

# Misunderstood

*by kizzy7*

The boys notice that Snape is happier than usual. Hermione wants to know why. DH compliant, but definitely EWE.

## To Covet

*Chapter 1 of 3*

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"Don't you think he looks different, though? Happier, more relaxed even?" Harry whispered, stuffing sausages into his mouth. "Maybe it's because we're graduating in a month and he'll be rid of us."

Ron nodded eagerly in agreement of Harry's assessment. "Yeah, it's odd. He doesn't even take away House points anymore! Well, except for Neville, of course."

Hermione sniffed and looked up at the High Table. Professor Snape was indeed lounging back against his chair, engaged in an animated conversation with Professor Sinistra. Hermione narrowed her eyes and turned back to the boys.

"He's probably just happy to be alive. Now with Voldemort gone, it's like a second chance at life for him." She nodded determinedly. There was nothing more to it.

Ron snorted. "You know, he looks like he's had a good shag."

Harry grinned. "Well, him and Professor Sinistra have been spending a lot of time together lately..." The boys looked at each other and cracked up. Ron leaned forward and set his elbows awkwardly on the table, knocking over his pumpkin juice. It landed in Hermione's lap.

"Ronald! Watch what you are doing instead of fantasizing about Professor Snape's sex life!" In a huff, she stood up from the table, glaring at her friend. "I have to go change now, thanks to you. And Professor Snape is most certainly not shagging Sinistra!"

With that, Hermione stormed out of the Great Hall, her hair crackling with fury. The boys thought it best to let her go. Lately, she had been a bit... odd about Snape.

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Hermione was surprised to find herself blinking back tears as she left the Great Hall. How annoying her two best friends could be! To imagine that Professor Snape was with Sinistra... preposterous. She simply could not accept it.

Lately, however, the two professors had been spending an inordinate amount of time together, and it irked Hermione to no end. She couldn't say why precisely, but the thought of Snape with Sinistra made her fume. She was angry.

When she arrived in her room, she angrily stripped off her robes and rummaged through her wardrobe for her other set. Ronald! He was so clumsy, and how could he say

those things about Snape? It wasn't true. It couldn't be true.

Having changed, Hermione spent the rest of the morning pacing restlessly around her room. Thoughts of Snape and Sinistra plagued her...she had seen them just the other day, walking slowly around the Great Lake.

But why, why did it matter to her? She was angry, but also a bit confused. Since Snape had successfully recovered from his Nagini-induced wounds, and since Harry had shown her Snape's memories, she had developed an overwhelming need to protect her dark professor. Lately, this feeling had been careening out of control. She found herself watching him, thinking about him, crying for him into her pillows at night. He had led such a sad life.

But he was happy now, it appeared. *With her*. Shouldn't she be happy for him?

Hermione thought again of the scene this morning at the High Table. Snape was relaxed, a smile playing on his lips, leaning towards Sinistra ever so slightly. Sinistra was laughing, and Hermione imagined her laugh to sound like tinkling little bells, delicate, matching the fine, porcelain sheen of her fair skin. A wave of some strong emotion suddenly roiled in Hermione's blood, and she felt she might be sick.

That answered it, then. She could not simply be happy for him.

With a shake of her head, she grabbed her bag and headed for her first class of the morning, double Potions in the dungeon. With Snape.

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She arrived barely in time for class. Harry and Ron were already there. Snape, however, was not.

She took her seat next to Ron, and her red-headed friend leaned over.

"I'm sorry about this morning, 'Mione," he whispered. "I didn't mean to spill my juice on you."

She rolled her eyes. "Never mind Ronald. Get your cauldron ready."

She glanced at the clock on the wall. Snape, it appeared, was late. He was never late.

Suddenly, the dungeon door crashed open, and Snape walked in, Professor Sinistra on his arm. They were talking quietly.

At the sight of the classroom full of Gryffindors and Slytherins, Snape, glancing at his timepiece, stopped with Sinistra at the back of the room. He smirked and whispered something to her, and she smiled winningly at him. With a squeeze of his arm, the Astronomy professor turned and went from the classroom, her melodic voice echoing in the dungeons.

"I'll see you later, then, Severus."

The class tittered with laughter, and Snape, his face quite suddenly impassive, told them to hush up, though his lips twitched ever so slightly. With a flick of his wand, the instructions for the day's potion were up on the board.

A sharp wave of nausea swept over Hermione, and she felt as if her blood was boiling inside her veins. There was no denying it now; clearly, that evil witch had put some spell on the Potions master.

Ron leaned over and whispered in her ear. "See? I told you he was getting some!"

Hermione grabbed her knife with ferocity and began stabbing her shrivelfig mercilessly.

"Shut it, Ron."

Ron stared at her, confused.

"Is something wrong, 'Mione?"

She shook her head. "No. Just leave me alone."

"Then what are you doing to your shrivelfig? Even I know that we have to dice them in exact..."

"Ron! I said *shove off!*"

"Fine! Blimey, I was just trying to make sure you're okay. You've been acting awful weird lately." With that he turned his attention back to Harry, and Hermione was left to fume in peace.

*Ruddy Sinistra*, she thought. *I've always hated Astronomy. Horrid teacher, she is. Professor Snape deserves so much better than that doe-eyed black-hearted witch!*

If she was being objective, Hermione would recognize that her thoughts were not only unfair but also untrue. She enjoyed Astronomy, and Professor Sinistra was a very able teacher. But she was not being objective. She was currently imagining that her shrivelfig was Sinistra, and she slashed with malicious glee.

Caught up in exacting such revenge, she did not notice Professor Snape walk up behind her.

"Miss Granger. What exactly are you doing to your shrivelfig?"

She stopped quite suddenly, her heart pounding wildly in her chest. He was speaking to her!

"I... I am preparing it for the potion, sir."

"Wrong, Miss Granger. You are mangling the poor plant." His black eyes gazed at her curiously. "Is something the matter, Miss Granger?"

She shook her head, trying desperately to fight the sharp sting of tears in her eyes. She didn't know what was happening to her anymore. She felt completely out of control.

"Normally, Miss Granger, I would assign you detention for your... bizarre behaviour," he said, still speaking quietly. "However, it happens that I am feeling particularly generous today." He wordlessly Summoned another shrivelfig and placed it before her.

"Try again... Hermione."

With that, he left, his seductive voice lingering in the air.

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Later that night, Ron and Harry were engaged in a lively game of Exploding Snap, and Hermione was curled up in a squashy chair in front of the fire. A book lay abandoned in her lap, and she watched the flames of the fire dance merrily.

She was confused.

Professor Snape had called her Hermione, and even now, hours later, her insides twisted pleasurably at the thought. Hermione. She never realized how much she liked her name until he had said it.

Her professor had recently been conjuring up new feelings and emotions in Hermione, and she did not know what to do. She couldn't consult a book on this matter, as she doubted very much there was a book entitled *What To Do When You Are A Bit Mad For Your Professor, and He Already Has a Significant Other (Even Though She Is Clearly A Bitch)*. She definitely couldn't ask Harry or Ron for advice. They would be horrified. She was actually a bit horrified herself, as she couldn't properly explain where these feelings were coming from and she didn't know how to control them.

With a sigh, she forced herself up from the chair. She might as well go for a walk. It was a few minutes before curfew yet, and perhaps a walk might do her some good. Clear her head.

"I'm going to the library, boys. To read."

Harry and Ron did not answer her, and she doubted very much that they even heard her.

Climbing out of the portrait hole, Hermione inexplicably found her feet leading her towards the dungeons. She dutifully followed.

She paused before she rounded the last corner to the hallway leading to Professor Snape's office and (she presumed) his quarters. Hiding herself behind the wall, she peered down the darkened hallway, feeling decidedly like a mad woman. She listened for a sound, any sound that would alert her to the presence of a certain dark-haired Astronomy professor.

Ah. The tinkling of laughter. She was in there with Professor Snape. She had no right to be in there with Professor Snape!

Hermione's heart was beating erratically in her chest, and it was well past curfew, but she didn't care. She had to make sure the witch left his quarters. Or she would have to do something drastic.

Moments passed, and to Hermione it felt as if she had been standing in the darkened hallway for an entire lifetime.

An eternity later, the door to his quarters opened. Hermione quietly and quickly Disillusioned herself and peered around the corner.

Snape had stepped out of his office and into the hallway. A feeble light emitting from the doorway illuminated the sharp angles of his face. Behind him emerged Sinistra, and Hermione breathed a sigh of relief at the sight of the fully clothed witch. Snape, however, was in only shirtsleeves and trousers, which rendered Hermione momentarily breathless. She had never seen him in anything but full professorial robes.

They were talking, and Hermione strained to hear their words, wishing desperately that she had some Extendable Ears.

"Yes, well, it's all going as planned. Thanks to you, Severus."

He chuckled. "I am more than happy to be here for you, dear Aurora." Hermione rolled her eyes. Good lord.

Sinistra laughed. "Well, I really must be going." She leaned up towards Snape and he put his arms around her and pulled her in for a quick hug. Hermione's heart stopped. Were they kissing? She couldn't tell. Damn the man and his penchant for darkened hallways!

Hermione waited until Sinistra strode past her and left the dungeons. Snape closed his door, and then she moved from her hiding spot, agitated. Ridding herself of the Disillusionment charm, she began pacing the hallway in front of his door. She had half a mind to begin pounding on his door, demanding he open up.

As if granting her unspoken request, the door opened, revealing Professor Snape. His eyes widened at the sight of her.

"Miss Granger? What are you doing here?"

Hermione stopped pacing and stared at him. Caught off guard and unawares, she did not know what to say. What could she say? He would think her a complete lunatic, and perhaps, she thought wryly, that particular description of her was becoming an increasingly accurate.

"I...I..." She trailed off. "Could I come in, sir?"

He blinked in surprise.

"Why?"

"I need to speak with you."

He blinked again and his brow furrowed in confusion. Wordlessly, he opened the door wider and gestured at her, beckoning her to follow him.

Breathing deeply, Hermione Granger followed her professor through the door, completely unsure as to what she was doing.

Hermione followed Snape into his office, where he immediately sat down behind his desk and gestured towards the chair opposite him, clearly establishing their respective teacher/student roles. Hermione was still too emotionally distraught to notice.

She came up to his desk, but did not sit in the proffered chair. She stared at him, drinking in his appearance...the top few buttons of his shirt were loosened, revealing but a glimpse of the body which lay beneath. She swallowed. Did *she* do that? Did Sinistra loosen those buttons, whispering sultry things in his ear and laughing her damnable laugh?

Her professor looked at her oddly.

"Well, Miss Granger? What is it?"

Hermione shook her head. "You called me 'Hermione' today in class. Why?"

His eyes widened. "I... I was not aware that I called you by your given name."

"You must have had a reason, Professor!"

He shook his head. "It was a slip of the tongue, Miss Granger, I assure you. Is there anything else?" He looked slightly bewildered.

"Yes, there is something else, actually." She drew in a shuddering breath. Might as well make a complete idiot of herself.

She straightened her spine and looked him directly in the eye. "What is going on between you and Professor Sinistra?"

He frowned. "Our relationship does not concern you, Miss Granger."

"So you admit to a relationship, then?"

"I am helping plan the wedding," he stated simply.

Hermione distinctly felt the weight of the world shift beneath her feet. He was getting married. And not to her. She felt the blood drain from her face, and she started to slightly shake. Tears welled up in her eyes, threatening to fall, and she blinked rapidly. Somehow, in the course of this past school year, she had fallen deeply and completely in love with her professor. She knew that now, now that she was to see him marry another.

And in the span of a few breathless moments, Hermione saw her entire life before her. She saw herself graduate from Hogwarts, forced to leave him. She imagined she would see him now and then, perhaps with his beautiful wife clinging to his arm and dark-haired children playing at his feet. He would laugh and swing his son into the air, and loop his arm around his wife's waist, kissing the top of her head. He would be happy, and for the rest of her life, Hermione would have to cling to the knowledge of his happiness.

It would have to be enough.

"Congratulations, sir," she whispered, not trusting her voice enough to speak loudly. "If anyone deserves happiness, it's you."

A lone tear slid down her cheek, and she brushed it away. Turning, she walked towards the door and left even as she heard him whisper her given name into the darkened dungeons.

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A/N: Special thanks and undying love to my wonderful beta princess\_gracetudor! Thanks also to the amazing admins at TPP for all their hard work. Chapter two is almost completed and will be up shortly, and reviews, as always, are much appreciated.

## To Complicate

*Chapter 2 of 3*

Hermione receives support from Luna, and more misunderstandings abound.

**Disclaimer:** Not Mine!

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Hermione did not sleep at all that night. She lay awake in her bed, staring at the moonlight filtering through her window. How could she not have seen it? How could she know herself so little to not even recognize love? She lay in her bed fitfully, her eyes leaking constant tears. The emotion which consumed her entire body was so painful she imagined she would die.

*Hermione Granger, War Hero, Dies Suddenly from Heartbreak*, she thought bitterly. And she let out a short bark of laughter.

She was truly going mad.

Running her fingers through her wild hair, she decided to calm herself by attempting to figure out when exactly this had begun.

The summer after Voldemort was defeated was wonderful and sad, full of both celebratory parties and heart-wrenching funerals for lost loved-ones. She had survived the summer by clinging to her two best friends, and she had even shared a few more bittersweet kisses with Ron. Any possibility of a relationship with him slowly faded away as the long, sweet summer months dwindled into the fall. They were friends, and it felt right, somehow, to simply leave their romance with the faded summer nights.

She remembered with stunning clarity the night when Harry showed her Snape's memories. Snape was lying in St. Mungo's, recovering from Nagini's poisonous bite, and at the time, his survival was by no means certain. Harry reverently placed a Pensieve before her, and Hermione was struck to her very soul by the memories. This man, Severus Snape, her professor... she did not know him. She did not know this man who sold his soul to the devil only to reclaim it for unrequited love.

Hermione started visiting Snape at the hospital, reading snippets of the newspaper and sections of books to him, though he was unconscious. She brought him flowers and talked to him about her dreams, fears, even desires. As Harry became more involved with Ginny, and as Ron threw himself into Quidditch, Hermione found herself believing that Snape was her only true friend. She would spend her nights confiding in a man who could not hear her and would only sneer at her if he could. The Healers told her that she was the only person who visited him regularly, and thus a deep connection was born. Hermione began feeling... protective of him. She began to care for him as a man. When he finally awoke, a Healer Flooed her in the middle of the night to tell her the happy news. She cried, but did not visit him. A conscious Snape became in her mind the sneering and harsh Potions master of her childhood. He would not want her there. He would laugh at her foolish sentimentality.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione made a deliberate decision to return to Hogwarts in the fall to complete their N.E.W.T.s. Harry professed an eagerness to rebuild the school, and his mere presence at the institution guaranteed its success. Hermione wanted to take her N.E.W.T.s, and Ron followed along, as he always had. A small but insistent part of her was overjoyed when she discovered that Snape was returning to Hogwarts once again as the Potions Master.

The year progressed uneventfully, a novelty to Hermione and her closest friends. Harry and Ron maniacally devoted themselves to winning the Quidditch Cup. Hermione maniacally devoted herself to N.E.W.T. preparation. All was as it should be, but Hermione noticed that her eyes were increasingly drawn in search of her enigmatic Potions professor. She found herself searching for him, wanting simply to be near him. What was more, she thought nothing of this newfound attachment to her teacher.

Then, there was the matter of Ron and Harry's astute observation at breakfast. Professors Snape and Sinistra had indeed been spending excessive amounts of time together. Hermione had resolutely ignored this fact until her two best friends had unceremoniously thrown it in her face.

And now? Now, she didn't know what to do. She turned to lie on her side and closed her eyes, attempting to ward off images of a laughing Severus with wife and child.

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The next night found Hermione reluctantly following Harry and Ron up and up to the Astronomy tower for their night class with Professor Sinistra. Dragging her feet, Hermione turned to look at Ron.

"I don't feel much like going to class tonight."

Ron laughed. "Funny, 'Mione."

Harry chuckled and vigorously rubbed the faded scar on his forehead. "We're learning about the movements of Jupiter's moons and their effects on planetary balance... or alignment. Or something. You want to miss that?"

Hermione glared at him. "Well, sometimes I just don't feel like going to class."

Ron shook his head. "Hermione, do you remember third year? Time-turner? You always want to go to class."

Harry smiled in agreement. "Yeah, come on."

"All right, fine." Hermione sighed. She really did not want to go to class and see Sinistra, smiling and happy. But this was an important class; she couldn't very well rely on Harry and Ron for notes.

The trio reached the top of the Tower and assumed their custom positions on the balcony. Harry adjusted his telescope, cursing as he fought with the machine for dominance.

A hush fell over the students as Professor Sinistra walked in and began handing out assignment sheets. Hermione heard two Hufflepuffs on her right whispering about how happy Sinistra seemed lately, causing her to cringe.

"All right now, class. Fill these out and give them to me at the end of class, please. Note in particular the odd movements of Adrastea. If you have any questions, please ask. I'll be here."

A seventh year Hufflepuff whose name Hermione couldn't remember spoke.

"Professor?"

"Yes, Ellery?"

"Well, I'm in Divination with Professor Trelawney." The girl sounded proud, and Hermione would never understand why it was that people even confessed to being in Divination, let alone proudly trumpet the fact.

"Professor Trelawney says that the weird movements of Adrastea mean that the gods will smile upon summer unions. Is that true?"

Sinistra laughed. The tinkling sound grated on Hermione's nerves.

"I'm afraid I am no expert on Divination, Ellery. I will leave that to my esteemed colleague."

At that, Ron snorted and Harry openly laughed. Ellery threw an icy glare at the boys and then looked up at the night sky.

Ron, still chuckling, whispered. "I tell you, I am liking Sinistra more and more. 'Esteemed colleague,' indeed!"

Hermione glared at him. "Well, I thought it was downright rude. To make fun of Trelawney like that, in front of everyone!"

Ron cocked his head to the side. "Wh...What? Hermione... you hate Divination."

She sniffed. "Perhaps it doesn't quite have a... purely scientific basis, but still..."

Ron opened his mouth to say something but was cut off by an excited shriek.

"Oh, Professor! Look at your ring! It's lovely!"

Hermione quickly turned her head towards the noise. A group of tittering girls were surrounding Sinistra. The temptation was too great for Hermione to resist. She rose from her telescope and joined her classmates.

Sinistra was seated at her desk, a flush prettily spread over her face.

"Now, girls. Return to your seats. You have an assignment to finish."

"Let us see it again, Professor. Please?"

Sinistra smiled and waved her left hand at the girls. Hermione gasped. A large emerald stone set on a silver band twinkled merrily in the moonlight. Silver and green. If Snape were to get married, he would definitely choose such a ring. Hermione glanced down at her left hand, wishing desperately that the ring might appear on her finger.

A curly-haired redhead interrupted Hermione's thoughts. "When is the wedding, Professor?"

"Well, it's this summer. Severus and I..."

Hermione loudly cleared her throat. She certainly had no desire to discover the end to that particular sentence.

"Professor? I'm not feeling well. I think I need to go to the infirmary." It was not a complete falsehood. Hermione was beginning to physically shake again, and tears were starting in her eyes.

"Oh! My dear, of course! Here, let me come with you..."

"No! Er...no, thank you. I can manage."

Sinistra looked at her with concern, her eyes wide.

"Of course, Miss Granger. You can complete this assignment later."

Hermione turned around and practically ran from the Tower, refusing to look at Ron and Harry. She didn't want to see the questions in their eyes.

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Hermione took the steps two at a time, hurriedly rushing back to Gryffindor Tower. She wanted nothing more than to throw herself in her bed and have a good long cry. And eat some chocolate. It was times like these that Hermione greatly regretted the fact that her two best friends were boys. Not that there had been many times like these. Even her jealous stint during her sixth year did not come close to this misery. Never before had her emotions manifested themselves into such strong physical reactions.

Hermione was not one for misery. She had previously thought of misery and heartbreak in abstract terms, distant and unrelated to her entirely. She had seen it, sure. Two years ago, when Thomas, a tall, rather gangly Ravenclaw had broken things off with Parvati, Hermione witnessed firsthand the girl's heartache, as evident by the copious amounts of tears and sleepless nights. It seemed as if this was to be Hermione's future.

And all because of her professor.

Lost in her misery, Hermione made her way back to Gryffindor Tower, wiping tears from her face. She paused as she reached the winding staircase leading to her rooms, surprised. Luna was on her hands and knees scouring the floor of the corridor and humming quietly.

"Luna?"

The blond Ravenclaw looked up. "Oh. Hello, Hermione."

"What are... well, what are you doing?"

"Looking for my earrings. I seem to have lost them."

"Your radish earrings?"

Luna blinked. "Of course not. The carrot ones. It's really a shame; I'm working on the entire vegetable collection. To lose these now is truly awful."

Hermione, momentarily stunned out of her misery, smiled a truly genuine smile.

"Have you tried Summoning them, Luna?"

The girl clambered to her feet and looked at Hermione, her silver eyes gleaming. "Well, I tried. But I fear it's too late."

"Too late? Too late to Summon them?" Though the War had endeared Luna to Hermione, the girl was clearly a few Sickles short of a Galleon.

"Yes." Luna nodded vigorously. "My father recently wrote an editorial for *The Quibbler*...some objects can escape magic, you see."

"Um... what?"

"It's how we wizards and witches lose things. Sometimes, things don't want to be found. Like my carrots."

Hermione shifted, uncomfortable. "Right... Well, good luck!"

Luna abruptly came disturbingly close to Hermione and touched her cheek. Surprised, Hermione took a step back and looked at Luna warily.

"It will be okay, Hermione."

Hermione blinked. "What are you talking about?"

"You're sad. Perhaps sadder than you've ever been before," Luna whispered mysteriously. "But you mustn't dwell on it."

Hermione looked up towards the ceiling, blinking her eyes rapidly. How could Luna tell? What did she know?

"I...How can you tell, Luna?"

"It's in your eyes. The sadness."

A tear slid down her cheek. "I... I don't know what to do, Luna. I don't know what to do. I fear... I fear so much. You don't know what it's like, to watch as your only chance for true happiness slips away. And I can't do anything about it!" Hermione sobbed, and Luna comfortingly put her arms around her, pulling her in for a fierce hug.

"I don't know much about love, Hermione. But I do know you. You are the strongest, bravest woman I know," Luna stated matter-of-factly. "And you can overcome this."

Hermione smiled through her tears. Luna, always there when needed. She never asked for anything in return. Perhaps Hermione did have a girlfriend.

"But," Luna continued. "Guard your thoughts. Don't let the Kinkleboos in."

"Wh...What? The Kinkl... What?"

Luna smiled patiently. "The second-cousins of the Dementors, you see. They are attracted to misery and can control your thoughts, make them dark."

"Oh. Right. I'll look out for those," Hermione said, hoping desperately she wouldn't laugh.

Luna nodded in agreement. "No one wants their thoughts tinged with darkness, Hermione."

With that, Luna smiled lopsidedly and skipped away.

Bewildered, Hermione continued her walk towards the Gryffindor Tower.

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Hermione woke up early to grab breakfast alone. She did not want to face the boys, as they would undoubtedly pester her about her admittedly bizarre behaviour. She was also sure to avoid the sight of Snape and Sinistra so early in the morning.

She quickly dressed and pulled her messy hair back into a loose bun. Grabbing her wand, she quietly snuck out of her room, so as to not disturb her bunkmates at this early hour. She felt considerably better today. The talk with Luna had helped her tremendously. She was strong, and she could overcome this! She would have to, as she had simply no chance for capturing Snape's attention away from the beautiful Astronomy professor. Last night in bed Hermione had contemplated the seductive powers of heavy makeup and shortened skirts but laughed. She was not yet that desperate, and surely the ink stains on her hands and the overflowing book bag on her back would entirely ruin that particular image.

The Great Hall was almost completely empty. Two Ravenclaws were conversing quietly at their table, and a handful of Slytherins were hurriedly shovelling food into their mouths. Professor Flitwick was sipping tea and perusing the morning's *Daily Prophet*. He waved merrily at her from across the Hall.

Hermione took her seat at the Gryffindor Table and piled her plate with eggs. Food suddenly sounded appealing to her once again. Perhaps it was her new outlook, her new determination to somehow live through the acute emotional mess that was becoming her life.

She eagerly poured ketchup on her eggs and reached for a piece of toast. She felt famished.

Suddenly, Hermione paused, her butter knife poised above the jam. She thought she had heard...but no. It couldn't be. Professor Snape never took his breakfast so early.

His voice, however, was unmistakable, and Hermione fearfully looked towards the doors of the Great Hall. Snape, his dark hair tied regally in a clasp on the back of his head, entered the Hall, Sinistra lightly touching his arm as she glided along next to him. Hermione stared at the sight in horror, and her knife dropped from her hand, clanging loudly against her plate.

The two professors looked towards her, Sinistra's eyes wide with compassion and Snape's narrowed to small slits. Sinistra whispered something in Snape's ear and he nodded once. She released his arm and headed towards Hermione with determination.

"Miss Granger," she said as she sat down uncomfortably close to Hermione on the bench. "I do hope you are feeling better, my dear."

"Oh... yes. It was just some nausea." Hermione deliberately scooted away from her professor. What did the woman want from her? An admission of defeat? Congratulations, perhaps? Surely, Sinistra was mocking her, with her perfectly manicured nails, her alabaster skin, and her long black hair which curled attractively around her face. Hermione considered herself in comparison...nails often bit ragged after a late night study session, skin often blotchy with imperfections, and her horrid, horrid hair, which frizzed terribly, framing her heart-shaped face in a persistent halo of fuzz. Glancing quickly at Snape, she noticed her professor was watching the exchange intently, his dark eyes glittering. Though he was not conventionally handsome, Hermione felt a strong burst of emotion start painfully in her heart and settle deep in her stomach at the sight of him. Was he handsome? Perhaps not. But alluring in ways she could not name, yes.

With a start, Hermione realised that Snape had apparently noticed her attention and was gazing at her curiously. She blushed and quickly forced her eyes back to Sinistra.

The witch was also looking at her curiously, and she placed a cool hand on Hermione's forehead.

"Why, my dear, you feel quite warm! Let me take you to Poppy."

Hermione pulled away from the offending appendage and violently shook her head.

"No, no. It's just a bit hot in here, I think."

Sinistra nodded understandingly. "Of course. If you need anything, Miss Granger, please do not hesitate to ask. I'm always here for my students."

"Thank you, ma'am," she said in reply, her voice shaky.

With that, Sinistra gracefully got to her feet and looked at Snape pointedly, shrugging her shoulders and gesturing discreetly to Hermione. She then walked to the High Table, her heeled shoes clicking with a confidence Hermione could never muster.

Snape, standing alone next to Hermione, shifted uneasily. Hermione watched his every twitch with heart-wrenching interest.

"Miss Granger," he murmured. "Could I perhaps speak with you?"

Her heart leapt in her chest. "Of course, Professor," her calm voice belying the panic that coursed strongly through her veins.

He looked away from her and sighed. "Would you mind going... elsewhere?"

"No. Not at all," she said, feeling as if she would follow him to Hades and back again if he would but look at her.

Leaving her breakfast abandoned on the table, Hermione hurriedly followed Snape out of the Great Hall. Students were beginning to trickle in for the morning meal, but Hermione spared them not a glance. All of her thoughts were strongly focused on the man before her.

Oh, how she loved him.

He led her through a winding corridor and into a hallway she had never seen before. He stopped abruptly and turned towards her. The wan morning sunlight streamed through the windows, lazily playing with the harsh angles and unforgiving lines of his face.

"Do forgive me, Miss Granger. I did not want other ears to hear this conversation."

Hermione swallowed. What conversation? What could he possibly have to say to her?

"Yes, Professor?" She nervously wiped her sweaty hands on her robes.

"Is something the matter, Miss Granger?"

Hermione noticed that his voice trembled slightly and he was fidgeting with the cuff of his shirt. He was nervous.

"I... I am not sure what you mean, sir."

He looked at her sharply. "Don't you? I believe you do."

As Hermione saw it, she had two choices before her. She could confess her feelings to Snape and risk being ridiculed and, worse, pitied. Or, she could feign ignorance and simply try to salvage a bit of her self-respect. She opted for the latter.

"No. There is nothing the matter. You are mistaken."

He shook his head and started pacing in front of her, his hands clasped tightly behind his back. "Then why did you come to my office that night, Miss Granger? Why... Why did you ask me those questions?" His voice was agitated, and he appeared positively unravelled. Hermione had never before witnessed her stoic, unaffected professor in such a state.

"It was a misunderstanding, sir," she whispered. It was very difficult to be in the presence of the man she loved and think rationally. Her thoughts were beginning to fray, and she wanted to tell him to stop pacing. He was making this very difficult. She was mortified to feel the bitter prickling of tears behind her eyelids.

"A misunderstanding? Then why are you crying?" He stopped his restless roaming and faced her, concern in his dark eyes.

"I'm not...I'm not crying," she said miserably, averting her gaze.

He stepped closer. "Hermione..."

And he reached out his hand and gently cupped her chin, tenderly turning her face towards his. It seemed to Hermione that time stopped in that sunlit passageway, as if her very life had been leading to this moment, standing in an abandoned corridor with her professor. She closed her eyes and concentrated on the feel of his fingers on her skin.

He was saying something, and Hermione struggled to concentrate on his words.

"...Aurora told me she suspected," he was saying, and Hermione suddenly realised that he knew; ~~he~~ had to know she loved him now. And he was getting married, and that *woman* had caused this situation. Sinistra knew, the witch, and she had told Snape to talk with her, and his hand, his hand that was touching her so intimately amounted to nothing more than pity.

So she stepped away from him, away from the warmth of his hand on her face.

She wiped the tears from her eyes and shakily faced him. "I'm so sorry, sir. I didn't mean to..."

He lowered his hand, confused. "Didn't mean to do what, Hermione?"

"I just..." She stopped, uncertain if she could go on without sobbing. "I just hope your happy, Professor. And Professor Sinistra was wrong, sir."

He stared at her blankly.

"She...she is?" His voice was hoarse. "Is that all? All you have to say? I don't think I quite understand... Surely there was more... and I wasn't mistaken..." He turned away from her, muttering to himself.

She stood very still before him, uncertain as to what she should do.

"Very well, Miss Granger. You may leave. I apologize for any inconvenience I may have caused you. Apparently, I misunderstood your intentions." His voice was cold and harsh. He had not spoken to her like this since well before the War. She felt eleven years old and incompetent once again.

He brushed past her and walked away. Hermione struggled to comprehend the meaning behind his words. He misunderstood her intentions? But then that would mean...she had to stop him, to find out what he meant.

"Sev...er, Professor! Sir." She yelled after his retreating form, and she ran along the stoned floor to catch up with him. She had to know what he meant.

He stopped and slowly turned around, his face impassive. She smiled brilliantly at him and opened her mouth to speak, but he cut her off.

"I have nothing further to say to you, Miss Granger."

With that, he left.

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**A/N** Once again, thanks to my marvellous beta and to the admins at TPP.

## To Complete

### *Chapter 3 of 3*

Hermione and Severus finally come to an understanding...

The halls of Hogwarts were quiet, empty. Most of the students and professors were gone, watching the final Quidditch match between Gryffindor and Ravenclaw. Hermione felt persistent twinges of guilt at missing the match, but it couldn't be helped. She had seen Sinistra leave the stands, undoubtedly heading for the Astronomy Tower, and Hermione was determined to talk to her alone.

Professor Snape had successfully avoided Hermione since their conversation in the corridor yesterday morning. Last night, Hermione had spent a good ten minutes pounding on his office door to no avail. He hadn't been in the Great Hall for any meals, leaving Hermione to surmise that he was taking his food in his own quarters merely to avoid her. The man, she concluded, was worse than Harry and Ron combined.

And since Snape wouldn't talk to her, perhaps Sinistra would.

As she climbed the stairs up to Professor Sinistra's office, Hermione considered her situation. Clearly, she had misunderstood a few things. It was time she took matters into her own hands.

After reaching the top of the tower, she knocked sharply on Sinistra's door, hoping that she was correct in her belief that the professor had gone to her office.

Sinistra's light, melodic voice sounded through the door.

"Come in."

Hermione nervously straightened her skirt and stepped through the door into Sinistra's office. A large, moving model of the solar system dominated the room, and the Astronomy professor had bewitched her ceiling to portray a glimmering Saturn in the night sky. The walls were adorned with posters of the ringed planet, and Hermione smiled when she caught sight of a large plaque on Sinistra's desk. 'I Love Saturn,' it proclaimed, and the 'o' in 'Love' periodically transformed into the red planet.

A large bookcase in the corner of the room held hundreds of magically shrunk books on a surprisingly diverse number of topics, given the general décor. Unable to resist, Hermione began reading the titles she could see and noticed in particular a large collection of Shakespearean plays as well as a number of Muggle how-to knitting books. On Sinistra's desk, Hermione saw a collection of knitting needles and several unfinished scarves and hats, all uneven and misshapen. Thinking immediately of her own knitting craze in her fourth year, Hermione almost laughed out loud. Perhaps she and Sinistra had something else in common other than Snape.

Snape. Sitting centerfold on Sinistra's desk was a picture of a scowling, dark-haired man, his large nose featured prominently on his face. He was determinedly attempting to walk out of the picture frame, but a laughing Sinistra persistently pulled him back whilst she merrily waved her left hand at the camera, the ring upon her finger twinkling happily.

At the sight of the picture, Hermione suddenly felt as if she could fly unaided by magic throughout the castle. Throughout the world. Surely she was floating...the light, bubbly feeling coursing through her body could lead to nothing less. For Sinistra was indeed marrying a Snape...the overlarge nose and harsh features could belong to no other family...but the man struggling in the portrait was not Severus Snape, war hero and Potions master of Hogwarts. His hair was too short and his eyes too light...more gray than piercing black. He was older than Severus as well...the lines in his face were deeper and more numerous. And he wore olive green dress robes. Surely her own dear professor wore nothing but black cloth and buttons!

Though the picture only proved what Hermione had strongly suspected since yesterday's conversation with Snape in the empty corridor, the sight still made her tingle with an emotion which threatened to bubble out of her manifested in laughter and tears. Smiling broadly, Hermione looked up to face Sinistra, no longer an enemy but a dear friend. Sinistra smiled in return.

"I am glad you've come to visit me, Miss Granger. Please do sit down. I believe we've a few misunderstandings to discuss."

With a murmur of thanks, Hermione took the proffered chair and sat down. Sinistra clasped her hands together and nodded.

"So. Severus tells me that you have been repeatedly... visiting his office since last night."

Hermione flushed. "If he would but open his door..."

Sinistra chuckled. "The man is at times worse than a petulant child. Believe me, I know. I am marrying a man very similar, both in looks and temperament." She gestured with her shapely hand towards the framed picture, a smile playing on her lips.

Looking back at Hermione, she paused. "I take it, Miss Granger, that you believed that I was marrying Severus."

Hermione nodded her head, a blush spreading across her face.

After a moment's consideration, Sinistra nodded her head. "Yes, I see how one could reach that conclusion. But please let me explain, as I am sure his odd behavior has confused you."

"It has, ma'am."

"Severus and I have never been truly close, for I do not believe it is humanly possible to be 'close' to a man such as he. But I expect that he considered me a friend when he introduced me to his uncle about two years ago. His uncle and I... well, we became... friendly. More than friendly." She smiled and blushed. "And now we are getting married."

Hermione gaped in surprise. "You're marrying his uncle? But...but in class you said you were marrying 'Severus.'"

"Hermione, Professor Snape's uncle is also...perhaps unfortunately...named Severus. Professor Snape was named after him, you see."

"Oh!" In her mind, pieces began to fly into place like a puzzle.

"And why is Professor Snape helping you plan the wedding? Forgive me, but that doesn't seem to particularly suit his... character."

At that, Sinistra smiled devilishly. "Partly, he is helping at the request of his favorite uncle, as the wedding is to be here at Hogwarts. However, at the beginning of this school year, he asked me for a favor. I agreed to help him insofar as he would, as he fondly puts it, be my 'errand boy' for the wedding."

Hermione blinked. "What favor did he ask of you, Professor?"

Sinistra smiled. "I am afraid that I can't tell you that, Miss Granger. Professor Snape will have to tell you that himself. It'll do him good."

Snorting, Hermione settled back into her chair. "He won't talk to me," she mumbled.

Sinistra leaned forward onto her desk, her eyes positively dancing with amusement. "And when has that ever stopped you, Hermione?"

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Monday came rather quickly, and Hermione's stomach fluttered with nerves. She couldn't eat a thing all day. Noting the concerned and determined looks on the boys' faces, she muttered something about possibly having a touch of the flu. Harry and Ron accepted her diagnosis without argument, though Ron did thoughtfully suggest that she pop in to see Madame Pomfrey.

The evening came all too soon for her. Double Potions. Despite her best efforts, she had not seen Professor Snape since the confrontation in the hallway. Since he was putting such considerable effort into avoiding her, Hermione reasoned that the only way she would see him was in class. They both had some explaining to do.

After breakfast, she followed the boys into the dungeons to find Snape already in the classroom, writing instructions on the board and laying ingredients out on students' desks. He did not look at her when she took her seat.

He did not look at her throughout the entire class.

Hermione spent her time meticulously preparing her ingredients and counting off the minutes until class ended. Until she could finally talk to him.

At the end of class, Professor Snape stood up and reminded his students of the assignment on Vanishing Solutions due next week. With that, he dismissed the class with a wave of his hand and turned to the chalkboard.

Hermione waited until her all of her classmates left in a flurry of robes. She was so nervous her hands were shaking. She took a deep, steadying breath.

"Excuse me, Professor? I was wondering if I could perhaps talk to you?"

Snape started at the sound of her voice but did not turn around to face her.

"As I believe I said before Miss Granger, I have nothing to say to you."

"Sir, please. I thought... I thought Sinistra was marrying you."

Suddenly, her professor went very still. She saw the muscles in his back tense. Very slowly, he turned to her.

"What did you say?" His voice was tight.

"I thought she was marrying you. I just wanted... to apologize. For everything. I'm sorry, sir."

He stared at her blankly until she saw comprehension dawning in his dark eyes. *This is it*, she thought excitedly. *This is it for me. This is what I want*

Smiling slightly, he gestured vaguely towards a nondescript brown door.

"Come," he said. "Let's go to my office."

She followed him into his office where, turning to her, he asked, "Miss Granger. Would you like some tea?"

"I would love some."

Grabbing a kettle from the fireplace, he walked over to his desk and poured two cups of a dark, strong tea. Hermione noticed that his hand was shaking slightly. He was nervous.

Grasping the tea with both hands, he directed her towards a couch nestled in the corner of his office. He sat next to her and put the cups down on the table in front of the couch with force. Hot tea slopped out of the cups, spilling over the sides.

"Now," he said. "You thought I was marrying Aurora."

"I did, sir. I wasn't aware you had any family," she added helpfully.

"Am I to assume that I am too irritable for relations?" His voice was amused.

Hermione laughed. "No! That's not what I meant. I simply... I was very relieved to discover you are not marrying her."

His eyes narrowed. "And why is that, Hermione? Why were you relieved?"

Hermione flushed, not knowing how to answer him. And so she remained quiet.

After a moment of silence, he continued.

"Hermione, a few days ago, you came into this office and asked me two rather unforgettable questions. Do you remember?"

She nodded. "I could never forget, sir."

"You wanted to know the extent of my relationship with Aurora, I believe. Now, however, you know the truth. We are friends, and she is marrying my only living relative. Are you satisfied with this?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you recall your first question?"

"I wanted to know why you called me 'Hermione' that day in class."

"I'm afraid I was not completely honest in answering you. I desire to... rectify this by answering your question now. Truthfully." He swept a hand through his dark, lanky hair.

He leaned in closer to her. "Do you want to know why I called you by your given name that day in class? Hermione, look at me." He reached out and gently cupped her chin with his lightly calloused fingers. Their eyes met.

"I wanted to see how your name would taste on my lips...."

He slowly began caressing her cheek, tracing small patterns with his thumb, leaving her breathless. And ever so agonizingly, he tilted her face upwards and lowered his lips to hers. The kiss was chaste, yet Hermione had never known anything more beautiful. He urged her mouth open with his tongue, deepening the kiss, and with a scrap of irrational thought, Hermione imagined he tasted like freshly fallen rain.

All too soon, he ended the kiss and looked at her uncertainly. She smiled.

"I think I've wanted that for a long time."

"Me too," he whispered. He pulled her close and she rested her head on his chest, listening to his heartbeat.

"Hermione," he said quietly. "I have to know. Why did you not visit me in the hospital when I awoke?"

She looked up at him. "What?"

He ran his fingers through her hair. "I awoke because of you," he admitted. "An angel, I thought. An angel had come down from heaven to save me. The Healers told me my angel was one Miss Hermione Granger. But you never came again."

Her eyes filled with tears.

"I didn't think that you would want me there. I was... I was just your student."

"Silly girl, don't you know that I have thought of no one but you since I awoke? I have since hardly allowed myself to hope until that night in my office."

Hermione nuzzled his neck contentedly. "I was very foolish, then, Severus."

He scowled at her. "Indeed you were."

She kissed his cheek and leaned forward to whisper in his ear. "I think that I am in love with you, Severus Snape."

In response, he tightened his hold on her. "I know that I am in love with you, Hermione Granger."

She reached up to kiss him again, and he twined his fingers in her wild hair, pressing her mouth to his desperately.

"Stay with me, Hermione."

"Oh, yes. Forever."

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Much later that night, Hermione lay in Severus' arms, her fingers tracing delicate patterns across his chest. Unbidden, a question popped into her mind.

"Severus?"

"Yes, love?"

"What is this deal you made with Professor Sinistra?"

He stiffened and attempted to break away from her embrace.

"That... that's nothing that concerns you."

She laughed. "I want to know. She said you asked her for a favor. What was it?"

He sighed heavily. "I suppose you will give me not a moment's peace until I've answered you?"

"Absolutely not."

"Fine. But you can't laugh." He glared at her.

"Severus, just tell me."

"Tell me, Hermione, have you noted any... unusual changes in my behavior this past year?"

"I have," she said thoughtfully. "And so have Harry and Ron. You've been behaving much less dark and foreboding than you usually do."

"And that, my little sprite, is the favor I asked of Aurora."

Hermione blinked, confused. "I don't understand."

He rolled over onto his side and put his arms around her, pulling her close. "Hermione, I have been madly in love with you for an entire year now. I didn't know what to do about it. The fact that you stopped visiting me once I awoke was proof to me that your bedside visits were simply motivated by pity."

She opened her mouth to protest, but he silenced her.

"However foolish that may seem to you, it is what I believed. And I didn't know how to... persuade you to love me. So I asked Aurora, and she told me I should... lighten up a bit. Let you see me smile, maybe laugh." He grimaced at the thought, and Hermione broke out into peals of laughter.

"For me? You... laughed for me?"

His scowl deepened, and he suddenly pulled her close against him, running his hands lightly across her breasts.

"Let's see if I can't stop your infernal laughing, shall we?"

"Oh!" she gasped as he traced small circles on her inner thighs, making her writhe against him with desire.

All thoughts of laughter left Hermione's head as he again claimed her mouth with his own, as he again brought her to dizzying heights of pleasure.

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The next morning, Hermione barely made it to breakfast on time. Harry and Ron were almost done with their meals.

"Hiya, 'Mione," Ron said. "Where were you last night?"

Hermione blushed. "Oh, I was just at the library. Reading."

"Oh. Harry and I were just talking about Snape again." He pointed at the High Table where their professor was laughing heartily with Professor Flitwick. "You can't deny it anymore, Hermione. He's actually *laughing!* He's definitely had a good shag."

Hermione ducked her head, hoping that the boys wouldn't notice the red blush staining her cheeks. "Perhaps you're right, Ron. He certainly looks happy."

She looked at Severus again and at that precise moment his eyes caught hers. They both smiled.

A good shag, indeed.

\*Fin\*

**A/N** I must apologize for the extensive delay in bringing you this chapter. Please feel free to contact me for proper excuses ☺ As always, my undying gratitude to my beta, the admins at TPP, and my readers. Love to you all!