

Picking up the Pieces

by Shadow

Hermione travels to Australia to retrieve her parents. While there, she runs into none other than the "late" professor Snape.

Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 5

Hermione travels to Australia to retrieve her parents. While there, she runs into none other than the "late" professor Snape.

Greatest appreciation to Scattered Logic. Without her, this fic would be unbearable!

~*~

"Oh, come on, Hermione! We've been at this for so long, and we're not getting anywhere."

Hermione Granger ignored her redheaded boyfriend and flipped another page of the book she was perusing.

"I've just about had enough of this," Ron whined. "It's been ages since you've touched me, let alone had a good snog!"

Hermione flipped over another page.

"You don't look at me."

Flip.

"You don't talk to me anymore."

Flip.

"I may as well not be here!"

Flip, flip, flip.

"Hermione, let's go back. We'll go visit with Harry, see little Teddy. Bill and Fleur's baby is due soon. We are missing out on so much back home. Can we please just give this wild goose chase up?"

This last sentence finally earned him her full attention, something he quickly realised he didn't really want, particularly when her eyes were flashing so dangerously.

"Give it up? *Give it up?*" she hissed, seething with anger. "Did I ask you to give it up when you got it in your head to hunt down the Death Eater that cast the spell that killed Fred? No, I stuck with you every step of the way, and that took us *months!*"

"All that time I stayed with you, and supported you, and *helped* you. We have only been here six weeks, and you are ready to just give up and go home? Fine, then. Go home. Leave me and go find something more interesting to do!"

She brushed impatiently at the angry tears that were forming. She really could not believe how completely insensitive he was.

"Hermione, no! It's just... Well, it was supposed to be a short trip. We were supposed to come here, get them and go home again. You didn't say that it was going to take so long to..."

Ron's voice trailed off at the look of fury blazing across her face.

"Ronald Weasley. They are my parents! What would you have me do? Just say, *'Oh well, my parents have disappeared without a trace, so let's just go back to England and forget all about them'*? I am so sorry if this trip is not as exciting as you thought it would be."

Ron's face had darkened with a flush that was part embarrassment, part anger. He opened his mouth to speak, but Hermione cut him off before he could get a word out.

"You are right, though. I don't talk to you anymore. Every time you open your mouth it is to complain about how much you hate it here. I don't *want* to touch you or kiss you. Truth be told, I don't even want to look at you sometimes, because when I do, all I see is that sulky, bored look. You have been so inconsiderate and uncaring lately; I actually don't want to be around you anymore. So, please, do us both a favour and go home. Leave me in peace to find my parents, because I am not leaving until I find them, even if I have to search the whole of Australia to do it."

Finished with her tirade, Hermione stalked across the hotel room past Ron, who now gaped at her like a fish, and yanked the door open. She paused, turning back slightly, before making her exit.

"I would greatly prefer it if you were not here when I get back."

With that she heaved the door closed with a crash that made the window rattle in its frame.

Ron watched his now ex-girlfriend dash past, his heart sinking to his feet. He had really buggered up this time.

~*~

Furious, Hermione stalked through the streets of Sydney, her gaze on the pavement. Ron was such an unfeeling, nasty git! He was such a... Well, he was Ron. She had known he was immature. Even as she started to fall in love with him, she had known. She just didn't think they would be this incompatible or that he would be so selfish when it came to her needs. And she really had needed his support this time.

Hermione heaved a sigh of frustration. Ron was right. It had seemed like a quick, simple trip: go to Australia, get her parents, re-modify their memories and go back to England.

The problem was, when they got to Sydney, there was no trace of her parents. Hermione was wracked with guilt. She had sent them to Australia to keep them safe. What if some rogue Death Eater had found them somehow? What if her modification had been a little too overly-enthusiastic and they had started to forget everything? Anything could have happened to them, and she might never find them. She shook her head. That thought was too terrible to comprehend.

Hermione lifted her eyes to the buildings around her, realising she didn't know where she was. She had wandered aimlessly for hours, not paying attention to her surroundings. She gazed intently at the shop windows, willing herself to recognise one of them. It was getting late, and most of the stores had closed for the evening.

At the end of the street, a dim light glowed in the gathering dusk, beckoning her forward. At least she could ask the proprietor for directions back to the hotel.

Stopping in front of an old fashioned storefront, Hermione looked for the name of the little shop. The sign swinging above the door reminded her of the quaint shops in Diagon Alley. It simply said: Herbologist.

Hermione's brow puckered in a thoughtful frown. She remembered during the last summer she had spent with her parents how her mother had gone on about the Muggle craze. Everything had to be natural. Muggles were now turning to natural, herbal supplements instead of chemical solutions for health problems. Her interest was piqued. It might be worth looking around the little shop. She might even find something useful for any potion-making she might need to do.

The bell above the door jingled as she pushed it open. The little shop had shelves stacked to the ceiling, each one packed with herbs and glass bottles. A small, wooden counter was at the back of the room; cash register, old-fashioned scales and even more herbs in piles, obviously in the process of being prepared for something, were sitting on the surface of the counter.

"I will be with you shortly," a voice called from the back room.

Hermione was slightly surprised to hear the voice had an English accent. She was so used to hearing Australian accents lately. Looking around the store again, she breathed in deeply, taking in the fresh, spicy scent of the air.

While she waited for the proprietor, she looked more closely at the items on the shelves. There were beauty products, vitamin tablets, food supplements and even (Hermione had to stifle a stunned giggle) libido boosters for him and her.

As she moved closer to the rear, a new aroma assailed her nose: juicy beef, garlic and roasting potatoes. Hermione's stomach gave a most embarrassing growl, reminding her that she had not eaten a proper meal in days. She closed her eyes and inhaled the delightful smell again.

"Yes, what can I do for you?" asked a frightfully familiar voice.

Hermione's eyes snapped open, locking onto the black eyes of the little shop's owner. Suddenly, the shelves began to whirl and spin around her in a dizzy dance. It was all too much. The last few weeks of desperately searching for her parents, Ron's unsympathetic attitude, the subsequent argument and break-up, lack of food, and now this.

"But, he's dead," was her last thought before her world went dark.

Hermione fell in an unconscious heap at the feet of one very much alive and hugely unimpressed Severus Snape.

~*~

This was my response to the winter SS/HG gift exchange for Wolf Moonshadow.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 5

Hermione wakes in Severus' flat.

All hail Scattered Logic. She is simply the best!

~*~

Severus directed a glare at the young woman on his couch. A Level 4: Fear. As his face twisted into the familiar expression, he knew how effective it was; he had been practicing in the mirror for the last few months. One had to be well prepared in order to achieve the correct reaction from one's prey. Severus was saving his masterpiece, Level 5: Pure Terror for a special occasion.

The only problem was that the current recipient of the Level 4 was unconscious.

He was furious. How had she found him? Where were her tagalongs, Potter and his idiotic sidekick, Weasley? And just why was she lying on his couch, plying her feminine wiles? If anyone had the right to faint at their meeting, it was him.

But at least he knew she was not faking. He has ascertained that she had truly passed out before he brought her up to his flat.

Severus let his features slide back into his normal bland mask. There was no use wasting a good glare on a person who was completely unable to appreciate it.

Why had she tracked him down? Did the silly girl think to gain a bit more glory than her status as a War Hero could provide? Bring back the notorious Severus Snape, Murderer of the beloved Dumbledore and most hated Hogwarts Headmaster? If she thought he would go easily, she had another think coming!

He had not worked so hard to set up his new life here to give it up. No one knew that the introverted herbologist, Tom Stevens, was actually ~~he~~ *the Severus Snape*. Severus had found that setting up his little store in the middle of Muggle Sydney was the best form of disguise. He could cater to the new rage of natural living by supplying them with all herbal supplements and products (it did, of course, help that he did add a slight amount of magic to his products, ensuring they were always the best), while also catering to the needs of the magical community by brewing difficult potions and supplying rarer ingredients.

Oh, yes. He knew about his status as "War Hero." The spy in Voldemort's camp. Posthumously award the Order of Merlin Third Class for his many tireless years of hard work. Once he had thought that was all he wanted, the recognition. Now, he actually enjoyed his simple life here in Australia. He was... content.

Severus rubbed absentmindedly at the old puncture wounds on his neck as he recalled that night in the shack. He had known Voldemort was up to something. Luckily for him, he had been taking doses of antivenin before coming before the Dark Lord since the night Dumbledore... well, he had been prepared. It was simple enough to convince Potter and his friends that he was dead, use the Dittany he had hidden in his robes and disappear completely. No more Severus Snape.

Severus again turned his attention to the oblivious female. He bent closer to her in order to scrutinise her features. The last time he had seen her ~~he~~ *properly* was the night Dumbledore... the night he had knocked Flitwick out and she and the Lovegood girl had been outside his office. That was nearly two years ago.

She was thin; he recalled how light she had been in his arms when he carried her up the stairs to his flat. And she was pale. Her hair surrounded her head in a frizzy mass that seemed to defy the simple braid she had obviously attempted to keep it in. Dark circles bruised the delicate skin under her eyes. In short, Miss Granger looked terrible.

Severus thought back to what he had read in the *Daily Prophet*. He still received that rag. It was the best way to keep up with what was happening back in England. Squashed into a tiny corner near the back of that *worthy* publication, there was a notification of a reward for any information on the whereabouts of one Miss Hermione Granger. What was not clear was who had put out a reward for information on her.

Now, for the first time, Severus wondered who had offered that reward. Was it friend or foe? There were undoubtedly Death Eaters out there who would be desperate to get their hands on one of The Chosen One's sidekicks.

Shrugging his shoulders at his endless questions, Severus walked to the kitchen to tend to his dinner before it burned.

~*~

A sharp pungent smell assailed Hermione's nose, bringing her back to lucidity. Irritably, she pushed the vile-smelling contents away, only to have it brought back again. Really, Ron was insufferable. Why would he think it was funny to shove that disgusting stuff in her face first thing in the morning?

"Come, Miss Granger. There is much to discuss, and I fear my temper is running short."

That voice! It could not be true: he was dead. She saw him die in the shack.

"Miss Granger, my patience is wearing very thin."

Hermione cracked one eye open very slightly, only to have her vision filled with the visage of a ghost. She slammed her eye shut again as she heard what sounded like a chuckle. Surely ghosts don't laugh? Once again that foul stuff was waved under her nose. Hermione grabbed the wrist that insistently forced that stuff on her. That wrist was warm, she could feel the warm skin and the hardness of bones under her fingers. She was touching Severus Snape!

Opening her eyes fully, Hermione gazed disbelievingly at the face hovering above hers. It really was Severus Snape. But how? Severus retreated, placing the phial of smelling salts in his pocket as she pushed herself up onto her elbows and sat up, cradling her head in her hands.

Oh, Merlin, she thought. I feel like I've been run over by a hippogriff. What happened?

Her thoughts were interrupted by an irritated clearing of a throat. Hermione looked up to see Snape back in his nasty Potions master disguise, complete with a scary glare. Hermione blinked up at him, then turned her head, placing it back into her hands. As her eyes were closed, she missed the glare sliding into a brief look of astonishment. No one had **ever** failed to respond properly to a *Level 4*, i.e. scuttling away as quickly as possible or cringing in fear. Miss Granger had simply ignored him!

Hermione started when something banged onto the coffee table. Opening her eyes, she saw a vial of milky white substance tottering on the table in front of her.

"Kindly drink the headache potion, Miss Granger, so we can discuss... things."

Hermione uncorked the potion and swallowed it in a single gulp, grateful for the immediate release of the pressure on her cranium. She then turned all her attention to her former professor, leaning against the wall, his arms crossed and an irritated scowl on his face.

"Well, Miss Granger. I'm waiting."

"Waiting for what, sir?"

At Hermione's blank stare, Severus sighed irritably.

"Why are you here? How did you find me, and what do you want now that you have?" Severus sneered nastily into her shocked face.

"Professor Snape? I don't know what you mean."

"Don't play silly buggers with me, Miss Granger. I have no patience for it. And don't call me 'Professor.' I am no longer employed at Hogwarts, as you well know."

"Sir, I honestly don't know what you are talking about. I came to Sydney with Ron to get my parents. Only, they have gone missing and I can't find them, and Ron is an insensitive jerk, and I got lost, and now I find my dead professor is alive. I just can't... I can't."

Hermione broke off, closing her eyes and leaning back against the cushions, as the events of the past few weeks overwhelmed her. Severus looked down into her grief filled face and somehow knew she was telling him the truth. That did not explain how she had come to be here, in his little shop.

Severus moved over to one of the wingback chairs placed at an angle to the couch. While he waited for the girl to compose herself, he began to think on a few things she had just told him. Had she not said something about her parents being missing? Perhaps there was a little more to the question of the reward than he had originally thought. Miss Granger appeared to be more interesting than he had imagined.

He thought back to her schooldays. She was always an insufferable know-it-all, always flaunting her intelligence before the other students. She never did realise how much it intimidated the other students. Constantly waving her hand in the air, answering questions as if she had swallowed a textbook.

Although, Severus had never realised what the voluminous school robes had been hiding. Even though she was wearing Muggle clothing, he had to admit she filled them well. Her upper body was encased in a tank-top that moulded to her breasts, her round little buttocks filled her jeans, tapering down to a pair of long, slim legs. Yes, she was thin, but nothing a few good meals could not sort out.

Then, of course there was that hair. Masses of frizzy, bushy hair. At least some things did not change. Severus glanced at Hermione. It appeared that she had been growing it out. She probably thought the length would help to control some of that unmanageable mess. It hadn't worked.

Heaving a quick sigh, Severus leaned forward, pulling a tray he had set earlier on the coffee table towards him. He picked up a plate full of steaming food and placed it before Hermione, removing the stasis spell he had used to keep it warm.

Hermione's nose was again assaulted with the delicious smell of beef and potatoes. When her stomach gave a decidedly unfeminine growl, Hermione's eyes flew open to meet the amused ones of her former professor. She could have sworn his mouth twitched up in a smile, before his usual blank mask slid back into place and he turned his attention to his own plate.

Hermione glanced at her own plate, seeing it filled with juicy beef in a red wine sauce and roasted garlic potatoes. Hermione smiled slightly. She should have known a Potions master could cook as well. Within minutes her plate was empty. She had not realised how hungry she was.

Hermione set her plate on the table and stood.

"Sir, may I please use your bathroom?"

Silently, Severus nodded towards a door to his left.

Hermione quickly walked across the room, closing the bathroom door.

A chuckle escaped Severus as, a few seconds later, he heard a distressed shriek coming from Miss Granger. He knew just what had made her react like that.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 5

A long night for Hermione Granger.

Praises and chocolate to Scattered Logic. Without her this would not be worth the parchment it's written on.

~*~

Hermione closed the bathroom door behind her, leaning against the wood as she contemplated her situation. Severus Snape was alive and in the other room. How was it possible?

Opening her eyes, Hermione walked to the basin. She splashed some cold water over her face, relieved at how it was waking her tired brain. Hermione dried her face with the little towel hanging next to the basin and straightened up, glancing at her reflection.

A loud shriek escaped her. Hermione quickly stifled it with a hand clasped over her mouth. Her eyes, wide with horror, were bloodshot, with dark rings underneath, and her face was pale. But worse, much, much worse than that was the state of her hair. It surrounded her head in a huge frizzy bush. Even tying it in a tight braid had not helped. The hair had simply escaped its binding and done whatever it liked.

Hermione had not realised how humid and rainy it would be in Sydney in January, and hadn't thought to bring any Sleakeazy with her. Not that it would have mattered much if she had. She was so worried about her parents, and so busy trying to find them, she had hardly looked into a mirror in the past few weeks, let alone had time for

priming and fussing with her hair. She was aware her hair was getting frizzier, but had paid it little attention.

Now, standing in Professor Snape's flat, she was very much aware of it. Maybe he didn't really notice what she looked like?

A knock on the door startled her out of her reverie.

"Miss Granger, there are some clean towels in the cabinet next to the basin, if you wish to make use of all the facilities. On the shelf above the sink you will also find a... umm... smoothing crème that may just help with your current situation." There was no disguising the amusement in his voice as he said the last sentence.

Hermione's face flamed. He had noticed. Well, it *would* have been difficult not to notice the bush that had taken residence on her head!

Sighing loudly, Hermione reached up and removed the little bottle of crème. She opened the top and sniffed delicately. It smelled *divine*! It had a subtle floral scent with a spicy undertone. Why would Snape have a smoothing crème in his bathroom? Unless... unless he had gone down to his shop while she had been unconscious on his couch.

Hermione turned on the taps of the little cubicle, pulled off her rumpled clothing and stepped under the warm spray. She massaged a generous amount of the crème into her hair and was amazed at how much smoother her hair felt. Snape really could make a fortune with this if he ever decided to mass market the stuff. It would put Sleakeazy out of business!

What she could not understand was why he was being so nice to her. He had given her dinner, provided a potion for her hair, and allowed her to use his shower. What was going on?

Stepping out, she dried herself off with the towel Snape had provided and dressed in her old clothes, casting a quick cleansing spell on her jeans and top, then a drying charm on her hair. Finished, she opened the door and entered the sitting room.

~*~

While Hermione was in the bathroom, Severus had been preparing his little flat for his uninvited guest. There was no way he was letting her leave here tonight. She may not have found him on purpose, but she obviously had no idea of the potential danger she was in.

Just as he placed the last pillow on the couch, the bathroom door opened. Severus felt his jaw drop. He never knew his crème could *do that*. Where Hermi...Miss Granger's hair used to stand out from her head in a bushy cloud, it now lay in silky waves down her back. And she seemed completely unaware of just how gorgeous her hair was.

Clamping his jaw shut, Severus gestured to one of the wingback chairs. As she seated herself, Severus handed her a glass of Firewhisky, smiling at her curious glance.

"I assure you, madam, I have no intentions of taking advantage of you in a drunken state. It is simply to help you relax."

Hermione nodded, bending her head to look at the contents of her glass. Severus had to control the urge to gather her hair in his hands and see if it was as soft and silky as it looked. Crushing the impulse, he stalked to the chair opposite hers and flung himself into the cushions.

Hermione cast a curious look at the makeshift bed to her right.

Severus, correctly interpreting her glance, stated, "Miss Granger, I cannot allow you to leave here tonight. I am still unsure of how you came to find me, but that is a discussion for tomorrow. I do not wish to have Potter and his sidekick, Weasley, descending on my head, for whatever reason, and therefore cannot allow you to run off and inform them of my whereabouts until I am certain of your motives. You are unable to Apparate without my assistance, as the wards are set only to me, and the doors are set with charms that will only open with a password that only I know. Your best option is to get some rest, and in the morning we will discuss this further."

When Hermione only sat there gaping at him like a fish, Severus stood and walked over to her. Glancing down at her, he reached out and gently closed her mouth.

"As much as I would like to play the gentleman, I am not one. Enjoy your night on the couch, Miss Granger."

With that, Severus swept out the living room and closed his bedroom door with a snap, smirking at the look of fury that blazed across her face.

Hermione shook her head slowly, amazed at the audacity of the man. She quickly finished off her drink, fighting the urge to choke as she swallowed too fast. Setting her glass down, she walked over to the couch, considering it for a long moment. Hermione whipped out her wand, transfiguring the lumpy, uncomfortable couch into a soft, feather bed. With a sigh of contentment, Hermione settled into her new bed and was soon drifting in the arms of Morpheus.

~*~

Sounds of rattling and a huge crash from the kitchen area had Severus awake and out his bedroom door in an instant. He was halfway through the living room before he remembered the presence of his unwanted guest. One look at her face, and Severus remembered his state of dress, or rather undress. In the warmer climate of Australia, he had taken to sleeping in the nude, and last night was no exception. A flush staining his features, Severus whirled and strode quickly back to his room, slamming the door behind him with a resounding crash.

Hermione stood rooted to the spot. For the second time in less than twelve hours, she stood gaping like a fish. When she woke this morning, she immediately thought of food. It was as if the delicious meal Snape served her last night had awakened her to the fact that she'd hardly been eating lately.

Not hearing any sounds of life from Snape's room, she decided to search his kitchen for the makings of a good breakfast. She had soon rustled up all the ingredients to make pancakes. The only problem was that the pan was wedged at the back of the cupboard. When she had given it a mighty tug to release it, she had instead caused the whole cupboard of pots to come crashing down. As she stood there with the pan clutched to her chest, she heard the sounds of one enraged Severus Snape charging towards her. One stark naked Severus Snape.

Oh, what those teaching robes had been hiding from the student population at Hogwarts! By no means hugely muscular, Severus had broad shoulders, a well-defined torso that tapered down to slim hips and an impressive... umm... endowment. Hermione had just stood and gaped at this gorgeous, gorgeous man. Once he had turned around and fled, Hermione gathered her scattered wits one piece at a time as she concentrated on making the pancakes.

She knew she was not the only student at Hogwarts who had fantasised about the Potions professor. Whereas Lavender and Parvati had wondered at comparisons of nose lengths to various... appendages, she had dreamed about his hands. Those oddly beautiful hands with those long fingers that had worked nimbly with the ingredients. She had wondered what such hands could do to a woman's body...

Snapping out of her daze, she returned her attention to the pancake that was beginning to smoke slightly. She quickly flipped it over, nearly dropping it to the floor when Severus cleared his throat behind her.

Severus had been watching Hermione as she stood by the stove, gazing off into the distance. She was again dressed in the clothes she had worn yesterday, but with her hair pulled up into a ponytail high on the back of her head, leaving the rest to fall in waves across her shoulders. Apparently a good night's sleep had been what she required; the dark shadows under her eyes had all but disappeared, and her cheeks were stained with a becoming pink.

Seeing her come out of her thoughts, Severus cleared his throat, smirking when he made her jump and nearly drop the pancake she was flipping.

With a nervous little smile, Hermione turned to Severus (after this morning, she would never be able to think of him as Snape again) and handed him a plate of pancakes dripping with syrup. She smiled up at him as he nodded his thanks. She quickly removed the last cake from the pan and joined him in the living room. As there was no

space in the tiny kitchen for a table, they had to eat off their laps as they had done last night.

Hermione ate quickly, waiting for Severus to finish and talk to her about the incident earlier. When he had finished, he handed her his empty plate, nodding his thanks once again. Hermione flicked her wand at the pile of dirty dishes, watching as they cleaned themselves and sailed back to their proper places in the cabinets. Hermione glanced at Snape from the corner of her eye. Apparently, he was going to ignore the episode and her too.

Hermione moved back to the living room, handing Severus a cup of steaming coffee. When he didn't even nod this time, she seated herself opposite him, staring at him until he turned his attention to him.

"Can I help you, Miss Granger?"

"Yes. I would like to leave now."

"As I told you last night, it is impossible for you to leave my company."

"Exactly. That is why I'm asking you to go with me to find my parents."

~*~

'How do I get myself into these things?' Severus groused to himself as he trudged up the suburban Muggle street, the strong smell of eucalyptus wafting in the air. He could not believe she had talked him into coming here with her. Just because she smiled beautifully at him and begged prettily did not mean he had to come. Truthfully, it was the sheen of tears in her eyes that actually convinced him.

That and the fact that he was becoming increasingly interested in Hermione and her complicated little life. However, no matter how many tears she shed, he was not going to wear conventional Muggle clothing. He would rather really be dead than be caught wearing jeans. So, clad in normal attire of black pants and shirt, they stopped at Hermione's hotel room to get her luggage.

Hermione walked into the hotel room she had shared with Ron, took a deep breath and looked around. It seemed he had finally listened to something she had said. He was gone. All his things were gone. She could not believe he had not at least fought for her. Maybe he had been as sick of the situation as she was. Well, she was not going to waste any more tears on him. She had to find her parents.

As she collected her things, Severus sat on the bed, watching at her constantly. Feeling self-conscious, Hermione picked out a top and skirt and retreated to the bathroom.

Since Hermione's back was to the door, she didn't realise she had not closed it properly, and Severus was treated to a delightful view of a long elegant back and smooth creamy skin before she moved out of his view.

While she was otherwise occupied, Severus shrank her trunk and placed it in his pocket. When she returned, he opened the door allowing her to precede him through so that he could surreptitiously admire her long legs displayed by the short skirt she wore.

Now, as they walked up the street, Hermione began telling him about her mind manipulation before she had set out with Potter and her consequent search for her parents.

Apparently, Hermione and Weasley had gone to the dental practice her parents had set up, but there was now a doctor's surgery in the rented space. When they had gone to the flat her parents were staying in, there was no sign of them either. No furniture, no clothing, nothing. Most of the neighbours had not been home that time, and those who were didn't even know who Wendell and Monica Wilkins were.

Now Hermione was determined to go back and interview all the neighbours she had not spoken to before. Someone had to know something.

Severus and Hermione climbed the stairs to the second floor where her parents' flat was. Hermione thought it made more sense that their closest neighbours would know more about the missing couple than ones that lived further away. Severus agreed with her logic, and so found himself knocking on the door to the flat closest to her parents'.

The sounds of a cricket match on the telly ended abruptly. Hermione wondered if Tony Greig was commentating today. She really hoped not; she couldn't stand him and his blasted keys!

An old lady opened the door, her eyes widening as she stared up at the dark man in front of her. Hermione cleared her throat, bringing the woman's attention to her.

"Excuse me, ma'am, but we are looking for Wendell and Monica Wilkins. They used to live in the flat next door to yours."

"Why, that accent! You must be Monica's daughter, Hermione. Please, come in my dear."

~*~

A/N: Thanks for all your wonderful suggestions, Reets. Hope you approve.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 5

Hermione gets some news about her parents.

Scattered Logic is the best!

A/N: This chapter moves very quickly. I hope I don't offend anyone!

~*~

"How did you know they were my parents?"

Hermione and Severus were sitting on the couch in Phyllis's living room. It reminded Hermione of Umbridge's office when she was at Hogwarts. All kitten plates and lacy doilies. The difference was that the woman sitting opposite her had a kind, grandmotherly air about her. Hermione liked her immediately.

"My dear! There is no mistaking those eyes. You have your mother's eyes, no doubt about it. Of course, you don't seem to have the same hair as your mother. She struggled terribly with her hair in this humidity."

Hermione could actually *fee*/Severus smirking.

"Oh, yes," Phyllis continued. "Your mother and I chatted a lot in the evenings after work. She seemed a bit lonely. Sometimes I wondered why she had left England in the first place; she talked about that cold, rainy place constantly. One day she seemed to be in a very distracted mood. When I asked her what was wrong, she said she was just thinking about her daughter. When I asked her to tell me about you, she just laughed and told me she didn't have a daughter. The last time I saw her, she was rushing up the stairs muttering frantically to herself. When I asked her what was such an emergency, she said she had to get to her daughter, Hermione. I remembered that name because it was so unusual, but it really suits you, my dear."

At the end of this long speech, Phyllis sat back in her chair, a happy smile on her face, oblivious to the shocked stare of her young guest.

"Thank you, Phyllis," Hermione said, standing. "You have been most helpful, but we must be going."

"Anything to help, my dear. Give your parents my regards."

Hermione promised she would as she practically ran out the door.

"Avagoodweekend!" Phyllis called to Severus as he stood to follow Hermione.

Severus thanked the older woman and rushed to catch up to Hermione. He caught her in the stairwell, halfway between two floors.

"Where are you going in such a hurry?"

"Didn't you hear her? I have to go back to England! My parents are probably there and worried sick because they can't find me. They are Muggles; they won't know how to contact the Weasleys!"

Hermione tried to yank her arm out of his grip.

"Let me go, damn you! I have to get the next Portkey to England. I have to go now!"

Without another word, Severus wrapped his arms around the struggling witch, looked up and down the stairs for any signs of Muggles, and Apparated away.

~*~

Severus stepped back from the struggling witch. Her hair was falling out of the band, framing her flushed face.

"How could you?" she sobbed. "I have to find them. Can't you understand that? You heartless..."

Hermione broke off as Severus grasped her arms, hauling her closer so that her nose was an inch away from his.

"Stop acting like a child!" he yelled back at her. "Can you not understand that you cannot go rushing into a situation you know nothing about? What if this is some Death Eater trap to lure you to your parents' house where they can do all manner of disgusting things to you? Would you just *think* before you go running off half-cocked?"

Hermione's breath was coming in short little gasps that he could feel against his lips. Desire for this witch pulsed through his veins. It was something he had not truly felt in a long time, and something that was going to cause him to do a very stupid thing.

Hermione saw something hot flash in his eyes, something that caused her knees to go very weak. She licked her lips, and Severus unconsciously copied her movement. When she gasped, his eyes flicked back to hers, and she saw a question in his ebony eyes.

She nodded, no more than a slight movement of her head, but it was enough for Severus. His lips crushed down on hers. His tongue traced the seam of her lips, seeking, searching, asking. Hermione answered by opening her mouth to his, drawing his tongue into her mouth, then suckling it gently.

Severus' restraint broke. He released Hermione's arms, sliding one arm around her waist to press her body closer to his. The other hand slid up her neck, and into her hair, finally loosening her masses of hair from its band. Severus grabbed a handful, luxuriating in the slick, silky feel. When he felt her hands creeping into his hair, kneading his scalp, he groaned into her mouth.

Putting both hands under her buttocks, he simultaneously lifted her up and pulled her closer to his aching body. He walked towards the bedroom, never breaking their kiss.

Not being able to see properly, Severus misjudged the doorway and slammed Hermione into the wall. Hermione gasped as he pressed into her, his weight holding her up. Severus lifted his hands and ran the tips of fingers over her cheeks, barely caressing her skin. His hands drifted down her neck, past her shoulders, down the outer curves of her breasts, past her waist, stopping at the hemline of her skirt. His fingers drifted lightly up her inner thighs, stopping before they reached their target.

Panting heavily, Severus pulled away from Hermione, bringing his hands up to frame her face. Hermione opened eyes that felt as heavy as lead. Severus was forcing her head up, making her meet his hot, hot eyes.

"Do you want this? Because if you say 'yes', there is no stopping this. I want you more than I have wanted anything. If we do this, you are mine. You will always be mine. I will not share you with anyone, ever. So I will ask you again: *Do you really want this?*"

Hermione stared up into his midnight eyes, seeing acceptance, understanding and yearning.

Reaching up to tangle her hands in his ebony hair, Hermione leaned forward to press her lips against his before answering.

"You do understand that if we do this, you are *mine* and I will never share *you* with anyone, ever. Yes, I want this more than anything."

Again, Severus crushed her lips with his, plundering her sweetness until she was gasping. His mouth trailed a burning path down her throat, his teeth nipping gently at her skin. Hermione shivered as his hands came up to the buttons running down the front of her top. His lips followed as his agile fingers loosened each fixture. Severus removed her top, tossing it over his shoulder. Next he loosened the little zip on the side of her skirt, easing the material over her hips. When it was pooled at her feet, he stepped away to see his treasure.

Her face was flushed with passion, her kiss-swollen lips parted as she gasped for breath, her hair a mess from his hands. Merlin, she was beautiful. And she was standing there in the skimpiest bra and knickers set he had ever seen.

Drawing in a ragged breath, Severus started to undo his numerous buttons while his beautiful young minx stared at him like a hungry lion. With a growl of frustration, he drew his wand, banishing his clothes with a quick flick.

Hermione's eyes were drawn downward. Again, she licked her lips, and a little whimper escaped her. Letting out a deep, throaty growl, Severus was on her. It seemed like his hands were everywhere at once. He could not get enough of her soft skin. Hermione could feel his erection pressing heavily against her belly.

Severus calmed his movements. From her waist, he shifted his hands in one sweeping movement up her back, deftly unclasping her bra and removing it. This too was tossed over his shoulder. Severus reverentially cupped her breast in his palms before bringing his mouth down to taste her skin. Hermione arched into him, her hands moving up and down his back, finally tangling in his hair to hold him there while he did wonderful things to her.

Severus suckled her nipple, drawing the hard peak into his mouth, laving it with the flat of his tongue. He then repeated the process with her other breast, trailing his fingers down her belly, teasing her skin at the waistline of her knickers. His mouth left her breasts, trailing hot, wet kisses downwards, stopping to tease her belly button.

His fingers hooked the front of her knickers, slowly dragging them down. Hermione cried out as the back of his fingers deliberately brushed through her curls. Grinning up at her evilly, Severus let her knickers go and parted her thighs slightly, ensuring him proper access. Again, Severus brushed his fingers through her curls, seeking her entrance. His fingers slid through her folds, and he gasped at the wetness he found there. She was more than ready for him.

He inserted one finger into her slick heat. When he felt her shudder, he slipped in another, slowly pumping in and out.

"Severus!"

His name on her lips drove him wild. Standing upright, Severus pressed into her, wrapping her legs around his hips. Their mouths met in a passionate kiss as he found her entrance. Hermione tore her mouth free, crying out as she felt him slide deeply inside her.

Severus readjusted his hold on his witch, using the wall to take most of her weight. With one hand around her waist to hold her, he slid the other hand between their bodies, searching out that sweet little bundle of nerves. Only when Hermione cried out again at the contact did he dare move his hips. He would make damn sure this, their first time together, was not just a solo act.

He started pumping his hips, sliding in and out of her gorgeous body in a dance as old as time, all the while manipulating her hardened clitoris.

Hermione suddenly cried out, finding her release. Her body clamped down on Severus as convulsions rocked her body.

Severus' tempo changed. His thrusts became shorter, harder, quicker. With each thrust he panted into her ear.

"Hot... wet... tight... mine... mine... mine... MINE!"

The last word was torn from his throat in a raw of triumph as he felt waves of pleasure pulse through him, Hermione's body milking his dry.

With his face pressed into her neck, it took him a while to realise she was shaking. With a wrenching feeling in his gut, he knew she was crying. He pulled his face away, reluctant to let her body go just yet. He could not look into her eyes and see the disappointment there.

"I'm sorry." It came out very softly. Hermione barely heard it, since he seemed to be addressing her breasts.

Releasing her grip on his hair, Hermione lifted his gaze to meet her smiling face.

"Severus Snape, if you dare apologize for the best sex I have ever had, I swear I will hex you six different ways, none of them remotely pleasant."

Severus grinned back at her. Hermione thought this was the best look for him. She promised herself that she would make him do it more often.

"Well then, witch, we are going to have to spend a lot of time trying to top that."

With a whoop, Severus pulled her body closer and walked into the bedroom. Giving Hermione a little toss, he chuckled her on the bed, smirking at her shriek.

Hermione crawled up the bed. Leaning back on the cushions, she crooked her finger at him.

"Well then, what are you waiting for? You have a lot to live up to."

~*~

Severus was lying on his back, his arm comfortably around the witch who had given him so much more than he had expected. Hermione lay with her head on his shoulder, listening to his heartbeat while she traced patterns on his chest.

"Severus?"

"Hmm?"

"Why did you fake your death and come and hide all the way out here?"

Severus turned his head, looking down into her earnest, curious face. He realised she was not asking to hurt him. She genuinely wanted to know.

"I had nothing left. There was no reason for me to stay. It just seemed easier to pretend I was dead. I was Dumbledore's murderer, favoured servant of the Dark Lord and lowly Death Eater. So, I left everything that was dear to me and came here to start over. It is a peaceful life, and I have to admit, I am content."

"Content? Is that all you wish to get from your life? Don't you want a family and friends and... and love?"

"I am, of course, aware of Potter's efforts to clear my name and am aware of my War Hero status."

Hermione giggled at that. "I don't suppose you are aware of the Severus Snape Fanclub that had sprung up though?"

"Hmm, something else I was glad to be away from. I really do owe Potter a debt though. I never would have believed he would have been such an active campaigner for me. But to answer your question, I truly had not thought the options of having a family and friends were open to me. That is until you *dropped* into my life. Now, anything seems possible."

"Hmmm, remember to tell that to your future parents-in-law, when we find them, that is."

As she finished her sentence, she realised what she had said.

"Oh, I never meant... Well, I did mean... but only if you... I mean I... Oh, shut up, Granger."

Hermione buried her burning face into Severus' shoulder. She could be such a fool sometimes.

"Ahem. I believe it is usually up to the man to do it first, but if that is a marriage proposal..."

Severus trailed off, waiting for Hermione to look up at him again. When she did, he continued.

"Then I say yes."

Hermione blinked up at him before lifting her nose and sniffing. "You do realise that you still have to buy the ring?"

Severus looked down at his impertinent young fiancée, took a deep breath and did it. He gave her *aLevel 5!*

Hermione looked at him. Ahh, yes. Her face was about to dissolve into a look of terror. That would teach her.

But his feeling of smugness faded quickly as her face crumpled into laughter.*Laughter?* How could that be possible?

Seeing his glare fade into a look of distress, Hermione leaned up and kissed his cheek.

"But... but," he spluttered. "That was my*Level 5!* Pure Terror! I don't get it. I practiced it so hard, it even scared*me* sometimes. Why are you laughing?"

"Severus, it does help if you are not naked, and I am not exhausted from mind-blowing sex. You will have to come up with another grading system or a more creative way to 'teach me!'"

With a growl, Severus rolled his new fiancée onto her back and set about doing just that.

~*~

Just the epilogue to go!

Epilogue

Chapter 5 of 5

And so it ends...

Scattered Logic is the greatest!

~o0o~

"Hermione, you have been working on that dratted potion for two days solid. I have hardly seen you. Either let me help you or cast a stasis spell and come upstairs."

Hermione barely glanced at her husband, barely acknowledging his words.

Two days after their visit to Phyllis, Severus and Hermione had taken a Portkey back to England. Despite Severus' fears, the reward for information on her whereabouts had been placed by her parents.

Hermione had been right. Although she was an intelligent and powerful witch, when she cast the memory charm on her parents, she was an emotional teenager, not yet eighteen. After a few months, their memories started to return in patches, as the memory charm started to slip. Slowly, they began to remember bits of their old life, and their daughter, who was in the middle of some strange war.

They had closed up their practice in Australia, sold all their furniture and moved back to England to try and find their daughter.

Since they did not know how to contact Harry or the Weasleys, they decided to place the ad in the paper.

When Hermione had come home, completely unhurt and healthy, they had been overjoyed. That was until she told them what she had done to them and introduced them to her fiancée. Although it was difficult, they could understand that she had only modified their memories to keep them safe. They were less understanding when they realised her future husband was nearly twice her age and an ex-professor too. They did relent finally when they saw how happy their daughter was.

After leaving Australia, Ron went back to The Burrow. There, he licked his wounds and met a few of Fleur's friends. After their initial disgust at Hermione's choice of husband, Harry and Ron came round to the idea after realising that he and Hermione were never really well matched.

Now, six months later, Severus and Hermione were joint owners in an Apothecary / Herbology shop in London. The shop was perfect. It had two entrances. One opened up directly onto Muggle London, and the other entrance opened into Diagon Alley. It saved them trying to differentiate which customers were from which world. Above the store was a large flat. They were saving up to buy a bigger place for when their family came along, but for now, it was wonderful for the two of them. The space between the two shop doors was a perfect workshop. Potions were constantly brewing, and Hermione was able to expand out to do a little potions research too.

Her current project was to improve on the Blood-Replenishing Potion. Its effects didn't last long enough if someone was seriously injured. ~~It~~*was* taking up a lot of her time.

"Hermione." Severus was trying to get her attention again. Hermione smiled as she looked at him. Uh oh. He was doing it again. He was giving her the look. Luckily, it was only a *Level 1: Sultry*. She could resist a *Level 1*. Hermione returned her attention to her potion.

"Hermione." Oh dear, his voice was becoming huskier. She glanced up at him again. Hmm*Level 2: Sexy*. Still okay. She could resist a *Level 2*.

Severus moved further into the room, stopping opposite her and leaning against the wall. When Hermione looked up again, he had upgraded to *aLevel 3: Hot*. Not good. He meant business. Better start putting things away.

Out of the corner of her eye, Hermione noticed Severus moving. He was unbuttoning his shirt and had pasted *aLevel 4: Come hither* on his face. Definitely not good. Hermione felt her belly clench with desire. The man knew how to fight dirty. Hermione quickly cast a stasis spell on her cauldron and finished packing away her ingredients. When she turned away from the cupboard, it was to see her husband, naked from the waist up, crooking his finger at her displaying a tantalizing *Level 5: I want you now!*

'Oh well,' Hermione thought, walking over to her sexy husband. 'I never was one to fight unnecessary battles.'