

Example of Widowhood

by sc010f

Hermione Weasley's world falls apart. Or does it? Set at least sixteen years after the Final Battle. DH/Epilogue Compliant. Sort of. Based on Patronius' story of the widow from the "Satyricon". Complete in 6

I - Hermione Gets the News

Chapter 1 of 6

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AN: thanks to ladyinthecloak for her invaluable help with the blasted commas!

War Hero Dies in Freak Accident screamed the headline of the *Daily Prophet*, and Hermione Weasley's world ground to a halt. She sat at her desk in the Ministry staring at the headline, wondering why nobody had thought to inform her before the paper decided to. Before she could even move to the Floo to inquire, Harry's tousled head poked through her door.

"Oh, gods, Hermione, did you hear?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied, "but I haven't gotten the details. Why didn't they inform me first?"

"Apparently Rita was on the scene when it happened, and she couldn't wait for the authorities to do their job."

"Harry, this is terrible!"

"I know. I'm so sorry, Hermione. I'd always hoped you two would work it out. He just needed time to adjust."

"Work it out? No, Harry, not that! He had fifteen years! What I'm worried about is how are the kids going to react? And what am I supposed to do?"

"Rose already knows. I saw her in the hall with Hugo. They're old enough to handle this properly, and you've never kept anything from them. There's no love lost there, I think." Harry did have the grace to try and look regretful, Hermione noticed. She would have looked regretful too, had Ron had the grace to clear off a decade earlier.

As if on cue, Rose and Hugo burst through the door.

"Mum!" Rose ran to her mother at once, hugging her tightly. Hermione ran one hand over her sixteen-year-old daughter's hair and motioned to her fourteen-year-old son to join them. After a moment, Hugo moved into the embrace.

"Well, that's that," Hermione's boy said. His face lit up with a grin. "The old bastard finally kicked it."

"Hugo Weasley, speak more respectfully of your father. Your grandparents were most definitely married at his conception," Hermione snapped. Hugo rolled his eyes, and

Rose lifted her head from her mother's shoulder.

"You don't expect us to be sad, do you?" she asked incredulously.

"Privately, children, we're having a bloody big bonfire. Publicly, however, as the bereaved family of the Great War Hero, we are overcome with grief. Is that clear?" Hermione struck her "lecturing pose" for the benefit of her offspring and best friend.

"Your mum's right," Harry chipped in. Ron may have turned out to be a petulant piece of work (like the vocabulary, Hermione?) with serious fidelity issues, but the world doesn't need to know that. The next days are going to be difficult; not because you miss the sot who begat you, Hugo, but because the rest of the world expects you to. Is that clear?"

Hugo sulked. It was his specialty. Then he brightened up. "So, when do we get the bonfire?" he asked.

II - Hermione Prepares

Chapter 2 of 6

Molly, Harry and the children prepare for Ron's memorial service. Hermione takes some advice.

AN: Thanks to melusin for her tireless pursuit and prevention of comma, semicolon, and Brit-pick abuse.

Rating is for language and subject matter.

Oh, and a disclaimer: not mine, no denarii.

"Did you see this?" Hermione waved the offending paper at Harry. "This is utter tripe!"

"I know it is, Hermione, but you have to understand: Molly wanted to make this a big deal. Ron was Companion to Me, and Wife to You, and all of that. Since you told her that you didn't care and could, er, do whatever she liked with the funeral arrangements, she did." Harry ducked the flying piece of china and twitched his wand to repair it when it shattered against the wall.

"I never agreed to this!"

"Actually," Harry raked his fingers through his hair, "you did when you told Molly that she could 'screw herself in the arse with the memorial bust of her misbegotten, troll-bitten, red-headed...'"

"She took that as consent?" Hermione threw another teacup to relieve her feelings. Harry sighed; he loved his best friend, but he wished that she had not taken to throwing things when angry. Ron had taught her early on in their alleged relationship to throw a Quaffle, and that had been the end of non-projectile-tossing Hermione.

"Mum, that's enough!" Rose's voice cut across the clamor of shattering china. "It won't be difficult: you just have to keep vigil at the grave for a few nights."

"And I also have to march through the streets, wailing like a madwoman and expose myself to ridicule and commentary. I couldn't stand to spend five minutes together in the same room with your father. What makes you think that I can stand to spend a few nights alone with his corpse?"

"He won't talk back?" Hugo was never far behind his sister these days. Hermione's rant stilled as her son's logic sank in. She smiled and ruffled his hair. Hugo ducked out of the way and then sidled back to his mother for a hug. She kissed the top of his head. It wasn't fair that his father was such a tosser, she thought. It would have been fun to bring up this boy with a dad instead of on her own.

"In any event," Harry continued, "Minerva's been 'round to the Burrow, and she and the Hogwarts faculty are going to be there, for ceremony, anyway."

"That is supposed to cheer me up?"

"Well, it's not like you'll be by yourself the whole time." Harry looked a little sheepish.

Hermione sighed and made another mark in the Things Ron Owes Me For column. She wasn't objecting to seeing Minerva, Hagrid, Filius, and the rest of them, but the strain of keeping her true feelings for her husband hidden from them was going to be great.

"It looks like there's no getting out of this, is there?" she finally asked.

"Fraid not, Mum," Rose replied. "But don't fret; once our time is over, we'll start the bonfire in the back garden and get the piss-up started. You'll see: it'll be worth it."

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The prospect of the world-class booze up within the bosom of her family, who understood the truth about Ron (even if it did include Ginny), was enough to buoy Hermione's spirits for her to survive the initial ceremonies and services of the funeral.

As the Muddywamp in charge of the service droned on and on about the tragedy of losing Ron in his youth, and the glory with which he had covered himself in his short lifetime, Hermione took the opportunity to examine her fellow mourners.

The Hogwarts faculty from her youth was present – with the exception of Professor Snape. Hermione was not particularly surprised. After his unexpected (and in some cases unwelcome) survival of The Snakebite, Snape had been tried despite Harry's best efforts to restore his good name. No longer accepted into polite society (thanks in large part to Ron's efforts as the Auror in charge of his probation), Snape, Hermione assumed, was floating about doing menial labor.

The Muddywamp wrapped up his two-hour address, and the congregation rose to their feet. Hermione prepared herself for what was going to be the most difficult task of the week: living with the dead. Thankfully, Molly had agreed to Ginny's request that the coffin be opaque. The seven-foot tall statue outside the mausoleum was enough of a testament to Molly's spectacular lack of taste without having to subject Hermione and the mourners to the shocking visage of a purple-faced, dead Ronald. It was fortunate, Hermione reflected, that the prostitute with whom Ron had been when he died had had the foresight to remove the green leopard-print choker before the

authorities had arrived. She looked around and saw him standing in the back of the crowd of mourners looking more bereaved than she felt. That surprised her: Hermione had always supposed that the "heart of gold" phenomenon was just a myth.

Being sure to drag her feet properly, sniffle loudly, and bow her head deeply, Hermione followed the coffin into the mausoleum. In the mausoleum was placed a high stool, a table, and a pallet upon which, if exhausted by her grieving, Hermione could rest. Carefully arranging her skirts and veil, Hermione seated herself upon the stool as the other mourners formed a line, passing first by the coffin to say goodbye and then by Hermione to console her. Hermione noted that only a few of the Aurors with whom Ron had worked tried to pinch her arse. She supposed that at thirty-four, she was no longer pinching material. That suited her just fine: it would have been a shame to have to have more than one Auror funeral that day.

III - Hermione's Meeting

Chapter 3 of 6

Bored and tired, Hermione finds some company.

AN: A million and two thanks to melusin for fab. beta-ing and Brit-picking! Mistakes belong to me.

Oh, and I don't get a single denarius for this.

Three days into her vigil, Hermione Weasley was bored. Her children had been thoughtful enough to provide her with reading material, but that had to be secreted away when devotees of the Cult of Ronald Bilius Weasley came to pay their respects. Unfortunately, the stream of mourners started early in the morning and did not usually end until after the sun had set. On the upside, once the visiting stopped, the cemetery was a quiet place for Hermione to catch up on her reading. This had lasted until the third evening when she finished her seventh book.

Stepping out of the mausoleum, Hermione stretched and looked about the cemetery. It was a pretty, peaceful place: the willows gently caressed some of the more modest gravestones, and the stream that wound through the property burred merrily in the gloaming. The swish of the gardener's rake provided a counterpoint to the brook.

Hermione froze. Since when did the gardener do his work after dark? Sliding her wand down from her sleeve, she stepped off the little porch of the mausoleum and looked around. Upon the path, lighted by low lamps, stood a tall figure swinging a rake, gently moving the gravel around.

Unable to restrain her curiosity, Hermione stepped forward and onto a twig. The loud crack resounded through the graveyard, and the figure straightened up and looked towards her. Black hair surrounded a white face that seemed to glow in the dim light. Hermione brought her hand to her mouth and gasped.

"Professor Snape!" Suddenly, the world seemed to spin and go dark. The next thing she knew, she was on the ground leaning against the unsightly statue of Ron. At her side knelt the ghost Severus Snape.

"Not 'Professor Snape', Mrs. Weasley," growled the ghost.

"Wha...?" Hermione waved her hand in the general direction of the apparition. "Ghosts. I've been in this damned graveyard too long."

"Why would you assume I am a ghost?" inquired the shade. "I assure you, Mrs. Weasley, I am as real and as solid as you and that eyesore against which you are leaning. Surely it would take more than a serpent and a weasel to lay me low?"

"Wea - weasel?"

"Your departed beloved."

"Oh, gods. You're the groundskeeper? Ron told me you had a job, but I wasn't expecting..." she trailed off.

"Obviously not," Snape replied, shifting so his long legs were stretched out before him. "For your information, I am also the Executive Vice President for Excavation and Exhumation at this particular facility. I don't just sweep up."

"Executive Vice... Are you having me on?"

"Not at all, I assure you. Now, if you are feeling better, I have work to do, and you will no doubt want to return to your grieving. I should warn you, however, Mrs. Weasley, do not open the door to your mausoleum tonight unless," he said ghoulishly, "you do actually want to see a ghost." Snape made to rise, but Hermione grasped his sleeve.

"Wait. Why?" she asked. "And what makes you think I want to return to my grieving anyway?"

"Getting bored already, Mrs. Weasley? I'm surprised. I have been watching you these past three days, and you seem to be quite bereaved."

"Leave off, Snape. If you've been watching me these past three days, you've seen exactly what's been going on, and it hasn't been grieving." Annoyance, exhaustion, and lack of food other than fruit and water drove Hermione to bark at the irritant beside her. "I haven't had a decent meal in three days, a decent book in two hours, an intelligent conversation since I found out that the tosser who was my husband had died, or, most importantly, a bath in almost a week! I'm tired, I'm angry; I'm bored, and I stink!"

"I noticed. Cleansing charms not working for you?"

"You know they only go so far," Hermione snapped. "And anyway, you're the first intelligent creature apart from Harry," Snape snorted, "and my children who've actually come 'round. So keep your arse on that ground, Mr. Groundskeeper, and entertain me!"

"Well, since you put it so charmingly, how can I refuse? We should go inside, however; there are... well, things you shouldn't know about afoot tonight." Snape pulled a bottle from beneath his robes and, using the rake for leverage, rose. He offered his hand to Hermione, and together the two of them adjourned to the relative comforts of Ron's mausoleum, the pallet, and a bottle of Ogden's Worst.

Once they were settled, Hermione fired the first shot:

"Tell me, how does a Potions master, Headmaster of Hogwarts, Spy for the Order of the Phoenix, former Death Eater, and subject of several of my lascivious schoolgirl fantasies end up being an Executive Vice President for... whatever, a gravedigger and groundskeeper?"

Snape choked on his Ogden's and looked at her in wild surmise. When he could breathe again, he replied, "Well, since you asked . . ."

IV - Hermione's Evening

Chapter 4 of 6

Shared confidences in the crypt

AN: More thanks than I can calculate to melusin for beta, brit-pick, and general awesome-ness!

And a disclaimer: these characters are not mine. I get no denarii for playing with them.

Several hours later, the candles in the mausoleum had burned down, and Hermione and Severus were pleasantly drunk.

"So, it's not so bad, really," a mellow Severus was observing. "People leave me alone; I can work on some brewing in the off-hours and no bloody snakes."

"Move to Ireland."

"Tosser wouldn't let me."

"Oh. Sorry about that."

"Not your fault." Severus waved his hand magnanimously. "You had nothing to do with it, I'm sure."

"No, Tosser wouldn't let me. I got stuck with the part-time office job and the kids."

"Sorry about that."

"Not your fault. Besides, I got the better end of the deal with the kids. Rose and Hugo both saw Ron for what he was very early. I probably helped them, but if you'd known Ron, and I mean really known him, it wasn't difficult. Rose and Hugo are smart kids. I know they miss their father sometimes, but Uncle Harry and Auntie Ginny do a good job. I made sure they never lied to them, at any rate. Ron was always lying to us. Did I tell you about the prostitutes?"

"Yes."

"After I found out, I stayed as far away from him as I could. Molly, Harry, and Ginny took longer to come to the party on that, but the penny dropped eventually when he showed up drunk to a Christmas Lunch. I mean, you're supposed to get drunk *at* lunch, not before! Is there any more in that bottle?"

"Here."

"Ta very much."

"So what happened?"

"What happened to who?"

"Whom. What happened when Tosser showed up at Christmas Lunch drunk?"

"Well, it wasn't that he was drunk, really. It was the three-knut-for-an-hour hooker that he brought with him as his true love. The kids were there, too. I mean, it's nobody's fault, really; it's just that Ron fell in love. He did that a lot: at least three times a week. Fortunately, he was faithful. You know, Severus, he was more faithful than I was. Did you know, I did the maths one day?"

"Why am I not surprised?"

"I did. Stop laughing at me!"

"Do you see me smiling, Hermione?"

"I can hear you thinking."

"No, you can't."

"Whatever. Do you want to hear the rest of the story?"

"Pardon me. Pray continue, Mrs. Weasley."

"Prat. Anyway, I did the maths once, and I found out that Ron wasn't actually a tosser. He was faithful to forty-seven different women! Believe me, he was getting his fancy tickled quite frequently. That's quite a feat, you know. I was only faithful to him. Anyway, we had to keep it quiet, and even Ron realized that after a while."

"Still, that's quite an achievement. Keeping him and forty-seven women pure as the driven snow."

"Yellow snow."

"Indeed. I'm curious; how did you manage that?"

Hermione twinkled at him drunkenly. "Magic."

Severus snorted. Hermione shifted so she was leaning against him more comfortably.

"Tell me, Severus," she asked. "Why do you have a rake? I mean, Ron didn't take your wand, did he?"

"A rake? Oh, that's part of my probation. I can only use magic during daylight hours. They have a tracker on me similar to the one they have on underage wizards and witches. I can brew and cast spells and do all that sort of thing between sunup and sundown, but after dark, I'm essentially a Squib. It's fairly quiet around here, as you can imagine, so I don't really need my magic. Doesn't mean I don't miss it, however. But I have to admit, and I wouldn't do this unless I was drunk. Which, it seems, I am: doing menial labor in the evening is a good way for me to relax. There are other reasons... Hermione, what are you doing?"

"Testing for your improper use of magic. Your voice is definitely casting a spell."

"Feels more like you're tickling the back of my neck."

"Is that a problem?"

"No, it was more of a scientific enquiry."

"Mmmm, it's a nice neck, too." Hermione's hand smoothed his hair away as she knelt behind him, pressing her lips to the exposed skin.

"Mrs. Weasley, you are drunk."

"Why, yes, Mr. Snape, I believe I am." Her lips moved to tickle his ear. "Now, let me tell you about my lascivious schoolgirl fantasies I used to entertain about you whilst Ron was out entertaining his forty-seven loves."

"Me? Really?"

"Really. Now, the first one begins with the two of us in the mausoleum of my late, unlamented husband..." Hermione pulled herself around so she was sitting in Severus' lap and pressed her lips to his. When he didn't resist or reciprocate, Hermione drew back.

"Problem?" asked Severus.

"No. I just, well, I was expecting you to react."

"Ah, I see. Will this do?"

"Very much so, Severus."

"How about this?"

Hermione giggled. "Even better. Ooh, Professor, I've been a very naughty girl..."

"Leave off! I like my women a little riper. A little more like you." Severus tightened his hold on the witch.

"Like me? Really?"

"Exactly like you. Now, did you want to talk or be ravished?"

V - Hermione Takes Charge

Chapter 5 of 6

It's the morning after, and there are some issues. Rating is for language and suggestion of distasteful subjects.

AN: Thanks again to melusin, best beta and Brit-picker ever!

Disclaimer: I get no denarii for this. Just the satisfaction of reading your reviews.

Severus woke up some time before sunrise the next morning. His head and his back hurt. The culprit for the headache was lying innocently on the floor of the mausoleum, a green glass bottle with a tan label. The culprit for the backache was lying innocently on the pallet next to him, her hair a tangle, snoring gently, cheek firmly pressed into the puddle of drool on the only pillow.

It was a little stuffy in the tomb, and Severus donned his trousers and ventured outside. In the predawn gloom, he noticed that his business associates had been and come and gone. Stretching out his back, he walked over to the freshest of the graves to inspect their work.

Hermione woke some time before dawn to an impressive volley of profanity coming from out of doors. Hurriedly throwing on a robe, she scrambled off of the pallet, wincing slightly at the soreness of her muscles, and rushed out of the mausoleum. There she found Snape, pacing in front of a newly installed gravesite. This one, unlike Ron's, had a slightly transparent coffin so that mourners and passersby alike could see the silhouette of the recently departed. Eventually, Hermione knew, the coffin would be lowered into the ground, and nature would take its course. But for at least the next three weeks, the stasis charms would hold.

Snape was exercising the outer limits of his vocabulary with a skill that made Hermione blench. When he finally paused for breath, she asked, "Mr . . . Severus, what on earth is wrong?"

"What's wrong? What's wrong?"

"Yes, it's a reasonable question. Why are you so upset?"

"Nothing! Nothing's wrong at all except those shit for brains dunderheads have taken the wrong fucking body!" Severus resumed his pacing, tearing at his hair.

"Wrong body?"

"Is there an echo out here? Yes, wrong body!"

"Why would anybody take a body?"

"Because, you stupid woman, cadavers are very useful in certain obscure potions and practices."

"Dark magic?"

"Not all the time," Severus replied testily. "Our world isn't always in touch with the times, as no doubt you know, having spent the last three days in a bloody tomb! Certain legitimate businessmen discreetly supply certain research institutions with subjects that those institutions wouldn't necessarily have access to."

"Grave robbing?"

"Are you incapable of comprehending English? It's not grave robbing *per se*. It's more exhumation for scientific purposes."

"How do you fit into this?"

"Not telling."

"They pay you, don't they? Oh, gods! They pay you to turn a blind eye. And then they go and unearth fresh corpses! Oh, I think I'm going to be sick." Hermione sagged against the statue of Ron.

"Me, too. They're only supposed to take the cadavers that nobody can see and then put everything back where they found it."

"Except the body."

"Obviously, except the body. Only this time, they robbed the wrong grave." Severus sank to the ground next to Hermione and put his head in his hands. "I'm sunk. When my boss finds out about this, I'll be sacked," he groaned.

"For letting the grave-robbers in?"

"No," Severus snorted, "for allowing them to exhume the wrong grave. I only get a small percentage of the money here. My boss gets more than I do."

Hermione shuddered. "This is just too macabre. Wait a minute. Is that why you didn't object to me... Oh, gods! You wanted to distract me from... Severus Snape, you low down son of a misbegotten troll!" Turning to her erstwhile lover, she began to pummel him. "How could I have fallen for such utter shit! You bastard! You conniving git! And I thought you were interested in me!"

"Hermione, stop! Ouch! Hermione, leave off! I am interested in you, you stupid woman! Ever since you left Hogwarts, and Tosser was assigned to my case, I've been interested in you! I've watched you these last few days, pretending to grieve, completely taken in by it, thinking you actually missed the red-headed whatsit, and finally, you admit to me that there's a chance for us. And then you showed me in no uncertain terms last night! Twice! I am interested! I want you; I respect you; heaven help me, I actually like you! That troll never should have put his filthy hands on you!"

Thankfully, the pummeling stopped. "Really?" asked Hermione.

Severus sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Really."

"Wow."

"Wow?"

"Is there an echo out here? Yes, wow, Severus. Nobody's ever said that to me before. It means a lot."

"Well, I'm glad you think so. Now if we've finished with the pleasantries, why don't you get dressed? I should, too. The sun will be up soon, and you've got visitors to receive, and I've got bags to pack and a letter of resignation to write."

"Severus, wait. What happens then?"

"When?"

"After you resign."

"I'll probably be put back in prison. Was Tosser specific about the conditions of my probation?"

"Not really, why?"

"One of the conditions is that I hold down a job. I've been grave-digging for the last ten years now. If I get sacked or resign without the authorization of my probation officer (or his successor), it's back to jail."

"Severus, that's awful."

"Really? I hadn't noticed."

"Don't be snide. Wait! I've got an idea! We've a little more time before you have to open the gates, right?"

"Yes."

"But the sun's up, now."

"Mostly."

"So you can use magic."

"Hermione, where are you going... ? Oh, brilliant girl! My brilliant Hermione!"

"You're cute when you're poetic." Hermione giggled as they hurried back into the mausoleum. "Help me move this. *Alhomora!*" With a groan, the lid of Ron's coffin opened.

"Hermione, why is he purple?"

"You don't want to know. Here, help me shift him. That's it. Now, where's that empty grave?"

**

The family of Norton McAfee was surprised that their beloved father and grandfather had grown taller in the few days that he had been interred, but the helpful gardener pointed out to them that with these new cheap, semi-translucent coffins, one never knew what kind of image one would get. It didn't matter to them, really; as long as granddad was happy, they were happy as well.

VI - Hermione Comes Home

Chapter 6 of 6

Hermione returns to the bosom of her family. But who is there to greet her?

AN: Heartfelt thanks to melusin for her valiant effort dealing with commas, misuse of British English, ellipses, and all the other nasty surprises that came with this chapter.

And a disclaimer: I made no denarii from this. My only reward is your review!

When Hermione returned home after her vigil, she was greeted with drunken whoops and the smell of burning wood and poly-blend fabric. Rose rushed around the house to greet her exhausted mother,

"Mum! Welcome home! Phew, what's that smell?"

"Five days of cleansing charms and fresh grave. Give your poor, tired, old mum a hug, will you?"

"No, I smell something else. Something ... Is that sandalwood?"

"No! Drop it."

"Fine, Mum, whatever you say." Rose grabbed Hermione's hand and led her into the house. "The gang's all here, by the way."

"I'm thrilled. Right now, I want a shower."

"Right. Here you go, then. But hurry, there's a party in the back garden, and you're the guest of honor. Mum, you can tell me, what is that smell?"

"Nothing, and speaking of smells, what's the pong?"

"Oh, that. Stephan brought over Dad's gear the other day. He was pretty broken-hearted about the whole situation. I invited him to put it on the bonfire with all of Dad's Quidditch crap. Really round out the whole experience." Rose grinned impishly.

Hermione's heart swelled with pride. "That's my girl."

"I knew you'd be happy. Now hurry up, Mum. I want to get you blotto so you can spill nasty secrets about us to Stephan and Severus."

"Severus is here?" Hermione's heart stopped.

"Oh, yes! I invited him after I saw you two snogging last night outside Dad's bloody ugly mausoleum. I'd come by to see if you were still alive. You looked fairly happy, so I left."

Hermione's heart started beating again, grudgingly, and she climbed the stairs to shower.

Refreshed and rejuvenated, Hermione wandered to the back garden where the bonfire was burning merrily. Around the huge pyre were gathered Harry, Ginny, her children, Stephan, two Aurors with whom Hermione had got along, and Severus Snape. Hugo rushed up, his eyes shining, pulling Severus behind him.

"Mum, Mum! Look who came to your party! He's teaching me how to hex people, and he does it so much better than you! Watch this!" Hugo raised his wand preparatory to casting the hex, but Severus grabbed it.

"Not now, Hugo," he said. "We'll show your mum later."

"How did you manage to swing this?" asked Hermione.

"Oh, that was my doing," replied the younger of the Aurors. Hermione recalled vaguely that his name was Danny, and he was in his very early twenties. "Your Rose came round our office the other day and asked to see her dad's old case files. It seems she recognized the gardener from a photo your Ron brought home one night. We weren't going to allow her access, but she sat in the middle of the floor and refused to budge until she had gone through all of the old case files."

"And then I found him, Mum!" Rose exclaimed, attaching herself to Hermione. "The man in black that you were snogging the other night!"

"Rose Weasley!"

"Aw, leave off, Mum. Everybody here knows about Dad; we all support your right to snog whomever you choose! Besides, when I found him, I went to Danny here and had him help me go through the file. We discovered Dad's ridiculous probationary conditions and Uncle Harry's testimony and decided that the time had come to right some wrongs."

"After that it was simple," Danny chipped in. "Your Rose is a scary girl, Ms. Weasley: she all but dragged me and the file into Mr. Potter's office and yelled at him for a good hour and a half. I was impressed."

"Danny! How could you say I'm scary?"

"True, isn't it?"

"Hugo! That's not true!"

"Anyway," Harry cut across the bickering, "Rose sat herself down and showed me just what Ron had done. I made some Floo calls, and the next thing we knew, Sn-Severus had his parole ended, back pay awarded, is eligible for an Order of Merlin, and was free of doing menial labor! It's about time, too!"

"Thank you, Mr. Po-Harry," Severus ground out, looking like he had swallowed a frog.

"So, you're a free man," Hermione said.

"Indeed."

"What are you going to do?"

"I am uncertain. Mr. Po-Harry assures me that there are several institutions of higher learning that wish to employ me in their research laboratories, both for Potions and other practices. Apparently, they feel I have certain experiences and connections that would be beneficial. Right now, however, I am going to do something I should have done fifteen years ago."

"Oh? What's that?" Hermione asked.

Rose, Hugo, Danny, and Harry discreetly slipped away. Hermione noticed that Rose and Danny were holding hands. Then she noticed that Severus was holding her hand.

"Hermione Granger, will you marry me?"

Hermione frowned. "Severus Snape, have you lost your mind?" Severus' countenance began to darken, but before he could say anything. Hermione continued, "I've been married. I've been married for fifteen years. I don't want to be married anymore. I want my name back, and I want my life back. However, I also want something else even more important than that."

"What's that?" Severus voice had just a hint of sulkiness.

"Severus Snape, I want you in my bed. Right now. That pallet may have been romantic, but it's hell on my knees and your sciatica. So you just march your shapely arse upstairs. I'll bring the Ogden's, and we'll get pissed and take sexual advantage of one another. And then we'll have breakfast. After that, you're going to interview with those institutions, and I'm going to beat the shit out of Danny until he agrees not to touch my daughter until she turns eighteen. Rose is a sensible girl, so her lecture can wait, but she isn't that sensible. And then we're going to return here, and I'm not going to put you down again until at least next Thursday. Is that understood?"

Severus sucked in his stomach and saluted, "Yes, ma'am!" Then he grabbed the love of his life around her waist, and the two of them manhandled each other into the house and up the stairs.

One final AN: this story is based on a fable from Phaedrus, and adapted from the "Satyricon," published in the late 1st Century AD by a satirist named Petronius who was the Emperor Nero's chief adviser on the arts - a dangerous job!