and tentatively started on the course to experimentation. At the end of the second week, she began to discuss with Snape her various ideas and viewpoints on different ingredients and to envision the possible outcomes. By the end of the third week, Claudia took her final and retained her place as the top student in third-year Potions. She was so happy, she ran into the common room where Snape was gathered with his cronies: Mulciber, Avery, Rosier, Wilkes, and Nott. She ran up to him, squealed out her grade, and attacked him with a huge hug. She felt his body stiffen like a board, and she realized she just might have made a grievous error. She slowly released him and saw the angry, furious glare on his face. He looked at her as if she were insane and contagious at the same time! The others were quite amused by it.

"Well, little Claudia, do you have a crush on our boy, Severus, here?" Mulciber said saucily.

She didn't like the way the boys were leering at her. She leaned into Snape and whispered to him meekly, "I'm sorry, I was just excited about my grade. I got the top grade in my Potions class. I wanted to thank you."

"So in thanking me, you decided to assault my person?" he asked icily.

"It was a hug!" she blurted out. "Can't you accept a hug, or just plain old niceness from people? I got what I worked so hard for, and I'm a decent enough person to recognize that I couldn't have done it on my own." She stopped talking since he did not seem to be swayed by her words. She hung her head, embarrassed and ashamed.

"Like you said, you got what you wanted," he retorted coldly.

She shook her head at him. She wanted to tell him off, something! But all she could manage was a, "You're pathetic!" and she ran off.

A/N: Thanks to my beta, MadBrilliant, who has worked wonders with this fic. I do hope if you have read this far, you will continue, for this story will grow and develop into a new world I've created inside the Potter world we all know so well. The dialogue between James and Lily was taken from OotP.

Part 1 - Chapter 2 - Claudia

Chapter 2 of 15

Claudia learns the weight of duty when she is betrothed to Severus Snape in accordance to the pure-blood traditions of her world.

A/N: Thanks to my beta, MadBrilliant. I hope you enjoy this chapter. This chapter gives a look into the world of the pure-bloods with their traditions and duties.

Claudia's words had hurt Severus deeply. He had given a lot of his time to helping her, and he was expecting gratitude, just not how she went about it! He was embarrassed to be smothered by her in front of his friends. It had been a very hard two months. His long-time friendship with Lily Evans was over since the "Mudblood" incident. He had racked his brain trying every possible way to get her to forgive him, but she would not relent. He hated having to return to Spinner's End knowing she would be close by but not being able to talk to her. His heart was broken. It was so broken that he had poured all his anger and hurt into a little know-it-all who was as irritating as any third-year girl could be. But, she was a very intelligent young witch, and he found himself thinking if she progressed in her learning just how far she might go. She had the brains, just not the guts to branch out. Lily had guts. She wasn't afraid to stand up for something or someone. That was what he loved so much about her. She had brains and courage. What was he going to do without her?

He sat on the Hogwarts Express back to London with his friends. They were all chatting about their summer plans.

"Severus, you've got to come to Malfoy's for a couple weeks. The whole crowd from our first year will be there. And I heard the Dark Lord might visit. Besides, you've got to get your head cleared out!" said Mulciber.

"He's right!" said Avery. "You got to get that Mudblood bitch out of your head. What were you going to do with her anyway? Fuck her a couple of times just to make sure her short and curls were red as well?"

The whole compartment laughed, except for Severus, who was raging inside. He did not like anyone to deride Lily.

Mulciber leaned over to speak directly to him. "Look, mate, you may not realize this, but you are about to embark on a new phase of life."

Severus furrowed his brow. *What the hell is he on about?*

As if he read his mind he said, "Take it from me, Severus, you'd better make nice with that Fairfax girl. She's as pureblood as they come, and she's going to be a looker. You wait. I noticed she's just starting to fill out. I bet by the time she comes back here after the summer, she'll be in full bloom. And if you are nice to her, she'll remember how good you were to her, helping her out with Potions. Then perhaps, she might be conducive to a match. I saw the look on her face when she jumped you!" he laughed heartily at the last bit.

The boys started howling with laughter as Severus blushed furiously. *How can Mulciber even suggest marriage?*

"He's right, Sev, she's got these tiny buds just sprouting, but she'll be filled out all nice soon!" said Rosier.

"Rosier, you are a pig!" snarled Mulciber. "Save that talk for Mudblood whores!"

Severus was not comfortable with how the guys were talking about Claudia. He only had those feelings for Lily. But, it would be expected of him to form an attachment with a pure-blood girl...even if it was just for show. Besides, she promised she would owe him a favor one day. Perhaps if she became the beauty the others thought she'd be, it would not hurt to take her to Malfoy's and have her on his arm. Perhaps she would let him touch her breasts if he kept being nice to her. And if there was a merciful God in heaven, he could talk her into touching him! But that would have to be in the future. She was just a fourteen-year-old kid!

So the summer dragged on for Severus Snape. He saw nothing of Lily Evans, though not for lack of trying. She had decided against staying home for the summer, and her sister, Petunia, was more than happy to let him know that! He went to Malfoy's and watched as his friends chatted up various girls at the numerous parties, but none of them wanted anything to do with him. He was envious of his friends having women desire them. The image of Claudia running to him and throwing her arms around him kept flashing in his mind. She didn't mind being close to him. He decided by the end of the summer that he would make that little know-it-all girl his and show her off when he had parties to attend. After all, in six months time he was to be seventeen, of legal age and a sixth year. He had grown vastly taller over the summer, and Malfoy had helped him with a new look. He was sporting all new, expensive, tailored black robes now, and at Malfoy's, there was a wonderful potions lab, in which he could brew. He made a great deal of money making potions for Lord Voldemort and other friends who needed his services, like contraceptive potions, lust potions, and various illegal potions one could not buy, but for a pretty penny, and a needy Potions master in the making, one could have all what one needed. All Severus worried about now was if Claudia Fairfax had blossomed or not?

September, 1976

Mulciber, Rosier, and Wilkes came into the common room, and Mulciber whistled loud and long. Avery and Severus turned to him.

"Well, Sev, it looks as if God has smiled upon you, my boy! I just saw Little Miss Fairfax in the Great Hall, and she is gorgeous!"

Avery snorted. "Yeah? What about that bushy mane of hers?"

Rosier smiled. "Lads, the girl is hot! And what did I tell you, Sev, she is stacked! More than a handful, I'd say! You'd best get your groove on and move in for the kill because she will be snatched up before the night's out."

Severus was skeptical. "So soon? Isn't she a little *young* to be picked?"

"Well, hell, Sev, the girl's fourteen, and she looks sixteen!" She's a fourth year now, sure she's ready!"

Severus sighed. The impatience these boys displayed was embarrassing. If there was one thing he knew about girls...no, ladies...it was that you couldn't pressure them. Lucius had taught him that. Slow seduction was the way to get a lady in your bed. If a girl was a slut, sure you boss her around into a fuck. Hell, he'd seen Lucius and Rosier do it a million times...sometimes they let him watch. But when it came to a future consort, a bride, one did not act in such a manner. He learned that by watching Malfoy with his young fiancée, Narcissa. She was treated like a goddess. Sure, Malfoy slept around, but he didn't respect those women. Narcissa was the chosen one. She was worthy.

Now if Claudia had truly blossomed into a beauty, and if he could charm his way into her life, perhaps she *should* be the one. He would always love Lily. Always! But he needed a wife to solidify his standing, especially after meeting the Dark Lord during the summer. Everyone knew he was a half-blood, but if he could get an aristocratic pure-blood to marry him, his worth and power in the Dark Lord's eyes would soar. He had received so much praise for his Potion making abilities; he had walked on air for two months! Never in his life had he been treated with so much respect! He truly wanted to please the Dark Lord. Snape observed how much the Dark Lord respected family. He was thrilled to hear of Malfoy's engagement to the lovely Narcissa Black. Malfoy's status and standing rose significantly now that he was going to marry and sire

more pureblood offspring. If Severus wanted to solidify his own standing with the Dark Lord, he would have to follow suit. So, he decided at the Welcoming Feast to re-acquaint himself with the lovely Miss Fairfax and begin the process of seducing her to become his consort.

He watched for her as the fourth years came in. She was indeed very lovely. Her hair was longer, wavier, having lost the previous frizzy look about it. She was taller, but she wore her robes, so he couldn't see just how well she had filled out. He would find out later. Her face was less babyish, looking more like a young lady just coming into the promise of the woman she would one day become. He stole glances at her during the meal, and once she caught his stare, her face froze at the sight of him, and then she timidly lowered her eyes, lifting a hand to her face to shield her from him. Severus' anger flashed in him. *Who does she think she is?* he thought viciously. He did not look at her again, nor did he feel her eyes on him.

Later, that evening, after the first years had been inducted and given the Slytherin house rules, Severus made his way over to the table where the fourth year girls were sitting. As he approached, the faces on the girls went white with fear, except for Claudia's. He glared at the other girls, angry over their fear. Why couldn't girls ever smile at him like they would the others in his house? He knew he wasn't handsome, but he did have some feelings and desires. His glare sent them packing, and as Claudia went to join them, he whispered gently to her.

"Please, Claudia, speak to me."

She stopped her retreat and swung around. His voice was so smooth and deep. It was a caress to her senses. She looked at the tall, dark, young man before her. Then she remembered how cruelly he had treated her last year. She had grown up a little since then, and now she was going to give him a piece of her mind. She strode up to him and looked up into his bottomless, black eyes.

"You've got a nerve! How dare you come speak to me after you treated me so shabbily?"

She waited for a response, hopefully a heart-felt apology, preferably groveling on his knees, the great git!

Slowly, he reached out to her and placed his hand on her arm. She started to shrink from him, but he slid his arm around her back and hugged her. She was now the stiff one as he continued to hold her close to him.

"I was a fool, Claudia. If you ever have a need of additional assistance with your Potions work, all you need is to ask, and I shall be at your service," he murmured into her ear.

He released her and said, "By the way, excellent work on your grades last year. I was and am very proud of you. You are a very gifted witch."

She smiled shyly and lowered her gaze. He was looking at her so intently; she felt he could see right through her.

"Thank you, Snape," she replied.

He reached out and lifted her face with his long white fingers cupped under her chin. "Please, call me Severus, Claudia," he said softly.

He kept his hand on her face and held her with his eyes for a while before releasing her. She dashed off to her room, her newfound maturity having failed her. She ran into her dormitory and immediately became bombarded with questions.

"What did *he* want?"

"Oh, Claudia, he is so creepy! Stay away from him."

"What did he say?"

"Did you see him in those new robes? He looked *soformidable*!"

Giggles erupted from some of the girls. Claudia was starry-eyed. What had happened? Well, one thing was for sure. She was going to need a lot of help with Potions; she sensed she was going to perform rather hideously on her lab work.

Back in the common room, Severus watched Claudia run off in retreat. A wicked smile played around his thin lips. Slaps on the back were given to him. He went to sit with the other sixth and seventh years. He relaxed back into a sofa chair and took up a proffered snifter of brandy. He watched it swirl as the color reminded him of Claudia's eyes. As he plotted his course for the year, he allowed himself an indulgent smile.

Mulciber was the first to address him.

"So, my lad, did you discover anything new?"

"Indeed," replied Severus. "She has a very ample bosom."

The Slytherins all cracked up laughing. Avery shook his head. "Geez, Severus! Must you always be so proper? Can't you say 'tits' or 'boobs' or something?"

Severus glared at him. "If I were speaking of a whore, I would have no problem with those words. Miss Fairfax is a very worthy pure-blood lady. She deserves respect, and I shall endeavor to continue to *endear* myself to her," he said calculatingly.

The others looked at him respectfully. He had the look of a predator about him, not quite unlike Lucius Malfoy. Mulciber smiled malevolently. "You do that, Severus. The Dark Lord would be most pleased with his favorite up and coming potion maker creating an alliance with such a beautiful pure-blood."

Severus lifted his glass to Mulciber and gave a cruel smile.

Mulciber gave an intimidating glare to the others. "You have heard it here, gentlemen. Miss Claudia Fairfax is now out of bounds. She belongs to Severus now. It will be your responsibility to make sure any randy little berks that come around her be informed of that fact. Congratulations, Severus, on your conquest!"

They all toasted him on his success. It was an understanding that any and every Slytherin pure-blood would know. Once a wizard had made his declaration known, no other wizard would dare to approach his witch. Claudia did not know it just yet, but she was for all intents and purposes the property of Severus Snape.

Claudia found her return to school very strange to understand. She was given a wide berth in the halls; younger Slytherin boys were opening doors for her and addressing her as "Miss Fairfax." Whenever she walked past the older Slytherins, they would stop their conversation and nod respectfully to her. She was confused as to the attention and the formality of it all. She owed her mother and explained what was happening. Her mother replied immediately with many questions and answers for her. First, Claudia had been claimed. It was a great honor that she had been chosen by a worthy Slytherin. That she was being treated with such respect from upperclassmen was an indication that the young man must be at least a sixth year. She said that unless her father found him to be unworthy, she should consider herself as good as engaged. Her mother wanted to know who the young man was so she could ascertain his blood status and wealth.

Claudia replied that she had no idea who the young man was. She said it was all so strange and clandestine, it seemed. She questioned the propriety of it all. Should not a suitor make his intentions known?

Her mother replied happily, stating that the young man must be a very influential young wizard if he were keeping his identity from her. It was the oldest of traditions. She would know soon enough. Then, when he revealed himself, he would then present himself to her father. She wanted to know if he followed the Dark Lord. Claudia had no idea, but as she thought about it, only one Slytherin had made anything that could be construed as a declaration for her. That would be Severus Snape.

Claudia approached Snape in the hallway one afternoon.

"Severus."

He was talking with the usual Slytherin crowd. His back was to her, and he swiftly turned to her and gave a polite nod. The other gentlemen bowed to her and made themselves scarce.

She was nervous. "I was wondering if we could resume our arrangement from last year. Potions class has become more demanding...antidotes." Her voice trailed off.

He gave her a slight smile. "Of course, Claudia. Meet me in the Potions Lab at 7:00 p.m. I look forward to working with you again. May I escort you to your next class? I trust you have been able to discern the status you now hold in Slytherin?"

Ah! He is making his intentions known!

"Yes, it has not escaped my notice, Severus," she answered sweetly.

"So, I am not remiss in believing my advances will not be in vain?" he asked cautiously.

Claudia honestly did not know how she really felt. All that she knew was what her pedigree expected. It would not be her choice anyway. He would have to deal with her father, and she was Daddy's girl. She trusted her father to do right by her.

"I am most anxious to hear what my father has to say," she answered cryptically.

She took his proffered arm and felt the strength that radiated from him. She noticed most people avoided them and did not look her in the eye. She was actually being courted by this dark young man...and a man he was becoming. He held himself with poise and finesse. He spoke with confidence and held an aura of purpose. He knew what he was about. Claudia wondered if Potter and Black would be bothering him again this year.

He left her at the door of her Transfiguration Class. He lifted her hand to his lips and brushed them across her knuckles. At that moment, Lily Evans rounded the corner. Snape hastily dropped her hand, and he and Lily locked eyes. Lily's green eyes glanced at Claudia, and she walked on by, ignoring Snape completely.

"Get inside," he hissed as he turned and left in a swirl of robes trailing him.

Claudia frowned at his dismissal. He turned and walked off without so much as a 'by your leave' *What is this about?* she wondered.

She walked into the Potions lab and waited for Snape to arrive. He came ten minutes late. He was in a black mood. He started to set up the cauldron and ingredients.

Claudia tried to meet his eyes. Finally, she said, "Hello?"

"Good Evening, Claudia. I apologize for my tardiness. It shan't happen again."

He still refused to meet her eyes.

"Antidotes," he began. "It is very important to have a thorough knowledge of all the various antidotes. However, a bezoar can work as a quick antidote for most poisons, but not all. Most antidotes contain Mandrakes, so it is important to know how to handle the various parts of the root and leaves. Let us work tonight on a base for a Mandrake Draught, which is the antidote for Petrification."

"Severus?" she asked softly.

"What?" he snapped, not meeting her in the eye.

"What is going on? Why are you so angry?" she prodded cautiously.

He sighed and leaned against the table. "There are certain things, Claudia, that I shall be unable to discuss with you. Suffice it to say that I am indeed in a foul mood, and you should not take it personally."

Claudia shrank back from him, unable to process what he had said. She was positive it had to do with Lily Evans.

"Does this have to do with Lily Evans?" she asked boldly.

His head snapped up, and his eyes bored into hers. He stepped closer to her and glared at her with a murderous glint in his eyes.

"You will never mention Lily again. Have I made myself clear?" he said in a deathly whisper.

She didn't need this. She gathered her belongings and faced him. "Snape, I think that I am capable now of figuring my Potions work by myself. Obviously, you are not in the frame of mind, and I am not in the mood for ultimatums."

She swept out of the room without looking back. She heard a terrific crash echo from the room she'd left. She was sure Snape had cleared the table of the ingredients and the cauldron, smashing them all to the floor.

She went back to the common room and went right up to Severus' gang of friends. They nodded and grew silent. She eye-balled each one of them and said in a calm voice, "I am not going to be with Severus Snape. I refuse to be mistreated and lied to. I do not want this treatment from any of you. I am a fourth year, and I think it would be best for me to start hanging out with boys my own age. Not that Snape has acted with more maturity; nonetheless, I think it would be best for all parties."

She marched off and went to her room, not bothering to see the reactions on their faces.

Later that night, as she settled in bed with a book before turning in, a soft knock on the door drew her attention from her book. One of her dorm mates answered the door. It was a seventh year Slytherin, Iris Oldcastle. She was this year's Lady Slytherin: a very beautiful and wealthy pure-blood who was deferred to by all according to the old traditions of Slytherin house. All the girls were shocked by her presence. She was in a sparkling gown of jewels and long opera length gloves. She must have come from a ball or some dance.

She smiled and was kind to the girls who fawned over her blonde hair turned up so beautifully and her gorgeous dress. She dazzled them with her brilliant smile. She spoke softly to them with a sophisticated air, but was kind as she patted cheeks and stroked the bedraggled hair of the fourth years crowding her. Claudia rolled her eyes at the

girls' fawning.

"Hello, my darlings! I'm here to visit with Claudia." She glanced around and saw her in her bed. She smiled sweetly and came directly to kiss her on her cheeks. She sat down and cocked her head to one side, evaluating the young girl with her sky blue eyes.

"My sweet girl, I heard that you and Severus had a lovers' quarrel."

Claudia sat up straight and crossed her arms in anger. "Lovers' quarrel, indeed! We are nothing more to each other than tutor and tutee! And even now that relationship has been terminated."

Claudia knew what Iris was about. The Fairfax line was as noble and pure as the Oldcastles, Malfoys, and the Blacks. No doubt by the time she was a seventh year, she would be holding the title Iris now enjoyed.

Iris dropped her sweetness. "Claudia," she said harshly. "I am not going to blow sunshine up your arse. You and I know what is expected, and although Severus Snape is not the most *desirable* young man you could have, he certainly is a *very* eligible and worthy wizard to marry. You may not realize this, but he has the Dark Lord's eye. He spent his entire summer this year brewing exclusively for the Dark Lord. He is the youngest wizard to ever join in the ranks of the Dark Lord. He will be a very powerful and wealthy wizard one day. Unfortunately, he *is* only a half-blood, but an alliance with you, Claudia, would be most advantageous for you and your family. As we speak, Severus and your father are meeting with the Dark Lord to discuss your betrothal. You *will* marry Snape, and you *will* do your duty by giving him an heir. Have I made myself clear?" Her tone was unmistakably forceful.

Claudia was crestfallen. "Iris, I think his heart belongs to another. I saw him looking at Lily Evans. I think he is in love with her."

Iris sighed deeply, took out her wand from her dress pocket, created a Silencing Spell around them, and spoke quietly. "Severus was very close to Lily Evans for many years, but they had a falling out last year...which was very fortunate, since the Dark Lord does not want one of his best and brightest to be sullied with a Mudblood! But, your female intuition is correct. He loves her. It pains me to tell you this, but it is a truth that must be admitted and accepted. He has always loved her, but that is not your concern. Your concern is to be a suitable consort. You and I will be spending more time together. You and Severus will not be seeing much of each other until your sixteenth birthday. It would not be proper since you are so young. By the time of your sixteenth birthday, you will be available for a more *intimate* relationship. Your future is set, and you must accept that you will not marry for love. He will be a good wizard to you, but he will always love another. That is the lot we must bear, my dear. I shall help you learn to bear it with grace and dignity."

With that, she stood and left the room. Claudia was shocked. What had happened to her life? Snape, her father, and the Dark Lord were conspiring about her future? She felt ill. It was true. Snape loved Lily and always would. What would there be left for her?

December, 1976

Christmastime was always Claudia's favorite time of the year. That was until this year. She had spent every spare moment outside of classes and studying under the watchful eye of Iris. She no longer sat with the other fourth years in the Great Hall, but they did not begrudge her. In fact, Claudia's standing grew to even greater heights. Iris was grooming her to take her place when she would be a seventh year and take the title of Lady Slytherin.

Iris explained one night over dinner that this Christmas she would be spending her time between two pure-blood manors: Malfoy Manor and Lestrange Manor. It was important for Claudia to learn from the mistresses of those houses, for Narcissa Black Malfoy and her sister, Bellatrix Black Lestrange, were in their respective days the head and elite of Slytherin house. She would learn to defer to the girls ahead of her, and she would be prepared to wait on the Lady Slytherin before her. The current girl waiting in line was Althena DuBois: a half-Greek, half -French pure-blood whose parents sent her to Hogwarts in order to make an alliance with one of the wealthier pure-bloods. Althena was the fiancée of Mulciber. He was already a seventh year, so Althena would reign alone. Iris was Avery's fiancée, and as soon as June came, and they left Hogwarts for good, they would be immediately married. The girl who would take over after Althena was yet undetermined, but once the decision was made, Claudia would be notified so she could attend to her as Althena attended to Iris.

"I realize this seems overwhelming, but you shall succeed. Snape is a *poor* young man, but he is a powerful wizard with great talent. Your family is wealthy and affluent enough to balance the union. Also, because he *is* only a half-blood it is *imperative* that he marries a pure-blood. The Dark Lord is a half-blood, so he knows the importance of having Snape make an alliance with a pure-blood. Now Claudia, *you never speak of the Dark Lord's blood status in his presenc*!" Iris warned severely.

Claudia's life seemed to be mapped out for her. She received a beautiful, ornate, green and silver gilded letter from her father the day after her first talk with Iris. The Dark Lord had whole-heartedly accepted the union of Claudia Fairfax and Severus Snape. Claudia was to join Iris at Malfoy Manor for the duration of the holidays. Her father and her mother would be coming to the various balls and parties the Malfoys would be hosting as well as the balls and dances at the Lestrange Manor. Her engagement would be officially announced at the opening of the season, and she would be announced as Snape's "Wife in Waiting."

Claudia showed Iris the formal letter, and as Iris scanned it, she asked, "What does that mean, 'Wife in Waiting'?"

Iris smiled mischievously. "I can't believe your mother never spoke to you about these things! Well, you are a bit young, but you might as well know now instead of being shocked later. It means, my dear, that you will become the property of Severus Snape. If he chooses to bed you, he is allowed. You will be required at his side when he desires your presence, but I would not worry, darling. You are only fourteen. He will not try to bed you before you are *at least* sixteen," she said in an off-handed way.

Claudia could not believe her ears. This was insane at best! She couldn't imagine being married to Snape, let alone having sex with him. She probably would have been more open to the idea if she were ignorant of the fact his heart belonged to another. Suddenly the rich, heavy parchment with all its elegance and pomp felt like a lead weight.

As if Iris had read her mind, she leaned over and whispered to Claudia, "I have arranged a meeting between you and the Mudblood Evans. You will need to sort this all out so you can carry on with your duties. This wondering and sulking will only anger Severus further."

Claudia snorted. As if she cared about his feelings! She was the one being forced to marry a man that would never love her! But the thought of a one on one with Lily sounded tempting. She wanted and needed to know if Lily loved him in return...

Part 1 - Chapter 3 - Claudia

The Christmas Season begins and at the first ball, Claudia and Severus' betrothal is announced. Claudia is overwhelmed with the pagentry of it all and longs for the solace of Hogwarts with her books.

A/N: Thanks to my beta, MadBrilliant. Please send reviews! I want to know your opinions!

She waited nervously in the Astronomy Tower, pacing back and forth, waiting for Lily to show. Mulciber stood guard outside as Claudia's protector. Lily arrived with Remus Lupin to stand as her protector. The two men closed the door on them, and she finally faced Lily alone.

"Hi, I'm Claudia Fairfax," she said in a strangled tone.

"Hi. Lily Evans. I was told you needed to speak with me," she replied tersely.

She was extremely nervous and glanced around the room.

"Don't worry," Claudia reassured her. "It's just you and I. I need to know who you are to Severus Snape."

"Nothing, I am nothing," she answered sadly.

Claudia pressed her. "But once..." she asked.

Lily went into her history with Severus. From the age of ten until their fifth year, they had been the best of friends, but when he called her a Mudblood, she couldn't be around him anymore. It had been a long time in coming. Calling her a Mudblood was just the final insult in a long line of hurts along the way.

"I'm just a Mudblood to the lot of you. He doesn't want to be in my world, and there is no place for me in his. So, it had to end," she concluded sadly.

"Were you in love?" Claudia asked timidly.

"In a way. I always knew he loved me, perhaps if he hadn't of taken up with Mulciber, Avery, and that lot, I might have grown to love him. We had something special. A part of me will always love and care for him, but I can't be anything to him, not even his friend. It is hard, but I am moving on with my life."

Claudia was partially relieved. There was no reason to fear Lily; she would not try to steal him away. She didn't want Severus, but Claudia felt very sad at the knowledge that he still loved and wanted *her*. He would never love her. Iris made that plain, but it was not until this moment that it became real.

"I am to be married to Severus," she admitted to Lily. "I am very disturbed about it. I don't want to marry a man who will think of you when he touches me, spending his days wishing it were you sleeping by his side and bearing his children." She closed her eyes as she felt the tears well up, and her throat became constricted. She raised a hand to massage her forehead. "This is all too horrible!" she finally choked out.

Lily looked on Claudia with pity. "Perhaps in time it will change. I know that he must be at least physically attracted to you for him to go to the lengths he has to court you. Even a lowly Gryffindor Mudblood like me is not completely ignorant of what is transpiring between you two."

"Do you wish it were you instead of me?" Claudia asked boldly.

Lily looked horrified. "No, I don't. I can't imagine all the rules and obligations. Severus wants to be in *your* world of pure-bloods, power, and ceremony. He is obsessed with it all. The Severus I love is the young Severus. He died the day he called me a Mudblood. Claudia, I wish you the best in your life. I pray to God that you both will find happiness with each other. Please, do not concern yourself. Whether or not you were or were not to marry Severus, it is no concern of mine. I do not want him as a friend, let alone as a lover. I have mourned the loss of the boy he once was, and the dear friend that no longer exists."

She turned to leave, and Claudia stopped her by putting her hand on her arm. Lily turned her green eyes up and into Claudia's brandy-colored ones.

"None of us have a choice into which world we are born into. Believe me when I tell you that I am in chains far worse than you could ever imagine."

Lily swallowed, cast down her eyes, slowly turned, and left Claudia. She felt cold and alone. At least she could take solace in the fact Lily didn't want him in return. Perhaps there would be hope after all. But, he still loved her and perhaps he would never let her go completely. What then?

She walked back with Mulciber to the common room. Iris was waiting for her. She embraced the girl and shooed Mulciber away.

She placed her arm around her shoulders, and they sat in front of the fire. "Tell me all what she said."

Claudia told her what Lily revealed, and Iris listened without interruption. Finally, after Claudia stopped talking, she said, "Claudia, you are so pretty, and you will continue to become more alluring! I am going to train you with the help of the best seductresses in the Wizarding world: Narcissa Malfoy and Bellatrix Lestrange. We all will teach you how to mesmerize Severus and break him to your will. It will be very important to use what you have between your legs as a formidable weapon. Men are all alike when you get down to it. They all are looking for a warm place to bury their cocks into. Now, granted...in all fairness, to his credit, Severus does value intelligence, wit, and charm. He doesn't suffer fools! You are naturally talented and bright. You have beauty with a lot of spirit with which to entice him. We just have to get you to harness that spirit and drive your shyness away. Mark my words, if you learn to build up your assets, one day Severus Snape will be saying 'Lily, who?'" She gave a short laugh at that, and Claudia smiled shyly.

"That's another thing, my girl! You must learn to overcome your insecurities. You are going to be the bride of the most talented future Potions master in Britain *and* in His Dark Lord's service! It will be all right, take heart...at least you know she doesn't want him! So, if you suffer, at least you won't be alone in it!" she said viciously.

Claudia nodded dumbly. She didn't know how to process all that she'd heard.

At the start of the Christmas hols, she reported to Malfoy Manor per her instructions. She entered the manor and was greeted by a very beautiful blonde woman. She was tall and willowy. Her face was pale with cold blue eyes. She was wore an ice blue dress and reached out to the young Claudia.

"My darling girl!" she cried in a breathless voice. She took Claudia's hands into her own and kissed her cheeks. "I am Narcissa Malfoy. I am so glad you are here! We have so much to do. Your parents shall be with us tonight for the opening ball of the Season. *And* your mother has sent you a gift!"

They walked into Mrs. Malfoy's salon and were greeted by an exotic dark-haired lady and Madam Malkin. They both were surrounded with various robes and dresses, fine silks, satins, and velvets. On one of the settees were piles of silk stockings and on the floor were the most glamorous shoes.

"What is all this?" Claudia said with wide eyes.

The dark-haired lady spoke in a sultry voice. "My dear child, you are to be introduced formally into our pure-blood society! You must be dressed in your finest. After all, you are to become engaged to our dear future Potions master! She turned to gaze over the materials, and Claudia noted a hint of derision in her voice.

Narcissa smiled and said, "Please meet my sister, Bellatrix Lestrangle."

Claudia gave a gasp of recognition. "Madam Lestrangle, Iris told me I would be meeting you. She spoke most highly of you! It is a pleasure!" she said sincerely.

Madam Lestrangle smiled, but it was a cruel smile. "I must say, I was shocked to say the least that Claudius Fairfax would be so open for his only child to marry such a poor boy as Snape!" she spat.

"Bella," Mrs. Malfoy chided. "You know very well that Lucius and I have taken him in hand. He is becoming a most charming young man, despite his *unfortunate* features."

"Yes," Madam Lestrangle replied sharply. Then she flashed a predatory smile. "Who am I to second-guess the Dark Lord? He has the utmost faith in the opportunist. I'm sure it will be a mutually satisfying union." Her dark, hooded eyes hovered over her, and Claudia started to think that Madam Lestrangle was not completely sane.

Madam Malkin interrupted them and began her process of measurements. Claudia was stripped down nude and measured for a new wardrobe. Bras, knickers, garter belts, and silk stockings were everywhere. Soon, though, a heated debate began over the choice of color and material. Claudia watched as the three women argued their choice while she stood naked, trying to cover herself with her arms. Each time she tried to cover herself, her hands were slapped down by one of the three women. Many times, she was pulled into various postures, her face pinched, her breasts and hips analyzed, her eyes scrutinized, and her hair fussed over. She was mortified.

Mrs. Malfoy began to laugh at the girl's modesty. "My dear child, you must stop being so prudish! If anything Lucius has confided in me about Severus is true, you had best relinquish your maidenly fears concerning nakedness! That shall be the least of your worries!"

Claudia felt the blood drain from her face.

Madam Lestrangle laughed maliciously as she freed Claudia's hair from its pins and pulled her hands through the impossible tangles of curls and waves.

"This is quite the unruly hair you have, my dear," she murmured.

"I have to work hard to keep it under control," admitted Claudia nervously.

Mrs. Malfoy peered into her eyes. "Most unusual, they are like the color of a fine brandy."

"She is much too pale for any of those," Mrs. Malfoy said, waving her hand toward a pile. "She needs warmth, fire... red! And we must definitely accentuate your figure, my dear! You have a lovely, ample bosom with hips to match. Severus is a very fortunate wizard!"

Soon, Claudia was fitted into a gorgeous red velvet dress that had a burnished hue to it. It was daring, as it clung to her curves and pushed up her bosom to an almost scandalous manner. She was fitted with white gloves, and a choice of stockings and shoes were made. The dress went straight to the floor with a small train with an equally scandalous slit up the left leg to match the cut of the bodice. Narcissa charmed her hair up in to a French twist, and Claudia looked at herself in the mirror for the first time. She was only a month and a week away from her fifteenth birthday, and she looked at least eighteen! She was so frightened; she could barely comprehend what Madam Malkin was trying to say.

"Now when you dance, child, you will slip this circle of material onto your middle finger so you can dance without the fear of tripping over your train," she explained.

By the time the ball was to begin, Claudia felt faintly nauseous. She was terrified. She sat at the vanity alone in her guest room and looked hard into her face. Her lips were painted a lovely dark red, and her eyes sparkled in the candlelight. She wasn't a beauty, but she had a loveliness about her, a calm serenity about her face that emitted peacefulness and tranquility. She thought to herself, *I am going to become Mrs. Severus Snape. My name will be Claudia Snape.* She still didn't know how she felt about it all, but she had to obey her parents' wishes, oh, and the Dark Lord's as well. *Mustn't forget about the Dark Lord* she thought sarcastically.

Her wild riot of waves and curls had been tamed into a beautiful French twist. She fretted over looking so much older than fourteen. She prayed Severus would not be deceived by her dress and remember that underneath it all, she was still just a bookish girl who normally had unruly curls and ink smudges on her hands. She hoped Severus would not require her to have relations with him anytime soon!

She floated along, watching the beautiful people chatting, drinking, smoking, laughing, dancing. She was passed from one pure-blood family to the next, never without another lady by her side. She glimpsed Severus from across the room. He was quite intense looking in his black dress robes. He was with Lucius Malfoy, of course. Yet, it seemed to her that Severus was trying too hard to be like Lucius. He was trying to be carefree and nonchalant like Lucius. It did not work for him. He had to trust in his own abilities. He was not handsome like Lucius, but he had a raw energy that was unique. *Perhaps that is what I can do! I can help him to evolve into the man he should be, not imitate a pale copy of another.*

Finally, Claudia saw her parents enter. *Thank God!* She forced herself to remain calm and not run over like a silly girl. She walked over demurely and held out her arms to embrace her mother. Her mother kissed her cheeks, and Claudia gave a small curtsy to her father, as a young pure-blood lady should. Her father was most pleased at her keeping with propriety, and he took her chin into his gloved hand. His eyes, exactly the color of his daughter's, shone. His dark-bearded face broke into a smile as he looked over his daughter. Finally, he gave her a kiss on the forehead.

"You have made me very proud, my dear," he said happily.

"You are most welcome, sir," she murmured.

Narcissa and Lucius came over and welcomed the Fairfaxes. Suddenly a buzz came across the room. *He was here!* The entire ballroom erupted in applause, and immediately men and women all alike were bowing and curtsying to the Dark Lord. He was a vicious sight. His eyes were red, and his skin was so pale he looked like death. His face had taken upon a serpentine quality to it. The last time Claudia saw him, he looked much different, but that had been years ago. She shuddered at the look of him.

He gave a short speech, and at the close, he made the announcement Claudia was dreading. She watched as Snape slowly made his way next to the Dark Lord.

"My dear friends, most of you have met the young Severus Snape. He is a promising wizard and has been of enormous help to me this past summer. I want to officially introduce him into our society. Master Snape will also be joined with Miss Claudia Fairfax, daughter of Claudius and Sapphira Fairfax, in marriage after she comes of age and finishes her education at Hogwarts. Until then, she shall retain the status of 'Wife in Waiting.' Come, my dear," he called to her.

Claudia joined Severus, and they stood on either side of the Dark Lord. He took their hands closest to him and joined them. The room applauded, and Severus led his fiancée down to the waiting masses.

It was a blur of smiles, kisses, handshakes, and words of well-wishes. Soon the room was alive with music and the guests were dancing. Claudia danced with her fiancé and looked up into his eyes for the first time that night.

He was very satisfied. Although his face was grim, his eyes glittered.

"You have pleased me, Claudia. You and I shall be most happy. I promise to give you all the respect that is due you."

And what of love?

He mistook her sadness as fear over the idea of intercourse so soon. "Claudia, do not worry yourself. I have no designs on forcing you into my bed. You are still a child. It shall keep for now."

She still had not spoken to him when suddenly Mulciber halted them. "Miss Fairfax, our Lord wishes a word with you."

He offered his arm, and she went with him without so much as a glance back at her new fiancé.

She stood in front of the Dark Lord and curtsied to the floor.

"Please, look at me, child," he asked kindly in a high, nasal voice.

"You are a very well-mannered and lovely young woman. I have heard the most interesting information on your magical abilities as well as your extraordinary marks in school. You have a sterling reputation amongst your fellow Slytherins. I am so glad you have not sullied yourself with lesser males. You and Severus shall embark with me on an incredible journey that will culminate in the dawn of a new era where pure-bloods will rule the over the Mudbloods and Muggles that creep along this terrain."

His eyes locked into hers, and she found herself dizzy.

You will learn to obey me and serve me by uniting yourself with Severus

She blinked. His lips had not moved, but the words were in her head. She was very afraid. Very afraid.

"Don't be afraid, child," he whispered to her softly. "Now enjoy your betrothal night."

He dismissed her with a wave. Mulciber took her arm, and she felt him pull at her. She blinked and shook her head a little. She was not well at all. She was walking towards Severus, and she was overwhelmed with everything around her. She was dancing now, and still as she swirled around and around, she still felt strange, as if she had been drugged.

"Look at me," a voice commanded.

Her eyes snapped up, and she was taken in by Severus' black eyes that knew no end in their depths. She felt so weak.

"Claudia!" he snapped.

Her mind snapped into focus. She was clear. Severus was looking her intently. He lowered his mouth onto hers. He had a time positioning his nose, but when he did, he brought her close to him, and she slid her arms up his back as he wound his around her shoulders. She felt shivers and tremors as he teased her lips with his. After he released her, she was shocked to find the entire room watching them and broke out into applause. She felt a ring slide upon the forefinger of her left hand. It was a antique emerald and diamond ring in a beautiful, long rectangle setting that she recognized immediately as a family heirloom. The small emeralds and diamonds sparkled in their delicate swirled pattern. She was officially now Severus Snape's intended. He had not asked permission of her father to kiss her, nor did he propose marriage. The transition was now complete. She went from one man's house to another's. But as she looked up at him, she realized, he had no home! He had no money! He needed her, and she was his security into this world she had been born into. But if she had been born into it, why did *he* seem to know the rules better than *she*?

The season passed swiftly with its various dinners, balls and receptions. She spent much of her time with Narcissa, Bellatrix, and Iris. Her head was fairly ready to burst with all the new information she had to retain. She was more than happy to return to Hogwarts where she could curl up with her books and forget all that had transpired. But each time the light caught the ring on her forefinger, she was dragged back to all that wanted to forget. Many times she longed to take it off, but feared what her fiancé would say if she did. So, when she was in her room in the evenings, she removed it and did not wear it as she slept. She had to allow her little rebellions, or she feared she might go quite mad!

One evening, she was working in the common room. Her hair was again eschew from fisting it in frustration as she tried to sort out her thoughts. She didn't know that Severus was watching her scribble furiously, with parchment and books piled around her. She had another ink smudge on her nose and on her fingers. She finally noticed a dark figure hovering above her. She looked up.

"My goodness, you really do nothing other than study, don't you?" he asked smoothly.

She raised her eyebrow at him. "I do have O.W.L.s to consider. This year is coming to a fast close, and I shall be starting my fifth year before I know it!" She pursed her lips and went back to work.

He regarded her, the bookworm, the know-it-all, as she was well known. She was pretty, intelligent, and had quite a lovely demeanor, albeit on the weak side when it came to dealing with other people on a social level. Not that he was any better! But she was no Lily, who was fiery and passionate...just what fueled his desires, but he would be content with Claudia. At least he would be able to have a decent conversation with her. But she was still too young. He left her alone then and walked away a great distance before turning around to capture the memory of her with her ink stained hands, wild hair, and books. That was the real Claudia. He rather liked her this way: untamed and focused. He decided to keep that image just for himself. Little did he know it would haunt him...

Part 1 - Chapter 4 - Claudia

Chapter 4 of 15

Claudia and Severus' relationship heats up as she turns sixteen and later when she leaves Hogwarts. The wedding date is set, but their relationship comes to an abrupt end.

A/N: This is a HUGE chapter, I know, but I really didn't want to break it up into another chapter. We still have two more parts to go through! Anyway, I am VERY excited about this chapter, and I am begging and pleading with all who read: PLEASE REVIEW! I want to hear all of your feedback! Hugs and chocolate to my beta, MadBrilliant. Love ya, girl! Warning: Major Explicit Sexual Content!

Claudia was now in her fifth year. She was so deep into her preparation for her O.W.L.s; she had barely seen Severus more than a handful of times since their engagement. He was leaving school soon. It was February 9th: Claudia's sixteenth birthday. She watched as the morning owls came in during breakfast with the daily mail. Claudia was bombarded with cards and presents. She decided to open them in the privacy of her own room, so she shrunk them all down, transfigured her handkerchief into a tote bag and carried all of them to her room. She fished through to find what Severus had gotten her. Surely, he would have remembered her birthday.

She found a flat package and noticed his spiky, cramped handwriting. She read the card first.

My dear Claudia,

I cannot believe that today has arrived. You are now sixteen and officially no longer a girl, but a young woman. I know you must have wondered why I have not been around; well, honestly, it was because I did not want to cause any complications with your studies, and also I felt the pressure of being a "Wife in Waiting" would prove to be too much for you.

Claudia, I will respect your wishes. I shall always endeavor to treat you with the honor due you. I have told you this before, but since we have not seen much of one another in so long, I believe it bears repeating. I shall not force you into my bed. Nevertheless, I shall be asking...soon. I hope you will be willing to begin this new chapter in our relationship. But if you are not ready, please be honest from the start. I would not appreciate being taken to a certain point only to be told "no."

Please accept this gift from me, your future husband. You have all my devotion and affection.

Yours,

Severus

The gift was a stunning diamond and emerald necklace with matching earrings. They would go perfectly with her engagement ring. It was breathtaking! It did not slip Claudia's notice that Severus did not mention anything about love. It saddened her to be reminded again that the man she would spend her life with would never love her. How was she going to have sex with him when there was no love there for her? It angered her. At least he could lie, or pretend to love her. At least she could save face in front of her friends. Perhaps, though, after he and Lily left school and went their separate ways, he could grow to love her. Claudia knew that Lily was dating James Potter, and everyone believed they would be engaged soon.

She thought of Severus, Lily, and James. She heard about the dueling, the hexing, and the out and out battles. Black and Pettigrew had left Severus alone, but Potter and Severus would still every once in a while, go at it. She heard the rumors, and she would walk past Lily sometimes in the hall. She always had a sympathetic look for Claudia, and she didn't appreciate it. What was that, pity? There were a lot of very conflicting and angry feelings churning inside her, and she didn't know what to do with them.

It had been in the spring when it first happened. It had been May, one month before Severus had finished his schooling at Hogwarts and went on to his apprenticeship. Claudia had been walking with her fiancé in an isolated area outside of Hogsmeade. He had changed so much. He was taller than ever, and he had grown into his sharp features. He had a very mysterious air about him in his black robes, and his voice was very deep and commanding. He had become a man. He was no longer trying to be like Lucius. He had become his own person, and for good or bad, he was what he was. She had discovered quickly he had retained his rather prickly nature and still did not like to be questioned. He also had an acidic tongue that had reduced her to tears more than once on occasion. Iris had told her she must toughen up if she was to be the consort Severus deserved! So, she had made up her mind to obey him unquestioningly and defer to his wishes at all times.

When they had reached a suitable, isolated area, he had informed her curtly of his virginity and that she should not expect anything extraordinary. He had been a bit cold, refusing to look her in the eye, and she could tell he had hated admitting his virginity to her. So, without another word, he had laid her down on the floor of the woods, on top of his black cloak, and had asked her for her permission. She had said "yes." He had not been rough, but he had definitely been in it for his own gratification. She had cried softly that first time against his shirt, and he had been considerate enough to pause his movements to assure her it would never hurt again. It had ended a few seconds after that.

The subsequent times she had just watched the spring leaves above her and had focused on the sound of the birds in the trees and rustling wind...anything to distract her from the panting man on top of her. He had never taken long anyway to make much difference to her. It had continued to become just a two-minute inconvenience that proved to be indeed painless after that first time.

It continued thusly for the remainder of the summer. She stayed at Malfoy Manor so she could be available to Severus whenever he required her. A couple times a week, they would meet and she would say "yes." As time went by, it got better, but he still had yet to touch her mind and soul, and because of that she never received the pleasure she knew that she should be experiencing.

Then suddenly it got *much* better. The fall of her sixth year, he had come into the school secretly to surprise her, and she found herself being taken up against a wall in an empty classroom. He was aware she was not responding to him. For the first time, he slowly uncovered her and took his time to focus on her. It was dark, and the guttural sounds that escaped his lips as he nipped and lapped at her skin almost sent her over the edge. She had to admit afterwards to herself that he had worked his arse off trying to get a response from her, but she fought with every ounce of resolve in her not to respond to him.

Before Claudia knew it, she was over half way through her sixth year and was deep in her training to take her place as Lady Slytherin. She knew from observing and attending to the current Lady, Hortense Ogilvy, that it was a very important position that demanded much time and patience. Lady Slytherin would be required to handle any delicate problems of *all* the Slytherin girls. She would, in fact, be a mother figure. She would be required to know all the answers, be wise in her advice, and also demand a quiet reverence from every Slytherin male. Claudia knew that just by being Snape's fiancée no one would cross her. At least there was one perk to being the fiancée of Severus Snape!

One morning while reading the *Daily Prophet* over breakfast, Claudia read that Lily and James Potter had married. Claudia sighed a sigh of relief. There would be no way now for Lily and Severus to be together. Lily loved James, and she and her new husband were fighting against the Dark Lord. "*Foolish idiot!*" she thought harshly. "*She's going to get herself killed if she continues to fight against the Dark Lord.*"

When Severus had left Hogwarts in June of 1978, he had taken the Dark Mark and had begun his training as a Death Eater. When the fall had arrived, he had become the Dark Lord's Potion maker in addition to his apprenticeship. Because of this, they almost never saw one another. Only once or twice a month would they meet and have sex.

On her seventeenth birthday, though, he surprised her with a visit, an emerald and diamond bracelet, and a romp in the broom closet at Hogwarts. This time, he was more menacing and fierce in his ardor. He was very skilled in his carnal expertise. At first, Claudia wondered where he had gained his knowledge. He roughly stripped off her clothes from the waist up and devoured her breasts. It was pure torture to not respond when he was so good at what he did! So, as she managed to pretend nothing was happening, he would whisper in her ear all the things he knew. He told her he knew she was fighting him and resisting giving into her pleasure. His voice was deep and silky now, and he knew how to use it to his advantage. He teased her with comments about her wetness for him and how good she felt around his fingers. He tried hard to seduce her body and make it his in the most intimate way, and she had to force herself to resist responding to his touch. He finally knelt down, hooked one leg over his shoulder, and began to lap and suck on her most sensitive areas. She squirmed and bit her lip until she thought she would cry if she did not find release, but she held her ground and thwarted him at every turn.

That signaled the first of many similar liaisons between the couple. Claudia knew each time Severus would eventually stop his ministrations and resign himself to the fact she would not relent, and then her punishment would begin as he would thrust himself into her as hard as he could, over and over, growling filthy, dirty things in her ear. She actually began to enjoy that wild, unleashed part of him more than anything else. After he came, he required her each time to taste a sample of his emission that ran down her thighs. Claudia knew he did it to try and humiliate her for refusing to orgasm, but she did not show any emotion about it. She just did as she was told. Then, later in the privacy of her bed or the bathroom, she would replay how his thrusting cock had felt and how his growling perverted words had sounded so good as she gave herself relief.

Now that she was seventeen, Severus made concerted efforts to bed her more often. After all, she was of age in the Wizarding world. But after a while, she realized that all her successes to thwart him in bed were becoming more and more difficult, as he took it as his mission to break her and make her want him. She was determined she would never allow a man who loved another woman force her to surrender to him. She fought hard to reject the demands her body screamed at her for release. Whenever things became too heated, she would implement some of the tried and true tactics she learned from Iris, Narcissa, and Bellatrix, and within minutes, he would be hollering out his own orgasm, thus creating her own escape. And though he was sated, the look of disgust in his face was almost painful enough to make her regret keeping him at an arm's length. As soon as she thought it safe to leave his bed, he would yank her back to him and start all over again, teasing and drawing her closer to the edge. She soon learned to disentangle herself from him after he was weak from his release and escape to her room where she could be free to relieve herself with no limitations on her enjoyment...privately. It was her own quiet, secret rebellion that no one would punish her for. Besides, it wasn't as if she was required to climax in order to bear her husband an heir!

Towards the end of her seventh year, she met again with Severus. Claudia could not believe it now had been over two years since they started having sex. He took her into his bedroom at Malfoy Manor and began to undress her. He was always very vocal in bed for a man who was so quiet in life outside of the bedroom. As she allowed him to take off her clothes, he stopped and looked at her face.

"Claudia, please, I know I'm not the handsome man you had hoped to marry, but I try so hard to get you to engage with me. But you are so detached. What can I do?" he pleaded.

She looked at him incredulously. "You don't get it. All this time and you *still* don't get it?"

"Get what, Claudia?" he asked impatiently.

"Lily Potter."

His eyes snapped and he grabbed her arm. "Don't speak of her, Claudia!" he said softly, but with anger behind that softness.

Claudia pushed him away from her. "What do you expect? That I will just get on with it and give you all of me when you give me nothing of yourself that truly means something? Giving me your orgasms means nothing to me if I don't have your love. And releasing orgasms to you would be stripping me of the last vestige of self-respect I have. This is *my* self-preservation. You save your heart and your love for her. And what about me? What do I get? I get to satisfy your urges. That makes me a whore because I lay down for it, and it provides my family their standing with the Dark Lord. So I am your whore. But a whore isn't required to enjoy it, Severus."

She readjusted her robes and prepared to leave. Severus stopped her. His hands encircled her arms and he pressed her back into him, his lips kissed her hair.

"Please, please, Claudia. Does my respect, my affection for you mean nothing? You *aren't* a whore. I do not come to you just to get off. I truly and deeply care for you. Otherwise, why would I work so goddamn hard at pleasuring you? You are a brilliant witch. I adore your mind and spirit. I enjoy talking with you, and you *are* so desirable. I do want you to know I respect you more than any woman."

"More than Lily?"

He whipped her around and faced her angrily.

"*Don't*, Claudia. Look, I'm *trying* here. Please let's *try*. Perhaps if enough time goes by, we can learn to love each other. But I am willing to *try*. And I want to please you as much as you please me." His hand caressed her cheek.

"Claudia, you are so beautiful in your body and mind. Please, stay and let me pleasure you."

Claudia was deeply touched. "Oh, Severus. You *truly* meant what you said?" She looked up at him with so much hope it made him cringe inside.

"Yes."

"Okay."

She undressed and stood naked before him. He was overcome with desire for her. He did truly care for her, although he did lie to her. He would never try to love her. Lily would be the only woman he would ever love. But Claudia was a flesh and blood woman with whom he could share his baser nature and fulfill his immediate needs. He would never have Lily; she was gone from his life forever, but Claudia was a very beautiful witch, and he did enjoy losing himself in her body. He hurriedly stripped off his clothes and climbed on top of her. She was so appealing and lovely. He loved her breasts; they were amazingly firm and perfectly round with beautiful rosy nipples. He loved to tease and nip at them until they were red and swollen. He knew she enjoyed it as well, for within minutes of his sucking and swirling each nipple into hard peaks, she was dripping wet, and he could feel her aching for him to fill her. He got on his knees and pushed her thighs apart, pressing down on her inner thighs to spread her further. He watched himself enter her, and he pumped in and out of her glistening core, desperate for her to respond to him. He raked his eyes over her beautiful body; her red, swollen breasts were moving in time with his thrusts as she clutched the bars of the headboard behind her. Claudia was amazed and shocked by the lengths he went to so she would find release. She decided to let her guard down and stop fighting her desire for him. He had a raw sexuality that was very primal. She wanted more than anything to have him bring her to climax as she did in the privacy of her own bed imagining him as she cried out her release.

She gave herself over to him and watched him pant and groan as he continued to slam into her. Once she had made that decision, she snapped and allowed her passion to wash over her. She grabbed onto her lover, her future husband, and passionately kissed him while bucking and grinding against him. She was lost in her pleasure and wantonly cried out Severus' name as he brought her to orgasm.

"Severus! Severus! Oh...God...I...love...you!"

She rode out her burst of feeling and he came quickly with her. Shouting her name "Claudia" over and over. But he never said he loved her.

Afterwards, he held her, and Claudia thought, "It is enough for now."

Things changed after that. She and Severus spent more time getting to know each other. She was becoming increasingly besotted with him. They took long walks around the manor whenever he could get away from his work and talked about Potions, History, Alchemy, and Magical Theory. She loved to see the surprised look on his face when she would give an answer to a question he was sure she would never understand. And intelligence was Severus' true aphrodisiac. He may salivate at the sight of her plump breasts, but a heated debate between them would find herself slammed up against a wall or thrown on to the ground, and within minutes he would have her screaming his name over and over. They spent most of the summer after her graduation making love outside in the warm sun. She reveled in making love to him, giving herself over to him, and knew he enjoyed bringing her pleasure. It was something that built up his ego. After pleasuring her nether regions, he would rise up, lips glistening

with her juices and a smug look on his face. It was only fair of course; so many times she had reduced him to a puddle of writhing masculinity that could not put two words together while under her control. The mental and physical closeness they shared brought Claudia closer to the belief that he would one day utter those words: *I love you*.

She had made it a policy to never mention Lily again after that last argument just before she gave all of herself over to him. As she had neared the end of her school career in the late spring of 1980, more and more time was spent planning the wedding. They had decided to be married on Christmas day, December 25, 1980. That would make it officially four years to the day of their betrothal announcement. It had been Claudia's idea. Severus had agreed, muttering something about "romantic nonsense."

Claudia had liked the idea that she would be married in this new decade that she hoped would usher in a new life and love between her and her husband. She had also decided when she officially moved into Malfoy Manor after graduation to begin assisting Severus in the lab. Things were fine until the end of the summer when Severus became distant and angry. Claudia, being ever the voracious reader and student, devoured books on Potions, tried to ask questions, and at times corrected his work. He hated her interference, especially when she was right!

"Why must you continue to be such *an insufferable know-it-all*?" he snapped at her one miserable, hot August day.

She was affronted. No one had called her that in years! Sure she was bookish and enjoyed learning, but why did he have to be so cruel?

"I'm only trying to help you! I read a new article about this potion and it said..."

He slammed his hand down on the table and glared at her. "What did I tell you about books, Claudia, or should I start calling you Miss Fairfax again? You are acting like a child! A silly girl who thinks she can learn all there is to life by reading a book. Just get out!" he snarled.

"Fine!" she yelled at him and she strode out of the room, banging the door shut in her wake.

"Insufferable? He is the insufferable one...insufferable *bastard*, that is!" she muttered to herself.

She didn't know what was getting into Severus lately. He had become increasingly shirty the last couple of weeks. As she made her way up the stairs to his bedroom, she thought about when he had started getting strange in his temper. She had first noticed it just before she had left Hogwarts. He had been asked to go on a delicate mission for the Dark Lord, and when he had returned, the Dark Lord had been elated with Severus' work, although Severus had seemed not to be content with his newfound success.

Then, when she had come to live with him, he had been happier having her with him whenever he had wanted. The summer had been going so well, and Severus had been so attentive, but two weeks ago, at the start of August, he was snarling and vicious to everyone who came into his path. He only reserved his manners for the Dark Lord. Claudia had noted grimly after two months of having relations nearly every day, sometimes twice a day, he had not touched her in two weeks. She was growing concerned.

She stole into his room and decided to go through his things. He had many protective charms on some of the drawers, but she knew him enough now to bypass them. When she found nothing in his drawers, she paced around the room, trying to think with her Slytherin sensibilities. She looked at the bedside table. She considered it and tapped the bottom with her foot. It was hollow! Claudia got down on her hands and knees, cleared off the top and tilted the table to see if something was underneath it. She found a small box and dragged it out. She took a couple of deep breaths to get up her courage to open it. She felt sick to her stomach. It was full of odds and ends. There was a lock of red hair intertwined with black. Claudia gasped at it. She closed her eyes, still fingering the hair between her fingers. She knew it would not be good for her to continue looking but knew she must. She found pictures of Severus with Lily. And there was a clipping of the Potters' wedding announcement. There was a burn hole where James' face should have been. At the bottom of the box, she found a letter that had a "return to sender" written on it. She nervously opened it and read the letter. It was dated August 5, 1980. *That was just two weeks ago!* she screamed inside her head.

She continued reading the missive. It was a letter Severus had written to Lily and obviously, it had been returned to him. In the letter he had begged Lily to run off with him and leave Potter and her son behind. He had written he would always love her, and his love would never die. It didn't matter to him that she was a new mother with a son. He would give her a dozen sons to replace the one she'd leave behind. The more Claudia read, the angrier she became. She was almost at the end when the door opened, and he was standing there. When Severus saw what she had done, his face became white with rage.

"What the fuck are you doing? These are mine! MINE!" he roared.

Claudia got up off the floor with the letter and shook it in his face. "You son-of-a-bitch! You are sharing your bed with me and plotting to run off with her!"

She was blind with rage. She flung herself at him and struck him over and over on the face. "How COULD you? How could you hurt me like this? I gave you everything! You told me to trust you, to try, and you lied...you LIED!" she shrieked.

He grabbed her hands to stop her assault. "Stop this exhibition of hysteria this minute!" he hissed.

She wrenched herself from him. She was crying and falling apart. And there he stood, emotionless and unyielding. She placed a hand on her forehead; she felt it would explode. The letter was crumpled in her other hand. She continued to look at him in disbelief. How could she have been so blind and stupid! And how could he just stand there and act as if he had done nothing of significance?

She challenged him. "Why can't you just give me some show of remorse, of emotion that you are hurt or that you feel just the tiniest bit of shame? Can't you summon even that *for me*?"

"And what precisely would that accomplish?" he said coldly.

She screamed at him wildly. "Maybe it would help me feel a little bit better! I gave you everything I could and even that wasn't enough! You even took without my permission! You, my father, the Dark Lord have all taken my life, and I tried to play by your rules! I gave you so much...I just want something, something back for me!"

Claudia looked at him as he continued to show no emotion in his face. She tore the letter to shreds, balled it up in her fist, and threw it at him with all the rage she could muster as she screeched, "You bastard! You can't even summon the littlest bit of emotion for me. But you'll beg and scrape for a Mudblood!"

His eyes snapped and glared at her. "DON'T CALL HER THAT!" he thundered.

"Why not? You did! *I hate you!*" she screamed as she pounded her hands on his chest.

He grabbed her wrists and flung her from him. "Stop feeling sorry for yourself! You knew I did not love you. I never lied. What do you want, my pity? Are you going to sink that low now?" he said icily.

"I don't want your pity! I just want what is due me!" she screamed. She pushed past him, ripped open the door, and dashed down the hall. He followed her and dragged her onto the balcony out of sight.

"You will control yourself, you *stupid* girl! I gave you all I could give!" he spat.

"Oh, but if she'd left Potter and come to you, you'd have left me in a heartbeat!" she hollered.

He stood silently.

"ADMIT IT!" she screamed.

"What the devil is going on here!" said a thunderous voice. Claudia and Severus turned and faced a very angry Lucius Malfoy. With him stood Mulciber and Avery. The Dark Lord slithered out from behind them.

"Severus, Claudia, what pray tell is all this domestic squabbling about? We could hear you from the foyer," he said softly.

Severus glared at Claudia. She knew he wanted her to keep her mouth shut. She didn't care! This was all complete shite!

She glared at the Dark Lord, pointed an accusing finger at Snape and said, "He is in love with another woman and is trying to steal her from her husband and leave me!"

Lucius groaned as he closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. Mulciber and Avery were wide-eyed and pale. Claudia realized as she glanced at the three of them that they knew! She understood it all now. They all knew about Lily and Severus. She had been played for a fool. *No more. No fucking more*

The Dark Lord turned his head slightly towards Lucius' as he heard the wizard groan.

"There seems to be much deception occurring here. Severus, what do you have to say?" he asked simply, but with a glare in his eyes.

"My Lord, I care deeply for Claudia, but I do love another. However, I have no intention of abandoning Claudia, especially since we have been enjoying a physical relationship for some time now," he replied silkily.

"Coward!" she spat at him. "I found a letter dated not two weeks ago, begging her to leave her husband to run off with him, and we've been intimate for two years!"

"Severus, do you wish to leave me?" asked the Dark Lord quietly, ignoring Claudia's outburst.

"No, my Lord, I had a moment of weakness. When I discovered she had given birth to a child, I foolishly sent a letter I should not have. At any rate, I would have never left you...just Claudia." He stood there and spoke those words without so much as a glance towards her.

Claudia looked at him and gasped at the cruelty she was being shown *Am I so worthless, that he can dismiss me without so much as another thought?*

The Dark Lord finally fixed his eyes upon her. "My dear, life is so fleeting. I am sure that Severus is deeply regretful and will never misuse your feelings again. However, you have promises to keep, my dear. I am counting on your union with Severus to bring more pure-bloods into this world."

Claudia thought she was going to lose her mind. Her eyes flooded with tears and her hands started to shake. She backed away from them. "None of you ever cared about me...y-you just used me! How can you face yourselves? You're all evil, *evil!*" she screamed at them.

She pointed accusingly at Severus. "And you are a COWARD!" she thundered.

Severus was getting agitated. He tried to interrupt, but the Dark Lord cut him off. "My dear," he began in a sickly, sweet voice. "You would do better to hold your tongue and *do as you are told*" His red eyes bore into hers.

She broke the contact. She would not allow her mind to be raped by him. She looked back at him, but avoided meeting his eyes. "You are a sick and twisted viper! You spout your 'pure-blood' mania when you are just a half-blood bastard whose father threw him away! Dumbledore is right. You are all evil, and I'm sick *to death* of all this!"

She kept backing up and away, closer to the edge. Voldemort broke the tension filled silence.

"Very well," he conceded.

"*AVADA KEDAVRA!*" he boomed.

The green light burst from his wand and hit her directly in her chest. The force threw her over the balcony edge, and she fell backwards gracefully into the air and finally crashed on to the pavement below. The men dashed to the edge and saw her broken body. She was dead.

Severus turned to face the Dark Lord, his face pale with horror.

"I am sorely disappointed, Severus. You have much to make up for." The Dark Lord turned and exited the balcony with Mulciber and Avery in his wake. They both gave him a look of sorrow before leaving.

Severus was unable to tear his eyes off Claudia's broken body, now oozing blood from her head onto the pavement.

Lucius stood close to Severus. He was angry. "You have been a complete fool!" he spat.

He leaned into the grief-stricken man and whispered, "If he can do that to *pure-blood*, what do you think he will do to your precious Mudblood?"

Severus tore his eyes from Claudia and turned his horrified face to Lucius.

"Oh, yes," he said angrily. "You would do better to get yourself under control, my friend, before you get us all killed!"

He left Severus there on the balcony, shouting to the house-elves to dispose of the body.

Severus stood there paralyzed. *What have I become?*

A/N: There is still one more chapter left in this sad tale of Claudia.

Part 1 - Chapter 5 - Claudia

Chapter 5 of 15

In the aftermath of Claudia's murder, Severus deals with the realities of serving the Dark Lord and is determined to save

Lily so she will not fall at the wand of the Dark Lord.

A/N: This is the end of Part One. I shall have Part Two up as soon as possible. I appreciate all the reviews I've received. Please keep it up. I live for reviews! Also, big thanks to my beta, MadBrilliant.

Snape was working in his laboratory when Lucius came in filthy and exhausted.

"Severus, for God's sake, stop that infernal brewing and take a break!" he snapped irritably.

"What for, Lucius? Besides, the Dark Lord needs this finished!" he said bitterly.

Lucius walked wearily to a chair by where Snape was working feverishly and sat down into it with an audible groan.

"Do you even want to know what has been afoot these past three days?" he asked exhaustedly, rubbing his eyes with one hand.

"Not really," Snape replied coldly as he chopped up daisy roots in a swift fashion. He deliberately kept his eyes from meeting Lucius'.

"Well, I think you deserve to know. No use in suffering alone in my knowledge, especially when it was *your* mess we all had to clean up!" he said grudgingly.

Snape stopped working and came around to sit across from Lucius, defeat etched on his face. "Fine," he relented petulantly as he crossed his arms across his chest. "What of the past three days?" He did not want to know anything anymore, but it seemed Lucius would not let him out of it. His voice sounded strained and weak. Lucius almost felt sorry for him.

"The *body* has been disposed of, along with her parents." He tossed something to Snape, and he caught it deftly in his hand. It was Claudia's engagement ring. That ring had been a Fairfax family heirloom Claudius had entrusted to him the night of their engagement.

Snape looked at him in a mixture of horror and pain.

"Oh, spare me, Severus!" he spat irritably. "You didn't actually think that the Dark Lord would allow her parents to live? They would have most assuredly wanted retribution; we can't have that! With Karkaroff's arrest and Rosier and Wilkes' deaths, things are getting quite *out of hand*." He placed emphasis on the last three words.

"Your work here," he said, waving his hand around, "including your information on the Prophecy, has saved your skin. Severus, you have made a cock-up of so much! We all are on tenterhooks. We now have to give an explanation as to why you are no longer getting married and a plausible story as to the whereabouts of the Fairfax family to the other pure-blood families. We can't have everyone gossiping and making conjectures now, can we? It might get back to the Ministry!"

Snape sat looking down at the emerald and diamond ring in his hand. He was exhausted. He still couldn't believe Claudia was dead. He expected her to come bounding through the door to annoy him about something or other she had read in some damn book!

"Lucius, I'm going to ask the Dark Lord to spare Lily," Snape croaked out brokenly.

Lucius leaned forward in his chair. "You are going to what?" he asked, not wanting to believe what he was hearing.

"Lucius, I *have* made such a mess of things. Something has to be salvaged. I can't let Claudia have died for nothing. Besides, when I realized Lily would never leave Potter and her child voluntarily, I knew I had to make things happen, not just leave it up to chance."

"You can't be serious! You can't!" he seethed as he jumped up from his chair. "This whole blasted, sordid business is all because of your fascination with that Mudblood! So, you think the Dark Lord will just let you bring her in here and take Claudia's place as your consort? Has it penetrated your skull that she just had a son? She's not going to leave Potter and her brat!"

"No, but I do know that the Dark Lord is planning to attack the Potters, and I want to have Lily spared. I'm going to ask him to give her to me."

"And with her husband and infant son dead, what precisely do you think you could possibly achieve?" jeered Lucius.

Snape looked at his friend with such openness and fervor it terrified the other man.

"Lucius, I love her. I don't care as long as she is near me. Even if she never lets me touch her, it will be enough. Just having her near me *feeds* her."

Lucius closed his eyes and swallowed. "Severus," he began calmly. "You are overwrought. You are not thinking clearly. The Dark Lord will *never* accept Lily Potter. *Never!*"

"Fine, then at least he could let her live, and even if I never see her again, just knowing she is alive, that can be enough," Snape choked out.

Lucius shook his head and walked back to the door. As he turned to leave, he said, "Severus, I have been your friend and your confidant for many years now. I have watched you grow from a sickly, sniveling child into a promising wizard that commands respect. But these last days, I have seen a regression that is terrifying. I don't want to bury another friend. I beg of you, Severus, forget Lily Potter."

"I can't, Lucius. I love her." He looked at his friend with sad, black eyes full of tears.

Lucius looked away and then turned back, his grey eyes cold and harsh as he pointed a finger at him.

"Love will be your undoing my friend. Mark that!"

He turned and walked out.

"My Lord,"

"Ah, Severus, thank you. Your punctuality is to be commended."

Snape was standing at the bedside of the Dark Lord giving him his daily morning potions. The man was positively obsessed with immortality. He was a complete hypochondriac. Snape was extremely nervous.

"Something else, Severus?" he asked.

Snape got onto his knees. "Please, my Lord, I know I am unworthy, but I ask...*beg* of you to please spare the life of Lily Potter."

Voldemort fixed his reptilian eyes on the cowering man before him.

"Why?" he asked coldly.

"Master, she was my dearest friend for years, and almost my whole life I have loved her. If you will it, I shall never speak of her or see her. I just ask that, when you do finally destroy the child of the Prophecy, you would please spare her life."

"And if I spared her life, wouldn't you want me to bring her here, Severus? You would want me to bring her in this house *into your bed*, and make her your consort? Isn't that what you truly want? You just desire the Mudblood!" he raged.

"No, my Lord," he whispered. "I just don't want her to die. Just spare her life. Kill Potter and his son, but spare Lily."

"You know you are not worthy of such a request, Snape."

"I understand my Lord."

"This entire fiasco with the Fairfax girl has caused more problems than even *you* are able to conceive of, Snape!"

"I am so grievously sorry, my Lord. Know that my life from now on is yours to do with as you see fit," Snape said tearfully.

"It is unsettling that you still prefer this *Mudblood* over more worthy, purer women!" he spat.

"I do see now, my Lord, my grievous faults. Just spare her life, and I will forget her. Perhaps one day, I shall see the error of my youth and see the better way of binding myself with a pure-blood...only if you desire it, of course!" he said in full prostration.

"Very well, Severus. I shall *try*. Now leave me," he said dismissively with a flick of his wrist. Snape bowed out of the Dark Lord's chambers and stalked back to his own room. He paced up and down, turning a thought over and over in his head. *I know he won't do it. I must keep her safe. How? Damn it all to hell! I have to see Dumbledore; it's the only way.*

He went out that night and Apparated to the Hogs Head Inn in Hogsmeade. He walked in and sat at the bar. He saw Aberforth, and though his head was covered with his hood, Aberforth immediately recognized him. He spoke slowly and quietly so as to not draw attention to their conversation.

"I thought I told you the last time I threw your sorry arse out of here I don't want any goddamn Death Eaters in my Inn," he seethed.

"I must speak with the Headmaster. I am alone, and no one knows I am here," Snape pleaded softly.

Aberforth poured him a glass of firewhisky. "You wait here. Don't you move, or I will kill you myself."

"Alright," he replied.

The minutes ticked slowly by as he nursed his drink. He was extremely afraid of being detected. Finally, Aberforth came to him and told him his news.

"You walk out of here and make your way towards Hogwarts. My brother will meet you on the way."

He grabbed Aberforth's arm. "You did tell him I mean no harm?" he hissed.

"I'm not your keeper. You deal with him!" he said angrily.

Snape got up slowly and left. He couldn't believe how much his life had changed these last few days. He found his mind wandering back in time to when he had taken the young Claudia, only sixteen, down the road beyond and lain with her the first time. He walked a little towards the way as he remembered how much he loved the feel of her, how soft and timid she had been. He had recalled her soft, mewling cries against his shirt as he pushed inside her that very first time. Then he remembered how she had called out his name in ecstasy just months before and told him she loved him as she climaxed. He had loved her body; he just wanted Lily more. It hadn't been Claudia's fault she wasn't Lily. He took Claudia's engagement ring out of his pocket and turned it around and around in his hand. He dropped it onto the ground and made his way to meet Dumbledore. It was over. He had killed her just as surely as if he'd cast the Killing Curse himself. He couldn't get the sight of her falling back off the balcony as the Killing Curse collided onto her chest out of his mind. It was time now to focus on saving Lily. She was all that mattered. At least he would not have her death on his conscience as well! He was lost in his thoughts as he felt a hex hit him in the back.

He was running and sweating. His wand was out, and he was panting in terror. Then he saw Dumbledore. He tripped and fell.

"Please, don't kill me! Please, I'm alone...they don't know I'm here..."

~End of Part One~

□

One of these Mornings

Won't be very long

You'll look for me

And I'll be gone...

Moby

Hermione the Child - Part 1

□

Hermione the Child

I wear this Crown of thorns

Upon my liars' chair

Full of broken thoughts

I cannot repair

Beneath the stains of time

The feeling disappears

You are someone else

I am still right here...

September, 1991

It had been quite the decade. Severus Snape sat in his usual seat at the High Table for the Sorting Ceremony as he had a decade ago...his first year as Potions master back in September of 1981. He had spent a year spying for Albus Dumbledore before approaching the Dark Lord with the idea of infiltrating Hogwarts masquerading as a Potions teacher. The idea had thrilled the Dark Lord to no end, since he himself had been denied the Defense against the Dark Arts position by Dumbledore. He wanted that school, with all its Old Magic and hidden, powerful secrets under his control. So with his blessing, he had sent Snape off to a new life as a spy. Little did the Dark Lord know that he was assisting his most powerful Death Eater in betraying him. So, began the new life of Severus Snape.

Unfortunately, everything came undone that horrible Halloween night when his precious Lily had been taken from this world. He had been inconsolable. Albus had put him together again with a new purpose: *Do not be fooled, the Dark Lord will return, and when he does, Lily's son must be saved and protected at all costs*. So for Lily, he gave himself over to his new reason to stay alive. He would much rather be dead, but he had promised Albus he would not commit suicide, nor would he foolishly place himself in harm's way in order to be killed. The Order needed him.

So the years went by, and before he knew it, ten years had passed since Claudia's death. He had silently mourned her and nursed his guilt more acutely than normally on a daily basis. To their credit, Lucius and Avery had come by to get him drunk so he could at least forget for a while. Mulciber had been notably absent, now rotting away in Azkaban. But when Snape had awoken hung over, he had realized it had been just another year to check off in his mental calendar that would bring him closer to his own death. Life was, as it had been for a long time, no longer livable...but "he had promises to keep and miles to go before he could sleep"...or so that's what the Muggle poet said.

So each year had represented another mile. But then he had remembered as he dressed for the Welcoming Ceremony the following year after the tenth anniversary of Claudia's death that this year was going to be different. It was September 1st, 1991. Dumbledore had called a staff meeting at the close of last term to announce that this fall, Harry Potter would be coming to Hogwarts. Snape had sat still, his face refusing to betray all the emotions that raged inside him. He had never even seen the child, but he hated him. He hated him for just breathing.

He had looked into his bathroom mirror before coming down to the Welcoming Feast and had regarded himself. He was older, the folly of youth had left its mark on his lined face. He looked a decade older than his thirty-one years. Grief and shame that had never left weighed heavy on his face, and it showed in his eyes and in his demeanor. Not that he had ever truly been a happy person, but as the years had passed and as the pain he felt buried itself deeper into his psyche, he had grown more short-tempered and vindictive in his self-loathing, which he projected onto other people in increasingly sadistic doses.

He had splashed water over his face, and as he had wiped the water off, flashes of the past had flickered before him that he had wished he could forget, but could not. A brown-haired girl with impossible hair and brandy-colored eyes moaning underneath him, the same girl screaming and hitting him in rage, and then her lifeless body flying off the balcony in a graceful arc.

Then the images had changed into a beautiful red-head that he ached to touch. Her green eyes haunted him every day. He had remembered sitting in Dumbledore's office hearing that she was dead along with the man he hated, but that her son survived. His grief had been palpable. He had wanted nothing more than to join her in death. But Dumbledore had had a plan. Thus began that first mile. He had dedicated his life to the survival of Lily's child. Yet, he hated the child! *The child* should be dead, not Lily. But all his begging and conniving to save her had failed. The Dark Lord had not spared her, and Dumbledore had failed, even though Snape had sold himself to the aged wizard. Now his life was all contained into one singular purpose: protect Lily's child. All this had been decided years ago, but now the plan was no longer abstract. Finally, Snape's life's role was going into play, and he needed to be ready to accomplish what he knew he must.

God, he hated him. As Snape saw Harry Potter walk into the Great Hall, he couldn't fail but notice him; he looked exactly like his thrice-damned father! Except for his almond-shaped green eyes. *Damn!* He hated him even for existing. Lily should be living. She should have been with him, safe in the dungeons *Lily*.

He scanned the scared group of first years. *Another damn Weasley!*

Then he saw a small girl with huge brown eyes and impossible, bushy hair. She stood wide-eyed with fright, and he could tell she was trying hard to focus and keep her composure. He looked down at his hands, and a fleeting image of a small thirteen-year-old girl with wild hair scribbling furiously, surrounded by mountains of books crossed his mind. *The know-it-all*. His hands trembled a little, but he arrested it by steeling his resolve. He could fall apart later. That idiot Curriell was trying to talk to him!

He had the Potter boy in his class finally later that week. He was going to make sure he lived, but damn if that existence would be livable! He looked exactly like his father, but possessed Lily's beautiful eyes. It was enough to make him retch! Here before him was the proof that Lily had actually let that swine touch her, push himself inside of her, and empty his seed into her. When he was alone at night, he would remember Claudia and how passionate she had been with him, all the things she begged for him to do to her, and all the things he had done to her. Now he tortured himself with the thought that Lily must have begged Potter to perform those same acts, and the result of her defilement with that swine was right in front of his face!

He had lit into the boy that first day, shooting off questions he had known the lad would not be able to answer. But he had noticed the bushy-haired girl with big brown eyes shooting her hand in the air. With each question, her hand had seemed to get higher and higher. This had not amused him. He had decided to ignore her. He had finally asked Potter a question about bezoars, and the infernal girl stood up, her hand shooting for the sky. He had no time for show-offs.

The boy had finally got cheeky with him. "I don't know, sir. But I think Hermione does. Why don't you try her?"

The room had tittered with laughter. He had then looked at the girl.*Hermione, is it? Stupid girl!*

"Sit down!" he had snapped at her.

He had focused again on Potter and made damn sure the rest of his time in class made him as miserable as possible. He could tell right from the start he was like his father in more ways than one. He had hoped, perhaps, he would have had inherited some of his mother's intelligence in potion making, but he could scratch that off his list! He was mediocre at best...and Snape had wasted no time in telling Albus what he thought of him!

After the day's work was done, he relaxed in his chambers and settled down with a nice drink. He watched the liquid as it swirled in the glass. Brandy-colored eyes crept up into his mind.

Severus! Severus! Oh...God...I...love...you!

Images of Claudia's naked body writhing under his, her beautiful breasts uncovered for his enjoyment filled his mind. He closed his eyes recalling clearly as if it were yesterday how erotic it looked as he watched himself thrust over and over into her willing flesh as she screamed his name. No woman had ever done that. There had never been another woman since Claudia. Would he ever be free of her? He stood up and flung the glass into the fire and watched it roar as the alcohol ignited the flames upward.

The poem mentioned is Robert Frost's, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening".

The Potion scene was taken from J. K. Rowling's first book, "The Sorcerer's Stone". Thanks to Ms. Rowling for creating such wonderful characters and a delightful world!

A/N: So you know, the R rating was for the ending part and also for angst. I'm the kind of person that would err on the side of caution where ratings are concerned. Just so you know, we are dealing with Snape's POV here, and Hermione is a child. There will be no nonsense of the lemony kind this part until the very end, which is *ahem* one-sided and Hermione is of age and not even in the room, if you get my drift! :) Again, thanks to my beta, MadBrilliant and please Read and Review! It's my only form of payment! :)

Livvy

Part 2 - Chapter 2 - Hermione, the Child

Chapter 7 of 15

Severus recalls his thoughts, fears, and experiences when he had to endure the second and third years of Harry Potter and Hermione Granger's at Hogwarts.

A/N: Thanks to my beta, Mad Brilliant. This shall be the last chapter written with nearly no dialogue and Snape's mental POV. The next chapter will show how Severus and Lucius had maintained their relationship.

Time is cruel. It seems to take vengeance on those it wills. At times it is fleeting, then agonizingly slow...especially during times you wish you were anywhere else, doing anything else, than in whatever situation you find yourself.

Snape had discovered that the bushy-haired girl had attached herself to Potter and Weasley. They had managed quite nicely and effectively to get themselves into more trouble than all their collective hides were worth!

First, it had been the damn troll. Then someone had set his robes on fire during a Quidditch match. It did not take a genius to figure out who had been behind that! Finally, something extraordinary had happened that actually caused time to reverse itself. It had been the day Quirrell had died, and he had been forced to face the reality Albus had tried to get him to accept: the Dark Lord was not dead after all, not *completely* at least. It had been a *horrible, horrible* day that seemed to go on forever. Then, Dumbledore had told him it had been little Hermione Granger, that bushy-haired know-it-all, who had figured out the potions riddle he had formulated to protect the Stone. He had been dumbfounded. He had worked for ages on that puzzle. The logic was to have been far too complex for a grown wizard, let alone a ruddy first-year! He had sunk into his chair and traced the sides of his mouth with one long finger. Hermione Granger, the Muggleborn, the *know-it-all*.

It could not be undone. The present time was reeling forward and backward simultaneously, and he felt caught in time. The Dark Lord was alive, a reincarnation of Claudia Fairfax lived in front of him, and walking around was irrefutable proof that Lily had given her body over to his nemesis and their spawn had her eyes! It was cruel, so cruel to live through this again. He started to watch the young Hermione as the next year began. Oh, she was intolerable! He had known that she had been the one who had brewed Polyjuice Potion with stolen ingredients from his stores. It had been brewed to perfection, except she had added a damned cat hair instead of a human one. *Stupid girl!*

Her work was outstanding; she possessed a mind that he had not encountered since the last time he had known another little know-it-all! But what was the most upsetting was that she was the consummate bookworm. She would spew answers straight out of a textbook, and every time she did it, he grew angrier and angrier with her. He began to loathe the sight of her almost as much as he did Potter.

But the worst was yet to come when the "Terrible Threesome" returned for their third year. He had walked into the library on a sunny Saturday afternoon when he had figured no students would be about. He had been walking towards the back when he heard the scratching of a quill on parchment. He had turned the corner and saw a sight that had made him want to collapse onto his knees, scream, and cry in agony.

There she was, Hermione Granger, sitting at a table with her hair all askew from fisting it in her frustration. She had an ink smudge on her nose and on her fingers. She was writing furiously and was surrounded by a mountain of books and piles of parchment. She was completely oblivious to her surroundings. It was a real-life image of his beautiful memory of Claudia. Claudia, the girl he had manipulated, used, and destroyed.

How dare she! He knew it wasn't logical, that it wasn't her fault, but he couldn't process it. So began the years that would pit them against each other. He would make her

cry, insult her, and belittle her. It had been enough that he was forced to face Lily's eyes in Potter's face, now he had the memory of two dead women with which to contend! One, who was the unattainable object of his desire, whose death he had inadvertently caused, and the other who had been the flesh and blood lover who had loved him completely and had been betrayed...by him.

Each Potions class she tried to assist that idiot Longbottom! No matter how many times he called her a showoff or took points off for helping that dunderhead, she still refused to back down. What was worse was that she was now the age Claudia had been when she had first caught his eye. Hermione Granger officially became the school's resident know-it-all. He could not stand being in her presence for more than a minute before he wanted to beat her to a bloody pulp.

Then came the day he actually hated himself for his actions. He had been substituting for Lupin, so the werewolf could transform in his usual secret solitude. He had been already angry that he was only fit to be a bloody backup teacher for a class that should have been rightfully his when that Granger girl began to spout off her knowledge that was just regurgitated from some fucking book! He had lost it. She had been interrupting him again and again. He had tried to be diplomatic but the chit pressed him and had continued to usurp him. He had snapped at her that he was teaching this class and not her. Then she had interrupted him *again!* It was the final straw.

"That is the second time you have spoken out of turn, Miss Granger. Five points from Gryffindor for being *arinsufferable know-it-all*," he said cruelly.

As soon as the words had come out of his mouth, he had regretted it. Had he not said those exact words to Claudia just an hour before her death?

Why must you continue to be such an insufferable know-it-all?

I'm only trying to help you! I read a new article about this potion and it said...

What did I tell you about books, Claudia, or should I start calling you Miss Fairfax again? You are acting like a child! A silly girl who thinks she can learn all there is to life by reading a book. Just get out!

He had cruelly watched as Hermione had lowered her head. Her face had been red, and there had been tears that threatened to drip down onto her robe. She had not made a sound or a whimper to betray that she had wanted to cry. He had realized his self-hatred that moment just as much as his class had, for each Gryffindor in the room had glared at him with the same hate and loathing he felt for himself. Then the Weasley boy started shouting at him...

Next came the day the whole debacle with Sirius Black came to a head. He had thought he would lose his very mind. It was something he felt pushing him. He had thought to himself, *If I have to face another reminder, I shall go mad...*

Then as if the fates had conspired to test his mettle and sanity, he had found himself faced again with that son-of-a-bitch, Black! His promise to protect Potter had driven him back to that goddamn shack of his nightmares! All the years of torment, all the goading, if Black and the elder Potter had not pushed him, if he had never been lured to that werewolf, he never would have called Lily the name that ruined it all. Then, as if on cue, that damned girl had to speak! He had lost it again. He could not handle the guilt and remembrances of two women.

"...for once in your life, hold your tongue."

"But if...if there was a mistake..."

"KEEP QUIET, YOU STUPID GIRL! DON'T TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!" he screamed at her.

He knew he had lost it then. Past and present time had become meaningless. *There was Claudia taking sides against him. But of course she would, she had always been jealous of Lily!*

He had been stark raving mad and at a point where his mind threatened to come undone. Then he had been blasted across the room and had sank into oblivion.

He had known Potter and Hermione had helped Black escape. When he had regained consciousness and had helped to transport them all to the infirmary, only to learn that the blackguard had eluded the authorities, it had been too much for his mind to process! He had pictured Lily and Claudia laughing at him in the form of the children in front of him. However, *no one had been laughing*.

He had snapped again at Hermione to hold her tongue, then before he knew it, he had lost complete grip on reality. He had pointed at Harry and Hermione and accused them of helping Black escape. The Minister of Magic had been shocked beyond reason, but Albus, who had known (at least in part) the true fury behind his rage, remained calm.

He had returned to his dungeons and for the remainder of the year, he had not been able to look at Potter or Hermione without feeling a desperate need to kill them both. It had been too much, and it was only going to get worse. He began to truly fear for his sanity.

Portions of this chapter were taken directly from J.K. Rowling's third book, "Prisoner of Azkaban".

My sincere thanks to Ms. Rowling for her creative work.

Please read and review!

Part 2 - Chapter 3 - Hermione, the child

Chapter 8 of 15

A visit from Lucius Malfoy spurs a decisions that will change the course of Snape's life.

A/N: Thanks again to my beta, MadBrilliant. Hope you all enjoy this chapter! Please read and review!

1995

Lucius Malfoy knocked on Snape's office door.

"Enter!" he bellowed.

"Severus! I see you are as genial as ever," he said with a mocking smile.

"I thought you were a damn student," he snarled. "What do you want, Lucius? I am quite busy."

Lucius looked around the horrid room and shivered with distaste. "How the mighty have fallen! Just how long are you going to spend your days rotting away in this godforsaken place?"

Snape sighed, but did not turn around to face his friend.

"You and I both know the Dark Lord wants me here. It is my post."

"More like your 'purgatory.' Is that not what the Muggles call it? A place of torment where you spend time for your sins?"

Snape whirled around. "Don't you think I deserve it? Or don't you recall anymore the sight of a beautiful young woman flying off your balcony, dead from the Dark Lord's Curse?" he spat angrily.

"Oh yes," he said softly as he stood up. "I can recall every detail." His whisper grew vicious as he walked closer to Snape. "I can recall in even more vivid detail how two of our friends, one still with us while the other rots in Azkaban, and I cleaned up after your little mess. Tell me, Severus, when you dream, is it Claudia or Lily you envision?"

"What do you want?" Snape said icily.

"I have some interesting news, my old friend. The Dark Lord is returning. He will be in a human body once more. You had best get all your affairs in order and prepare yourself for his return."

Severus just stood frozen in place, his face set in indifference. His outward expression betrayed nothing, but inside he was screaming and cowering.

Lucius made to leave and then stopped to turn around, smiling viciously.

"Oh, yes, Draco has regaled me with the most interesting stories of late. There is a certain 'bushy-haired know-it-all' that seems to excel in every class—it is most annoying to him with her being a Mudblood and all. He said she has untamable hair, brown eyes, and exhibits an over-winning sense of justice of what is right and fair. Actually, I think I might have seen her once before in Diagon Alley," he mused.

He tapped his chin with his forefinger.

"Reminiscent of someone else, is it not for you, Severus?"

Snape stood silently.

"Am I going to have to clean up another mess, Severus?"

Snape closed his eyes and clenched his jaw.

"Lucius, that was many years ago, and I do not sleep with my students!" he snarled.

"Of course not! I apologize. But I'm sure you can appreciate my concerns? You seem to have a soft spot for her type—actually the last part, the part of the sense of justice, only manifested itself moments before her untimely demise. On the other hand, fiery, a strong sense of right and wrong... I'm reminded of another young woman who was also a Mudblood. It's as if this *student* of yours is an amalgamation of the two women you helped destroy. But of course, I'm sure this is nothing new to you."

Snape sat down in his chair. He refused to be baited. "Don't be concerned, Lucius. You know better than anyone that I do not wish to have *entanglements* in my life."

"How long has it been since you've had a woman, Severus?" he asked with a sincere touch of concern. After all, he truly did care for Snape.

"Not since Claudia," he replied hesitantly.

Lucius sighed. "Severus, go get yourself laid. Stop fighting with the Mudblood in class."

Snape looked up into Lucius' eyes with anger.

"Oh, don't get indignant with me! My son tells me everything that goes on here. First, commenting on the girl's teeth? How sophomoric! Then there is this latest display; reading that Skeeter woman's infernal article about that Krum boy and the Mudblood—so childish, Severus! My son may not yet understand the subtlety behind your particular brand of petty jealousy, but I know you, my friend. Stop it now, otherwise when the Dark Lord returns, he may not be so forgiving."

With that he left Snape alone in his office to think over what was said.

Snape slumped in his chair and let his mind wander.

Fascinating though your social life undoubtedly is, Miss Granger... I must ask you not to discuss it in my class.

Ah! Reading magazines under the table as well?

He recalled the events Lucius spoke of. He had been so angry, although he could not for the life of him understand why a ridiculous love triangle of Potter, Hermione and Krum should bother him. He had known enough from having to endure Karkaroff's incessant trailing of him with that idiot Seeker Krum by his side that Hermione wasn't interested in him sexually. Krum was more infatuated with her, but he was too much of a dunderhead for Hermione to be interested in him romantically!

He had not altogether ruled out Potter, though. After all, if he were like his father, it would not be beneath him to steal her heart. He remembered ordering the Dream Team to break up, and he got Potter as close to him as he could get in order to taunt him.

You're nothing but a nasty little boy...

Whatever had possessed him to say that? Sure, he was angry about the missing ingredients from his storeroom and was not altogether sure he did not have a hand in getting his name in the Goblet of Fire, but where had that comment come from?

Then there had been the day Draco had hexed Hermione months prior to the article nonsense! He had been so cruel he made her cry and run off. She had never broken down in front of him. But he couldn't stand it. She was growing up so fast. She was already fifteen, the age when he and Claudia became engaged. Sometimes when she spoke in class, shivers went down his spine. If he ever believed in reincarnation, this would be his reason to believe. She threatened his sanity and pulled at his guilt.

I see no difference.

He had spoken with such detachment as if he were far away from himself. Oh, how true it was! The lines were blurring, and there were days he swore Claudia was sitting there in his class. He was going mad.

Severus! Severus! I—love—you!

Save your breath! I can't pretend anymore, you've chosen your way and I've chosen mine!

Why can't you just give me some show of remorse, of emotion that you are hurt or that you feel just the tiniest bit of shame? Can't you do that for me?

COWARD!

Snape jolted up in his bed. He was sweating profusely and crying. What was he going to do? Why couldn't he shake them? No, he wanted to keep Lily, but why couldn't he shake Claudia? Perhaps Lucius was right. After all, Claudia was the only woman he had ever been with. He fell back on his bed. He could still remember how good she felt, how her hair flowed down her shoulders in wild waves and curls as she straddled him. She was so beautiful; she was to be his wife and mother to his children. She had loved him, had given everything to him, and he had crushed that love under his heel. She was so young! So innocent! No, he wouldn't make the same mistake again. So began the improbable task of keeping two young people alive in the name of the women he had destroyed: one he had loved and the other who had loved him.

Portions from J.K. Rowling's "Goblet of Fire" are included in this chapter as well as one sentence from "Deathly Hallows". Thanks to Ms. Rowling for sharing with us her wonderful world!

Part 2 - Chapter 4 - Hermione, the Child

Chapter 9 of 15

Time marches on. Snape remains stuck in a time warp where he battles Claudia, Lily, and Hermione in his mind.

A/N: Thanks to my beta, MadBrilliant and to all who continue to review! I also would like to thank Sempra for all her hard work making this chapter readable! Thank you!

He had maintained his distance from Hermione after that, but kept her in his sights as much as he could. His life consisted of being summoned to the Dark Lord and trying to keep things under control as the Ministry ravaged the school to ferret out any and all information about secret meetings of Dumbledore's Army. It had galled him to no end that the Defense against the Dark Arts class taught by that damn Umbridge woman had been reduced to a joke.

That previous summer, being at Black's family home for Order Meetings had been pure hell! Hermione had lived there helping out Mrs. Weasley and her brood in cleaning the dilapidated house. He had at times run into her, and a sneer had been all it had taken for her to get out of his way. He had refused to spend one second longer than necessary there. He had never stayed for dinner, nor had he loitered around to exchange pleasantries.

Lucius' words haunted him. She did remind him so much of both Claudia and Lily that it had physically pained him to be in the same room with her. Especially when he had realized that she would be turning sixteen shortly. He had looked at her sometimes while she bickered with the Boy Wonder and his side-kick and had allowed himself to gaze on her womanly features that were starting to blossom. *God, was Claudia that young when I first took her?* And he had remembered he had turned eighteen exactly one month before her sixteenth birthday, which had been February 9th. It had been May when he asserted his rights to take her body since she had been his 'Wife in Waiting'.

Yet, Claudia had been so weak when compared to Hermione. Hermione was fierce and bossy. She openly questioned authority, where Claudia had just obeyed but resisted in a very passive-aggressive manner since it was "her duty". Snape had almost belted out a laugh when he'd heard from Minerva on the quiet that Hermione was staging her own fight against Umbridge by sitting at her desk for entire class periods doing nothing but sitting there in defiance. She wouldn't even crack a book!

Looking at Hermione had made him hate himself even more. He never should have made Claudia have sex with him so young. And to have had her first time on a coat in the outdoors, no wonder she had cried clutching him to her, hiding her face in shame. She had said, "yes" when he had asked, and she had never fought him. For a long time, she had not wanted him, and he was now old enough to realize that she had only given her consent because she had no other choice. He felt he had raped her. Why would she have wanted him anyway? He had treated her body with little regard. He was never physically rough with her, but he had been just so detached from her! Claudia had known Lily was the one he had truly wanted. So seeing Hermione pricked his conscience. He had done Claudia wrong...

So when he had heard from Aberforth about a meeting held at the Hog's Head one Hogsmeade weekend and he had described a very bossy, bushy-haired girl in charge of the proceedings, inside, Severus had smiled. *Why am I not surprised?* He envisioned her in the clandestine meetings with Potter and the others working to defend themselves. He had very low expectations of the others, but she...she was the brightest and most brilliant student he had ever taught. He watched her from afar, noting that she was growing and changing even more. She was becoming a lovely young woman, more in control of herself, and held a determination that he found intriguing. Sometimes he wondered, if he and the Dark Lord had not manipulated Claudia's life and forced her life into the mold they had wanted, how would she have grown and developed? She had been extremely smart, so very focused on her schoolwork and had been an excellent student. Now that he was older, looking back on the times when she had tried to help him brew his potions, he realized her ideas had been actually quite brilliant. But he had been so young and prideful, he could not appreciate what he'd had in front of him.

Snape also noticed that Hermione was no longer so eager to please, nor would she always try to answer every question in class. She still was attentive to his lectures, so that hadn't changed. She still tried to help Longbottom, but she was definitely sneakier about it. He swore he only caught her half the time. He was surprised at how much her disinterest in proving herself *to him* bothered him. Each time she made a potion, it was flawless. *She is so much like Lily.* He wished with everything in him that he could praise her and give her the credit due her, but that would be a death sentence, and he still had miles to go...

He was forced to now see her as a young woman growing up and changing. Soon, before he knew it, she would be gone forever, making her mark on the world. It was difficult to look at her and not compare her both to Lily and Claudia. What women they might have been if he had not interfered in their lives and destroyed them! He vowed to never do that to Hermione. She would succeed by keeping away from him. That was the best he could hope for.

One day, after he had neglected yet again to praise her for a perfect potion, he cast a Disillusionment Charm upon himself and followed the trio from the dungeons to the Great Hall. He was saddened to the very depths of his wretched soul when he heard the conversation that took place.

"I did think he'd be better this year. I mean... you know... Now he's in the Order and everything," Hermione said in a disappointed voice.

"Poisonous toadstools don't change their spots," said Ron eagerly. "Anyway, I always thought that Dumbledore was cracked for trusting Snape, where's the evidence he ever stopped working for You-Know-Who?"

"I think Dumbledore's probably got plenty of evidence, even if he doesn't share it with you, Ron!" she snapped.

He hated that he caused her hopes to be dashed, but he couldn't risk it. She deserved so much better, damn it! And every week, he had to hurt her over and over again!
One day, I swear, I shall tell her how truly brilliant she is!

He had known by observing and listening in on their conversations that Hermione constantly defended him to Potter. She had urged him to continue to work on his Occlumency training. One conversation had showed him how passionate she was about protecting his reputation. Weasley had said perhaps Snape was weakening Potter's mind "on purpose" and he was trying to thwart Dumbledore's plan instead of help. Hermione had stared at him along with Potter in disbelief, and then Weasley had taken his accusation one step further: that perhaps Snape was actually trying to *open* up Potter's mind to the Dark Lord even more. Hermione snapped.

"Shut up, Ron! How many times have you suspected Snape, and when have you ever been right? Dumbledore trusts him, he works for the Order, that ought to be good enough."

"He used to be a Death Eater," Ron said stubbornly. "And we've never seen proof that he really swapped sides..."

"Dumbledore trusts him. She had said firmly. And if we can't trust Dumbledore, we can't trust anyone."

Snape had wanted to laugh at her Gryffindor bravery and blind faith in Albus, but he had been moved beyond words by the tenacity and fierce hold Hermione had on her principles. She was not a person easily swayed. She was becoming more and more alluring as the weeks went by...

Lucius sent an owl to Severus, asking him for a secret meeting at Hogwarts. When he arrived, he was visibly upset.

Snape poured him a drink and the two friends sat down to talk.

"Lucius," Snape said gravely. "What has occurred with the Dark Lord?"

"Misinformation, bloody Rockwood, Avery..."

Severus turned deathly pale. "What of Avery?"

"Such a waste of valuable time. Avery was a fool! I placed the Imperius on Bode, and Avery assured him *and us* that Bode would be able to retrieve the Prophecy! Of course, it failed! The Dark Lord is furious! Months of planning *wasted*. We are now no better off than when we first started. Damn Rockwood dared to claim Bode had been able to throw off MY Imperius Curse because Bode *knew* Avery's information was wrong. Rockwood! That man served Avery on a silver platter to the Dark Lord! That information from Rockwood gave the Dark Lord enough reason to believe that Avery had *disappointed* him. I fear for him, Severus," he said warily.

"What did the Dark Lord do to Avery?" Severus asked, a part of him not wanting to know the answer.

"The Dark Lord's wrath was severe, and Avery was tortured 'appropriately,'" Lucius concluded sarcastically. "Oh, Severus, sometimes I am so very weary!"

Snape had been furious when he later learnt that Potter had dreamt of the event. He had been even more incensed that Potter had seemed to know many of the details involved.

He was growing terrified that the gap between Potter and the Dark Lord was closing in fast. If that little prick didn't start applying himself, the Dark Lord would easily be able to supplant all of the Order's plans by manipulating the weak boy to his twisted will.

He was furious, so furious that it spilled over, not for the first time, into Potter's Potions grade. Their next Occlumency lesson had been a complete debacle; the boy had been too drawn into discovering what was in the Department of Mysteries. He had been so obtuse he hadn't even realize the Dark Lord had been planting false memories mixed with real ones in order to get him to do his bidding! He still watched over him and Hermione, grateful for her insistence that Potter practice and work on his Occlumency, but it seemed to all be falling on deaf ears.

Then came the terrible day when Potter had looked into his Pensieve and had seen his memory of calling Lily a Mudblood. He had promptly ended his meetings with him and had refused to teach him Occlumency anymore.

The damn fool boy was hell-bent on carrying on, not thinking, not considering the consequences of his actions. He hated that Potter treated Hermione's instincts so shabbily. He was just like his father! James Potter had never appreciated the talent and power Lily had as a witch. As soon as he had married her, he had foolishly got her pregnant...in the middle of a damn war! If Lily had accepted him, he would have disciplined her powers and would have assisted her in every way possible to reach her full potential! Now, Potter ignored the cleverest witch he would ever know, just so he could play the goddamn hero! This was all going to end badly...he could feel it. And he was powerless to stop it.

Finally, the dreaded night came that had changed everything forever: Potter and his group called "Dumbledore's Army" had gone to the Department of Mysteries based on a false vision the idiot had of his damn godfather being tortured by the Dark Lord at the Ministry of Magic! Snape had gone to Grimmauld Place and had found Black there, safe and sound. He had appraised him of the situation and had asked him to stay there so someone would be available at headquarters when Dumbledore arrived. But the damn fool, like his damn best friend and cursed son, had run off to the Ministry of Magic and had gotten himself killed. He had been beside himself when he had heard Hermione had been involved, but had been relieved she was going to be fine. *Of course she will be fine!* he had thought. *Clever girl can hold her own, but that damn Gryffindor in her...could have gotten herself killed!*

He had known that Mulciber and Avery had been there along with Malfoy! It had been very painful to think about his old friends. They had been together for such a short period of time. He had heartily embraced Mulciber when he had returned to Malfoy Manor after the escape. He had realized he hated the man he had become, along with Malfoy and Avery, but they had held that common bond of boyhood friendship. Not to mention, they had been there when Claudia had died and could share in the pain and guilt that he still felt over her death. Inwardly, he had hated the ambivalence he felt towards them all. He had wished things could have been different, but before he could get too caught up in maudlin nostalgia, the Ministry had been attacked and Malfoy, Avery, and Mulciber had been sent to Azkaban. One of them could have easily killed Hermione! It had been a terrible summer that had set the Dark Lord's plans back so far, each Death Eater had feared for their life.

The Dark Lord had decided upon a very cruel punishment. Lucius had failed him for the final time, so he had forced young Draco to take the Dark Mark and had proceeded to order him to either kill Dumbledore or face death himself. Snape had felt everything was spiraling out of control. The Dark Lord had been losing his confidence in everyone around him and becoming increasingly insane as the days and weeks had passed. Then the Dark Lord had ordered him to keep that rat bastard Pettigrew in his home for the summer. His state of mind had been taunt and painfully stretched to such a degree of desperation that he had just wanted it all to end. He had just wanted it all to be over...

"Why? Why did you have to put on that ring?" he yelled at the Headmaster.

"I couldn't resist, Severus. I know it was foolish, but I just couldn't resist. I...was a fool... sorely tempted."

Snape's lips were drawn into a thin line. "Tempted by what?" he prodded.

Dumbledore remained silent.

"If only you had contacted me sooner, I could have given you more time. The damage is too severe, Albus. A year, maybe," he said grimly.

"Well, I had best get things in order, hadn't I?" he said calmly.

Another life I can't save, Severus thought angrily.

Albus leaned over to look into Snape's downcast eyes. "Severus, there seems to be something more that you are carrying inside you. I wish you would open up and let yourself be free of it."

Snape's eyes glazed over in remembering. "A friend asked me once how long would I remain in purgatory." He chuckled. "There is something about my life before I came to you, Albus, that hurts so deeply that I fear I shall never be free from how it haunts me. It has a life of its own now..."

"Severus, you are going to have to kill me..."

It was becoming a hellish year, a terrible year that was bringing so much to a head. The past, present, and future melded together as Snape tried desperately to salvage something of value, but as the days passed and saw the Headmaster deteriorating, all semblance of hope faded fast. The only bright spot was the development of Hermione's powers. She was going to become a formidable witch one day. Watching her work in his Defense Against the Dark Arts class was a joy to behold. As she wielded her power, he could see Lily, clear as day. But he knew it was her weakest subject, and her determination to excel and conquer the difficulties the subject gave her never ceased to impress him. She was by far the brightest pupil in his class, but he could not show his approval. Time and again, she reminded him of brandy-colored eyes and wild hair with its waves and curls, working hard to understand the subtle art of potion making. And once in a while, warmth in his belly would creep up and spread itself inside him when he caught a glimpse of her. There was no rhyme or reason to it. She could be casting non-verbal spells, sitting in the library studying, or walking with determination across the quad. It was a new feeling that he had not felt in such a very long time.

Snape wondered from time to time if she ever realized how much he regarded her. But his disdain for her in his class and her irritating bookish ways that constantly forced him to see Claudia again and again in his mind assaulted his conscience each time he verbally thrashed her. Each time she would heartily spout off answers that were verbatim from the textbook, he would show her no quarter, and for that, he heartily wanted to go up to her and shake her by the shoulders and scream at her to stop torturing him! But the truth was that it wasn't her fault she was so much like Claudia.

He wished with all his heart he could tell her how amazing she was and how brilliant and powerful she could be if she stopped leaning so much on her blasted books! Perhaps, though, it was better this way. Keeping his distance from her was only reaping wonderful results. That must be his punishment in this purgatory. He was not to be trusted with beautiful minds and hearts. He would only crush them in the end.

He argued with the Headmaster constantly. He resented the lack of information he gave him. Narcissa was not well. Draco looked even worse. He desperately missed Lucius. He knew Draco had been at the breaking point. Draco was not cut out to comply with all the Dark Lord's wishes. He wished whole-heartedly that he could get them all to defect and work as he did for the Order. But such things might have well been a pipe dream for all it was worth. Looking at his godson, Draco, he finally accepted there was no way he would be able to carry out the Dark Lord's wishes to execute Dumbledore! Every time he caught Narcissa's eye on him, he knew she was pulling on him to remember what he had vowed, what he had promised. As if he could ever forget!

During one meeting, he sat across from Bellatrix. She knew...as most of the older Death Eaters did...about Claudia. She looked at him as if he were filth under her boot. He knew what she thought of him. He was a weak man who had led a pure-blood to her death because of his lust for a Mudblood. She also did not trust him one iota. She thought him pathetic. *Perhaps she is right, he thought. After all, what am I able to do anymore? People are still dying, Potter and Dumbledore are constantly off God knows where, doing God knows what! All I'm fit for is chasing after Draco and waiting for the moment I have to kill my friend!*

He tried to slip away quickly after the meeting, but was halted by Bellatrix.

"I don't want you to think for one second that I buy your 'obedient servant' act," she hissed at him.

He put a look of indifference on his face and replied in a bored voice, "Whatever are you on about, Bellatrix?"

She looked at him with pure venom. "I almost wish you wouldn't kill that old codger. Just so we can be rid of you. You are nothing but a disgrace to every pure-blood in this room. But why should I be shocked? You're nothing but a filthy half-blood anyway! Is that what led you to hand over that sweet girl to her death?" she whispered, taunting him with her knowledge of his most private wounds.

"You sacrificed a pure-blood because you couldn't get that filthy Mudblood off your mind. You should be ripped from stem to stern and fed to Nagini, you disgusting bat!" she seethed.

He forced a twisted smile on his face. "Always a pleasure, Bella," he replied smoothly as he Disapparated from the manor.

He Apparated back to the castle and met up with Dumbledore. Again, they argued about Potter.

"You trust him... you do not trust me!"

"It is not a question of trust. I have, as we both know, limited time. It is essential that I give the boy enough information for him to do what he needs to do."

They continued to argue as they walked back to the castle. They sat in Dumbledore's office, and they discussed their plan in more detail. Snape did not want to kill the Headmaster. Albus was the only friend that he could talk to.

Then Albus asked him a question that shook him to his core.

"How many men and women have you watched die?"

"Lately, only those I could not save," he said bitterly. He stood up and turned his back to Albus. It wasn't a lie. He had grown to become efficient in his mode of execution. He chose his battles carefully. He did not want another Lily or Claudia on his hands. Yet, that was what he was being forced to do again! He didn't want to be responsible for another death when he could back away from it. He just did not understand why Draco's soul should be more important than his own! Now Albus was talking about bringing Potter into the slaughter! It was too much!

"You have used me," he said angrily.

"Meaning?"

"I have spied for you and lied for you, put myself into mortal danger for you. Everything was supposed to be to keep Lily Potter's son safe. Now, you tell me you have been raising him like a pig for slaughter...?"

They continued to argue, and in a fit of pique, he conjured his Patronus to prove his love and fidelity to Lily. Yes, he still loved her and to his everlasting shame he always would. And for that, he would burn in hell even after this life in purgatory. He would never be cleansed of the sin he had committed against Claudia.

A/N: Portions in this chapter are taken directly from J.K. Rowling's "Order of the Phoenix" and "The Half-Blood Prince". Thanks to Ms. Rowling for her wonderful, creative work!

Part 2 - Chapter 5 - Hermione, the Child

Chapter 10 of 15

The fateful night on the Astronomy Tower brings Severus Snape closer to madness than he has ever been before.

A/N: Thanks to MadBrilliant, my beta, and to all who continue to review.

He had waited and waited for the time to spring upon him. Finally, the day had arrived. Flitwick had burst into his office and told him Death Eaters had breached the castle. He had Stupefied the wizard—he would have no one die for him! He would carry it all. He had dashed out and had nearly collided with Hermione and the Lovegood girl. *Shite! I cannot have Hermione near this*

"Professor Flitwick has collapsed. Go and stay with him and do not leave. Stay here. I shall go after the Death Eaters," he had ordered.

To his immense relief the girls had complied. He had made his way up to the Astronomy Tower to face Albus for the final time.

In years to come, it would be at that precise moment upon the Tower that he would swear was when time had melded and his mind had been forever altered. Past and present had ceased to have meaning. All in one horrific moment, he had lived again the dreadful event of so many years ago.

Albus had been begging him to kill him. He hadn't wanted to, and Draco had been so worthless, he had wished he could have killed him instead! He had cast the Killing Curse at Dumbledore, and his mind had reeled and snapped. He had lost his control over his sanity.

"*AVADA KEDAVRA!*" he screamed.

The green flash from his wand hit Albus square in the chest, and he saw the brandy-colored eyes of a girl long ago in his mind. Albus was blasted into the air and slowly descended down and out of sight. He watched Albus become Claudia, and then he was Albus again. Then Severus was the Dark Lord, and then he was his twenty-year-old self again.

"*What have I become...?*"

He had never been able to remember all the chaos that ensued past that point, save the exchange between he and Potter. He had been working purely on instinct. Mentally, he had shut down. Everything was rushing past him at breakneck speed. Aurors and Death Eaters had been fighting madly, but only one had been out for his blood. *Potter*. Potter had called him a coward. Snape had been already mad with raw grief, old and new grief so intensely interwoven, that he had been positive it was going to devour him.

This ignorant, ungrateful boy had dared to call him a coward?

His mind still could no longer distinguish between past and present time. The guilt and pain had washed over him, as did the rage of all the years he had endured to save this little prick's life!

In front of him had been Potter, screaming at him, calling him a coward. Then Potter had become Claudia standing on Malfoy's balcony, calling him a coward in front of the Dark Lord. He had been a coward, but not now. When he had been a boy, yes; but he had spent twenty years trying to atone in his purgatory. *How dare he?*

"DON'T CALL ME COWARD!" he had howled. He had not known to whom it had been he was saying it. Potter? Lily? Claudia?

It hadn't been until he had been safely ensconced back at the Dark Lord's lair that he finally collapsed and sank into sweet oblivion.

"Severus," a raspy voice called out to him.

Snape adjusted his eyes to the dim light in the dark room. He was lying in a bed, and Lucius was sitting beside the bed with a candle in his hand.

"Hello, Lucius," he muttered.

Lucius set the candle down on the table next to the bed. "How are things, my old friend?"

"Dumbledore is dead. I killed him."

Lucius looked terrible. It had been a while since he had really been able to see him up close since his escape from Azkaban. His eyes were watery and tired. His hands shook now. He was haggard even in his nice expensive clothes. Azkaban had taken its toll.

"I-I don't know what the Dark Lord will do with us now, Severus. It may be time for us to say goodbye, old friend."

"Lucius, the Dark Lord is very pleased with me. I have done a service that has now proven my loyalty beyond a doubt. He surely will grant me a boon. If he does, I shall petition for your lives."

Lucius hung his head and cried. This unnerved Snape. He had never seen Lucius so defeated before.

"Lucius, please! Control yourself!" he snapped. "This does not become you."

Lucius chuckled. "I don't know what becomes me anymore, Severus. I feel already dead. I am so weary. I just want this war to be over."

The tone he was using made Snape very nervous. He was coming close to a line that dared not be crossed.

"Severus, Narcissa and I are so very grateful for what you have done for Draco. We are forever in your debt."

"No, Lucius, You are not. I think we are even now. After all, you cleaned up a mess for me when I was a foolish young man. Now, I have repaid my debt."

"Touché," Lucius whispered.

He left Snape after that. Snape had no idea what the next days and years would now bring him. The summer was dragging on, and he still had another promise to keep for Dumbledore: that when he was dead, Severus would protect the school and to the best of his abilities and watch over the children. Although he was loath to carry even more duplicitous acts upon his already heavy-laden mind, he knew it was only the right thing to do. *We don't need any more Dracos! We've already lost Crabbe and Goyle, but we can't lose any more like Draco!* If he would even live for much longer, that was. He had no more allegiances to anyone in this physical realm. Just old promises he'd decided to keep to two women long dead. He would have to keep himself going for those promises, for Harry and Hermione.

Hermione. For the first time during that summer after he killed Albus, he allowed his mind to go where before he had never allowed. He recalled her fighting in her brilliance, casting hex after hex. Better than all of them. He recalled her lithe form, her strong form, and beautiful legs that went on to an even lovelier place he could only imagine knowing. Those brown eyes that were like a warm blanket burned into him. He imagined running his hands through her hair, pulling her under him, urging her legs to wrap around his waist. It had been so long! He closed his eyes and hastily unbuttoned his trousers and stroked his aching cock.

Hermione.

He let his desires run riot, imagining doing things to her and she to him that he knew would never be in reality. He imagined how she would moan if he could just taste one sweet, pink nipple. Oh, if only he could taste the nectar between her thighs! He pictured slowly sinking into her hot, tight quim. He gripped his shaft painfully, fantasizing it was her virgin warmth clenching around him. If only he could, he would do it right this time. He would treat her better than he had Claudia. He would kiss each tear away from breaking her barrier, he would tell her he loved her, and would thank her for giving him such a precious gift. He then would not move in her until her pain had subsided and she was begging him to thrust over and over into her. He imagined how his name would fall from her lips if she gave herself to him, if she would scream for him to fuck her harder and deeper as he pounded into her again and again. His climax left him with her name on his lips, completely exhausted and sated. He would sleep now, but his work still was not finished. He was no longer her professor, but he was still her protector. He would never have her. *Yes, it is true, like the Muggle poet said, "I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I can sleep..."*

A/N: This ends the story of Hermione, the Child

Part 3 - Chapter 1 - Hermione, the Woman

Chapter 11 of 15

Severus recovers from his near-death experience during the final battle, and returns to his old position as Potions master at Hogwarts. When the new Headmistress, Minerva McGonagall, informs him of his new assistant as he still convalesces, he makes the decision to drive her away from him in hopes of securing his future.

□

If I could start again

A million miles away

I would keep myself

I would find a way...

This is the beginning of the third and final part of this story. Thanks to my beta, MadBrilliant, and to all those who have reviewed.

He lay in a hospital bed. He was so weak, so weak. A familiar face would come to him and then leave. He remembered voices telling him Voldemort was dead. Harry Potter was alive.

Hermione? his mind shrieked. *What happened to Hermione? Dear God...please let her be alright.*

His agitation was apparent to all. The Healers were concerned about him. He would not rest until he knew. The face came back, and he was able to focus. It was Hermione! He passed out and welcomed the sweet embrace of release. No more battles to be fought... no more threats to endure. The bastard had gone to hell where he deserved. Harry and Hermione were well. He welcomed death. He would no longer need to fight it.

Instead of death, his release brought a faster healing for his condition. He found himself bombarded with well wishers and the remaining members of the Order coming and crying to him over the hateful thoughts they had harbored against him for so long. It made him uncomfortable. He did not deserve it. He deserved nothing. He saw Hermione with her bright smile and knew it was true that she had been there at his side, urging him to fight for his life. *Why? Why did she have to ask that of me, when I could never deny her?* She was so lovely. He had missed seeing her, looking at her, watching her work and study, and his personal favorite...bossing around the two idiot twins.

Minerva offered him his old position back as Potions master. He accepted it, not because he particularly wanted the job, but because he knew of no other life. He was still very weak and needed the familiarity around him. Minerva sensed his trepidation over his abilities and said that Hermione Granger would be assisting him with his classes while she finished her N.E.W.T.s. He was not happy at all with the arrangement and told her so. Repeatedly. And *loudly*.

"Severus," Minerva said timidly, as if she were testing the waters. "Hasn't this gone on long enough? Potter and Weasley will not be returning. Miss Granger will only stay on as a student until the Christmas Hols, during which she will take her N.E.W.T.s. She can stay on for the rest of the school year assisting you as you see fit, and then she will be gone. What could you *possibly* have against Miss Granger? Is it because she is Potter's friend? Because if that is the reason, Severus, I think you are being quite unreasonable!"

Snape glared at her. "You know nothing. NOTHING!" he raged. "I will not have that *insufferable know-it-all* in my classroom!" he roared. Then he slipped into a hacking cough that Minerva watched on with an "I told you so" smirk as he sank weakly into a sofa chair.

Minerva had watched his temper tantrum with a keen eye. Finally, something snapped into focus, and she decided to approach the issue delicately. She stood up, smoothed down her robes, and walked slowly around her desk to stand in front of him.

"Severus, I am your colleague, yet I do not presume to pretend I can just slip into a familiarity with you that you shared with Albus. Nevertheless, I was your teacher once, if you haven't forgotten." She gave him a knowing look, and he started to get agitated.

"I'm not going to listen to this!" he growled as he struggled to stand from his seat.

"You will listen to everything I have to say, Severus Snape! Now sit!" she barked.

He was far too exhausted and weak to fight her. He sank back into his chair and waited for the inevitable.

She began again. "I recall, as your teacher, many things that took place during your latter years here as a student." Snape glanced up at her with a scowl that distinctly said, "Don't!"

Minerva continued without regard to his silent warning. "Oh, yes, Severus, I remember how it used to be in Slytherin house: the so called 'old traditions'. I also recall another 'know-it-all', as your house was wont to call her. She was a brilliant student with a sharp mind and powerful in her magic. Unfortunately, she was conditioned to be obedient to the 'old traditions' and was susceptible to domineering and ruthless people. She left Hogwarts in your care, Severus, and I was told a marriage was to take place. Then she suddenly disappeared shortly after Harry's birth. I regret that with all the hoopla of securing the Potters a safe house, the subsequent moving, and then the shock of their deaths surrounding Voldemort's defeat, young Miss Fairfax slipped from my mind. That was until some years ago when another, as you call her, 'know-it-all' came into my Transfiguration class and amazed me with her knowledge and skill. Then I remembered." Her voice failed her, and she took out a hankie and blew her nose.

By now, Snape was slouched in his chair with one hand hiding his face from the Headmistress *Please don't! Please don't make me tell!*

She spoke again in a thick voice that trembled with emotion. "I've waited and endured for years, Severus. Please, just tell me what has become of her?"

"She's dead," he whispered.

She choked out a sob. "Was it he?"

He nodded. "Voldemort cast the Killing Curse, but it is my fault she died. I drove her to a state of hysteria that made her say things that angered him to such an extent that he just...he just killed her. A pure-blood! It was and is a reality that continues to be unbearable to live with!" he said in an anguished voice.

He steadied himself and then became angry. "You see now? I can't have her around me. She reminds me so much of Claudia."

"And Lily," she interjected.

He glared at her with a hate so intense, she knew that she was right in one.

"She stays, Severus," she stated in a firm tone. "You need to put these demons of yours to rest, once and for all. It is not Miss Granger's fault she reminds you of your past sins. *Do not allow history to repeat itself!*" she warned with a glint in her eye.

He left defeated. Miss Granger would stay, and he would have to live with the hurt.

The next time he saw her, she was coming into his lab, ready to start work. She had changed so much. She was a beautiful eighteen-year-old woman. Her long curly hair was styled, elegantly straightened, and fell down just past her shoulders. Her brown eyes were so familiar. He wanted to cry at the sight of her. Indeed, over time, whenever he would catch her working, her fingers covered with ink-stains and always a smudge of ink on her nose or cheek, his breath would catch, and the memories would flood back. There were many nights that he would brood alone, swirling his brandy around in his glass, thinking about *her*.

He found himself thinking less and less of Lily since the battle. When he gave his memories to Potter and begged him to look into his green eyes, it was his goodbye, and he let her go. The only problem was that he found himself dwelling more and more on Claudia. He never fully understood Lucius' comment about Hermione being an amalgamation of the two women. He thought Lily existed on a higher plane that was more beautiful and ethereal than Claudia was or Hermione could hope to be. Nevertheless, now he was starting to see the qualities he loved the best in both women manifested in the young witch he worked alongside day in and day out, and it bothered him a great deal.

When something bothered Snape, whether it was large or small, the people around him suffered. The war had taken so much from him, not only his health, but also his peace of mind. It wasn't that he was an invalid; he just could no longer summon the iron will and strength he had always relied on to help him hide the truth of his feelings from others. He never fully recovered from his breakdown the night he killed Dumbledore. He wished to be in Azkaban every day. He wanted to forget the memories that never seemed to leave him alone. Therefore, he lashed out. Unfortunately, it was his assistant, Hermione Granger, who caught the brunt of his bile.

At first, it was small things, such as her not placing an ingredient back in its proper place, or bothering him about a simple step in a potion that she thought she had a better answer for. There were times he would look at her when she was quiet, working silently, dutifully, and there would be Claudia, and he would start screaming and yelling at her out of a dead calm. She would look at him with a fear that shamed him those times. He was going insane, and he knew it. Then at times when she would disagree and argue a point with him about a potion question, it was as if Lily was back. Hermione would get so fierce in her argument; he would feel the burning in his belly traveling throughout his loins that refused to leave him. He began to snap at her for the most ridiculous things because he hated what she represented. Moreover, he hated that she made him yearn for things he had not wanted in over twenty years.

He was not so far gone that he could not realize Hermione was her own person. Yes, she represented and resembled the two loves of his life, or what had passed for love because unfortunately he had never had a *true love*. One woman was an angel, pristine and perfect with no flaws, and the other had been the one woman he had only

sated his lust with but never had allowed himself to accept or return her love. However, Hermione was by far a bigger and brighter star! She was already on that road to greatness, which had been stolen and ripped from Claudia and Lily because of his selfishness. He covertly started to watch her work. He would stand deliberately close to her to be near her to torture himself. He hated himself for acting like a lecherous pervert. She was barely 19 years old, and he was just an old bastard.

One day, he snapped and yelled at her so badly; she burst into tears and ran out of the lab. He felt like an arse. ~~He~~^{was} an arse! But she was driving him mad with longing, and he feared what he would do to her. Half the time all he could think about was tearing off her clothes and forcing himself inside her. Even after twenty years, he could still remember how it felt the first time he took Claudia. She had cried and whimpered against him as he pushed himself into her. He had held her and calmly soothed her, promising her it wouldn't hurt again. He still felt the guilt and shame that he did not treat her better, but he had relished in the fact she was a virgin. He wondered from time to time if anyone had taken Hermione yet. If not, God help him if he were to find out! He couldn't handle it anymore! So, he decided to drive her out! Make her absolutely detest his presence to the point where she would refuse to be near him. If she stayed near him for much longer, he would ruin her and destroy her future as well. So, his course was clear. Just a few more miles and then he could sleep. Yes, that was what he would do.

Part 3 - Chapter 2 - Hermione, the Woman

Chapter 12 of 15

Severus learns of Lucius' work for the Order. A n argument finally erupts between Severus and Hermione, and she has an interesting discussion with Lucius Malfoy.

A/N: Thanks to my beta, MadBrilliant, and to all those who have continued to read and review. Keep it up! I live for reviews!

Lucius Malfoy and his family had redeemed themselves during the darkest days of the war. It was only after Severus' own acquittal that he was able to sit down with the remaining members of the Order and discuss all that had occurred after his supposed "defection." He sat in what was now Potter's house at Grimmauld Place with Arthur, Molly, Potter, the many Weasley offspring, Hermione, and Minerva.

"It was an incredible turn of fortune for the Order!" exclaimed Arthur. "Actually, Remus was his contact because he was playing spy for us against Greyback," he explained.

Snape was dumbfounded. *That bloody opportunist! Lucius Malfoy: spy for the Cause!*

Arthur continued. "Well, we of course were highly skeptical of any information that came from Lucius. But when all the details came out, how the information was getting to Remus, we left it then for Remus to call whether to accept or reject the information given."

"How actually did Lucius go about this subterfuge without the Dark Lord becoming suspicious?" Snape asked.

"Well, it seemed, and you have corroborated this, that ~~he~~ was becoming increasingly unstable during the final year of his life. He seemed to forget at times that Lucius was in the room, since he had lost so much favor with You-Know-Who after the Prophecy debacle. Lucius would gather whatever snippets of information he could and pass it on to Narcissa, who had the freedom to come and go as she pleased. She would go visit Draco, who would then meet up with Remus during his patrols and give him the information. What was interesting was that Lucius was feeding information on you, Severus, because he did not know you were a spy as well!" Arthur chuckled.

Harry spoke up. "It is positively eerie! We discovered the information we had received from Phineas Black's portrait had corroborated Lucius' information. So, we know now there is some truth to it. What is even weirder is that now we know the news we were hearing about your leniency with the students who were "troublemakers," like Ginny and Neville, was given to the Order through Lucius! He was concerned that Voldemort thought you had gone soft and was about to replace you with a Headmaster who would be crueler!"

"We know now, Severus, that you were doing the best you could to look after our Ginny and the other young ones," said Molly while giving him a squeeze on his hand.

Snape was embarrassed. He didn't know what to say.

Arthur spoke up. "The Malfoys' trial is coming up, and I say that we should all make a grand showing to help them. Damn, if it were not for Narcissa, Harry would be dead! They all risked a great deal to secure vital information we desperately needed to win the war. Shackbolt is behind it. Of course, there will be no medals, or commendations, since they did not fight in the battle, just that they will be able to keep their property and live their lives in relative peace."

Snape grimaced and slowly closed his eyes. "If only that could actually be a reality," he muttered to himself. He did not see the sad brown eyes looking at him with longing...

Another day in the dungeons stuck with Hermione was giving Snape the migraine of his life. She didn't have to do anything anymore. Just her mere presence was enough to put him in an ill humor and give him a raging erection that refused to go away...

He fumed as she worked on a potion. He was trying to focus on grading essays, but she was driving him mad. She was humming, which was common. Humming was normally what she was wont to do while working. Never before had he paid attention, but as the weeks went by, everything she did was grating on his nerves and fueling his lust for her at the same time.

Finally, he snapped. He threw the essay and his quill on his desk and stood up. She flinched at his fast movement and spilled her phial of dragon's blood onto the floor. He swept over to her, his eyes glittering with murder.

"You *stupid, stupid* girl! How long must I have to endure your incompetence?" he snarled.

She whirled around, looked hard at him, and refused to back down.

"If you had not startled me, I would not have spilled it!"

"A professional does not react to distractions, Miss Granger!"

"A professional does not continue to sabotage and belittle the people working for him!"

"I have had enough of your insolence," he retorted in a dead calm. "I want you out of this lab and never, I repeat, ~~never~~ come back!"

"That's fine with me, you pathetic sod! You have done nothing but goad me and abuse your position since I started on with you!" she yelled as she gathered her belongings and stormed out.

Snape sat down defeated into his chair. Well, he had finally done it, chased her off. It was better this way. She would be much better off. After all, if she stayed, all he would accomplish would be to hurt her.

Hermione stomped down the corridor to the stairs when she almost collided with Lucius Malfoy.

"Oh, Mr. Malfoy!" she gasped.

"My dear girl, are you all right?" he asked, concerned.

After the Malfoys' exoneration, Lucius had kept a very low profile. The tortures he had suffered under the Dark Lord had weakened him. The vicious Lucius Malfoy no longer existed. A mellow gentleman had taken his place, but Hermione was still a bit leery of him.

"I'm fine, sir," she replied, and she tried to walk past him.

"Please, Miss Granger, Hermione...stop," he asked pleadingly.

She halted and turned around to face him. She could see the worry and concern on his face.

"What do you want?" she whispered suspiciously.

"Please, sit with me here for a spell. You seem to be quite upset. Besides, I am quite winded by all these stairs," he said weakly.

Hermione finally decided she didn't care anymore who knew what about what had been occurring in the lab or between her and Snape. She decided to unburden herself on the wizard.

"I was just thrown out of the lab by Professor Snape. He is *socruel*! I mean, he wasn't a nice person to start with before the war, but now, even after all I did to help save his life, it's apparent he still absolutely detests me. I'm so *sick* of how he treats me!"

Lucius fairly winced at her last words. It reminded him too much of Claudia's final words before her murder.

You are all evil, and I'm sick to death of all this!

She turned and looked into Malfoy's tired, gray eyes. "You know him, Mr. Malfoy. Why is he so miserable? Why does he treat me so horribly? Why should he loathe me so?"

Malfoy sighed and shook his head. "With Severus, nothing is ever clear. He is the most complicated man I've ever known, apart from the Dark Lord," he confided.

He looked into Hermione's eyes and said sadly, "You need to accept the fact that Severus carries a vast amount of guilt and self-hatred inside him. He's been carrying it for twenty years. I wish I could tell you, my dear, but it is extremely personal, and it is not my story to tell."

"Well, if it's about Lily, I already know about her. Harry told me all about it. He told everyone about it just before he killed Voldemort."

"Well, that is indeed a part of the story, but there was another. Her name was Claudia...a pure-blood Slytherin. All I'll say is that she was a pretty young girl who became a beautiful young woman honored with all of the old traditions we Slytherins held dear and practiced before the Dark Lord fell the first time. She had the wildest brown hair! It was a mass of curls and waves gone riot! She was known as 'The Know-It-All,' according to Severus' friends. I was a seventh-year when Severus was a first-year. I never attended school with Claudia. What I was told, until I finally met her, was that she was a brilliant and intelligent witch. What I recall most clearly were her eyes. They were so amber that they looked like the color of brandy! Sound familiar?"

Hermione gaped at Lucius. She didn't know what to say.

Lucius rose and said to the young woman, "Hermione, I will speak to Severus. I will do my best to get him to speak to you about her. But, unfortunately, I cannot make any promises."

He left her then, and Hermione thought she was losing her mind. Was there ever an end to the depths of that man?

Part 3 - Chapter 3 - Hermione, the Woman

Chapter 13 of 15

Lucius and Severus have an interesting conversation. Later, at the Victory Celebration to honor all the war veterans, Severus comes undone in front of Hermione. She decides it is time to end the silence and confront Severus about Claudia Fairfax.

A/N: Thanks to my beta, MadBrilliant, and to all those who read and review! Keep 'em comin'!

"Good afternoon, Severus."

"Lucius," Snape said curtly as he continued to grade his essays.

"I just ran into Miss Granger in the hallway. She is extremely upset."

Snape grunted in reply.

"Oh, how Neanderthal, Severus. Come now, have we not been through enough that you could at least give me the courtesy of being honest with me, even if you can not summon that honesty for yourself?"

"Whatever do you mean, Lucius?" Snape said irritably.

"How long are you going to punish yourself and that lovely young girl for sins you committed years ago?"

Snape glared at his old friend in pure loathing. "Was it not you who said that I was living out my time in purgatory?"

"Ah!" said Lucius. "But, my old friend, that time is past! There is no more Dark Lord, no more to fear. You have a beautiful, enticing witch with whom you could enjoy and live your life. Why not grasp the happiness with both hands?"

"She would never...not if she knew what I did to Claudia," he whispered.

"So it is true! You desire her!" He smiled brightly at the thought.

Severus hung his head low as he turned from facing his friend. "I do want her. It's all I can think of. I want her so badly; I can not think at times except how much I want her in my bed. But she would never, it is just torture to be around her, and know I can never have her."

"You may be able. Give her a chance. Tell her!" he urged.

"Lucius, I can't! If she were to reject me, I could not bear it *I can not*"

"What will you do now?"

"What I've done for the last twenty years. Satisfy my own lust by myself. I am loath to touch another woman," he admitted.

"Severus," Lucius said. "I am old and tired. I may be young according to Wizarding standards, but my magical powers have been greatly diminished, and my wounds have aged me significantly. Yet, I have a beautiful witch who holds her naked body next to mine every night, and I *know* that there is nothing more fulfilling than experiencing that kind of joy. Severus, take her and make her yours. Open yourself up; confess your desires *and* your sins. I don't think you will be disappointed."

"Love will be your undoing, my friend. Mark that," whispered Severus, his black eyes staring out into nothingness. "That is what you told me." He looked to Lucius with such sorrow and pain that it cut the older wizard to the heart.

"Severus, I don't know what else to say. I would just ask that you look upon me and see where my old beliefs have led me. I was wrong."

With that, he left.

Severus sat in his chair, covered his face with his hands, and cried bitterly.

It was Christmas, and the Ministry had decided the time had come to officially celebrate the death of Voldemort and to formally acknowledge all of the war veterans. It was an incredible celebration. The wine flowed, the music played, but Severus Snape stood off in a dark corner, unable to bring himself to appreciate the festivities. Hermione had sat for her N.E.W.T.s two days ago and was leaving. She had argued with Minerva that she could not and would not stay on as Snape's assistant only to be harassed and abused.

Minerva was livid with Snape. She continued to try to persuade Severus to apologize and reinstate Hermione's position. Minerva maintained that he still was not up to par, but he refused to accept Hermione back. So, because she was still in such a foul mood, Minerva forced him to attend this gathering. He was downright miserable. Hermione was leaving, and there was no point to anything anymore. He was extremely depressed and it showed. Finally, Lucius and Narcissa pulled him out of his corner, and Narcissa refused to take "no" for an answer. She wanted to dance and wanted Severus to have some fun in his bleak life.

As he danced with Narcissa, he could only think of Hermione. Lately, when he would dream of either Claudia or Lily, they would turn into Hermione. He knew he wanted her, but the situation was hopeless. She would never love him if she knew how he had treated Claudia.

He stood by the Malfoys after his dance with Narcissa ended. He was starting to warm up, thanks to the wine and the warm reception he was receiving from the people around him. It was at that moment his world came crumbling down. The past and the present ceased to exist and melded into one...again. He felt the familiar snap inside his mind. Yet, this time was different. Severus Snape had officially reached his limit.

He had been talking to Lucius as Narcissa chatted with the other witches nearby before the moment came where he finally snapped.

"Tell me, old man, when did you decide you didn't want to be under Voldemort's thumb anymore?" Severus asked flippantly. In reality, it was nothing but. He truly wanted to know what had been the catalyst to make Lucius decide on such a risky move.

"Honestly, Severus, it all started with a tiny seed Claudia Fairfax planted in my black heart when she stood on my balcony, called the Dark Lord 'a viper' and spoke what was true to his face. Although, it all was tragic, I truly admired her for standing up to him, and it frightened me to such an extent that for years I was terrified the Dark Lord would find me weak. But, he did eventually, so it is moot now. Then, after Azkaban, I looked at my wreck of a family and decided we would be better off dead than to continue living the way we were. We Malfoys are not cut out for such crushing devastation. So, I made the decision, and I was fortunate enough to have the full support of my wife and son behind me. And to think, it was all because of Claudia."

He looked intently into Severus' eyes and said, "Do not ever think Claudia's life was for naught. She had a noble purpose, and I would like to think she, in the end, had her revenge on the Dark Lord through us."

He raised his champagne flute. Severus did likewise. "To the brave and noble women who gave to the end their full measure of devotion," saluted Lucius.

"To a mother's love and a young girl's truthful heart," saluted Severus.

A beautiful brown-haired woman walked into the Great Hall. She was wearing a burnished red gown with a small train in the back. Her unruly hair was tamed into a tasteful French twist and her gloves were an opera length white. Her light brown eyes sparkled, and for a moment, there she was: Claudia on their betrothal night. He was dancing with her, kissing her, and slipping her engagement ring on her forefinger.

Flashes of the girl, his young lover, lying naked on his cloak, making love to her flew into the front of his mind. The feel of her breasts and the softness of her skin, like silk, never ceased to haunt him. And for so long, no matter how much he tried, she would not give in to his attempts to satisfy and pleasure her, until that fateful conversation,

and he had lied to her, giving her hope that he could learn to love her one day. She had unleashed her passion then and given up the fight. He had never deserved such unbridled trust, such sweet innocence, in the first place. Certainly, he did not *again*. Yet, he wanted Hermione with every fiber in his being. He could not control his urges. If he did not get away now, he would grab her, drag her ruthlessly into his rooms, and pummel himself into her body, making her scream his name until her throat was raw.

She made her way over to where he was standing and greeted him, Narcissa and Lucius politely. She smiled brightly at first, but the look on the professor's face was frightening, and the smile dissolved from her face. She was completely taken aback. Snape was furious with rage. His face was white, and his eyes were glaring daggers at her. She was actually terrified he would hurt her. She tried to start light conversation, but when she spoke, he threw his drink on the floor with a terrific smash and stalked out of the Great Hall, causing a mighty scene.

Hermione turned to Lucius and Narcissa. "What have I done? Why is he so angry with me?"

Both Lucius and Narcissa were taken aback by her attire and hair. Narcissa whispered to Lucius briefly, and he closed his eyes and nodded his head in realization. Narcissa explained to Hermione that she looked exactly like Claudia Fairfax on the night of her engagement with Severus. Hermione was shocked!

She turned to Lucius and said, "You never told me he had been engaged before!"

Lucius nodded his head in shame. "Honestly, Miss Granger, it is not my story to tell. You should talk to him. Ask him about Claudia Fairfax. That was her name."

She shook her head in sorrow. "I truly would, sir, but you saw how angry he was. I'm afraid of him. He's losing his grip on reality!"

She felt horrible and very guilty that she had inadvertently caused him so much pain, but he was becoming positively unhinged! For the first time, Hermione Granger found herself at a complete loss how to approach her problem with Professor Snape. Just leaving now was no longer an option. She cared too much, and she had struggled too hard to keep him alive after that terrible attack in the Shrieking Shack only to lose him now. It was time to face the reality...whatever that was.

A/N: Up next: Hermione gets her fight on!

Part 3 - Chapter 4 - Hermione, the Woman

Chapter 14 of 15

Hermione finally confronts Severus about his past.

A/N: There will be one more chapter after this. Thanks again to my beta, MadBrilliant, and to those who read and review! I hope you enjoy this long-awaited chapter.

After a while to consider things, Hermione's anger started to rise up within her. Hermione was angry *Damn it if I am going to allow this to continue and let myself be intimidated!* She strode fearlessly into the dungeons ready for the confrontation of her life. She was going to face that git and tell him exactly what she thought about him and then demand he tell her about Claudia Fairfax since he was obviously picturing and fantasizing about her as the mysterious woman anyway!

She banged as hard as she could on the door to his private rooms.

"Get away!" she heard him snarl.

She gave the door a withering glare. The smug witch that refused to open for her since she didn't have the password smiled nastily as if she were saying, "I told you so!"

Hermione wasn't backing down. She banged fiercely and screamed at the door, "Open this door, Severus Snape, or I swear by all that is holy, I shall start destroying every phial and ingredient in your stores!"

That did it. He flung open the door, and she was faced with a man with an anger that she had never seen before. The rage on his face was so potent that she felt she should seriously consider turning her tail and running for the hills. But then she squared her shoulders and remembered why she was here in the first place.

"Step aside, and let me in!" she barked at him.

"No!" he spat angrily. "Now get the fuck away from me!" he snarled.

She was blind with anger now. She pointed her wand at him, and he chuckled. "What do you think you're going to do with that?" he sneered.

"I am not here for games, Professor!" she warned. "Now step aside! You and I have some unfinished business to attend to!"

He silently let her pass. Now she was in his inner sanctum. *What now? Okay, Hermione, get a grip!* she told herself.

"You are a spiteful, petty man. I have had quite enough of your abuse and I want...no, I DEMAND you tell me who Claudia Fairfax is!" she yelled.

He strode to her and grabbed her by her arm and pulled her to him.

"You want know about Claudia?" he asked in a deadly whisper. "Why don't I demonstrate for you exactly who she was to me?"

He was waiting for her to turn and run screaming from him, but she didn't back away. He was incensed *Did this idiot girl have no sense of self-preservation? Well, I will have to take this further to make my point!*

He jerked her flush against him and yanked up her dress to her waist. Her eyes were wide and full of terror. She seemed unable to move.

"You wonder why I treat you with such contempt?" he sneered. "You really want to know why I degrade you, insult you, and abuse you verbally?"

She nodded, aware that his hands were sliding slowly up and down her arse.

"I don't trust myself around you. And now you have entered the devil's lair, what should I do? Perhaps I should do all the things I have imagined in my deranged mind.

What should I do first? Which fantasy should I indulge myself with first?" he murmured dangerously.

Hermione looked into his feral eyes. His lank, greasy hair draped his pale face, making him look scarier than she could ever remember. He was so close to her face. What was he going to do to her? Should she run or maybe call his bluff? Perhaps this was all a tactic to terrify her?

She decided to call his bluff. She threw her arms around him and kissed him wildly on the lips. Snape felt his mind shatter into a million pieces, and all the grief, rage, lust and pain rushed out. He grabbed the witch and began to tear off her dress. Hermione shook as he overpowered her. *What have I done?* she thought. She was finding herself strangely aroused by his ferocity. He dragged her to his bed and unceremoniously threw her on it. She watched him quickly take off his clothes.

What the hell is wrong with this girl? Why isn't she screaming and trying to run?

He watched in disbelief as she took off her bra and knickers. She got up on her knees, hands on hips, and looked up at him standing next to the bed in complete disbelief at the sight in front of him.

This is it! He wants me and he has wanted me so much he's tried to run me out! Damn it if I'll let him. But damn him if I'm going to be a substitute either!

He took a step back. *This woman is not Claudia. Claudia never had the guts, the ability to stand up to me...until the end that is, but there is no Dark Lord anymore.*

"Hermione, I apologize, I..." His words failed him.

"Let's make this clear! I am Hermione, and I will not be a substitute for Claudia or Lily. Am I understood?" she hollered at him with anger in her eyes.

He was stunned. There she was, in her wild hair and naked body on her knees in his bed! And she was demanding satisfaction from him! *Lily never wanted me, and Claudia was just a pawn in the Dark Lord's game. She just did what she was told. But Hermione demands for herself! What kind of woman is this?*

Hermione was beaming inside. She felt she had finally cracked the man. He obediently walked over to her, but he did not cower. He was on his guard and did not trust himself. *Is she ready for all the things I want to do to her?* he wondered.

He grabbed a fistful of her hair and pulled her head back as he bored into her eyes. "I am an evil man, Hermione. I have destroyed a woman that I have loved for most of my life and another woman who loved me so much it cost her her life. I have nothing to give you but pain. Is that what you want, Hermione? The pain and hurt? That is all I have to offer anymore."

She wrenched herself free from his grasp and glared angrily into his black eyes.

"I am not these women. I am my own woman. I decide what I shall have in my life. And not to completely dismantle the lie you have constructed about yourself, I'll leave that job to you, but *just* to shake the foundation a little, you do not possess that much power, Severus Snape!"

He looked at her, completely shocked. "Everything I touch, I destroy," he said brokenly.

She was getting impatient. "Self-fulfilling bullshit!" she spat. "I think you lost them because you drove them out. I think you took choices away from them instead of putting a little faith in them. Well, I am no one's puppet, and I will not take orders from *you or anyone else!* I've wanted you for too long. You aren't going to drive me out now!" she roared.

He was broken down and weary. He didn't want to argue anymore. She grabbed his shoulders, pulled him to her, and pressed her naked body to his. She kissed him with a passion that was so sweet he wanted to cry. He didn't want to think anymore; she obviously wanted him to take her.

He pinned her to the bed and furiously devoured her. He bit and sucked on every inch of flesh he could find. He captured her breasts and suckled and bit them as she writhed and gasped underneath him. He spread her legs and lavished his mouth and tongue on her core. She screamed out as she rode out her climax, and he rose above her, grasping her hands above her head as he hungrily plundered her mouth. She did not fight him. *She is amazing!* he thought.

He looked intensely into her eyes, his lips so close to hers. "Hermione, you have surpassed every woman I have known. And I have wanted you, but I never thought you would want me. I never believed this day would come! I swear, if this is what you want, I will never love any other woman. Only you," he said passionately.

"It is, Severus, it is," she whispered.

Then, without a word, he thrust himself into her, filling her to the hilt. She was shocked, and he saw a flash of pain wash across her face. He did not move and furrowed his brows.

"You're a virgin?" he breathed.

"Not anymore," she whispered painfully.

He closed his eyes in agony.

She knew he was upset. "Please, Severus," she whispered. "Don't stop now," she said breathlessly.

He began to thrust gently and felt the tears stream down his face and drip onto the sweet body underneath him. He would not take her like a rutting animal. He loved her. He didn't feel sorry for her, and he did not feel an obsession for her. She was Hermione, brilliant Hermione, and the brave Hermione, who offered herself knowing what kind of man he was.

He felt her struggling and trying to achieve her satisfaction, but did not know how to do so. He tilted her hips and pulled her legs up, thrusting in earnest. He never looked away from her. Hermione.

He heard her cry out again, arching her back, screaming his name in pleasure.

Severus!

His mind flashed back to brandy-colored eyes, and he broke down sobbing as he emptied himself into his beautiful Hermione.

He did not stop his sobbing. Hermione slid out from underneath him and hugged his body with her own. She protectively covered his body as he cried out repeatedly between his choking sobs as he gripped the sheets with white-knuckled anguish, "*I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry!*" Hermione knew he was not talking to her. He was caught in a wave of pain from the past. There was going to be so much to talk about; there were years of anguish that needed to be released. There would be time. She would not leave. Ever...

She did not sleep, but watched him in his repose. It was the sleep of the emotionally exhausted. When he woke, he would be more vulnerable than he had ever been in his life. She steeled herself for the battle to come. He probably would try to run her out or insult her in an attempt to get her to hate him again. But she would not allow it. They were meant to be, and he was not going to run her out of his life. She sat sipping her tea and watched the sun peek out over the horizon through the enchanted window.

Part 5 - Chapter 5 - Hermione, the Woman

Chapter 15 of 15

Severus tells Hermione the whole story of Claudia and Lily. He confesses his sins and his wrongs. Will Hermione be able to accept him after all he has done?

They sat across from each other, drinking tea and pretending to eat breakfast. Hermione had made it clear earlier that she would not force him to talk about Claudia or Lily until he was ready, but he *would* have to talk about it eventually.

For a long time, he sat in his black bathrobe, legs crossed, staring off into distance not facing her. He rested his left elbow on the arm of his plush chair, tapping a clenched fist against his mouth. His eyes were red and swollen. He was still very emotional, and Hermione waited as he periodically broke down and cried. Then he would gain his composure and stare off into space. The cycle repeated itself numerous times. Finally, he blew his nose and came out of his stupor. Hermione handed him a fresh cup of tea, and he gratefully took it. He sighed and started to tell his story.

He told Hermione about the Slytherin know-it-all that was just a simple, uncomplicated girl who had been born into a complex, sick world and had been unable to escape it. He, along with her father, and Voldemort, decided her fate, and he explained to Hermione about the old traditions, including the archaic "Wife in Waiting" status. He told her he first asserted his rights when she was sixteen, and he was eighteen. After her graduation, she lived with him at Malfoy Manor. She was eighteen, and he was twenty. He reminisced to Hermione about their talks, her superb intelligence, how she infuriated him with her textbook answers to questions (at this Hermione flinched), and their trysting in the outdoors. With shame he told Hermione about his deception, his lie to her that he would try to love her, but in reality, he only desired her body and wanted her to respond to him in bed to feed his ego and assuage his guilt over taking advantage of her honest love for him.

"Looking back, I realize that she was a very intriguing and intelligent young woman that stimulated my mind as well as my body. But I could not and *did not* want to replace Lily in my mind. Because of that, Claudia was a threat. I did not handle the delicate balance well. I was cruel and thoughtless, and at times deliberately cut her down, held her at a distance, and at times only coming around to have sex with her. I did not want to risk her breaching the walls I had built around me when Lily walked out of my life. I was drunk with the power I had as my status in *her* society, which gives all the power to the wizard and forces the witch to comply. I took a perverse pleasure for a while in dominating her since she was the true aristocratic pure-blood and I was only a half-blood. I hurt her so much, to my everlasting shame," he confessed.

He told her about the fight and the box she had found with the letter that had destroyed everything. Finally, he recalled how she died, and how cruel and heartless he had been just before Voldemort murdered her.

After a period of silence, in which Hermione was unsure if she should speak, he gave a chuckle out of the blue and told her about his precious image of the real Claudia that he respected that had nothing to do with his selfishness or Voldemort's needs.

"One day, I watched her study. Her hair was all wild and untamed because she had this habit of fisting it and messing with it when she got frustrated with her work. She had ink stains on her fingers and an ink smudge on her nose. I remember telling myself that was the real Claudia, and I fixed that image in my mind," he said brokenly, his voice thick with emotion. Hermione closed her eyes in pain, realizing truly how much she must have reminded him of her and the guilt...oh the guilt! Her eyes welled up with tears.

He told her about Dumbledore's death, and how eerily similar his death was to Claudia's. He also admitted his belief that for a period of time he became insane after he cast the Killing Curse on Dumbledore and fought Potter before fleeing the castle.

He closed his eyes and leaned his head back onto the backrest as the tears wound their way down his face. Hermione felt for the first time that every insult, every cutting remark, and each cruel name he directed at her now made sense. This Claudia was very much like herself in several ways, but as Severus told her about how he had controlled her, bullied her, and manipulated her to suit his needs, she realized that was where the similarities ended. Although inwardly she applauded Claudia's *chutzpah* just before her death, it proved to be foolish and suicidal to challenge Voldemort.

Severus began to talk about Lily, the fierce protector of people who were weaker and vulnerable. Hermione already knew so much from what Harry had shared from Snape's memories about their relationship, so it did not take long for Hermione to see where she differed from Lily. Yes, she was a crusader at heart, but she had a stronger nature. In Hermione's mind, Lily had strung him along with false hope for a future. She also did not possess the high self-esteem Lily possessed. Lily was a scrapper and warrior naturally. Hermione had to summon a lot within herself to rise up and openly stand up and fight against injustice. It just did not come naturally. She had to think it all out and plan a course of action, not blindly chase after people. As Severus regaled her with stories of Lily's cheeky behavior with teachers, Hermione cringed. As a student, she had been far too needy and too eager to please than risk showing cheek, but again, that was Lily and not she.

Hermione thought more about the two women. The Muggle-born connection, the brilliance in Potions he admired in her and Lily, but her struggles in Defense mirrored Claudia's struggle in Potions. Both she and Claudia were bookish "know-it-alls" who worked hard to conquer the subjects that gave them such grief. Hermione started to understand some of the deep hatred Severus carried inside. Claudia and Lily would never have the chance to reach their potentials. She could and would. But was he going to be able to let them go and be free to love her? She prayed he would.

Finally the truth was out, and the two lovers sat facing one another. Snape was a nervous wreck. Would she turn him away now? Well, at least he told her the truth just before he broke her barrier that she had surpassed every woman he had ever known. And it was the truth. Lily and Claudia were only incomplete pieces, while Hermione was everything he could ever want and desire in a woman. She was fierce and passionate, intellectual and determined to succeed, but she knew her own mind and she always said what she meant and meant what she said. She would never confuse him like Lily had. And she would never let him get away with the bullshit they *both* knew he was capable of. For that, if she would stay, he would spend every moment adoring her and would do anything she asked if only she would stay and be his.

Hermione stood up and began to putter around the room. She transfigured a quill into a toothbrush and went into the bathroom without a word. Snape was frozen in his seat. *What now? Is she leaving?* He heard the water running and he waited afraid and alone, resigned to his fate of rejection. It was what he only deserved. After all he had done, he deserved nothing beautiful like Hermione. If memories of loving her last night would have to last him for the rest of his life, he would have to take comfort that he had one blissful, perfect night.

She came out naked, her hair brushed, face scrubbed clean, and her smile bright. She walked past him and crawled back into bed. He just stared at her, captivated by her. She was so sweet and kind.

She smiled at him and said, "Aren't you coming back to bed?"

He literally kissed every inch of her body. She giggled and got shy when he kissed her feet and nipped at her toes, but let him do what he desired. He ran his hands through her hair and got lost in all the waves and tangles. It was perfect. She was perfect. He could not speak; the words could not form. He just decided to show her with his body how much he loved and desired her. He felt so horrible about how he ripped into her body. He didn't think to consider that she might have been a virgin. Before the Dark Lord fell, yes, but not now.

"Hermione," he whispered. "Are you okay? I know I hurt you." His face was full of pain and anguish for her.

She smiled and replied saucily, "But, how can I not be okay, when you kissed it and made it better?"

He laughed heartily, recalling how he had just moments ago, licked and lapped at her core until she broke apart screaming his name and every other deity she could think of.

He took her and held her close as he nudged her thighs apart with his own. He held her tightly and so close they could touch their foreheads and stare intensely into each other's eyes. He kept his eyes on her and whispered for her to look at him as he took her. His eyes did not leave her as his erection easily glided into her dripping, wet sex. Her eyes grew wide as he filled her, and he slowly thrust into her, pushing himself in further with each stroke. She was starting to feel the need aching inside her, and she started to wiggle her bum to find the angle she needed.

"Severus," she whimpered, "I need..."

He grinned wolfishly and grabbed her bum, tilting her, and began to stroke vigorously inside her. She arched her back and cried out.

Snape was lost in her. His head was thrown back, mouth open as he grabbed her thighs, hiking them to her chest. He pounded furiously into her, crying out her name and his love for her.

Hermione was overcome with the passion he felt for her. Each thrust awakened something deliciously new and exciting that she never wanted to end. She felt him drawing out her orgasm so exquisitely slow that when she finally succumbed, she was floating along an intense wave of pleasure that rose and fell over and over. As she gently descended into her afterglow, she watched as her lover came into his own shattering climax as he fiercely drove into her.

"I... Hermione! *I love you!*

He finally stilled but remained hovering over her. He opened his eyes and was captivated by warm brown eyes glazed over with peace and love. She reached out her arms to him, welcoming him to rest. He collapsed onto her, burying his face into her luscious breasts and sighed as she enveloped him into her forgiving arms. It was far from over. There would still be demons to fight and fears to confront, but she loved him and he loved her.

It was enough.

He could start again. He had found a way...

The End, or the Beginning. It is however you wish to view it.

A/N: I am so grateful for those of you who have stayed on with this angst-filled and sad fic. I hope that you have found the ending to be hopeful, which is how I wanted to end it. The torments that have plagued Snape for years can not be erased by a good shag, yet I do believe that the love of a good woman can make a hell of a difference in a man's life if he is open to that love.

Thanks to my beta, MadBrillaint, and those who have stayed on and left my so many encouraging reviews. Lots of chocolate and kisses to you all!

Livvy