



"Did you see that? He was grabbing his left arm. That's where his Dark Mark is." Poppy's voice was low, but it was still loud enough to be heard by those around her.

"Don't be ridiculous, Voldemort is dead. Potter finished him off." Minerva nodded firmly. "Gone for good this time."

"Here now, that's what we thought the last time, too." Hagrid glanced worriedly around the Great Hall as if he was expecting He Who Must Not Be Named to jump out at them at any moment.

"That's enough of this foolishness." Minerva set her coffee mug down firmly on the wood table as if the force of her action could dispel the rumor.

"I have to agree with Poppy. Why did Professor Snape rush off like that if he wasn't being summoned?" Madam Pince nodded to Poppy; she'd seen Snape grab his Dark Mark, too.

"I'm sure there's a perfectly good explanation for his arm bothering him." Minerva looked speculatively at the doorway through which the Potions master had disappeared.

"Good morning." Hermione smiled as she took her seat at the table and reached for the pumpkin juice. The Headmistress had been thrilled when her favorite student had agreed to return to Hogwarts as her apprentice. They had taken to having afternoon tea together every Wednesday afternoon, Minerva eventually agreeing to train her to be an Animagus. Frowning, she noticed Minerva's worried glance. "Is something wrong?"

"No, dear, nothing's wrong." Nonetheless, Minerva was still watching the backdoor.

"Are you sure?"

"I'm fine, thank you for asking," she answered distractedly, her mind still on Professor Snape.

Poppy glanced nervously at Minerva before whispering in Hermione's general direction, "Professor Snape's been summoned."

"Summoned? Summoned by who? Voldemort is dead." Hermione looked around at the anxious faces. "Where is Professor Snape now?"

"He took off through the backdoor, there. You don't think there could be another Dark Lord trying to take over, do you?"

"Poppy, stop that. Severus was not summoned. Voldemort is gone. If you're all so worried, I'll just find Professor Snape right now and ask him what's going on." The decision made, Minerva rose from her seat and set off to find Severus. She failed to notice her apprentice had already left the table and slipped out through the backdoor.

Hermione's pace was almost a full run as she dashed down the sloping corridor. She reached the dungeon level in record time, barely stopping to draw breath as she threw open the Potions master's office door. "Professor Snape?" She suppressed a shudder as she looked around the empty office.

Resolutely, she strode past the massive oak desk dominating the room to stand before the back archway. Several quick taps of her wand revealed a disillusioned door. Quickly, she passed through the doorway, her panic increasing as she looked around the empty sitting room within. "Severus? Severus, where are you?"

Snape came out of his bedroom looking questioningly at Hermione, his coat cuff dangling open as he tried to close his shirtsleeve. "Hermione? What are you doing here? Are you all right?"

She gestured to the cuff he was closing. "Is it true? Were you really summoned? How can Voldemort be back? Harry killed him!"

"Voldemort's back? What made you think I was summoned?"

"Poppy said you grabbed your arm and then took off."

Severus' look of astonishment unnerved the witch. The fact that he doubled over with laughter did not help the situation any either.

"Severus?"

"My arm...Oh, dear Gods." He continued to laugh, tears streaming from his eyes. "Hermione, do you remember what we were doing last night?"

"Of course I remember; what does that have to do with anything?"

Instead of closing the row of small black buttons on his coat sleeve, he opened his shirt cuff to reveal four long scratches along the inside of his forearm.

"Oh my God. Did I do that?" Tentatively, she stroked the skin next to the scratch marks. "I'm so sorry. I didn't know I hurt you. Is that why you were holding your arm?"

"Yes, that's why I was holding my arm, the fabric was irritating me as it rubbed against my skin. The Dark Lord is not back. I wasn't summoned. Everything is fine." Severus chuckled lightly, drawing her into his embrace. "You weren't quite so hard on my right arm, by the way, in case you were wondering."

"Severus, I'm sorry."

"Really, I didn't even notice it until this morning. We need to hurry, classes start shortly." Pulling her closer, he captured her mouth in a searing kiss.

"I can't tell you how relieved I am to hear that He Who Must Not Be Named has not returned. But perhaps you two can tell me what's going on here?" Minerva stood in the doorway to Severus' quarters, her arms crossed tightly across her chest. She'd heard enough of their conversation to know that Voldemort had not returned. She'd probably heard enough to piece together what was really going on between the two of them, too. The fact that they looked as guilty as any two sixth years caught after hours in the Astronomy Tower just reinforced the conclusion she'd already come to.

"Minerva..."

"Professor..."

"There are no rules forbidding the staff from seeing one another. This did start after she'd cease being a student?" One brow rose questioningly as Minerva looked from one to the other.

Severus was sure the Dark Lord had never come close to inflicting the damage to his person that the Headmistress would if she thought he'd taken advantage of her favorite Gryffindor. "This..." He gestured awkwardly between them. "Is a recent development. We had thought to take things slowly, but..."

Minerva smiled. "There is no further need of an explanation. I'm happy for you both. I suppose I shall tell Poppy and the others that you are suffering from a brewing related burn, rather than reveal the true nature of your affliction."

Hermione blushed, barely able to meet Minerva's eyes. "You heard?"

Minerva turned abruptly on her heel as the class bell echoed through the open doorway. "There's the bell. You're late. Severus, may I suggest you learn the proper healing charm so that this type of misunderstanding may be avoided in the future?"

"Yes, Headmistress."

"Very well, off to class the two of you."

Hermione turned back to Severus, a slight blush still staining her cheeks. "At least she didn't give us detention," she said with a laugh.

Softly, he kissed the side of her neck before whispering in her ear. "I suppose I'll have to remedy that situation. You may serve detention with me. Tonight, my chambers, eight o'clock." Without a backward glance, Severus swept through the doorway and out of the room.

Hermione couldn't shake the grin that covered her face as she hurried to her classroom. It wasn't as if she didn't want anyone to know she was seeing Severus. They just never seemed to make it out of bed when they were together.

Detention. Tonight. With him.

She made a mental note to stop by the Restricted Section and learn the charm to heal his skin, just in case.

~Fini~

A/N: As always, my grateful thanks to the wonderful Southern\_Witch\_69 for her endless supply of commas and for taking the time to look over this bit of fluff; the mistakes, however, are all mine.