

# The Reluctant Mother

*by cocoachristy*

Severus decides that he wants an heir. He chooses Hermione to be the surrogate mother, but will she agree? My response to the Surrogate Mother Challenge posted on WIKTT.

## Chapter 1

*Chapter 1 of 13*

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**Disclaimer:** I own nothing. It all belongs to J.K. Rowling. I just like to use her characters in my twisted plots!

**A/N:** Thanks so much for my wonderful, wonderful betas Southern\_Witch\_69 and Meredith. Without them I could NEVER have done this. They are truly inspiring.

If you are one of the few who have not read The Succubus, Libertine, or Vengeance is Sweet, run and do so NOW!

This is based on the Surrogate Mother challenge posted on WIKTT.

For the challenge and challenge rules, please refer to the end of the chapter

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### Chapter 1

Severus Snape sighed. He looked around the room and grimaced at all the happy faces he saw. A solitary creature by nature, he usually didn't attend these events. He felt he had a right to be at this one, however, and thus was making an effort to keep a sour look off his face. Tonight was the night he would receive his Order of Merlin, First Class, for his efforts in helping defeat Voldemort during the war. It had been one year since the final battle, and for Snape, that alone was reason to celebrate. Yes, he did indeed want to enjoy this celebration. There were other awards and citations being handed out that evening, however, and the speakers were droning on and on. Could he be blamed if his attention wandered?

Snape glanced around the room again and focused on Draco Malfoy. Draco had been a big surprise to everyone in the Order. After some subtle probing and lengthy discussions with his godson, Snape realized Draco did not want to follow Voldemort, but was scared to refuse. Snape offered him a way out. He would still take the Dark Mark, as expected, but he would spy as well. Nobody had known the truth of Draco's loyalties except Albus, Minerva, and Snape. It had been worth it just to see the look on Harry Bloody Potter's face when Ron Weasley stood on one side of him and Draco Malfoy on the other, both protecting him fearlessly. Snape smirked when Draco put a possessive arm around Ginevra Weasley as Potter approached. Old habits die hard.

Snape's victory had been bittersweet. He had finally brought honor back to the name of Snape, but he had no one to rejoice with. His mother was long dead; he had no siblings, nor did he have any children. And there it was...the reason for his melancholia tonight. Severus Snape wanted an heir.

He had no illusions about himself, and knew the likelihood of ever finding a reputable witch to marry him was nonexistent. Despite his new Order of Merlin, the things he

had done in his past were irrefutable. He simply was a former Death Eater, and thanks to Fudge and the Daily Prophet, everyone in the Wizarding world knew it.

That was why Snape had turned to an agency to find a mother for his heir. The agency matched surrogate mothers to potential parents, which seemed an ideal solution to Snape's problem. He could find a witch of quality to act as a surrogate mother and bear a child for him without any hassle. The only problem was that he needed the surrogate's egg as well. It would cost extra, but he could afford it. Being the last of the line did have some advantages; not having to share the wealth was one. The agency made arrangements for him to interview several witches, and he approached each interview with the same determination that carried him through every confrontation he ever had with Voldemort. After the fifth one, however, he began to lose all hope. Each witch was worse than the one prior, and Snape was finally forced to admit that they were all terribly unacceptable.

Snape sighed heavily as he recalled his final interview. It had been an American Muggle-born witch whose name was Miss Shufford. He was not as bothered by that fact as one might think he would be. A child conceived with some Muggle ancestry and some pureblood ancestry greatly reduced the chances of a Squib birth or other genetic aberrations caused by the many years of inter-mixing the pureblood lines. He actually supported the Marriage Law that Fudge had recently proposed, but it would take a while to go through the process of legislation, and Snape did not want to wait that long. Besides, he didn't want to bring a child into the same sort of loveless marriage that his parents had brought him into. No, he had seen the results of that, and part of what he had become was a result of that type of marriage. He did not want his child to turn out as he had in his tempered youth.

Miss Shufford was a disaster from the beginning. She had bounced into the interview with the most ridiculous grin on her face he had ever seen. After his first question, he knew without a doubt she was not the one. She had attended The Salem School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, which was a very reputable school; however, she herself did not have a reputation to match. He learnt she had been expelled at the end of her fifth year for her promiscuous behavior with most of the male students and some of the staff. She had left the States for London to start over, but needed the funds to do so. Hence, her decision to become a surrogate mother. To say she was incompetent would be gracious. She couldn't even name the twelve uses of dragon's blood! No, she would not do. He had no intentions of the mother ever being around the child after the birth, but still wanted good stock and at least adequate intelligence.

Well, at one time he might have wanted a particular witch to have a relationship of sorts with him, but he knew better than to hope for anything to come of that obsession. The witch in question seemed uninterested in anything other than a working relationship. His thoughts drifted to Miss Hermione Granger, the cleverest witch of her age. A most brilliant witch who happened to owe Professor Severus Snape a Wizard's debt.

It had happened during the final battle. Everyone had been so focused on guarding the Boy Who Lived to ensure he got to Voldemort that they were paying attention to little else. Snape had glanced towards Hermione just as Antonin Dolohov cast the Killing Curse right at her. Dolohov had been looking for revenge against Miss Granger ever since the incident in the Ministry of Magic at the end of her fifth year, and that particular moment had been the perfect opportunity for him to get it. Without thinking, Snape had grabbed her and pulled her to him with all of his might as the curse glanced by, missing her by mere centimeters. She had looked her Potions teacher straight in the eyes and said, "Thanks! I owe you one!"

As Snape had looked into her eyes, so bright with excitement, he had thought immediately of several ways she could repay him. He was not blind to the fact that Hermione Granger had grown into a beautiful young woman. Oh, not the classic model beauty, but beautiful to him nonetheless. Combined with her intelligence, she was a complete package. Several times he had watched her in his Potions class, thinking of her full, rosy lips and her soft, graceful hands. He could never refrain from thinking of all the ways she could put them to use. Snape had seen her eyes glaze over while completing a potion. He'd wondered how much effort it would take to make those eyes glaze over while she was beneath him...but alas, that would never happen; he was certain.

But Miss Granger did owe him something. She likely had no idea how her words to him would haunt her some day. Today was that day. Severus Snape, Slytherin extraordinaire, was going to collect that debt. He would get his surrogate mother one way or another.

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### Challenge Rules:

Plot: After the war Severus decides that since things are safe in the Wizarding world, he wants an heir. Thinking no witch would ever marry him because of his background, he decides to hire a surrogate mother. Of course, it will have to be Hermione. He wants an intelligent witch, and she is the smartest one of the age! As to why Hermione does this, that is the author's discretion.

Requirements:?

-Severus must interview at least 5 witches.

-Severus insists Hermione live in his residence during the pregnancy (Whether he is still at Hogwarts or not is the author's choice).

-At least one of Hermione's friends tries to talk her out of it.

-Severus insists on a confidentiality contract so no one, including the child will ever know she is the mother, and he wants a contract giving him all rights to the child and her none.

-Hermione gets at least one weird craving and Severus gets it for her.

-They must at some point during the pregnancy develop romantic feelings for each other. -Authors choice on how it ends, but I prefer happy!

Required Sentences:

-I never knew I could love so deep

-Oh NO! Here come the hormones again!

-Your water has to break NOW of all times?

Bonus-not required

-You know, we could try this the old fashioned way.

## Chapter 2

Severus decides that he wants an heir. He chooses Hermione to be the surrogate mother, but will she agree? My response to the Surrogate Mother Challenge posted on WIKTT.

**Disclaimer:** Not mine, JKR's. Unfortunately

**A/N:** I would like to thank my angels in beta disguise, Southern\_Witch\_69 and Meredith, for all their help and time they have put into helping me with this story!

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## Chapter 2

Hermione looked around the room at all the people celebrating and smiled. She had not felt this content in a long time. She had been only two years into her university studies when Death Eaters attacked her parents' home. They savagely killed her parents before burning down her home with Crookshanks locked inside. She knew it was meant to stop her work for the Order, to keep her from helping to bring down Voldemort. It had almost worked. Almost. Hermione had mourned for three solid months. Her grades had slowly dropped; she'd become listless and solitary, shunning those closest to her.

Then one weekend at Number 12 Grimmauld Place, she had an encounter with the Potions master. He had come upon her in the library as she wallowed in self-pity, and instead of coddling her in the same soothing and placating tones everyone else had, he'd harshly snapped, "Miss Granger! What do you think you are doing? We have an Order meeting in five minutes, and I expect to see you there."

"What's the point? Nothing matters! I have lost everything!" she'd replied dully.

"Excuse me? *Everything*, Miss Granger? Who are all those people in there that care for you? What of Potter, the Weasleys, Minerva, and Albus? They ~~are~~*nothing* to you? Then, by all means, continue with your little pity party. I just thought you may want to help us in the effort to defeat the Dark Lord before you lose someone *else* you love. Clearly, I was mistaken." With that said, he'd swept out of the room with his black robes billowing dramatically behind him.

Professor Snape's words had the effect he'd intended. Five minutes later had seen Hermione at the meeting and back to business. During that meeting, Dumbledore had asked her to work with Snape to look for a potion that might defeat Voldemort. She had agreed, and the two of them had begun working together. Hermione had felt a newfound drive to succeed during that time. She'd desperately wanted to find a way to stop Voldemort, not just for her own sake, but because she'd realized that Professor Snape had been right. There were others she loved and cared about, and she did not think she could bear to lose anyone else.

It had taken her and Professor Snape nearly eight months to develop a potion they thought would work. The potion was designed to counteract the snake venom Voldemort was mixing with Nagini's milk to keep himself alive. Apparently, even though he had a new body, he still needed this mixture to keep his soul bound to its new home. During those eight months of working together, Hermione and Severus slowly came to see each other in a different light.

For his part, Severus learned some things about Hermione that he never realized. He had always known she was an intelligent witch, but he had thought of her as only being book smart. She would always spout information as if she was a walking textbook. He soon realized how very wrong he was. Hermione also possessed a cool intellect and appeared wise beyond her years. As a complete package, she was impressive, and he'd developed a new respect for her.

He had to remind himself several times she was his junior by nineteen years, especially when he started feeling attracted to her. It had happened so gradually that when he'd recognized what he was feeling, he'd felt as though he had been smacked in the face with a Bludger. Even if he acknowledged how he felt, he knew he would never do anything about it. He was certain she would never reciprocate, and pursuing his feelings would only cause them both to be uncomfortable. She need never know of his true feelings, and they could maintain their friendly facade. More than that, he felt she deserved better than him. Severus continued to suffer in silence as they worked together those long months. He'd managed to get through each day by telling himself that it was best that way.

For Hermione, working with Professor Snape had only added fuel to the fire. She had been attracted to Professor Snape since the beginning of her seventh year. She had watched him day after day, knowing he was a spy, risking his life in silence while suffering the ridicule of not only his students but also his fellow Order members. Her heart broke for him. As time went by, her feelings intensified. By the time they started the potion, Hermione had gotten to know Severus as a man, not just as a teacher. She'd learned that he had fears, hopes, and dreams just like everyone else. Hermione wondered if he ever dreamed of a woman, and if so, what type of woman he would dream about? Those thoughts usually depressed Hermione, because she knew he would never think of her like that. To him, she would always be a *silly little girl*, or the *know-it-all Gryffindor*, and that would never change. So, to keep the peace, she'd suffered in silence, refusing to give her feelings even a bit of hope. She'd gotten through each day by telling herself that it was best that way.

Finally, one month after the potion was finished, Severus had learned that Voldemort was to attack Hogwarts. Harry had graduated three years earlier, but Voldemort's plan was to kill all those there who loved and protected Harry. By doing so, Voldemort reasoned that Harry would be left defenseless and weak. However, thanks to Snape and Draco's efforts, the Order members had been fully aware of the pending attack and thus prepared. Draco Malfoy himself had administered the poison to Voldemort. By the time Voldemort had felt the effects of the potion and realized what had happened, it was too late, and Harry had been able to take him down.

Tonight, as she listened to various speakers drone on and on, Hermione thought back to the final battle. She remembered Antonin Dolohov's attempt to kill her and suddenly being wrapped in strong arms while being pulled against a hard chest as Dolohov's Killing Curse barely missed her. She had looked into the glinting eyes of Severus Snape and thanked him. Hermione had no idea what made her say the next sentence, but as she'd looked into the inky depths of his eyes, she'd told him that she owed him one.

For a brief moment, everything had stilled around them before Hermione finally caught herself and stepped back. What a fool she had been, acting like a love struck teenager in the middle of a battle! She had looked up just in time to see Lucius Malfoy kill Dolohov. As Dolohov fell to the ground, he'd winked at Hermione and started taking out Death Eaters. She knew Lucius had switched sides at the last minute to keep out of Azkaban, and it worked. He was there with them to receive his own Order of Merlin, although it was only Third Class.

Hermione watched as Harry walked over to Draco and Ginny, and had to laugh as Draco put his arm around Ginny possessively. Harry was not interested in Ginny, nor was Ginny interested in Harry anymore, but he couldn't resist getting a rise out of Draco. Hermione smiled as he kissed Ginny's hand. Old habits died hard. The summer before the trio's seventh year was when Ron and Hermione had become a couple. It was about the same time that Harry and Ginny became one as well. They had been at the Burrow together that summer. There had been no romantic interludes until the night before term started. Ron had kissed Hermione goodnight, and they'd both burst out laughing. There had been no sparks whatsoever. Hermione thought it'd brought new meaning to the term platonic. Ginny later confessed that the same thing had happened between Harry and her. Their friendships had survived the brief foray into romanticism, having only strengthened the bonds they each had with the other.

At last, the award ceremony ended. Hermione had never been so grateful in her life to be able to stand up. She turned to find Ginny when she felt a hand on her shoulder. When she turned to see Professor Snape, she smiled at him warmly. "Good evening, Professor."

"Miss Granger, I was wondering if I might have a word with you?" asked Severus.

"Yes, of course, Sir. What can I do for you?" Hermione asked curiously.

"Could you meet me in my office Monday morning? Say, nine sharp?"

"Yes, Sir, that would be acceptable."

"Very well. Until then, I bid you good evening."

"Good evening, Professor." As Snape walked away, Hermione couldn't help but wonder what that was all about.

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At precisely 9:00 on Monday morning, Snape heard a knock at his door and smirked. Of course she would be exactly on time.

"Enter," he called.

"Good morning, Professor; how are you?" Hermione asked as she took a seat.

"I am fine, Miss Granger. Would you care for some tea?"

Now that surprised her. Snape was being polite and offering her tea. He had been polite to her before, as they worked on the potion together, but his manner today seemed overly solicitous.

"Yes, I would, thanks." She took the cup he proffered and sipped, savoring the brew.

"I will get right down to business, Miss Granger. I suppose you are wondering why I have asked you here today," Severus stated, though it sounded more like a question.

"Yes, Sir. I have to admit that I have been wondering."

"Allow me to borrow a line out of Gryffindor's book and be blunt. I wish for an heir."

This statement was met with total silence. Hermione just stared blankly at her former professor wondering what she was supposed to say to that.

"Did you hear me, Miss Granger?"

"Yes, Sir. I was just wondering what that has to do with me, of all people."

"Allow me to explain. I want you to be the carrier of my child." Snape was careful not to say *mother*, as he did not intend for her to be in the child's life after the birth. His pride would not allow it. He cared too much for this woman and felt he had to tread very carefully.

"Excuse me? I don't understand. You wish to have a baby with me?" Hermione asked. For a brief moment, her heart leapt with hope.

"No, Miss Granger, I wish for you to carry and deliver my child," Severus explained.

Hermione immediately felt her heart twist inside her chest, aching with rejected need. She set her teacup down with a bit too much force and quickly clasped her slightly shaking hands together.

"I'm sorry, Professor, but the answer is no. I couldn't possibly have your baby, or anyone else's baby for that matter, right now. I still have another year to finish at university." Hermione was desperately trying to maintain her façade of decorum while keeping her pride intact.

"Oh, you can and you will, Miss Granger. You seem to have forgotten you owe me a Wizard's debt for saving your life in the final battle." Severus was nearly holding his breath while awaiting her reaction.

"No, Sir, I have not forgotten. I promise you, the next time your life is in danger you may call me, and I will be more than happy to save you. What you are asking of me is something entirely different!"

"Is it?"

"YES!" Hermione snapped.

"Miss Granger, I saved your life, and now you can save mine...in the form of a child. I am the last Snape of my line. If I don't produce an heir, my family name will die out. I can assure you, *that*, in itself, is a sort of death."

"Why, you sneaky, Slytherin bastard! You are totally twisting the whole thing around to suit your needs! Surely there is an agency in the Wizarding world you can go to?" Hermione felt as if her heart was going to beat out of her chest. More than once she had dreamt of having Snape's baby, but they were always married in her dreams! This wasn't the way it was supposed to happen!

"Yes, there is, and I assure you that I have been through the process." He sighed. "Several times, in fact. There was not one acceptable witch there! *No one compares to you*, Severus thought desperately. He wondered if perhaps he'd known all along that no witch would be adequate. He hated to force her into anything, but when it came down to it, she was his first choice.

"I have a hard time believing that, Professor!" Hermione said in a slightly panicked voice.

"I can guarantee it's the truth. Miss Granger, I want the best in everything, and in this instance, you are the best." He squirmed some as he bit out the unusual compliment. "You are young, healthy, and have above average intelligence."

"Would you be using my egg as well?" asked Hermione. If there was a wizard's equivalent to *The Twilight Zone*, she felt she was in it. She couldn't believe she hadn't gotten up and stormed out by now.

"Of course, that is the whole purpose of choosing you to do this." Snape could nearly taste her capitulation.

"I see. What exactly would you expect of me?" she asked, clearly intrigued. He was right, after all. She did owe him a Wizard's debt, but what else did he expect?

"I have a contract that you may read over," Severus replied. He picked up a scroll of parchment from his desk and handed it to her.

"I would prefer to take it with me, Sir, and have a read in private," Hermione said, tucking the scroll into her robe pocket.

"Very well, Miss Granger, you may have one week to decide."

"Fair enough, Sir. Same time next week, then?"

"That will be acceptable. Good day."

"Good day, Sir."

Hermione left the dungeons in a daze. Her mind just couldn't wrap around the fact that Professor Snape wanted her to bear him an heir. What she needed now was to talk to her friends. As soon as she stepped out of the gates of Hogwarts, she Disapparated to Number 12 Grimmauld Place.

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Severus leant back in his chair, deep in thought. He wished things were different. Hell, he wished that he could court Hermione, marry her, and have a baby the natural way. He knew many people only saw him as the greasy bat from the dungeons, and she was likely no different. His wishes would never be realized, as he was sure she would never have him. No, he had to use Slytherin cunning to get what he wanted. Hermione Granger is a Gryffindor. Therefore, his best bet would be to play upon her sympathies and, of course, her honor. She owed him a Wizard's debt and would think it only right to pay up. Severus smiled slyly to himself as he realized that he knew just how to play Miss Granger's sympathies.

His child was as good as conceived!

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**A/N:** Next up: Hermione talks to her friends and gives Severus her decision.

## Chapter 3

*Chapter 3 of 13*

Severus decides he wants an heir. He chooses Hermione to be the surrogate mother, but will she agree? My response to the Surrogate Mother Challenge posted on WIKTT.

**Disclaimer:** The world of Potter belongs to the great JKR...not Cocomochristy

**A/N:** I would like to thank my wonder beta's, southern\_witch\_69 and Meredith, for going above and beyond what beta's do! Without them, this story wouldn't exist!

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### Chapter 3

With a loud crack, Hermione Apparated at Number 12 Grimmauld Place. She opened the door and tip-toed quietly inside. Unfortunately, they had yet to find a way to remove Mrs. Black's portrait, and a huge, ear-splitting shriek permeated the air as soon as she shut the door behind her. "BLOOD TRAITORS! MUDBLOOD FILTH! THE MOST NOBLE AND ANCIENT HOUSE OF BLACK IS RUINED! CREATURE OF DIRT! PRINCESS OF PUTRESCENCE!" With a sigh, Hermione went to find her friends in the sitting room.

"Well?" Harry asked. "What did the greasy git want with you?"

"It's Professor Snape, Harry. Honestly, when are you going to grow up?"

"Fine; whatever you say, Hermione. What did he want?"

"You guys are never going to believe this. Snape wants an heir and has asked me to be the surrogate mother." Hermione sat down heavily on the sofa.

Draco, who was there with Ginny, looked at Hermione thoughtfully. He had known for some time that his godfather wanted an heir. Severus had even talked to Draco and Lucius about it once. The last Severus had told him, however, was that he planned to use an agency.

Draco understood why Severus would choose Granger. She wasn't the prettiest witch in the coven, but she was highly intelligent and had much in common with his godfather. He had always suspected that Severus had developed some sort of feelings for Granger after they had worked so closely together on the potion that helped kill Voldemort.

Draco and Hermione still did not like each other, but they had decided to be civil for Ginny's sake because they both loved her. He had stopped calling her Mudblood, and she had stopped calling him ferret. Potter's yelling interrupted the silence that had settled and brought Draco out of his thoughts.

"What! He wants to get you pregnant? As in, have sex with you?" Harry asked incredulously, his face a mixture of shock and disgust.

Hermione rolled her eyes with a sigh. "No, Harry. A surrogate mother is artificially inseminated," she explained.

"Why does he want *you* to do it? What would give him the impression that you would even agree to this, Hermione?"

"Because I owe him a Wizard's debt; that's why!" Hermione snapped back. "This is how he wants me to pay it."

"That does make sense," Ginny interjected. "Snape is the last of his line, and it doesn't look like he has any marriage prospects lined up."

"Actually, I can understand his need for an heir too," said Ron.

"WHAT!" exclaimed Harry. "You agree with this too, Ron? I would have thought that you would be dead against it!"

"Calm down, Harry," replied Ron. "Look, Snape is a pureblood wizard who believes in the old traditions. In our world it is expected to have an heir to carry on the family line, and I don't see why Snape should be any different."

"That is all well and good," said Harry, "but let him go to an agency and find a surrogate!"

"He said he's been to one," Hermione said. "He told me that the witches he interviewed are *unacceptable*."

"And, don't forget," added Draco. "Granger owes Snape a Wizard's debt."

All eyes turned to Draco. Hermione had been so focused on Harry and Ron that she had forgotten Draco was even in the room.

"That's another thing," said Hermione. "I thought owing a Wizard's debt meant that if someone saves your life, you save theirs. Quid pro quo." She sighed. "But, Snape said I would be saving his line from death, which was the same thing."

"He's right, Hermione," said Ron. "Besides, now that Voldemort," Ron could finally say his name without shuddering, "is dead, and the Death Eaters are taken care of, how many chances are you going to get to *literally* save his life?"

"Are you people out of your bloody minds? Hermione simply cannot do this. There *is no way!*" Harry yelled.

"Hermione," Ginny began, ignoring Harry, "what are his terms and conditions? I'm sure he has some."

"Of course. He gave me a contract to read, but I haven't had a chance to yet. I came straight here from our meeting."

"Are you considering it?" Ron asked.

"Well, I need to read the contract over first, but he kind of has my back against a wall with this debt I owe him."

Hermione looked at Ron, who was deep in thought. He had really matured in the last couple of years. She knew Luna Lovegood had a lot to do with that. People called her *Loony*, but she certainly had a positive effect on Ron.

"What is it, Ron?" Hermione asked.

"I'm just thinking about Snape's situation. He's an ex-Death Eater who is bound to be working at Hogwarts for the rest of his life. Sure, he has enough money so that he never *has* to work, but someone like Snape would not be happy to sit around idle too long. I mean, he was a spy for at least ten years! Besides, who would hire him if he **did** leave Hogwarts? Fudge and the *Daily Prophet* made sure he'd never get another job offer. If he did marry, how many women would be content living at Hogwarts nine months out of the year, if he even leaves the castle during the summer months, that is?" Ron pointed out before adding, with a chuckle, "except you, Hermione."

"He's right, you know," Draco said, "and you do owe him, Granger."

"Shut it, Malfoy!" Harry replied. "Stop trying to talk her into this. Who gives a damn about Snape or his situation? He created it himself!"

"Did he, Harry?" asked Hermione.

Her question was met with silence. After a few moments, Ginny asked Hermione if she could talk to her alone. Relieved to escape the tense atmosphere in the sitting room, they went up to the room Hermione stayed in during school breaks and vacations. After her parents had died, she always stayed at Grimmauld Place with Harry or the Weasleys during the holidays.

"What are you thinking, Ginny?" Hermione asked as she sat down on the bed.

Ginny sat down next to Hermione and turned to face her. "I was just wondering if you are in love with Professor Snape. If so, this could be a major problem."

"What do you mean? I am not, nor have I ever been, in love with Professor Snape!" Hermione nearly cringed at the sound of her voice, hearing a bit of panic in it.

Ginny sighed. "Hermione, this is me you are talking to! I know you probably even better than Harry and Ron know you."

"Why would you think I love Professor Snape, Ginny?"

"Call it a woman's intuition, but I know you do, all right?"

Hermione took a deep breath. "Yes, I have feelings for him. That is not something you can control, you know?"

"Yes, I do know. Look at Draco and me."

"What am I going to do, Ginny?" asked Hermione.

"Well, you can't do anything until you read the contract. That should give you a place to start."

"You think I should do this, don't you?"

"I think Snape deserves an heir as much as anyone else does, and I know it's true that you owe him a debt. You need to think this through, however, and not let your feelings for him cloud your judgment. I am sure it is a wizard's contract, and if you sign it and break it, there are magical consequences," Ginny replied honestly.

"I know. I am just so overwhelmed by this!"

"When do you have to give him your answer?"

"One week."

"Then you had better get started sorting this out!" Ginny said with a grin.

"Right. Thanks, Ginny." Hermione smiled back at her friend.

"Any time, Hermione," Ginny said while leaving the room, pulling the door shut behind her.

Hermione took out the contract and started to read through it. The first thing the contract stated was that she would have to live with Snape during the pregnancy *That's simply not possible*, she thought. *I still have one more year left at university*. Living with Professor Snape was certainly not something that appalled her, but she just didn't feel comfortable with it under these circumstances. Under other circumstances, she would have loved to live with him, but that would never come to pass. She knew what Professor Snape thought of her. He made it perfectly clear every time he called her a *silly little girl* or *Gryffindor know-it-all*, not to mention what he thought of her looks. His comment on her teeth during her fourth year proved that he thought her ugly.

She reminded herself that at one time he *had* been a follower of Voldemort. She knew he switched sides, but Voldemort's followers believed in the *purity* of blood, ergo, Snape must believe in this. Why else would he have joined the Death Eaters in the first place? No, she couldn't imagine Professor Snape ever loving a Mudblood.

The second thing in the contract was a confidentiality clause. *It's a good thing I hadn't signed it yet!* It was when she read the second half of the clause that her heart fell. If she agreed to this, she would have a child who would never know she was its mother. She didn't think she could live with that. It would be too hard to create a child with Professor Snape and not be a family with them. This was a fractured nightmare, serving as a poor substitute for her fondest dreams.

She would have no rights whatsoever! Snape could do anything or go anywhere and she wouldn't be able to stop him. Not that Hermione thought he would ever hurt the child, but that was beside the point. She simply would be non-existent to her own child. The only thing she knew for sure at this point was that if she was even going to consider this, they would have to renegotiate this contract!

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"I can't believe that overgrown bat would try to take advantage of Hermione like this!" Harry sulked.

"He's not taking advantage, Potter. Granger owes him!" snapped Draco.

"So you keep saying, Malfoy. She can repay her debt another way. He wants too much!"

"That's up to her, Harry. Whatever she decides, we need to be there for her," Ginny said calmly. Harry was getting way too worked up over this.

"Have you forgotten this is *Snape*, Ginny?"

"Harry, Snape is not your enemy and never has been. Stop acting like he's Voldemort," Draco said through clenched teeth. He found himself not only becoming impatient with Potter's attitude to his godfather in general but also to his snapping at Ginny.

"I haven't forgotten, Harry," said Ginny, "but this isn't about you or me. It's about Hermione and what she decides to do."

"Am I the only one who thinks this is the worst idea I've ever heard?"

"Apparently," smirked Draco.

"I don't know if this is a good idea or not," Ron said," but what **I** do think is Hermione will do what *she* wants to do whether we like it or not. This is her decision, Harry. She is the one who will have to live with it, good or bad. We need to support it, whatever it is."

"That's right, Potter," replied Draco.

Harry said nothing, but thought to himself that he would stop her from doing this if it was the last thing he did.

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Snape met Professor Dumbledore in the hallway outside his office.

"Headmaster, I was wondering if you and Minerva could join me in my chambers for tea."

"Certainly, Severus," the headmaster replied. "Is there something in particular you wish to discuss?"

"Yes, but I would prefer to discuss it in my chambers with the both of you."

"Very well. We will be there directly." Dumbledore turned with a swish of his purple robes. Snape returned to his room and ordered tea from the house-elves. Fifteen minutes later, he opened the door for Albus and Minerva.

"Hello, Severus."

"Hello, Minerva, Albus. Have a seat, please." Snape directed them to his sitting room where tea had been set up.

"You wished to speak with us, Severus?" Dumbledore inquired as he took a bite of a ginger newt.

"Yes, it is a matter of some importance that will indirectly affect you both."

"Does this mean you have found a surrogate mother?"

"Yes, Albus, I have."

"Excellent! It has been too many years since we have had a little one in the castle!" Dumbledore's eyes twinkled at Severus.

Minerva noticed a deeper look in Severus' eyes and simply asked, "Who did you choose? Do we know her?"

"Yes. Hermione Granger."

Albus choked on his ginger newt. "Miss Granger? Has she agreed?"

"Not yet, but she will. She owes me a Wizard's debt."

"Be that as it may, I can't believe she would readily accept. Has she seen the contract?" Minerva wanted to know.

"She took it with her this morning to read over, and she will be back next week with her answer."

"Don't get your hopes up, my boy. I cannot see Miss Granger agreeing to those terms." Dumbledore looked quite serious, a rare sight indeed.

"Oh, she will agree. Have no doubt."

Minerva sighed, "Why Miss Granger, Severus?"

"Because, Minerva, I want the best, and she is the best."

"Did you even go to the agency I recommended?" Minerva asked.

"Yes. There were only dunderheads there! I don't know how that place stays in business."

"Are you sure you are not being too picky, Severus?"

"We are talking about my heir, Minerva! My child! Of course I am being picky!" Severus snapped at her.

Severus was being truthful. He really did want the best and hence, was being picky. What he wouldn't tell them, however, was the *real* reason he was being so picky. He wanted Hermione Granger for more than just a surrogate mother. If he had his way, he would court her and marry her. Then, they could have a child together and be a real family, the natural way.

Severus' pride would not allow him to even ask her to dinner. He knew he would be rejected, and he had been humiliated too many times in his life to purposely set himself up for ridicule. He knew what she really thought of him; it was what they all thought. He was a greasy git or the overgrown bat of the dungeons. No, if he couldn't have the woman he wanted, he would have at least a part of her. It was the best he could do.

"Well," said Albus, "I hope you are not setting yourself up for disappointment. Hermione is a very headstrong witch."

"Yes, but she is also honorable. She will pay her debt, have no doubt."

Albus inwardly chuckled at the confidence Severus had. He knew of Severus' feelings for the girl, even if Severus would never admit them. Albus just hoped everyone would come out unscathed in the end.

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Monday morning came too quickly for Hermione. After she showered and dressed, she found her stomach too nervous to eat anything except dry toast. As she nibbled at her small slice, Harry came into the kitchen.

"Well, what did you decide?" he asked.

"I honestly don't know yet, Harry. There are some things I want to renegotiate in the contract." *Like everything*, she thought to herself.

"Hermione, you can't do this!"

"Stop it, Harry! This is my decision!"

"But, Hermione, you know how I feel about Snape!"

"Yes I do, Harry, and this is not about *you*! Get over yourself!" With that, she left the kitchen, slamming the door behind her.

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Snape was sitting at his desk feeling calm, cool, and collected when Hermione knocked at exactly nine that morning.

"Enter."

"Good morning, Professor."

"Miss Granger. Would you like some tea?"

"No. Thank you." Hermione didn't think she could keep anything in her stomach right now; the toast was barely staying where it should.

"Very well, then. I assume you read the contract?"

"Yes, and let me say that, first, I had already discussed this with Harry, Ron, Ginny, and Draco before I read it."

Snape smirked. He had known her friends would have to be told regardless. "What have you decided?" He asked bluntly again.

"Well, secondly, I would like to renegotiate this contract."

"No. Absolutely not. It is non-negotiable."

"But, sir, how am I supposed to live with you?" *Even though that is what I wish more than anything in the world.* "I still have one year left at university."

"You can finish your last year by Owl Post, Miss Granger. I am a professor should you require additional assistance, although, I doubt you will."

She sighed. "But why do you want me here?" *It would be pure hell for me having you so close and not being allowed to touch you or hold you.*

"Why, your health of course! You forget I have seen you stressed at test time and when you have papers due. You neglect yourself and your health. I won't have you skipping meals and barely sleeping, and by doing so, putting my child at risk. Besides, I can make you all the potions you may need, and there is a Mediwitch right here in the castle." *I want to see you in all the stages of pregnancy, round with my child. I will cherish the memories of our time together, because I know they will eventually end.*

Well, he had her there. She decided to move to the next problem.

"Thirdly, sir, I also have a problem with the child not knowing that I am the mother."

"Why, Miss Granger? The child would be solely mine." *It has to be. I would not be able to bear having you in my child's life, knowing you hate me, and knowing that you never will be truly a part of mine. I cannot give in to her demands without appearing weak.*

"It is not solely your child! You will be using **MY** egg!"

"Miss Granger, surrogate mothers do this for families all the time and have absolutely no contact with the child."

"That may be, Professor, but those women chose to do this. I am not choosing to do this, I am being forced." *I am being forced to give up a part of myself, created with you. My heart is already breaking in two.*

"You are not being forced. You simply have a debt you need to pay." *It had to be this way. I could not bear it any other way.*

"You expect me to donate my egg, be a human incubator, deliver a baby for you, and then be on my merry way?" Tears sprang to her eyes.

"Yes." *Don't you see, Hermione, how having you around afterwards would break what is left of my heart? Dignity and pride are all I have left after everything that the Ministry and the Daily Prophet have said and done to tear away at my redeemed reputation. I can't lose those, even for you.*

"I just don't think I have it in me to do that, Professor."

"Yes you do, Miss Granger, and that is exactly what you **will** do. You **owe** me. Because of me, you are still here to have a life and children. However, you are quite possibly my last hope and I will not be denied!" *Not in this*, he thought. If he could not have her, he would have a part of her.

*He couldn't possibly understand*, Hermione thought. Because of her love for Severus, she would love their baby that much more. How could he expect her to leave? She had to change his mind somehow!

"Miss Granger, when you owe someone something, you pay on their terms, not on your terms. I will not yield on this!" *I cannot, for my own sanity. It has to be you, don't you see?* "Now, what is your answer?"

"Who will care for the baby while you are at work? Will you continue to stay at Hogwarts? Where will you go during the summer?" Hermione desperately wanted to know what his plans were; she wanted to somehow stay a part of his life, the child's life.

"Miss Granger! None of that is your concern. You will simply carry my child, deliver him or her, and then leave us. You will have no more contact with me or my child after that. It should not be difficult; you have gone three years without contacting me whatsoever."

Hermione just stared at him. He almost sounded hurt that she never kept in touch, but that couldn't be true. He hated her...didn't he?

"Yes, sir, but you didn't have my child with you then."

"You are right, and I will not have *your* child with me later. I will have *my* child. I need your answer, Miss Granger. I grow weary of this conversation." *I have to end this now; I am weakening.*

"I suppose I don't really have a choice, do I? You won't forgive the debt?"

"No, my heir is far too important to me."

"Then, I will sign the contract." Hermione took the quill he offered, trying hard to keep the tears welling behind her eyes from spilling out.

As Hermione signed the contract, she realized something that eased her pain a bit. She would have nine months to change his mind and get him to let her into his and this child's lives. *There is no way I can just walk away after I give birth. Surely I can change his mind in that amount of time, considering I will be living with him! I will have to think like a Slytherin! It should be an easy thing to learn to do, since I will be learning from the master.*

Snape let out a breath he didn't know he had been holding. Hermione had signed the contract! He was a very happy man. He would have his heir by the woman he loved. If he couldn't have the complete package, he would have to settle for any part of it he could get.

"Miss Granger, you have another week to get your affairs in order and set up your last year at the university. I will have your rooms ready when you return. I will make an appointment to get us started. Until then, I bid you good day."

"Yes. Good day, Professor."

She walked out with one thought plaguing her. *Oh, Merlin! What have I done?*

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**A/N:** Up next: Hermione talks with Minerva and finds some legal rights for surrogate mothers.

## Chapter 4

*Chapter 4 of 13*

Severus decides that he wants an heir. He chooses Hermione to be the surrogate mother, but will she agree? My response to the Surrogate Mother Challenge posted on WIKTT.

**Disclaimer:** The Harry Potter world belongs to JKR, not cocoachristy

**A/N:** Thanks so much to the wonderful betas southern\_witch\_69 and Meredith. Those two go way above and beyond the call of duty for me and I am much in their debt!

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### Chapter 4

Hermione was in slight shock as she left the dungeons. She hoped that she had done the right thing, but wasn't sure. Severus Snape was a hard man. She wondered if she would be able to out Slytherin the master Slytherin. But, this was her chance to get what she truly wanted, and she was going to do everything she could to make it happen.

Flinging open the small side door to the grounds, Hermione drew in a long deep breath of fresh air. She missed the brisk Scottish air and the rolling grounds of Hogwarts. She decided to take a walk around the grounds to collect her thoughts before she left. The first thing she would need to take care of was university. She didn't think it would be a problem to study by owl; people did it all the time. Her major was Charms, and she had already spoken with Professor Flitwick about becoming an apprentice after she completed her studies, though he had not given her an answer as of yet. Usually, he only took a Ravenclaw as an apprentice, and at the present, Terry Boot was working with him. Hermione sighed. Maybe she wouldn't be allowed to stay at Hogwarts anyway because of the contract.

As she continued her walk, Hermione found herself in the rose garden. This had always been one of her favorite places to think, and she was not surprised that she had ended up there. Just as she sat on one of the benches, she was greeted by a familiar voice.

"Miss Granger, I am so glad I ran into you today."

"Professor McGonagall! How lovely to see you," said Hermione, turning her head with a smile.

"It's very nice to see you also. I trust you are well? And, please, call me Minerva, as you are no longer a student here."

"I am well, thank you, and do call me Hermione." Hermione glanced at her former professor with a contemplative look. "I suppose you are wondering why I am here?"

"I would imagine you have just finished your meeting with Severus. What did you decide, Hermione?"

Hermione didn't reply. She had already signed the contract and was not supposed to talk of this to anyone.

Minerva noticed her distress and told her, "Hermione, I know that Severus is looking for a surrogate mother and wishes for *you* to take this task on for him. I also know about the contract, so you may feel at ease talking to me."

Hermione was relieved to have someone to talk to who may be objective. "I signed the contract. I am going to do it."

"That does surprise me. I must admit, Albus and I were certain you would say no."

"Do you think I have made a mistake, Professor?"

"That is not for me to decide, Hermione. It is between you and Severus. *I am* curious to know if you can live with the terms of the contract."

"I tried to renegotiate the contract, but Professor Snape was having none of it. I decided to sign it because I do owe him a Wizard debt I can only hope that I can eventually change his mind on some of the terms." *Change his mind about ME, to be precise.*

"I see. How do you feel about Professor Snape, Hermione?" Minerva wanted to know.

Hermione panicked slightly. Did Minerva suspect how she felt about the Potions master? She felt so vulnerable, like everyone could see right through her. What would Minerva think of her if she knew she was in love with Professor Snape? Would she worry about the age difference? Even though Snape was nineteen years older than she was, she didn't think that would matter much, especially in the Wizarding world. Besides, she knew that Minerva and Albus were together. Perhaps she would be concerned about his past? No, that couldn't be. Albus and Minerva both trusted Snape. Maybe they would not think *she* was right for *him*?

"What do you mean, Professor?" Hermione asked in a slightly stilted voice.

Minerva sighed. She knew Severus and Hermione had worked very closely together for eight months as they created the potion that weakened Voldemort. She had watched them grow to respect each other, although she doubted either would admit it, and she suspected they had feelings for each other as well, though each was too stubborn to admit that either.

Minerva knew Severus would consider Hermione as being too good for him. He believed he would never be able to live down his past, and Minerva was sure he wouldn't want to put Hermione through the struggles he would face for quite some time due to his reputation. She also knew the age difference would bother Severus as it had bothered Albus when they fell in love.

However, Hermione was a Gryffindor, like herself. Age wouldn't be a problem for her, if Hermione truly loved Severus, as Minerva suspected she did. She believed she knew what would hold Hermione back. Because of Severus' teaching style, most students thought he hated them, the Golden Trio most of all. She believed Hermione would feel as though Severus could never reciprocate her feelings.

Minerva loved Severus and Hermione both as though they were her own children. She and Albus had, for various reasons, never been able to have children of their own, so Minerva always held certain people close to her heart. Severus and Hermione were just two of them, and she wanted to see them both happy.

Minerva wanted Severus to have his heir, as she knew how important it was to him. She also believed he could be an excellent father, but she didn't want Severus to have his dream at Hermione's expense. She feared Hermione was getting in over her head. Hermione hadn't said what she was hoping to change about the contract during her pregnancy, but she could imagine that it was Severus' feelings towards her. It wouldn't be the first time a young woman thought she could change a man and be wrong. Minerva needed to know the extent of Hermione's feelings for Severus.

"What I mean, Hermione, is what are your intentions concerning Professor Snape?"

"Ummm, I don't have any intentions towards Professor Snape, per se; my intentions are more towards the baby," Hermione answered, her eyes darting downward. She would never be able to tell Minerva she loved Professor Snape with all her heart and wanted nothing more than to be in his life forever.

"I see. Well then, what are your intentions concerning the baby? I thought you signed a contract giving Severus all rights to the child."

"Yes, I did. I tried to renegotiate the contract, as I said, to at least let me be in the baby's life, but he wouldn't do it. So, my intent, you could say, is to try to change his mind while I am living with him." *And if by some small chance he happened to fall in love with me in the process, all the better.*

"Do you think you will be able to do that, Hermione? Severus was very adamant about the contract when he spoke with Albus and me."

"I *have* to try, Minerva. This child will be a part of me, regardless of what Professor Snape says. He will be using my egg. There has got to be a way to change his mind!"

"Well, Hermione, if anyone can convince him, it will be you." *Along with Albus and me*, she thought to herself. She reached over and patted Hermione's arm. "I must be going. There is only one more month left before term starts, and I have much to do before then. Where does the time go?"

"Okay, Minerva. It was nice talking to you. I'm sure I will be seeing you soon, as I will be moving in the castle next week. Have a nice day," Hermione offered with a small wave, as Minerva headed toward the castle.

After her talk with Minerva, Hermione felt a little better. She decided what she needed now was more information on becoming a surrogate mother *it is always best to be prepared in everything you do*, thought Hermione.

Hermione Apparated to Grimmauld Place and changed into Muggle jeans and a pullover before venturing out into London. She was glad no one was there; she didn't feel she could deal with any questions or sideways looks right now. She found a directory in a small pub, giving her the location of the Centre for Fertility at London. She took the Underground to the closest stop and walked from there to the Centre. Hermione wanted to find out all she could about what to expect. After explaining to the receptionist that she had been asked to serve as a surrogate mother, she was given several pamphlets to read. She found a quiet corner to sit in and opened the first one.

*"Today's surrogate mother is the legal mother of her baby from the moment of conception. A married woman shares rights to her child with only her husband, as he is the legal father by law. A legal agreement must be written and signed by the woman being inseminated, also by her husband if she's married, and by the person(s) intending to adopt the child. It's the only way to exchange rights to the child.*

*The legal procedures could become lengthy when both sides make certain demands. The person(s) must apply for legal guardianship of the child before conception, (if previous arrangements have been made) during pregnancy, and within six months of the child's birth. It is recommended that no legally binding contract be signed until after the birth of the child. In some instances, the mother may want to change her mind. A new law was passed to ensure that both parties remain anonymous to the public, but when the child in question reaches the age of 18, he or she will have access to their file information. The decision to tell the child the truth lies with the legal guardian unless deemed otherwise by both parties via legal agreement.*

*If you would like to be a surrogate mother, apply at one of our many locations. A surrogate mother or a sperm donor, you must be at least 18 years of age living in the UK, Channel Islands, or Isle of Man. If you are interested in having a surrogate mother carry your child, please feel free to contact us immediately. All donors and mothers are subjected to testing and screening.*

There was much more, but Hermione couldn't finish reading. She could hardly believe what she'd just read! That sneaky, no-good Slytherin **BASTARD!** He *must* have known all this. That had to be why he insisted she sign the contract before she left.

Hermione knew that when she signed the magical contract she had forfeited all of these rights, and Snape must have known it too. She wanted to kick herself for not coming here sooner. She had been so worried about renegotiating the contract that she hadn't even thought to check the legalities. The cleverest witch of her age? She had never felt more stupid in her life.

Hermione's instinct was to go straight back to the castle and give Severus Snape what for. How *dare* he do this to her? He must really be congratulating himself right now for having pulled one over on her. Bastard! She stormed out of the clinic with the pamphlets and was halfway to the Underground stop when she began to calm down. Going back and having it out with him would do no good. She had already signed the contract, and there was nothing to be done. Severus wouldn't even have to legally adopt the child, as Hermione had signed her rights away before even leaving his office. And why? Because she loved him. She wanted him however she could get him and had allowed her emotions to rule her decision. Exactly as she was just doing.

If she went to him now, in the frame of mind she was in, it would only make things worse. She would never get him to let her see the baby, much less start to have feelings for her. No, she needed to stick to her plan. She would certainly not get him to see her in a better light if she barged into his office telling him what a lowlife, son of a bitch, heartless bastard he was or by hexing his balls off.

Hermione took a few deep breaths and decided to go home to Grimmauld Place, as no one was likely to be there. Harry had finished his Auror training and was working with Moody. Ron worked at *The Quibbler* writing for the sports section. Ginny worked in one of the many offices run by Malfoy, Inc., which was just as well. She knew Draco and Ginny would probably get married soon, and Ginny would never have to work again if she chose not to. None of them would be back home until the end of the day, so she would have some time to think this through.

She knew she needed to go to the university to speak with her advisor about doing her last year by owl, but she decided to go the next day. She wanted to finish reading through all the information she had been given, so she would be prepared for next week. Hermione Granger would not make the mistake of being unprepared again. She arrived at Grimmauld Place with this thought in mind and headed for the sofa in the study, parchment and quills in hand.

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Severus Snape was a very happy man indeed. Hermione Granger had signed the contract. It had taken some convincing, but he had gotten his way in the end. That also made him happy, as he rarely got his way in anything. A knock on the door brought Severus out of his reverie.

"Enter," Severus said.

Albus Dumbledore opened the door, walked in, and sat in the chair in front of Severus' desk. "Well, Severus, how did your meeting with Miss Granger go?"

Severus smirked. He knew the old man would be down in the dungeons before the day was over. The suspense was probably killing him. "Very satisfying," Severus replied.

"Satisfying to you or Miss Granger? Or, dare I ask, satisfying to you both?"

Severus rolled his eyes at the headmaster's dramatics. "To me, Albus. Miss Granger signed the contract, as I suspected she would. *I will have her here with me for at least nine months. Very satisfying to me, indeed.*

"Severus," the headmaster said, very seriously. "I doubt that she properly researched the legal aspects if she signed without too much of a fuss. She may very well find out that legally she had rights to this child until she signed your contract. How do plan to explain yourself to her if it comes up?"

"I have nothing to explain, Albus. She had the contract for a week before we discussed it. She could very well have researched things and chose not to. That is not my fault." *Thank Merlin she didn't. That is very fortunate indeed.*

Albus sighed. "Severus, she will still feel you tricked her."

"I did no such thing. I chose not to tell her something she could have very well found out herself. She had that contract for a week. It is not my fault she did not feel the need to find out more information before coming to our meeting," Severus snapped.

"How very Slytherin of you, Severus. Omitting details is the same as tricking. Even if you don't see it as such, Miss Granger most assuredly will, should she research things herself," Albus said.

"Yes, Albus, and I still stand by what I said earlier. It is through no fault of mine she did not spend her week wisely. *This old man is not going to ruin the only good mood I have had in a long time. Even receiving the Order Of Merlin can't compare to this!*

"Very well, Severus. I hope you know what you are doing. I must be going. I am meeting Minerva soon for lunch."

"Good day, Albus," Severus said. "Enjoy your lunch."

"See you later, my boy." And, with that, Severus was left alone with his thoughts.

Severus truly did not feel as if he tricked Hermione. He had given her the contract to read over and a week to do it in. Had she been in Slytherin, the first thing she would have done would have been get all the legal information she could find. He smirked. She had probably been so concerned about renegotiating *his* contract that she hadn't even thought of that.

Severus had almost weakened while she was in his office earlier. She seemed to truly want to be a part of the baby's life. He felt an ache in his chest at having to deny her. He didn't want to deny her anything; he wanted to give her the world on a silver platter. But, Severus knew she wouldn't want anything that he had to offer. Why would she? She could have anyone she wanted.

Severus felt confident that once this was over she would go back to her life and eventually forget about him. He knew she would not forget the baby; how could she? However, he was certain there would be no lasting damage, and he would have a piece of her when she left. *But, what will she have but a broken heart because you have denied her access to this child?* Severus quickly pushed those thoughts away. It would not do to dwell on them.

Severus had decided to give her monetary compensation after she had delivered the child. He did not have to, as there was nothing in the contract that stated he should, but he wanted her to have *something* for her trouble. He decided 35,000 gallons for a boy and 25,000 gallons for a girl. Some people would not agree that he would pay more for a boy than he would for a girl, he knew, but a boy would carry on the Snape name, not just the line.

Severus had decided to do some research on the different stages of pregnancy. If he was going to have a hormonal witch living with him, he wanted some idea about what to expect. He wanted to make her as comfortable as he could while she was here. *Maybe then she will never want to leave* Right. Like that would ever happen. With that thought, he left the castle in search of information.

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After several hours of pondering, Hermione was sure of one thing. She was happy that she was doing this the Wizarding way instead of the Muggle way. The Muggle way could take three or four tries, sometimes more. There was so much involved! She had owed the agency Severus had made arrangements with and asked about the procedure. She found out it only took one try. She would be given a potion to induce ovulation, go back the next day, and be inseminated while a spell was cast to make sure it worked the first time. The procedure also ensured there would be no multiple births, unless you wanted one.

The news also meant she would definitely be pregnant with Severus Snape's baby by next week. She had such mixed feelings. She felt like she was already hormonal! She always wanted to have a baby, but she had thought she would go through the pregnancy with her husband by her side. Instead, she was going through it with the man she loved, but he'd already told her he wouldn't have her around when it was over.

*There has just got to be a way to make him see my side of things. What can I do to ensure my place in this baby's life? In Severus' life?*

Hermione had been giving this a lot of thought as she could think of nothing else. She had begun to wonder why he had ~~really~~ chosen her. Of course, she did owe him the Wizard's debt, and she knew she *did* have above average intelligence, despite her overlooking a bit of research into surrogates. But, she was not the only intelligent witch

out there. Out of all the people at the agency, there had to have been *someone* who was adequate. So why had he asked her?

It would certainly have been easier to choose someone he didn't know to do this, considering the terms of the contract. If he wanted someone he would never see again, shouldn't he have picked someone he didn't have mutual friends with? They had a lot of history together.

No, there had to be a specific reason he chose her, and she was determined to find out *exactly* what it was. At first she thought it may have been to punish her because of his dislike for her, but she had quickly dismissed that notion. This was something too important to be of any petty use. She wasn't sure what his reasons were, but she knew she had nine months to figure them out.

Hermione looked up from her place on the couch when she heard the front door close and saw Ron entering the room. He had been spending much of his time there with Harry, slowly leaving the Burrow.

"Hi, Hermione," Ron greeted. "How did your meeting with Snape go?"

"Well," Hermione sighed. "I'm not exactly sure how it *went*, but I did decide to do it."

"That is an interesting way to put it."

"Yes," Hermione agreed. "I wanted to renegotiate the contract, but he flat out refused."

"Then, why did you sign it, Hermione?" Ron asked.

"He wouldn't forgive the debt. Oh, Ron, I don't know what to do! With the contract I signed, I won't have any rights to this child at all, and Severus won't even allow me to visit the baby!"

"Then what in Merlin's name made you sign the contract, Hermione?" Ron demanded.

"I think I can change his mind. I will be living with him during the pregnancy. Surely during those nine months we can come to a better agreement," Hermione explained.

"Did he specify you had to live with him during the pregnancy in the contract?" asked Ron.

"Yes," Hermione told him, "he said it was to monitor my health and keep an eye on my eating and sleeping habits."

"Well, he has a point there," Ron chuckled.

As the conversation drifted to sports and Luna, neither Ron nor Hermione noticed Harry slip back out the front door.

\*\*\*\*\*

Severus Snape was in his office reading books on pregnancy. He had learnt that a lot of changes took place at different stages of a pregnancy. He was surprised to learn so much happened during the first trimester, such as sensitive and tender breasts, tiredness, nausea, (he secretly hoped Hermione skipped that symptom) and the need for frequent trips to the loo. Those were just a few. It was a lot to take in.

During the second trimester, a pregnant witch could grow 'scatterbrained' and her belly would start to show the baby growing inside. Severus was particularly looking forward to that part. He wanted to see Hermione round with his child. He knew he would find her even more beautiful. He read she would have some new discomforts during this trimester, such as sleeping problems.

The third trimester would bring many changes: frequent urination again and a huge belly. He contentedly imagined Hermione going through all of these changes. The change that caught his eye the most, however, was the change in a witch's sex drive. The book said that although every witch is different, many found their sex drive went through the roof during pregnancy. *That should be interesting to find out* he thought with a smirk.

He was sitting there contemplating what he had learned when his door suddenly burst open, and a very unpleasant looking Harry Potter stepped in.

"Potter, to what do I owe this pleasure?" Snape smirked. He knew exactly why Potter was here.

"I want to talk to you about what you are doing to Hermione," Harry snapped, slamming the office door shut behind him.

"I am not doing anything to her she has not agreed to." *Although I can think of several things more I would like to get her to agree to.*

"I want you to stop this surrogate mother bullshit," Harry demanded.

"Why on earth would I do that? I want an heir, and she is the perfect choice to be my surrogate. Not that I need to explain anything ~~to~~ *you*."

"Don't you care what you are doing to Hermione? She is beside herself worrying about not being able to see the child once it is born. Although why she would want to claim anything created by *you* is beyond me!"

"That is quite enough, Potter. This is my private business and *I will not* discuss it with you or anyone else other than Hermione. Now, I suggest you leave my office at once." Snape's fingers were just itching to grab his wand and hex Harry Potter to the next universe.

"Fine, *Professor*, I'll go. But, know that you have not heard the last of me."

With that, Harry turned and stormed out of Snape's office, slamming the door again.

*Interesting*, Snape thought. *Did Hermione know Potter was coming here? No, she couldn't have. She would not have wanted him to. Was she really that upset about not being in his baby's life? Was she really "beside herself" as Potter had claimed?* Severus supposed he would just have to watch her closely and see what happened.

\*\*\*\*\*

The week flew by, and Hermione again found herself in Professor Snape's dungeons.

"I trust you were able to get your affairs in order and have made arrangements with the university?" Snape asked.

"Yes, Professor, it has all been settled. Have you made our appointment?" Hermione was so nervous her palms were sweating. She hoped he could not detect the tremble in her voice.

"Yes, I have. We will leave tomorrow morning at eight sharp. Please be ready," Snape instructed.

*I will never be ready to have your baby like this.* "Yes, sir, I will be. Could you show me to my rooms now?" Hermione could feel the weight of her situation weighing on her, and the last thing she wanted to do was to cry in front of Professor Snape. That would not help her plan at all!

"Follow me, Miss Granger," Snape instructed.

Hermione followed her former professor to a large bedroom down the corridor from his. It had a four poster canopy bed with sheer white curtains. A large, mahogany desk and bookshelf stocked full, including several advanced Charms books. When Hermione ran a finger along their spines and raised an inquisitive eyebrow at Snape, he merely said, "I know your major is Charms at university, and I wanted you to have some books on the subject."

Hermione said nothing but continued to look around the room. She noticed a door that she assumed led to the bathroom. Snape must've been reading her mind.

"That door takes you to the bathroom. There is another door inside the bathroom that connects to my room, so please be sure to lock it whenever you are in there *Unless you wish for me to join you.*"

"Okay, thank you, sir. I would like to take a nap before dinner. I will see you at six." Hermione just wanted to be alone to collect her thoughts and get some control over her feelings.

"Very well, Hermione. I will see you then," Snape said. He turned and left her room, shutting the door softly behind him.

As Snape left Hermione alone, she whispered softly, "And, so it begins."

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**Up Next: Hermione and Severus go to the clinic and Severus overhears a confession.**

## Chapter 5

*Chapter 5 of 13*

Severus decides that he wants an heir. He chooses Hermione to be the surrogate mother, but will she agree? My response to the Surrogate Mother Challenge posted on WIKTT.

**Disclaimer:** The wonderful world of Harry Potter belongs to JKR.

**A/N:** Thanks so much to my exceptional betas Southern\_witch\_69 and Meredith. Chocolate Frogs to you both!!

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### Chapter 5

After a fitful sleep, Hermione decided to rise early. It was only five in the morning, but she decided she would go ahead and shower to get ready for the day. By doing so, she reasoned that her moody roommate would not have to sit around and wait for her, which would only annoy him.

She turned the water on and let it get as hot as she could stand it before she got in. She hoped the heat of the water would relax her tired muscles, but she had no such luck. After she had been in the shower for nearly twenty minutes, she turned the water off and opened the door to grab her towel. Just as she did so, she looked up into the eyes of a very surprised Severus Snape.

He briefly looked her up and down, thinking, *Any man would look* He then turned and made a hasty exit from the bathroom.

Hermione was mortified. *I can't believe I forgot to lock the door! I didn't think he would be up this early, but still, I should have locked the door!* She finished dressing and grooming quickly. Afterward, she went to her room and stayed about thirty minutes, trying to calm herself.

\*\*\*\*\*

Severus Snape had always been a very light sleeper and had gotten used to even less sleep during his days as a spy. After a solid four hours of sleep, he knew he was up for the day. He had decided to go ahead and shower so that his young surrogate to be would not feel she had to rush in the bathroom. He wanted to make sure she was comfortable during her stay with him.

When he opened the door, however, he immediately realized his mistake. There in all her naked glory stood Hermione Granger reaching for a towel. The word *Goddess* sounded through his mind repeatedly since seeing her. After looking her up and down, he realized what he was doing and made a quick exit from the bathroom to steady himself. *Merlin, help me! This is going to be a long nine months!*

\*\*\*\*\*

When she left her room, Hermione found the dark wizard eating breakfast. "You should eat something," he said. "I don't know how long we will be with the medical staff at the agency's clinic. They want to give you a physical today as well as the ovulation potion."

"Maybe just some toast then. My stomach is too nervous right now for anything else. Professor, I apologize for forgetting to lock the bathroom door this morning--" Hermione began cautiously, cheeks reddening.

He held up a hand to stop her. "Miss Granger, it is quite understandable that you would forget, *Thank Merlin you did forget, temptress!*" you are not used to these living arrangements. Just remember to lock the door in the future," he added, in case she'd noticed that he'd gazed longer than he should have. *If you happen to forget again and a repeat incident occurs, I would not hold it against you, my dear.*

She hadn't felt the need to reply to that and instead finished her tea. She only looked up from her cup when he told her it was time to go. *You can do this, Hermione! You can do this.*

\*\*\*\*\*

They arrived at the agency's clinic with ten minutes to spare. Hermione was surprised that the nurse took her right to the back anyway. *Well, this certainly is not a Muggle clinic, or I would have been waiting half an hour at least in a sitting room,* she mused. After she was shown to her examination room, she put on the standard gown. She

only had to wait a few minutes before the Healer and Professor Snape entered the room.

Hermione was a little disconcerted that *he* was there. She wondered why he would want to be with her during the procedure. The professor seemed to notice her questioning glance.

"I want to be present for the entire process of the creation of my child, Miss Granger." She still felt somewhat uneasy, but she merely nodded acceptance.

The Healer started the examination by telling her everything looked fine. After a few moments though, the already nervous witch noted an unreadable expression on his face. "Miss Granger, you are a virgin, correct?" the man asked. Hearing that, Snape jerked his head around to look at her so fast she was surprised he didn't get whiplash.

Hermione felt uncomfortable answering this question with *him* in the room, but she murmured a quick, "Yes." The Healer nodded knowingly. So she decided to ask, "Will that cause a problem with the insemination?"

"No," he assured her, "it will still be possible for the semen to reach the egg. If menstrual blood can get out, then the semen can get in. I just did not expect to see a virgin agree to become a surrogate mother." He eyed the professor shrewdly.

Well, Hermione certainly understood that. She had not been expecting to become a surrogate mother or any kind of mother, for that matter, anytime soon.

After the exam was completed, he stepped out of the room, leaving them in an uncomfortable silence. Finally, the professor spoke. "Miss Granger, I apologize. I did not realize you were still a...*virgin*. That is very uncommon for a witch your age." *Good Lord, I've tainted an innocent witch.*

"Well, excuse me if I saw the need to put my studies before boys," Hermione snapped, feeling defensive. "Would it have made a difference if you knew?"

Snape thought for a moment, and then confessed, "No, it would not have. The need for me to have an heir is a great one, and I want you *and only* you to be the surrogate. So no, it would not have changed anything had I known."

"Lovely," she bit out sarcastically before sighing in defeat. She had known the answer before she had even asked the question. There was *one* thing she desperately wanted to know, though, that she *didn't* know the answer to. "Why did it have to be *only* me, Professor? I mean, I realize you think I have above average intelligence, and yes, I owe you a Wizard's debt, but there has to be more to it than that."

*Insufferable, little know-it-all! Severus* thought. He hadn't expected that question, or he may have had a ready response. *What am I suppose to tell you? Hermione, it is because I am desperately in love with you and long to have you as my own. Since I know that is not possible, I want to always have a part of you with me.*

The Healer's return saved him from having to reply. *Damn*, thought Hermione. "Well, Miss Granger," the man said, not noticing the tension in the room, "everything seems to be in order. You are in excellent health. Now, you will take the ovulation potion and go home. You will return here at eight in the morning, and we will insert the semen and cast a Conception Spell that normally guarantees you will become pregnant with the first attempt. Do you have any questions?"

"Will it be painful?" she wanted to know.

"No, you will experience only a slight discomfort similar to menstrual cramps," the Healer explained.

"Is there anything I should not do today?"

"Just get plenty of rest, and you will be fine. There is nothing at all to worry about," the wizened wizard answered. "Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"No," Hermione replied.

"Professor Snape?" he asked.

"No, I believe you have covered it all," Snape replied.

"Good," the Healer said. "Then I will see you both in the morning." With that, he left the room. Snape excused himself also, giving Hermione privacy to dress before they Apparated back to Hogwarts.

It was around 10:30 when they arrived back at the castle. Hermione decided to have a nap, as she had not slept well the night before and had woken rather early. She fell asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow.

\*\*\*\*\*

Severus woke Hermione up shortly after noon to have lunch. After her nap, she felt better and was over her embarrassment of the morning. Just as they finished eating, there was a knock at the door. Severus smirked. The old man couldn't even go half a day without prying into his business.

"Enter," Severus called. However, it was not Albus who entered. It was Lucius Malfoy. Severus rose to greet him. "Hello, Lucius. I must say I am surprised to see you here," Severus said. He only barely managed to keep his surprise from being evident.

"Good afternoon, Severus, Miss Granger. I came to bring good news. Draco and Ginevra have decided to get married, and I wanted to tell you personally before you read it in the *Daily Prophet* tomorrow. Also, Draco has told me of your...*project*, and I was wondering how that was coming along."

Just as Draco had suspected, Lucius also suspected Severus' feelings for the girl were deeper than he would let on. Having known him for years, Lucius was certain that Severus would not have been so determined to have her, in particular, bear his child otherwise. What Lucius wanted to find out, however, was if the girl reciprocated his friend's feelings, as Draco believed. It had been many years since Lucius had been able to get a rise out of Severus. He could think of no better way to do so now than to start with Miss Granger.

"Everything is coming along, Lucius," Severus replied.

"Is it now? That is good news indeed. Before I forget, Narcissa asked that I invite you, and, of course, you, Miss Granger, for dinner some time very soon. She said it has been too long since she has had the...*pleasure*...of your company." Lucius said it with a smirk, glancing sideways to see if Hermione took the bait.

Hermione had been reading quietly up until then, but snapped her head up upon hearing Lucius' words. Something about the way he had said *pleasure* unnerved her. *Had something gone on with Professor Snape and Narcissa Malfoy? Is she the type of woman he likes? Oh Merlin, if she is his type, then I will have to pack it in right now. There is no way I can compete with someone like her! For starters, she is a pureblood. Second, she is absolutely gorgeous, and she is closer to his bloody age.* She knew, of course, that she didn't have to worry about Narcissa herself, but there were plenty of witches out there just like her.

Severus wondered what Lucius was playing at. He almost sounded like he was *up to something*. "Miss Granger and I will be busy for the next couple of weeks, but perhaps sometime after that," Severus answered noncommittally.

"Of course, of course. And, how are you doing, Miss Granger? I trust Severus is treating you well," Lucius asked.

"Yes, of course, Mr. Malfoy. I am doing well, thanks," she answered cautiously.

"Please, call me Lucius. I hope I may call you Hermione?" Lucius asked.

"I..." Hermione didn't know what to make of this nice, polite Lucius. Uncertain, she looked to Professor Snape, who had his eyes narrowed. He began to speak before she could say anything further.

"Lucius, we appreciate your letting us know about the upcoming binding between Draco and Miss Weasley. Now if you would excuse us, we have a very busy day ahead of us tomorrow," Severus all but snapped.

Inwardly, Lucius chuckled. He could see it as plain as day. Those two definitely desired each other! The sparks flying in that room had been as blatant as the sun in the sky. What fun this would be! He wanted Severus happy and settled down, and he was going to do his best to ensure it happened. He knew Severus had been a spy but didn't hold it against him. They were still friends after all that had happened. He had done what he had to do at the end of the battle himself. No, he wanted his mate to be happy, and if he had a little fun helping him get there, all the better.

"Certainly, Severus. I must take my leave anyway. Narcissa and I have a dinner date this evening that I must prepare for." Lucius stepped to Hermione, lifted her hand, and kissed it, inwardly laughing at the narrowed eyes of his long time friend and godfather to his son. *Yes, this will be much fun, indeed!*

After Lucius's visit, Hermione found herself very confused. In all the time she had known the Potions master, she had never once seen him with a woman. Or, with a man, for that matter. *And, why would you, you were only his student. His personal life would have been none of your business* She found herself wondering, not for the first time, what kind of woman Severus Snape would fancy.

She had always believed he would be attracted to a woman with some degree of intelligence. But, until today, she honestly didn't think appearance would matter much to someone like him. Not because everyone thought *he* was an ugly man, due mostly to his attitude, she just thought that maybe he would be different from all the other men and be above that. Apparently not. Hermione sighed, feeling depression taking over. Finally, she excused herself to have a long soak in the tub, remembering to lock the door this time.

\*\*\*\*\*

What the hell was Lucius playing at, asking Miss Granger to call him Lucius? Kissing her hand! Inviting her to his Manor for dinner *Something is not right here, and I will find out what he is up to.* Severus paced back and forth in his room, a feeling of unease settling into his system.

\*\*\*\*\*

The next morning came all too soon for Hermione. She sat on the bed in the clinic and adjusted the gown around her knees. Today was *the* day. When she returned to the castle that day, she would be pregnant. Pregnant with the love of her life's baby, a baby she would have to relinquish in nine months.

*Stop it, Hermione! Don't go there! You can still change his mind.*

*Yeah, right. Have you SEEN Narcissa Malfoy?*

**STOP IT!**

Severus watched Hermione's face intently as she held this inner dialogue with herself. "You know, we *could* try this the old fashioned way."

Her head jerked up, and she searched his eyes. A bit of hope shot through her. Could he want her like that? She quickly searched his eyes, but she caught his small grin and realized he was only teasing her, trying to lighten her mood. She smiled weakly at him, feeling rejected again, even though she knew he had not really rejected her.

Finally, the Healer came in the room with a Mediwitch. "Is everyone ready?" he asked.

"Yes, we are ready," Snape answered for the both of them. Hermione only nodded, closed her eyes, and laid back.

The Healer raised her gown and lowered the blanket to cover her before handing her a potion. "Drink this, Miss Granger. It will help settle your nerves and is perfectly safe. It may cause you to feel strange for a little while after you get home. Therefore, you will have to rest on your back for a while. When you wake up, you should be fine." Hermione sat up and drank the potion while closing her eyes again, as if that would ease the bitter taste. She eased back down after polishing off the last bit.

A feeling of peace swept over her, but it didn't keep her from stiffening when she felt the Healer begin his task. A large hand wrapped around hers, and she heard Professor Snape's voice in a low purr near her ear. "Just relax, Hermione." Taking a few deep breaths, she gripped his hand tightly and felt his other hand reach to brush a stray lock from her forehead.

Next, she sensed a wand over her belly and heard the Healer say, *"Ualeo Uber Consipio."* A whisper of magic centered over her abdomen as the Healer waved his wand in what felt like four tiny circles over the flesh of her stomach. Hermione opened her eyes and found herself staring into Professor Snape's own dark eyes. For a moment, she saw something flicker there, something...but before she could name it, he removed his hands from hers and sat back in his chair.

As the insemination finished, the Healer gave her some instructions. "I want you to drink plenty of pumpkin juice, as it is loaded with folic acid. You may also drink orange juice, if you wish. You should limit your activities this week and make an appointment to see me again next Wednesday to confirm conception. Everything should be fine, but we do like to be certain." He smiled at them both. "Do either of you have any questions for me?" When they indicated that they did not, he left the room with the professor following closely on his heels.

Hermione dressed and found him waiting for her in the reception area. He asked her if she would like to have lunch, and she agreed. She hadn't been able to eat much in the past few days. Anticipation of the procedure had left her with little appetite over the past week. She was surprised when he actually made an effort to converse with her over lunch. When they arrived back at the castle, Hermione told him she was feeling light-headed from the potion and went to lie down.

She walked in her room and was standing by the fireplace when the thought struck her that she could be pregnant right at that moment. Overcome with a feeling of what she could only describe as awe, she rested one hand on her belly and smiled. She looked at her stomach and tried to envision herself round with child, with *Severus'* child. A feeling of warmth burst from her heart and spread throughout her body, causing her to nearly gasp with the joy of it. She closed her eyes and savored the feeling for a moment, before opening them again to look back at her still flat stomach.

"I know you are already in there, my love. I am your mummy. No matter what daddy tells you, please always know that I love you with all of my heart, and I never wanted to leave you or your daddy. I will let you in on a secret, my baby. I love your daddy, too. I wish so much for him to love me and to want me with you both, but that is just not possible." Feeling tears well in her eyes, Hermione went to lie on the bed, still fully dressed, and fell fast asleep.

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Severus backed away from the door. He couldn't believe what he just heard. *Could it be true? Could Hermione really love me? That would make my life so complete* No, it had to be that Calming Draught the Healer gave her. He said it would make her feel odd. She must merely be confused. *There is no way she would ever love me.* Rubbing his fingers along his chin, he began to wonder how he should treat what he'd heard. *It wouldn't hurt to keep a close eye on her and see how she acts around me, though. After all those years as a spy, I know how to judge people's reactions. This is definitely worth looking into!*

\*\*\*\*\*

One week later, Hermione again found herself waiting at the clinic to be led to the Healer's office. Professor Snape was by her side. She'd already taken the necessary test to see if she was indeed pregnant. They simply needed the Healer's verification. Their wait was over when he escorted them to his office and told them congratulations. The Conception Spell had worked. Severus was beside himself with joy, and before he knew what he was doing, he had grabbed Hermione and hugged her tightly. As soon as he realized what he had done, he released her, a tinge of embarrassment coloring his face. He cleared his throat and resumed his stern demeanor.

Hermione was taken aback by the hug but secretly thrilled at being in his arms, however momentarily. When they got back to Hogwarts, they had a celebratory lunch with Albus and Minerva. All in all, it was a very pleasant day.

\*\*\*\*\*

The next morning, Hermione and Snape both received owls. Hermione's was from Ginny, Snape's was from Draco. Draco and Ginny each asked of them to be a part of their binding ceremony. Hermione looked up to see her cohort scowl.

"Is that from Draco, Professor?" Hermione asked.

"Yes, he is asking me to be a part of his ceremony," Severus sighed.

"You don't wish to?" Hermione asked.

"I am not a person who enjoys these sorts of things, Miss Granger," Snape replied.

"Well, not until it is your turn, of course," Hermione joked.

"If I thought I would ever be married, I would have never seen the need for a surrogate mother!" Snape had not intended to be so snappish with her, but her reminder of something that would never be had hit a raw spot.

"I'm sorry, *sir*," she said, stressing his authoritative status. "I didn't mean anything by that."

Snape sighed. "It is quite all right."

"What is that list you are going over?"

"I am reviewing my syllabus to determine what new ingredients I will need to buy for the upcoming semester."

"If you let me, I can do years one through three to help you out. All I need are the syllabi for those grades."

"I would not wish to burden you."

"Oh, it's no burden, Professor. I would be happy to help. I am already ahead in my reading for the upcoming semester."

"Very well then. I would be happy for your assistance," Snape replied and handed his new helper the syllabi she needed *This is cozy, Hermione and I sitting by the fire working together. I could get used to her company, especially when she is quiet like this.*

Only the scratching of quills, as they each scribbled out their lists, broke the comfortable silence.

*Wow, this is nice, sitting here with Professor Snape like this. I could get used to spending all my evenings like this, especially with a little baby crawling around.* Hermione was brought out of her musings when a large, solid white owl tapped at the window. At first she thought it was Hedwig, but she soon realized it was the Malfoy owl. Snape took the parchment it held, rewarding it with a small treat before it left to return home.

"It seems we have been invited to a small celebration for Draco and Miss Weasley. The party is two weeks from this Saturday at Malfoy Manor. Do you wish to attend, Miss Granger?"

"Oh, yes, I have to be there for Ginny's party! It will be fun!" Hermione was beaming at him as she said this.

He rolled his eyes in annoyance. "Then," he said with a resigned sigh, "I suppose we will go."

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Up Next: Slice of Lemon!

## Chapter 6

*Chapter 6 of 13*

Severus decides that he wants an heir. He chooses Hermione to be the surrogate mother, but will she agree? My response to the Surrogate Mother Challenge posted on WIKTT.

**Disclaimer:** Harry Potter and the Potter world belong to JKR

**A/N:** Thanks so much to my wonderful betas Southern\_witch\_69 and Meredith who take the time out of their busy schedules to help me with my little story.

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### Chapter 6

The day of the party was beautiful. Hermione had been living with Professor Snape for a month and things were actually going quite well. They had a good arrangement that suited them both. School would be starting the following Monday, so Hermione was determined that her roommate should relax and have fun at the party.

She had helped him with purchasing all of his potions ingredients. They had gone shopping for them the week before, and the ones he didn't want to buy, they found for themselves in the Forbidden Forest.

Sometimes it was easy to forget why she was there, except when she was hugging the toilet, as she was currently. Each morning, sickness was her morning wake up call. It was 6:53, and she was retching and heaving while the ever-present professor held her hair back and pressed a cool cloth on her neck. His attentions had really embarrassed her the first few times, but she soon came to appreciate his help.

"I will be glad when this morning sickness is finished," Hermione groaned as she rose. He put his arm around her shoulder and helped her to the sofa.

"As will I, although you seem to get sick throughout the day. I wonder if this is normal," Snape mused, sitting on the chair opposite her.

"Yes, I read that this happens to some women."

"When did you say your check-up with Poppy is?" he asked.

"Monday morning," she replied.

"What time? You know I wish to be present for all visits!" Snape said, sounding a little harsher than he meant to.

"Yes, Professor. That is why I scheduled it for seven. I wanted to make sure it was before your class."

"Thank you, Miss Granger. I apologize for snapping at you."

"No worries. I know how important it is for you to be involved with everything. Are you ready for the party this evening?" she asked curiously.

He sighed. "As ready as I am going to be."

Hermione held back a giggle. He acted like he hated the thought of going, but she knew he was secretly pleased for Draco and Ginny and really wanted to see his godson happy.

"What about you? Do you think you will feel up to going? The Nausea Potion doesn't always work," Snape asked, sounding suspiciously hopeful.

"True, but the evenings are when I feel my best. I should be fine, but I will take the potion before we go just to be on the safe side," Hermione answered.

"Very well. I have some things to do before this evening, so if you don't need me right now, I will get my errands taken care of."

*I will always need you, Professor!* "No, I will be fine. I am going to have some dry toast, and if I can keep that down, I'll give my vitamin potion a try," she told him. "I'll see you this evening."

With that, Severus rose from his chair and was off. He wanted some new dress robes to wear to the wedding and had to be fitted. He would wear his traditional black tonight, but for the wedding, he wanted a set of dark green velvet robes. Draco and Miss Weasley were getting married December twentieth and wanted traditional Christmas colors. He rolled his eyes, remembering how the two had actually giggled at the fact these were nearly the colorings of Slytherin and Gryffindor.

He knew Hermione would be meeting Miss Weasley at Madame Malkin's Robes for All Occasions at eleven, and then they were going to lunch at the Three Broomsticks. He wanted to be finished at Madam Malkin's before the pair arrived. He didn't think he could stomach happy, giggling witches today.

Completing his task, he walked out of the shop and immediately ran into Lucius Malfoy. "Hello, Severus. What a pleasant surprise! Narcissa and I are looking forward to seeing you at the party tonight."

"Lucius." He nodded politely. "What brings you out on the day of your party? Shouldn't you be at home helping Narcissa prepare?" Severus was still a little bothered by Lucius' fawning over Hermione the month before.

"Absolutely not. Narcissa has everything under control, and I am always in the way when she is readying the manor. Will your lovely Miss Granger be joining you this evening?"

Severus narrowed his eyes. "If she feels up to it, yes."

"Ahh," Lucius replied, "morning sickness. Narcissa had that for three months with Draco. I hope you are treating her well, Severus. That is ~~your~~ baby causing the sickness."

"Much better than you treated Narcissa I am sure, Lucius. I must be off. I will see you this evening."

Lucius inwardly chuckled. It was always so much fun baiting Severus. Apparently the usually reserved Potions master was a bit possessive of the Granger girl. He couldn't wait to ask her to dance tonight. "Until then, Severus." Each wizard went their separate ways, and both were thinking of the likely outcome of the evening's events.

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Hermione met Ginny at exactly eleven to look at robes. She wanted to buy two new sets, one for the party that evening, and one for the wedding. Ginny immediately found the robes she wanted Hermione to wear for the wedding. They were crushed velvet, the color of deep red roses, with a neckline cut low and three-quarters length sleeves. They were perfect for Hermione. With that settled, they looked for robes to wear to the party.

Ginny decided on green because Draco always told her how much he loved her in that color, as it brought out her hair. Hermione was harder to find robes for. She wanted to look as good as she could for two reasons. The first reason was Narcissa Malfoy, and the second reason was that she wanted Severus to notice her. After searching a long while, she finally found the perfect set. The coloring was of deep champagne, and they were lined with silk just a shade or two paler. The bodice area of the inner robe was tight to the waist, with a slightly flaring lower half. It looked very beautiful, and she was very pleased to have found it.

Knowing they had a huge dinner that evening, Ginny and Hermione had a light lunch of salads. Ginny suggested they eat before they got their hair and nails done. Hermione readily agreed, not wanting to fight with her hair herself.

As they were getting their pedicures, Ginny casually asked how things with Professor Snape were progressing. Because Ginny knew of her feelings, Hermione felt she could confide in her about things. "Well, he is very nice and considerate of me, but that is just because I am carrying his baby. I don't think he will ever return my feelings, Gin."

"Never say never, Hermione. You still have thirty-six weeks," Ginny replied.

"Let's not talk about it today. Today is to celebrate your upcoming binding to Draco," Hermione said. She didn't want to get depressed today. Her goal was simply to have a good time with her friends.

"Okay, Mione. We can talk about this later," Ginny told her.

When Hermione got back to the castle, she was happy to see that Snape had not returned yet. She wanted to make an ~~entrance~~ entrance. She decided to have a soak in the tub before getting ready for the evening. She, of course, did remember to lock the door.

After the professor had gotten ready to go, he knocked on Hermione's door and called, "Miss Granger, are you ready?"

"Yes, sir, I'll be right there," she answered.

When Hermione shyly entered the room, Severus was speechless. She was beautiful. Though he loved her wild mane, he was equally entranced that she had somehow smoothed her hair and fashioned it into some elaborate twist. Her robes were gorgeous, the color suiting her beautifully.

Snape looked equally handsome to Hermione. He was, of course, wearing black; she didn't think she would ever see him in anything *but* black, but those were definitely dress robes he'd donned. She loved the clasp. Two intertwined silver snakes formed an SS; each had small emerald eyes. She blushed when Snape couldn't seem to take his eyes off her, but she was inwardly pleased. Her plan to catch his eye seemed to be working. After a long minute of gawking, Snape held out his arm and escorted her to the castle entrance where they Disapparated to Malfoy Manor.

When Snape knocked on the door, a house-elf answered. "Oh, Master Snape! Dippy is pleased to be seeing you again, sir. Please allow Dippy to take your cloaks, and you is to be off to the sitting room." Snape helped Hermione remove her cloak and handed it to Dippy along with his. They went to join the others.

Almost everyone was present. Hermione hardly knew most of the crowd. Straightaway, she noticed Narcissa Malfoy in ice blue robes, which left very little to the imagination. *She may as well be naked*, Hermione thought bitterly. Lucius and Narcissa immediately came to receive them.

"Severus, darling, how have you been?" Narcissa cooed.

Hermione unconsciously tightened her grip on Snape's arm. *That is interesting. Hermione seems possessive of me. I like it.*

"I have been well, Narcissa. I trust you have been also?"

Narcissa reached up and kissed both his cheeks. Snape was inwardly elated as Hermione's grip tightened even more. His elation only lasted until Lucius spoke.

"Severus, Hermione, how delightful you could make it to our little soirée." At this, he took Hermione's hand and placed a lingering kiss on it. He had to grin as Severus pulled her back to his side.

Hermione noticed the pull as well. *Wow, it's almost as if he doesn't want Lucius touching me. Hmmm, this is worth exploring.*

After saying hello, they went to socialize. Hermione thought Ginny looked absolutely gorgeous. She had decided to leave her hair down, so that it fell in long waves down her back. She absolutely glowed, which made her all the more beautiful. For a moment, Hermione felt a stab of jealousy, wanting what Ginny had. Not *who* Ginny had, but *what* Ginny had.

"Hermione, you look wonderful," Ginny exclaimed.

"Oh, thank you, Gin, but you are a goddess!"

"Too right you are," Draco agreed. Ginny blushed.

"Harry and Ron are here somewhere. We need to go mingle, but I will catch up with you later," Ginny told Hermione.

Hermione looked around the room at those in attendance. Of course, all the Weasleys were there, as well as most of the Hogwarts staff. She spoke to all she knew, still searching for Ron, Luna, and Harry. Finally, she spotted them by the punch bowl. *Who is Harry with? Is that...Tonks?* She made her way to the foursome. "Hi, guys! It's so good to see you," Hermione greeted.

"Hi, Hermione. How's life at the castle?" Harry asked. Hermione thought he sounded a little drunk. She looked uneasily at Tonks. *What is Harry playing at? He knows I can't speak freely in front of anyone!*

"I'm great. How are you, Tonks? Long time, no see," Hermione said.

"Wotcher, Hermione! Why are you staying at Hogwarts?" Tonks inquired.

Ron came to the rescue. "Well, as you know, Hermione is studying Charms at university, and she has been there working with Professor Flitwick."

*Thanks, Ron!*

"Oh, Hermione, that is great," Tonks told her.

"So, Tonks, are you here with Harry?" Hermione asked her.

At that question, Tonks blushed. Hermione never thought she would see the day that the witch would blush. "Yes, we came together."

*Well, that's interesting.* She directed her gaze to Ron's date. "How are you, Luna?" Hermione asked.

Luna smiled warmly at Hermione. She had always liked Hermione very much and knew that her Ronald had loved her once. "I am very well, Hermione. It's good to see you."

Hermione returned Luna's smile and looked back to Harry. She noticed he was glaring across the room and looked over to see what he was staring at. Naturally, it was Professor Snape. "Harry, what is your problem? Would you please just stop it?" Hermione asked, exasperated.

"I don't like him, Hermione, and I won't pretend to," Harry replied.

"I am not asking you to like him, Harry, but I am asking you not to make things more difficult for me," Hermione said.

Tonks looked at the arguing pair with an eyebrow raised inquisitively. Harry sighed and turned his head. He really didn't feel like fighting with Hermione, and he didn't want Tonks asking questions. This was their third date, and things had been going really well with her. "Okay, Hermione," Harry said resignedly "You look beautiful tonight."

Hermione smiled at him warmly. He was going to try. "Thank you, Harry."

She looked up as Lucius announced dinner was to be served. Everyone started making their way to the dining room to take their seats. Lucius, of course, sat at one end and Narcissa on the other. Hermione noticed that she was seated beside Lucius, and some woman she didn't know was across from her. Gregory Goyle was on the other side of Hermione. *This is just great. I wonder who Professor Snape got stuck with?*

She looked around the table for him and saw Narcissa Malfoy with her hand on his arm. Both of them were lightly laughing at something that had been said. Just as she narrowed her eyes, the starter course, figs roasted with blue cheese and prosciutto, was served. Her mouth was watering as she took her first bite. *I am so glad I took that Nausea Potion before I came! This food looks delicious!*

Lucius was talking so much to the woman seated across from her that she barely noticed when he started talking to her. "Pardon me, Mr. Malfoy. What were you saying?" Hermione asked.

"Please, Hermione, I asked you to call me Lucius. I was asking how you were enjoying living with Severus," Lucius replied.

Hermione quickly looked around. Surely Lucius knew about the contract. She noticed the woman across from her staring intently at her, waiting for her to reply. Hermione was saved from having to answer when the main course arrived. The honeyed duck confit with crispy seaweed and creamy mash looked amazing. The side dishes of roast butternut squash with lemon and mustard and new potato salad with truffle cream looked equally appealing, and Hermione enthusiastically started her meal.

"Miss Granger," the woman across from her asked, "why, pray tell, should you be living with Severus Snape? Are you not...*Muggle-born*?"

For the first time since Hermione had been seated, she really looked at this woman. *She must be related to the Malfoys* Her light blonde hair had been fashioned into an elegant twist, and her grey eyes were staring at her as if trying to burn a hole through her. She was very beautiful in a cold sort of way. "Excuse me, Miss...?" Hermione eyed her intently.

"Malfoy," the woman confirmed. "I am Lucius' sister."

"Miss Malfoy, I don't see that where I live is any concern of yours and neither is the origin of my blood," Hermione seethed.

Miss Malfoy raised one elegant eyebrow at Hermione. "Severus is an old...*acquaintance* of mine. You could say we were *quite close*."

"Then if you have any questions concerning Professor Snape, I suggest you ask him yourself." Hermione was becoming angrier by the moment.

*Who does this woman think she is? It is not like she has any claim on Professor Snape. Or, I hope she doesn't* She was beautiful, like Narcissa Malfoy, and just as elegant. She was also a pureblood and had a history with the professor. *He really must prefer this kind of woman* Hermione felt herself getting more depressed by the minute.

Lucius was enjoying every minute of the exchange between his sister and Hermione. He had purposely seated Hermione across from Lucinda. Draco had told him the Granger girl had quite a temper. Many years ago, Lucinda and Severus had been an item, and he suspected his sister never quite got over Severus. The problem was, his sister liked many men while Severus had always been the monogamous type. This was one of the reasons she never married; she tired easily of having only one man. However, Lucius knew his sister had always held a soft spot for Severus, and at times, she could be very possessive of him. During Lucius' musings, the dessert was served, a rich sherry trifle with raspberries.

Severus searched the room for Hermione and finally found her at the other end of the table beside Lucius. He startled slightly when he saw Lucinda Malfoy on the opposite side of Hermione, looking like she wanted to kill her. *What the devil is Lucius up to?*

Severus had always liked Narcissa and hadn't minded being seated by her. Sometimes she could be quite the conversationalist. However, tonight he had a hard time focusing on what she was saying. He kept watching Hermione and Lucinda. It looked almost as though they were arguing. And, there sat Lucius with a smug expression on his face. *Something is going on! Damn him*

When Severus had been involved with Lucinda Malfoy years earlier, he had entertained thoughts of marriage with her. That ended when he went to surprise her one day and caught her in a Lestrangle/Rookwood sandwich. He had ended things right then and there, never having much contact with her since. He only saw her at the social functions that he was forced to attend.

As he looked at Lucinda now, he couldn't deny that she was a classic beauty. However, it was her actions that made her unappealing in his eyes. She was nothing compared to Hermione. Hermione may not be a classic beauty, but she had many fine qualities, many more than Lucinda Malfoy could ever possess.

As Severus was musing, Lucius asked everyone to adjourn to the ballroom. Severus decided he was going to ask Hermione to dance to see how she reacted to him. Ever since he heard her declaration of love the previous month, he had watched her like a hawk. He had noticed lingering glances and lots of blushes, especially if he complimented her. He chuckled at the thought.

Before he could step through the door, Lucinda snatched him up. "Dance with me, Severus," she commanded.

Severus sighed. He really wanted to look for Hermione, but he knew Lucinda would not leave him alone until he danced with her. "You look lovely tonight, Lucinda."

She beamed at him. "How have you been, darling? Lucius mentioned something about that Mudblood Granger girl living with you. Whatever for?"

"What or who I do is no longer your concern, Lucinda," Severus replied, his tone cold.

"Not at all," she said dismissively, waving her hand nonchalantly. "I was merely worried for your reputation. A pureblood living with a Mudblood is not a good thing, Severus."

Severus threw his head back and laughed before turning very serious. "Never call Hermione Granger a Mudblood again, Lucinda. She is worth ten of you, and as far as my reputation goes, I think I ruined that all by myself a long time ago. You would do well to worry about your own."

As if on cue, the song ended. Severus bowed to her and went in search of Hermione.

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As she walked into the ballroom, Hermione looked up to see Severus dancing with Lucinda Malfoy. She was crushed. She felt a slight tap on her shoulder and turned to see Lucius with his hand held out in an invitation to dance. She accepted by letting him take her hand.

"I must say you look very beautiful this evening, Hermione," Lucius told her.

"Thank you," she automatically replied. She couldn't take her eyes off of Severus while he was dancing with Lucinda. The realization hit her that they made quite a striking couple. It made her feel sick.

Lucius noticed where her eyes were and commented, "We all wish for Severus to settle down. He needs to find the *right*...kind of witch and get married. Someone who would love him *and* his heir.

Hermione snapped her head back to look Lucius Malfoy right in the eyes. She was beyond angry at this point. "~~The~~*right* kind of witch? You mean a pureblood and not a Mudblood? Someone like your sister, perhaps? Are you warning me off, Mr. Malfoy?"

Lucius was surprised. That is not what he meant at all. He had no idea the Granger girl had been thinking along those lines. He decided it was time to end the game before it went beyond repair. "Actually, no, Hermione, I was thinking *you* are the perfect witch for Severus. My apologies if I led you to believe otherwise." The song ended, and Lucius left Hermione gobsmailed on the dance floor. She had never imagined that he would think *that* way about her.

Severus finally found his way to Hermione. "Miss Granger, may I have the pleasure of a dance before we retire for the evening? You are looking quite tired."

"Yes, Professor, I would like that very much," she replied, relief coming over her in waves.

It felt wonderful to be in his arms. *This is just one more thing I could get used to.* She could almost hear her hormones clicking into overdrive as he held her. His scent

assailed her, and she inhaled deeply, feeling herself grow warm all over.

"You and Lucius seem to be talking a lot lately," Severus observed.

"Yes," she agreed. "For some reason he is making an effort to be nice to me."

"Hmm," Severus replied, noncommittally. "I have noticed the cream I made for your stretch marks is still in the loo. You need to start now to avoid stretch marks in the future."

Severus had made the cream himself. He wanted to ensure that she didn't have any physical reminder of doing this for him. He wanted her as perfect when she left as she had been when she arrived. *Well, as perfect as she can be after delivering a baby she has to leave behind* Another bitter remark worked its way through his mind. *Perfect? It's your fault that she's a virgin giving birth. How can you give that back? There is no potion for that.*

"I know, but when I apply it, the smell stays on my hands. It adds to my nausea," she told him. "Besides, I don't know why you're so concerned. I'm barely four weeks along, and surely I won't be in danger of stretch marks anytime soon."

"The point of using the cream now is to ensure that your skin will allow for stretching without marking. All you need to do is apply it for two weeks early on before it occurs. I don't want you getting stretch marks because of this pregnancy. I will help you with it when we return home." *I would do anything to touch you, Hermione, in any way I can. Besides, I want to see how you react to my touch. And, I wouldn't mind seeing if you are one of those witches whose sex drive goes through the roof.*

*Oh no! Here come the hormones again. What does he mean he's going to help me with it? Apply it himself? I don't know if I can take his hands on me! I could almost climax thinking about it now. The vision is obscenely erotic. I can't believe how...randy I have been since I got pregnant. I really don't think I can just lie quietly while he has his hands all over me. Then again, if he is willing to have his hands on me, perhaps...* The song finally ended, cutting off her thoughts. They said their good-byes. They were both glad to arrive home. It wasn't very late, only 12:30, but they had both had busy days. Hermione tired more easily since she'd become pregnant.

"How do you feel, Miss Granger?" Professor Snape asked her, a concerned note in his voice.

"Tired, but not sick, if that is what you are asking."

"Good. Go prepare yourself for bed, and then I will come to you with the cream. Is this acceptable?"

*Hell yes! Come and touch me, please* "That will be fine, Professor."

While Hermione went to the bathroom to wash her face and prepare for bed, she noted that he went to his bedroom to change as well. *I might as well be comfortable for this.* She came out of the bathroom in her standard tank top and flannel pants and lay down on the bed, waiting for him to come. It wasn't long before she heard a knock on her door. "Come in." Hermione felt a knot of tension begin in her stomach as the door opened.

Severus came in wearing a pair of black pajama bottoms and a nightshirt. It was strange, but she realized that she had never seen his sleeping attire in the whole month she'd lived here. *Merlin, help me!*

"Just lie back on the bed and relax, Miss Granger. This won't take me long and then you may go to sleep."

Hermione raised her top up slightly, lowered her flannel pants a bit, and then did as he instructed. She closed her eyes to get comfortable and soon felt feather light touches on her skin. She didn't even notice the soft whimpers escaping her.

Severus noticed. It was taking all his willpower not to take the girl right then and there. He continued his motions, alternating the pressure he was applying, and moving in a larger area over her stomach.

Then he heard, "Severus, please." It was spoken so softly he almost missed it.

"Please what?" he purred in her ear.

Her eyes snapped open at this. She hadn't realized that she had said that out loud but decided to muster up some of that Gryffindor courage and answer him. "Touch me."

"But *I am* touching you," he told her, a sly look in his eye.

Her eyes never left his as she took his hand and put it where she needed to be touched most. That was all the invitation he needed. He gently ran his hand under the elastic of her pants and lowered them further, moving slowly to give her time to stop him if she wanted to. When he realized she wasn't going to, he removed them completely and tossed them aside before lying down next to her.

Severus ran his hand up her thigh and over her lacy knickers, smiling to himself as she let out a moan and slightly arched into his hand. He moved his hand higher, over her still-flat stomach and up to her breasts. Very slowly, he moved his fingers over her nipples just enough to cause them to harden and was rewarded when Hermione moaned again. *So responsive to me!* He continued stroking her breasts, enjoying how she gasped and moaned periodically. Soon, his hands weren't enough for Hermione, and he felt himself harden when she begged, "Please!"

"My pleasure," he replied, voice husky with want. He lowered his head and took one nipple into his mouth, laving the sensitized skin with his tongue.

"Severus!" Hermione bit out, panting. "That feels good."

Severus briefly released her nipple and lifted his head slightly to look at her. "You like that, Hermione?" He couldn't keep a bit of worry from his voice, worry that she would soon reject him.

"Yes, Severus," Hermione breathed, "very much."

He lowered his head again and turned to her other nipple. At the same time, he moved his hand to her knickers. Swirling his fingers over the lace, he was rewarded when she cried out and arched up into his hand, reaching for more. He rewarded her with a little more pressure and smirked as she thrashed on the bed.

"Severus, I want..." she gasped, "I want..."

"What, Hermione? What is it you want?" he whispered, staring into her eyes.

"I want to touch you," she whimpered, "please..."

Severus hadn't imagined he could get any harder than he already was until she asked if she could touch him. Not wanting to quit his own movement, he rose on his knees and scooted forward so that she could reach him. He groaned loudly when she gripped him, wrapping her fingers tightly around his pulsing cock through the fabric of his pajamas. It had been a long time since he had been intimate with a woman, and he realized with some embarrassment that he could very easily come with just her touch.

He unconsciously thrust forward as she slowly and a bit hesitantly pumped him. The feel of her hand on him, through the fabric of his pajamas, was very erotic, and he suddenly wanted nothing more than to thrust deeply within her, tear through her virgin flesh, and spill his seed with abandon.

He mentally shook himself and tried to refocus on pleasuring her. However, the more he gave her, the more she gave him. If he applied more pressure, or quickened his pace, so did she. Severus found himself struggling not to come. Her moans and whimpers drove him on, and he willed his fingers to work their magic before he lost himself in her hand.

Then he heard her whisper, "I need you so much."

His heart ached at these words. No one had ever said them to him before. Oh, he knew he had been *wanted* before, but he doubted he had ever been *needed*. Again, he quickened his movements, applying more pressure, and she responded with another cry of pleasure.

Severus found that as enticing as her hand was, her soft cries and whimpers were equally appealing. Hermione was obviously enjoying his efforts, just as he was enjoying her vocalizations. He rewarded them both by causing her to cry out again.

Soon, Hermione was calling out his name in quick succession; her hand had gripped on him like a vise and her movements slowed. She panted and moaned, arched up into his hand, and with one more cry of his name, exploded underneath him. He slowed his movements to allow her time to come down from her peak, and as he did so, she looked at him again and moaned, "Severus."

The tightness of her hand and her calling out his name sent Severus over the edge, and he felt himself drawing up and tightening as a wave of heat washed through him. "Hermione," he groaned, coming while she held him.

He collapsed beside her on the bed and drew her into his arms, their breathing slowly returning to normal.

Hermione snuggled up to Severus and gave a contented sigh. This was her dream come true. *Perhaps things are not so hopeless after all*, she thought, as she drifted off to sleep.

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Severus tightened his arms around the beautiful witch and kissed the top of her head. As he closed his eyes, one thought filtered through the haze of passion and fatigue. *Merlin, what have I done?*

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**A/N:** I know I promised lemon here but decided it was too soon. Nothing wrong with the scent of lemons though, eh? Also, before you say four weeks is too soon for her to be getting sick I just want to say I was going by my own experience! I got sick very early on in both my pregnancies.

Up Next: Regret follows their night of affection. Lucinda interferes again. Hermione flees temporarily to Grimmauld Place.

## Chapter 7

*Chapter 7 of 13*

Severus decides that he wants an heir. He chooses Hermione to be the surrogate mother, but will she agree? My response to the Surrogate Mother Challenge posted on WIKTT.

**Disclaimer:** The magical world of Harry Potter belongs to JKR

**A/N:** As always, thanks to my wonderful beta's southern\_witch\_69 and Meredith who take time out of their busy schedules to help me and also for the ideas they give!

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### Chapter 7

Severus made sure that Hermione was asleep before carefully getting out of the bed and putting on his dressing gown. He looked at her longingly for a moment, enjoying a sight he'd longed to see for awhile, and then made his way out of her room. He went to the liquor cabinet, took out his Ogden's Old Firewhisky, and sat down in front of the fire, taking a drink straight from the bottle.

Severus felt as if he'd made a mistake...one that was likely to haunt him the rest of his life. He was positive that Hermione had only let him touch her because her hormones were unbalanced, causing her to be emotional when she normally wouldn't be, so he decided to put her little declaration of love out of his mind. He knew that the particular Calming Potion the doctor had given her that day made a person's mind foggy. No, he would have to end their trysting immediately. No more intimate relations.

With a heavy sigh, Severus got up to shower and prepare for the day. He had much weighing on his mind. The students would be returning that evening, and classes would start the next day. Plus, he had to attend the checkup at seven the following morning with Hermione...no...*Miss Granger*.

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Hermione woke feeling very happy. She wasn't surprised to find that she was in bed alone. Severus was an early riser *Severus*. She liked the way his name rolled off her lips. She liked everything to do with *Severus* at that moment.

Her plan was working! During the past five weeks she had integrated herself into every part of his life. She'd helped list and buy his needed ingredients, even going to the Forbidden Forest with him. She'd worked on his syllabi for the younger grades, and she'd helped him brew the potions needed to restock the school infirmary. She made sure he had his tea and biscuits on time and even reminded him to eat and to go to meals. Now she'd gotten him in her bed! Well, they hadn't actually made love, per se, but she was positive that would happen soon. She was doing the things a *wife* would do, hoping he would realize how much he needed her. She allowed herself one more contented sigh before a wave of sickness hit her. She jumped up and dashed for the bathroom.

Severus heard her in the loo. He held an internal debate about whether or not he should go in there. If he didn't, this would be the first time since she'd started getting sick that he didn't help her. While he was debating, she sounded as if she'd finished. He sighed heavily.

He had gotten used to her being around. She seemed to want to help him at every turn, even going so far as to ensure he had his tea and favorite biscuits on time. He'd never worried much about tea before, but now that she had been fixing it, he was getting used to having it. He enjoyed her company more than he wished to admit, nor would he *ever* admit it, but her help over the last month had been most welcome.

Severus spent some time whilst he was alone contemplating why she would do these things for him. She was not happy about the contract that she had signed, and to be honest, he thought she would be very difficult to deal with indeed. However, she had pleasantly surprised him and had been quite a joy to have around. *She must not have discovered the legal rights to surrogate mothers*, he mused.

That was the reason the previous night had been both heaven and hell for him. It was heaven because he had dreamt of her in his arms like that for a very long time, and it was hell because it had to end. When he told her that it had been a mistake, the nice little living arrangement they had made for themselves would end. Unfortunately, he knew they would never touch like that again. No matter. He *had* to end it; there was nothing else to be done. When all this was over, she would go off to start a new life, and he would make a life together with his heir. *Well, the best life I can make without her in it* Yes, ending it was for the best.

Severus was so caught up in his thoughts he didn't hear Hermione approach him until he felt her arms around his middle. He stiffened at the contact. "Good morning, Severus."

"Miss Granger," he replied coolly. She raised her eyebrows at that. He turned to face her and immediately closed his eyes. She was wearing a dark blue dressing gown, and he couldn't help but notice it was *very* loosely belted. *Merlin, have mercy!*

"When you are appropriately dressed, Miss Granger, I would like a word." He made a note to keep calling her *Miss Granger*. He wanted to get the professional decorum back in their relationship, such as it was.

*What the fuck is this all about? 'Miss Granger,' is it? Oh no! Did I do something wrong? Is he repulsed by me? That has to be it; I am no Lucinda or Narcissa Malfoy.*

"Certainly, *Professor*, I will be right back." Hermione was determined she would get through this, whatever *this* was. *Whatever happens, he will not see me cry*, she promised herself.

As she walked away, Severus was glad for the moment to compose himself. She had looked too delectable standing there like that *This is going to be harder than I thought*.

She walked back in appropriately dressed with her chin lifted defiantly and asked in a cool tone, "What is it you wished to speak with me about?"

"First of all, Miss Granger, I would like to apologize for my behavior last night and tell you that it can never happen again. *Will this ache EVER leave my chest?*

"But why? We are both consenting adults." *Don't panic! Just calm down. Maybe when you hear his reasons, you can change his mind.*

"Miss Granger, you and I have nothing but a *professional* relationship, and I think it best to keep it that way. By doing so, certain lines will not be crossed, and when our...*business transaction*...comes to an end, it will be easier on all parties involved." *Did I really just speak so coldly to her? Just stay firm, Severus. You have faced the Dark Lord, and you can face this slip of a girl. No matter how much you want to take her here and now.*

"I see. I suppose I don't get a say in the matter?" *Don't cry, Hermione, don't cry.*

"I am sorry, but no, you do not. My mind is made up."

Hermione didn't trust herself to speak. She wanted to be as far away from him as possible at that moment. She turned around to leave.

"Where do you think you are going?" Severus asked.

"None of your damn business, *Professor Snape*," Hermione snapped. With that she strode out of his chambers, slamming the door behind her.

*That damnable Slytherin!! Why did he have to mess this up? Things were going so perfectly! I need Ginny and some chocolate ice cream, in that order.*

Quickly, she walked to the front gates in hopes that she could find Ginny. She first Apparated to The Burrow but had no luck. Mrs. Weasley told her to try at Malfoy Manor. Hermione sighed. She certainly didn't want to run into **any** Malfoys on such a horrible day. Not wanting to go back to Hogwarts either, she decided to go to Diagon Alley.

She first went to the bookstore, Flourish & Blotts, to see if there were any new Charms books. As she was browsing, she lost track of time and ended up spending a good three hours there. When she left, she had two new Charms books and her own copy of *Moste Potente Potions*.

As she walked down the cobbled street, she decided to have that chocolate ice cream after all, so she stopped at Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor. She got a double scoop and sat down at an inside table. She read a few pages from one of her new Charms books. She was so engrossed in her book that she didn't even think of lunch until her stomach reminded her. Knowing that if she didn't eat soon, she would feel sick. She left in search of a nosh, being too late for lunch and too early for supper.

She ended up at the Leaky Cauldron with a bowl of soup and a sandwich. Instead of pumpkin juice, she decided to have some hot chocolate, which always seemed to make her feel better. When she finished eating, she decided to stop by Grimmauld Place and see if maybe Ginny was there. She really needed her best *girl* friend at the moment.

When she walked in, she found the whole gang seated around the table: Ginny, Draco, Ron, Luna, Harry, and Tonks. They were laughing, eating junk food, and having a great time. Her heart fell. She felt like the only kid in class who hadn't been invited to a birthday party. They hadn't even noticed her.

She smiled a little too broadly and said, "What's the occasion?"

All eyes turned to Hermione. "Hi, Hermione! It's great to see you!" Ginny exclaimed. "What brings you here?"

Hermione debated. She really wanted to talk to Ginny, but not with everyone around. She decided to act like nothing was amiss. "Nothing. I just wanted to see what you guys were up to."

"Well," Tonks said, "we were just going to hang out, play some cards and chess...things like that. Want to join us? We're pulling an all-nighter!"

*Why not? It's not as if I have anything better to do.* "Yes, I think I would, but I need to get some things from home. You know, pajamas, toothbrush, and things like that."

"We could go with you," Harry replied. "I don't like you traveling so much by yourself."

"No, it won't take me long. I will be right back."

"Sounds good," Ron told her.

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Severus was fuming. *How dare she walk out on me like that? Who does she think she is? And where has she been all this time?* Severus heard a knock on the door. "Enter."

"Hello, Severus darling. It's so good to see you," Lucinda Malfoy all but sang to Severus.

"Lucinda. To what do I owe the...*pleasure*?"

"It's been too long since we have gotten together, Severus. Let's go to dinner, and then we can see where that takes us."

"I think not," was his answer.

"Why? Do you have better plans?" Lucinda inquired. "Where is your little Mudblood?"

"Lucinda, I told you not to call her that. I will not have it. I am not going to go eat with you or do anything else. We have been finished for years, and I would like to keep it that way. Now, if that is all..." Suddenly, there was a loud explosion in the Potions classroom. Severus jumped up and ran to see what was wrong. He called over his shoulder as he was leaving, "Please see yourself out."

*How dare he dismiss me? Who does he think he is? Who does he think I am? Surely this is not because of that little Mudblood bitch. I think it is time she found out who she is dealing with.*

Just then Hermione came into the room. "Professor? Oh, excuse me, Miss Malfoy. I was looking for the professor. Do you know where I can find him?"

"Miss Granger, he should be back shortly. We have plans soon, and I detest being late."

"Plans?"

"Yes, didn't Severus tell you? He may not even be back tonight, but I am sure he wouldn't see the need to run everything *by you*."

"That's fine, Miss Malfoy. I was just on my way out myself."

*I have got to be the most stupid witch of my age. Cleverest indeed! Again, I prove to myself that when it comes to that man I don't think straight. First, not doing research on surrogates and now this. Of course he wants nothing to do with me; he has her chasing after him like a dog in heat! Why would he even consider me? I have got to get out of here! A night at Grimmauld Place is just what I need. I will just have to be back here in time for my appointment.*

Hermione quickly gathered her things and left, missing the very smug look on Lucinda's face.

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When she returned to Harry's, she noticed that Neville and Susan Bones had arrived. She always thought Susan could've been a Weasley with that ginger hair and often wondered if that was why Neville wanted her. Perhaps she reminded him of Ginny. Well, that could be a reason, but her love for Herbology was certainly another. They both worked together in the Exotic Plants and Flowers greenhouse in Diagon Alley. Hermione was starting to get extremely depressed. Everyone was paired with someone, even Professor Snape. *Well, baby, it looks like it's just you and me tonight.*

"Glad you're back, Hermione," Luna greeted her.

"Thanks. I am just going to put my things in my room, and I will be right back." She hoped Ginny would follow her, but she was too caught up in drinking and playing a truth or dare game. *My goodness, playing that at our age!* She went back downstairs a half-hour later. She had waited, futilely hoping Ginny would come up. She noticed they were all well on their way to being very drunk. She sighed. *Here we go!*

"Your turn, Hermione," Susan giggled. "Truth or dare?"

*Oh, good grief!* "Truth, I guess."

Suddenly, Harry blurted out, "Why did you agree to have Professor Snape's baby?" Harry was very drunk and wasn't thinking about the three people in the room who didn't know. Hermione turned beet red.

"WHAT is he talking about, Hermione?" Neville yelled.

Hermione didn't say a word; she was not allowed to talk about the contract to anyone.

"Potter, you great *prat*! This was supposed to be in secret," Draco exclaimed. "Hermione has signed a contract with a confidentiality clause."

Everyone's eyes were on Hermione. She couldn't speak of it, however, so she just remained silent.

Luna, who was the least drunk and had already been told of the situation by Ron due to their closeness, sighed and explained. "Okay, Professor Snape wanted an heir. Hermione owed him a Wizard's debt, and now she is the surrogate. He made her sign a contract, however, and she can't talk about it."

"Right," Hermione said, "so could we please just change the subject? It's done, and I am pregnant. That is all I care to say *ohave said* on this subject."

"Okay, Hermione," Ron said, "it's your go."

"Fine. Harry, truth or dare?"

"Truth. I'm getting too drunk for the dare."

"Are you in love with Tonks?" Hermione knew she was acting like a child, but she could not believe Harry had put her in that position. She had hoped to embarrass *him* and put him in an *awkward* position.

"Yes," Harry replied.

Tonks looked at him, her eyes beginning to glisten with tears. "Really, Harry?"

Harry told her, "Yes, but this is not how I wanted to tell you." Harry then cupped Tonks' face gently and kissed her passionately. All the couples seemed to slowly pair off after that, leaving Hermione to read her Charms book. She had to start her university work the following Monday, and as always, she wanted to be prepared. *What else am I going to do?*

She couldn't concentrate, however. Her mind kept drifting back to *Severus* and Miss Malfoy. The thought of those two together made her stomach knot. Suddenly, she realized the room was very smoky.

Looking up, she noticed every man there was puffing on a cigar. *What happened to all the snogging couples?* Her stomach, already roiling with worry, could not take the smell of the smoke. It was all too much, and she ran to the bathroom, where she was violently ill. She kept on retching and couldn't stop. She glanced up to see Draco

Malfoy staring at her. *Great! Just the person I need.*

"Is it normal to get that ill, Granger?" Draco wanted to know.

"Well, usually it stops at night, but with all that smoke and everything, I guess it just all got to me," she told him *That and worrying about your godfather and slutty aunt!*

"Is there not something you can take for that?" he asked.

"There is a potion, but I didn't bring it with me. Why do you care? You hate me."

Draco sighed. "I don't hate you, Granger; I just don't care for you. There is a difference. I do, however, care for my godfather, and that is his baby you are carrying. We are going to take you back to the castle. Get your things."

"Why bother? He won't be there. He is out for the night with your *Auntie Lucinda*." She knew she sounded petty, but she couldn't help it.

"I highly doubt that. He doesn't care much for her any longer, not since their breakup. It ended badly for those two." If Draco hadn't been so drunk, he would've taken this opportunity to get a rise out of Hermione and find out just how jealous she was. "In any case, that is where the potion you need is, and you need to go to bed. You can't rest here; there is too much going on."

"Fine, then. I'll go get my things and leave." She started to rise and got sick again. Draco wet a wash cloth and placed it on the back of her neck.

"I am going to escort you, Granger. You obviously can't go alone. You are too sick, and if Severus is not there, I want to make sure you get the potion you need and get to bed." *If I don't make sure you are okay, Uncle will kill me.*

Hermione sighed. She really did not want Draco Malfoy helping her in any way. "Maybe Ron could? Not Harry since he is being such a prat about the whole surrogate thing, but I think Ron would be okay."

"We both will," Draco told her. "Ron and I, I mean."

Hermione unsteadily got to her feet and went to gather her things. She was still very dizzy from retching so much, and she just wanted to get to bed. When she came out of her room, Draco and Ron were both waiting for her.

"I'm sorry, Hermione," Ron apologized. "We all have been very inconsiderate tonight."

"Don't worry about it, Ron; I was the one who showed up uninvited. You shouldn't have had to change your plans for me anyway."

Suddenly, Hermione felt the urge to vomit again; thankfully, there was nothing left, even though her body was inclined to think so. When she was finished heaving, Draco told Ron, "Let's go. I want to get her home before this gets worse." He didn't want to admit it, but he was getting worried.

"Can you Apparate, Hermione?" Ron wanted to know.

"Yes, let's just get this over with." Hermione didn't want to say that she was scared to go back and find that Severus was in his bed with Lucinda. She knew her worry over that was a big part of her problem. However, Hermione didn't need to worry about Severus being in bed with Lucinda. He was sitting in front of the fireplace in a mild fury when they entered.

**"Where in the bloody hell have you been?"** Severus bellowed.

"I was at Grimmauld Place with the gang. What do you care? Where is your little date?"

"Hermione, it is one in the morning. You have an appointment with Poppy at seven. Why aren't you in bed? And, what are Draco and Weasley doing bringing you home?" Severus' voice rose with every sentence. He hadn't realized that he'd called her by her given name until Draco answered him.

"Calm down, Uncle. Hermione was just hanging out with us, and she got a little sick from the cigar smoke. That's all," Draco explained.

"Do not tell me to calm down, Draco! Miss Granger, you will not forget you have a signed contract with me! What were you doing around cigar smoke?"

"Yes, *Professor*, I remember all about that *bloody contract*! How can I forget I had to sign my *first born* over to the devil himself, or should I call you Rumpelstiltskin?" She growled in exasperation. "I didn't even realize they were smoking cigars until I started feeling sick. Plus, I am not showing as yet, so nobody would have known by simply looking at me that I am pregnant. I will come and go as I please; the contract only states I have to *live* here!" Hermione was getting very upset and was on the verge of a panic attack. She was still not over the fact he had made plans with Lucinda Malfoy the day after he had *been* with her, placed his hands upon her, his lips upon her. It was just too much.

"Oh, and Professor," Ron's drinks had made him a little brave. "About that contract, Harry let it slip in front of Tonks, Neville, and Susan Bones that Hermione is pregnant with your baby, but don't worry; they know not to say anything."

"Merlin's balls! Why the hell don't we just take out an ad in the *Daily Prophet*? Miss Granger, you knew I didn't want anyone to know. You have been most irresponsible tonight. I am highly displeased with your behavior. You may not care about *yourself*, but you **WILL NOT** put *my* child at risk! Am I making myself clear?"

Severus was very frightening when angered that much. Ron and Draco were starting to get a little worried. Not for Hermione, really, but for themselves. Whatever comment Hermione was going to make never came out as she rushed to the loo to heave uselessly. It was starting to hurt her, as her stomach was empty of food.

"Umm, Uncle? That is another problem," Draco explained. "Hermione has been getting very sick like that for the last hour or so. She didn't have any Nausea Potion with her." Draco and Ron both braced themselves for the professor's explosion. It never came. Instead, in calm, quiet tones, he simply said, "*Leave now.*"

They didn't have to be told twice. They bolted.

Severus sighed heavily. *What the devil is wrong with her? I know she has better sense than this. And, what little date was she referring to? And, just who the hell is this Rumpelstiltskin? I have to go help her and then make her talk to me.*

He went to get the potion and entered the loo. He gently laid a cool wash cloth on her neck, gave her the potion, and held up the glass of water. At this point, she was too weak to stand on her own, so he walked her into his bedroom and helped her onto his bed gently. "I don't know what you were referring to, but I had no date this evening."

"Whatever you say, *Professor*. I ran into Lucinda Malfoy in your chambers earlier. She even told me not to expect you home tonight."

*That almost sounds like jealousy in her voice.* "I don't know what Lucinda told you, but let me assure you that we had no plans this evening, nor will we have any in the future."

She rose up on her elbows and looked at him. "Really, what you do with your *personal* life is none of my business anyway. You made that perfectly clear this morning. Just as what I do with *mine* is none of yours, as we only have a *business agreement*, remember?" *There! Put that in your pipe and smoke it!*

*Like bloody hell it's not!* "Nevertheless, Miss Granger, I don't want you to get the wrong idea where Lucinda is concerned. Now, if you are able to walk, you may go to your own chambers and get some rest. We have an early start in the morning."

"Fine."

"Before you go, I would like to point out something. You should have known I would have never spent the night away from the castle on the day the students are due to return."

*He's right! How could I have forgotten the students were coming back today? Of course he would stay here. Damn that Lucinda Malfoy to hell!* Hermione went to her room to get what sleep she could. The early hour of six would be upon her too soon.

The next morning, both Hermione and Severus were ready to go well before seven. Just as they were walking out the door, Hermione ran to the loo. Snape was by her side this morning with everything she needed. After she finished, they hurried to see Poppy.

"Good morning, Severus, Hermione," Poppy greeted. "How are things going?"

"Other than me staying sick most of the time, Madame Pomfrey, I think things are okay," Hermione answered.

"Yes, Poppy, she is sick rather often," Snape told her.

"That is perfectly normal for some witches. Hermione, here is what I want you to make sure you are doing. Before you even get out of bed in the morning, take the Nausea Potion, and eat some crackers. This may be of some help. I want you do drink your Vitamin Potion when you eat lunch, as this should be taken with food. Even if you only eat a couple of crackers until your sickness passes, it'll help. And, please, be sure to drink plenty of pumpkin juice or orange juice when you can keep it down. They are full of folic acid. Now, let's get your weight charted."

Hermione obediently walked over to the scales.

"Hmm, you have lost three pounds, but with all this sickness, that is also to be expected. When are you the least sick?"

Hermione answered, "Usually at night."

"Then try at least one good meal in the evening if you are not feeling sick. You may take the Nausea Potion once in the morning and once in the evening, but please try not to take it any more than that. Well, I'd say that other than that, things are progressing quite nicely. So far, so good."

"Thank you, Poppy," Severus said. "When do we return?"

"In another month. Right now, she will only have monthly visits."

"All right. We shall see you then. Good day, Poppy."

"Good day, Severus, Hermione."

When they reached their quarters, Hermione informed Severus that she was going to go lie back down. She was extremely tired. He readily agreed with her and told her he would wake her in time for lunch. The moment Severus left to prepare his first class of the semester, Hermione slipped into his room to lie in his bed. She wanted to feel close to him. *I'll be awake before he gets back anyway.* As Hermione drifted off, she had thoughts of Severus' bewitching the mind and ensnaring the senses speech that he reserved for first years. She dreamt of him doing exactly that to her.

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**Southern's Notes:** Bloody hell! Why can't they just realize that they truly care for each other. Sigh. Anyone else feels like smacking Lucinda about? I know I do.

**A/N: I feel like smacking her myself! I am afraid that feeling will just get worse as the story continues...**

Up Next: Meddling visitors show up for tea, something interesting makes the paper, and that pesky Moaning Myrtle pays a visit to the dungeons.

## chapter 8

*Chapter 8 of 13*

Severus decides that he wants an heir. He chooses Hermione to be the surrogate mother, but will she agree? My response to the Surrogate Mother Challenge posted on WIKTT.

**Disclaimer:** The Harry Potter world belongs to JKR, not me. Only the plot and the challenge are mine.

**A/N:** Many, many thanks to southern\_witch\_69 and Meredith for all the work they put into my story. Their help is priceless! Smooches to you both.

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### Chapter 8

Severus came back to his chambers in a foul mood and with a terrible headache. He sat in his favorite chair by the fire and pinched the bridge of his nose. *Why does it happen every ruddy year? I do not know why Albus Bloody Dumbledore insists on continually putting Gryffindor and Slytherin together, unless it is to torture me!* Even though the Dark Lord had been defeated, there was still much rivalry between those two houses.

And besides that, he had at least two Neville Longbottoms so far this year. He had seriously considered changing the classroom supplies requirement to two cauldrons instead of one. With a heavy sigh, he went to wake Miss Granger. She needed to eat and get started on her own work. But, as he stepped into her chambers, he noticed she was not there, nor had her bed been slept in. *That is odd. She was obviously tired when I left earlier. She had better not be neglecting her rest!*

He turned to go to his own bedchambers, and that was where he found her. She was lying on his bed with her curly hair spread all around his pillow and a dreamy smile on

her face. She looked very edible at the moment. *Damn. There is that ache in my chest again. Merlin, she becomes more beautiful to me every day! It is getting harder and harder to deny myself what she seems to be offering willingly.*

Severus walked to the bed and gently shook her. "Miss Granger, wake up."

"Severus," she said softly. It was barely a whisper, but he got the gist.

Clearing his throat rather loudly, he tried again. "Miss Granger! It is time for lunch. Wake up now."

She rolled to her side, slowly opened her eyes as she sighed and smiled lazily. When she finally had her eyes completely open, she realized she was staring into the black eyes of Professor Snape. Quickly, she jumped to her feet, but the action made her dizzy, and she had to grab the Professor to steady herself. She was utterly mortified to have been caught sleeping in his bed.

"Is there something wrong with your bed?" Severus arched an eyebrow.

"No, sir, nothing is wrong with my bed. I was so tired. I just went to the closest one." She blushed, knowing her excuse sounded lame, even to her own ears. She looked down at the floor, unable to meet his eyes any longer.

"Be that as it may, I would prefer it if you slept in your own bed from now on and stayed out of my ~~personal~~ space. Remember, you are not some friend or family member coming to visit, you are here to pay off a debt, and as I have said, this is merely a *business transaction*." *Am I reminding her or myself?*

Hermione's face turned red again, but this time it was from anger. *Oh, that man can be such a ruddy bastard when he wants to be, which is most of the time lately. Business transaction, indeed! Why can't he treat me the way he did when we were working on that potion together? That is the man I fell in love with!* She looked at him through narrowed eyes and coldly replied, "Fine, *Professor Snape*, if you want this to be some cold and impersonal *business transaction*, then that is exactly what this *will* be."

With that, she swept out of the room and headed to his personal dining area for lunch, while he grumpily went to the Great Hall.

The next few weeks were stressful for both Hermione and Severus. Between her university work and his preparing and grading of class work, they barely had time to speak. It truly was becoming a business arrangement. They both secretly hated it, but each was too stubborn to make the first move to change things.

The only good thing for Hermione at the moment was that her sickness was not nearly as bad as it had been. She was nearing the eight-week mark, and she only got sick in the mornings. For that, she was grateful. It left her an afternoon and evening of peace. Most evenings found Hermione and Severus in the same room, but they would quietly ignore each other. Their silence was interrupted one evening by a knock at the door. Severus sighed and went to answer it. As he opened the door, Hermione looked up from her essay.

To Severus' utter shock, there stood Albus in his ridiculous lavender robes with neon yellow stars and moons. Behind him stood Minerva, Draco and Ginevra. *What the bloody hell are they doing here?* "To what, pray tell, do I owe the pleasure of *this* visit? Did I forget I was hosting some sort of party?"

Albus twinkled at Severus. "Severus, my boy! Draco and the lovely Ginevra were meeting with me to discuss the binding arrangements, and since they were here, we all thought we would come down to the dungeons and see how the two of you were faring."

Severus let out a long suffering sigh. "Well, are you just going to stand there? Come in."

They all entered the sitting area, and Hermione cleaned up her parchment, quills and books. "Shall I call for tea, Professor?" She looked at her disgruntled roommate as she asked. *Finally, some friendly conversation! Professor Snape certainly does not look pleased. Who cares? I am happy for the company; it has been too long since I have visited with my friends.*

Hermione had thrown herself into her university studies to mask her hurt feelings over the way Severus had been treating her, and as a result, she had gotten out of the castle very little in recent weeks. Her professors at university told her she was so far ahead in her work that she could finish and graduate by the first of the new year. This pleased her, and that was what she intended to do.

Before Severus could answer, Albus replied, "Please do, Hermione. We have come here to discuss the roles that you and Severus will play in the upcoming binding ceremony."

As Hermione called for tea, everyone seated themselves to wait for the house-elf. In just a few minutes, a tray was delivered; it held tea, cream, sugar, biscuits, and cakes. Aside from Severus, everyone dug in.

"Well, get on with it then," Severus snapped. "I don't have all night!"

"Uncle," Draco began, "we wanted to know if you would represent the air element and if Hermione would represent the earth element." He was a bit nervous as he took his tea and stuffed a cake down. The last time he had seen his godfather was when Hermione had been violently ill. Severus didn't look too pleased with him or anything else for that matter. *I hope these three know what they are doing, meddling in Severus and Hermione's business like this! If word gets back that I had anything to do with it, he will have my head!*

Hermione squealed. "Oh, I would love to, Ginny! It is so hard to believe in just a little over two months you will be getting married!" Suddenly, Hermione burst into tears. When everyone, especially Severus, looked at her in alarm, she said, "Don't worry about me; it's just these stupid hormones."

"How are things going with the pregnancy, Hermione?" Minerva wanted to know. "*Is everything* working out like you planned?" She stared at Hermione as she nibbled on a biscuit.

Hermione knew that Minerva was really asking her if she had been able to change Severus' mind about letting her see the baby. The question depressed her because of the wall Severus had put up between them.

"Things are going slowly, Minerva." Hermione eyed her intently. "But, at least the sickness seems to be subsiding." She sighed as she sipped her Earl Grey.

Albus asked, "When will you see Poppy again, my dear?"

"Next week, actually. I will be eight weeks then and will start seeing her once a month."

"This is so exciting, Hermione! I am getting married, and you are having a baby!" Ginny bounced with glee.

"Miss Weasley!" Severus barked. "Miss Granger is **NOT** having a baby! She is providing me with an heir and nothing more. I think her friends would do well to remember that." Severus was becoming angrier by the moment. Miss Weasley was talking as though he and Hermione had been married and planned the whole thing and that they were going to be one big happy family. It really bothered him. *It bothers you, old man, because you can see that in your mind so clearly.*

All eyes glared at Severus for his choice of words. He seemed not to notice. Hermione cleared her throat while she blinked the tears out of her eyes and shakily asked, "Wh-who will represent fire and water, Ginny?" Her voice cracked, and it was painfully obvious to all that she was near tears. She tried to swallow the emotion that was

creeping up her throat and begging for release. *I refuse to cry! I am beginning to wonder if there is any of the man left that I fell in love with. Lately, he has been so cold and unfeeling towards me, like I am no better than a house-elf in his eyes.*

Before Ginny could rebut his cold statement, there was a loud commotion in the bathroom, and suddenly, water was flooding from underneath Hermione's door.

"Oh, goodness! What has happened?" Minerva exclaimed, sounding suspiciously false.

Severus dropped his teacup and ran into Hermione's room with Hermione hot on his heels. The room was a disaster. One of the pipes between her room and the bathroom was poking out from the wall, water pouring forth onto her bed, rapidly filling the room. Hermione's bedroom was utterly destroyed. Just above the protruding pipe floated Moaning Myrtle.

"Oops," Myrtle laughed. "Dear me, what a mess! Hermione, you have not been to see me once! You always promised me that Harry would visit, but I haven't seen him in ages!" Myrtle was pouting as much as a ghost could. Suddenly, with a loud moan, Myrtle disappeared down the toilet.

"She's mad at me that Harry hasn't visited her, even though I've asked him loads of times, and she floods *my* room?" yelled Hermione incredulously. She drew out her wand and pointed it at the broken pipe, and said, "*Reparo!*" Sparks leapt from her wand, but nothing happened. "What is going on?" she asked, a puzzled look on her face as she examined her wand.

"Allow me, Miss Granger," Snape said, smirking at Hermione, as he took his own wand in hand. "*Reparo!*" Sparks flew again, but there was still no change. Severus turned to glare at his four guests; the only sparks visible at that point were the ones shooting from his eyes.

"What is going on here?" he demanded of the four. The sound of gushing water continued as the six of them stared at each other.

"No idea!" replied Ginny, looking mystified.

"Very odd," answered Minerva, her eyebrows raised to her hairline.

Draco stood behind Ginny. If Severus hadn't known better, he'd say the boy was hiding. In fact, he did know better. Just as he began to say something to Draco, Severus was stopped.

"Here, let me take care of this, Severus," said Dumbledore, as he withdrew a very old and well-worn wand from his robe pocket. "*Reparo!*" he stated firmly, pointing his wand at the pipe. Sparks again, but no repair was to be had.

"Hmm. Myrtle must have somehow damaged the magical integrity of the room. Let me try one more thing," Dumbledore said, giving his wand a quick polish on his robes. Pointing the wand at the gushing pipe once more, his voice boomed, "*Finia Cataracta!*"

As commanded, the water ceased gushing, but the damage had been done. Severus muttered several obscenities under his breath. The room had a layer of water upon the floor, and the bed was soaked. If his suspicions were correct, they wouldn't be able to magic the liquid away, thanks to that pesky Moaning Myrtle.

"Ah, much better!" Dumbledore's eyes twinkled merrily. "Must not be too much damage then. I'll likely have to recast some charms and spells to return the infrastructure to normal. Might take a bit of time, though; perhaps Filch can do something to repair it in the meantime."

"Here, let me clean it up for you, Hermione. At any rate, you should have a bed to sleep in tonight," said Minerva. She took out her wand, pointed it at the bed, and said, "*Scourgify!*" Nothing happened. "Oh, *very* odd, indeed!" Minerva stated in a seemingly befuddled manner.

"I guess I will ask the house-elves to bring a cot down," Hermione sighed. "You will be able to repair it soon, won't you, Albus?"

"Certainly! It's no trouble at all." He brought his hand up to his chin as if in thought, making a humming sound. "I've never actually had to do it. I'll have to go look up exactly how it's done in the *Headmaster's Book of Procedures*," Albus replied.

"Albus, you can't possibly have never done this before!" Severus' said in a very annoyed tone. "This can't have been the only time the magical integrity of a castle has been breached!"

"If there has been another time, I cannot remember it at the moment," Albus replied, trying desperately not to twinkle.

The four guests looked at each other and shared a brief, secret smile. "Well, Severus, Hermione, it looks as though you have a mess to attend to, so we will leave you to it. It might take a month or two to clean up!" Albus could contain himself no longer, and his eyes began twinkling so brightly Severus thought they were glowing.

*What are those four on about?* "A month or two? Ridiculous, Albus," Severus replied sardonically. "If you would be so kind as to send Filch up here, I'm sure he will be able to handle this mess."

"Certainly, my boy. I will do that directly." *Directly in the morning, that is.* Albus and the others took their leave of Severus and Hermione, walking as quickly as they could away from Severus' chambers.

Once they were out of earshot, Ginny started laughing with glee. "It worked! I told you guys I could get Myrtle to do that!"

Albus twinkled and replied, "Yes, that all worked very well. She will have to stay in his rooms now, even if he puts her in a cot. Which, I very seriously doubt that he will." Minerva and Draco looked less convinced.

"I am not so sure. Those two looked very tense, I'd say." Draco looked to Minerva to confirm his thoughts.

"Yes," Minerva replied. "I have to agree. I think I will have Hermione over for tea sometime within the next month. I want to wait awhile and see how our little plan works."

"It will work perfectly." Ginny beamed at them.

"I do have to say, Albus, that was an excellent Magic-Repelling Charm you managed back there. If I hadn't known you were going to do it, I would be just as confused as those two!" stated Minerva.

"Why, thank you, Minerva!" replied Albus. "And, may I say that your acting skills are extraordinary?"

Ginny laughed while Draco just shook his head in resignation.

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After their guests had left the dungeons, Hermione stared at her room in disbelief. With a heavy sigh, she told Severus, "Well, it looks like you will have to share your bed until this mess is cleaned up. That is to say, unless you'll truly force me to sleep on a cot." *Well, this is one way of getting in his bed,* she thought with glee.

"Absolutely not, Miss Granger!" *Merlin! Where am I going to put her?*

"Well, I am the pregnant one with *your heir* as you continually remind me and everyone else, and **refuse** to sleep on the couch or a cot! Really, Professor, it's not like I am going to attack you in your sleep!" *Maybe*. "So, unless you want to be run out of your own bed..."

*Yes, but I may attack YOU!* Severus sighed and pinched his nose again to fight his ever growing headache. "You stay on your side, *Miss Granger*, and I will stay on mine!"

"Piece of cake, *Professor*." Hermione turned and walked into the bathroom to see if there was any damage in there. She looked around, but she couldn't see anything. *How did Myrtle do that?* She decided she needed a long soak. After Severus provided her with something to sleep in for the night, she went into the bathroom for her bath, and in a spot of rebellion, she purposely left the door unlocked.

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The first week Severus shared a bed with Hermione was pure torture for him. He'd always started out right on the edge of his side and Hermione on the edge of hers, but they'd always wake up in each other's arms. On four occasions, he'd had to relieve himself in the shower. *This is insane! It's like I am a ruddy fifth year with a crush!*

The morning of Hermione's appointment with Poppy came, and she was looking forward to this visit. At only eight weeks, she still wasn't showing, but she was looking forward to each month and the changes each would bring. *Who am I kidding? I have to keep reminding myself this is not my baby! But...it is my baby. My baby with Severus.*

"Miss Granger, are you ready to go?"

"Yes, I am. Just let me get my robes on." Luckily, they were able to save most of Hermione's personal belongings. It was mainly the bed and the floors that were ruined. No matter what magic they tried, nothing seemed to fix her bed or the floors.

Poppy was waiting when they arrived. "Hello," she greeted. "Hermione, I want you to put this gown on and get up on that bed right there. I want to run some tests that are normally run during this stage. I will also be doing a pelvic exam, but after this one, I won't need to do that again until you are closer to delivering. Severus, you may wait outside until that part is complete."

As Severus was stepping out of the room, he heard Poppy tell Hermione to step up on the scales.

"I thought for sure I would gain this time!" Hermione was just a little disappointed she hadn't gained any weight.

"That will all come soon enough, child, and then you will be wishing you weren't gaining!"

After she stepped off the scales, she had to go to the loo to pee in a cup. She learned that was to check the protein in her urine and a few other things. Next, Poppy did a series of tests with her wand...one being a blood pressure test. The last thing before the pelvic exam she had to do was have some blood taken. It was interesting to watch Poppy wave her wand over the small tube of blood and cup of urine. Only a few swishes gave answers in seconds to the questions that took Muggles hours to retrieve.

When she was finished, Poppy called Severus back in. "Everything looks fine so far. I will let you know if I find anything wrong, but I don't foresee any problems. Soon, Hermione, you will feel slight movements, like butterflies taking flight."

Despite the situation and herself, Hermione was getting excited. A life was growing inside her, and it was hard not to get carried away with the excitement of it all.

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They returned to their chambers for breakfast. Severus always ate breakfast in his quarters, but he ate the other meals in the main hall. He picked up the *Daily Prophet* and began reading. "Well," he said, "it looks like this marriage law will be passed within the next two to four years."

Hermione couldn't believe it. How dare they treat Muggle-born and half-blood witches this way? "I have a hard time believing Fudge will get that law passed, Professor. What say you?"

"Oh, it will be passed. Something has got to be done about the stillborn babies and the number of Squibs being produced. Our world cannot stand much more of the idiotic wizards' inbreeding because they believe in the *purity* of blood."

"Do you not believe in the purity of blood, as well? After all, you were once a Death Eater." Hermione held her breath at the personal question. She couldn't help but ask; she was curious.

"Miss Granger, that was many years ago. People **do** change and realize everything is not always in black and white. So, to answer your question, no, I do not believe in the purity of blood. Since the Dark Lord's demise, I seriously doubt there are many who still do."

This was a surprise to Hermione. In all the time they worked on that potion, they never discussed things like this, and she found herself fascinated as she talked to the Professor.

"What will you do if it is passed, Professor? Do you have any Muggle-born witches in mind to petition for?" *Like me?* She thought the teasing was worth it just to see the look on his face. However, when he answered her question, her good mood faded quickly.

"I will not have to marry. You see, this law is being passed to ensure the population of witches and wizards by forcing those who have not procured offspring into doing so. I am producing *my* heir right now, so this law will not affect me. *You*, however, will be affected. Do you have any prospects lined up?" Severus smirked at her as he watched all the color drain from her face. He knew she had been teasing him, and he despised it. It felt as if she were mocking him and his love for her, even though she was doing no such thing. He felt *rejected* somehow.

So silently that Severus almost didn't catch what she was saying, Hermione murmured, "I thought I had." Then suddenly, she realized something. *Oh no! He's right! What am I going to do, really? In two to four years I may have to marry and produce another baby. A baby with someone other than Severus...Oh my! I may have two children attending Hogwarts at the same time who won't even know they are siblings. This is too much to handle. I need to go to my room...Oh, right, I can't.*

Severus started to feel slightly guilty as he watched the play of emotions on Hermione's face. Her face was always so full of expressions, especially in those warm, brown eyes. He wondered what was going through her mind when suddenly she spoke, voice cracking.

"May I have use of your study today, Professor? I need to get started on my essays. I have three to write, and my room is still unusable, as you know." When he just looked at her with his eyebrow raised, she continued, "I promise not to touch anything of yours." *Please let him say yes. I have got to get away from him for a bit before I start crying in front of him!*

"Very well, you may use my study, but I expect it in the same condition it is in now when I return to it this evening, and remember to not touch my things. You may read my books, however, if you have the time or see anything you like."

"Thank you very much." Her voice had started to sound strained from trying to hold back her sobs. Hermione quickly went to gather her things and head on to the study to start her essays and relieve her private agony.

Severus watched her leave with an unreadable expression on his face and then went to his first class of the day.

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Over the next several hours, Hermione had completed two essays and had lunch. When she finished eating, she decided to take Professor Snape up on his offer and read something for pleasure for awhile. The third essay could wait, as it was not due for another month anyway.

She was surprised to find *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen on his shelves. That had always been one of her favorites. She thought Colonel Brandon somewhat of a hero in that story, and had it been her, she would have chosen him immediately.

After reading awhile, she started to get cold and went in search of a blanket. Where would the Professor keep his extra blankets? She remembered an old trunk at the end of his bed, and went to investigate. As she opened it, however, she realized it didn't hold linens. She smiled at the treasure she had found.

The first thing she came across a small picture of a beautiful, black-haired, black-eyed baby being held by a stern looking witch. Upon closer inspection, she could see the witch gazing at the baby lovingly. *This must be Professor Snape and his mother!*

She put the picture back and found a small, black velvet jewel box. She opened it and found a beautiful, oval-shaped diamond of about one karat on a thin band of platinum surrounded by small baget emeralds. On either side of the diamond, between it and the emeralds, there were two entwining S letters, resembling two snakes. It was the same SS pattern she'd seen on the clasp of his cloak. A plain platinum band was in the box with the ring as well. *Could these be his mother's wedding rings?*

Unable to resist, she tried the rings on, and they magically altered in size to fit her finger. She admired them for a bit, then carefully removed them, put them back in the box, and returned it to the trunk. Searching a bit further, she found an old, green, threadbare, baby blanket. It had the initials SS embroidered in the corner. *Severus' baby blanket! He was holding it in the picture.*

She put the blanket to her nose and sniffed. Suddenly, an idea came to her. *Christmas is coming soon, and it will be a perfect gift! I know I still have some of my baby things in storage. I am almost positive they weren't in the house when the Death Eaters burned it. I will go check first thing in the morning!*

Carefully, she put everything back except the baby blanket and left the room, taking it with her. She was getting excited about her idea, but thinking about her baby things led to thinking about her parents, which usually caused her to get extremely depressed. Adding to her worries was the idea that the marriage law would likely be passed in a few years, and Hermione was soon very worked up.

She decided to have an early supper and a long bath, then go to bed and read until she fell asleep. She filled the tub with very warm water, added the soothing scent of lavender, and got in. She laid her head on the back of the tub, closed her eyes, and relaxed. After about forty-five minutes, she got out when she found herself falling asleep. She dried off and slipped on the green silk pajama top the Professor had given her the week before. It was very big on her, hanging nearly to her knees. She had worn it every night since. When the house-elves washed it, she made sure they put it with her things.

She couldn't believe she could be so tired when it was barely eight o'clock. She climbed into the bed and continued with her book. She knew the Professor had likely gone to his study to grade papers before supper and would then do a few rounds. Since the night they had...been intimate...he had avoided her, and true to his word, he kept this a business arrangement, even though he slept in the same bed with her. *I swear that man can run so hot and cold even though he is extremely passionate! I have got to find a way to get through the wall he has put up between us!*

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Two hours later found Severus sitting in front of the fire with a tumbler of Ogden's Old Firewhisky in hand. After his discussion with Hermione over breakfast that morning, he had been thinking. *If this marriage law is passed, she will **have** to marry if someone petitions for her. And, make no mistake, someone **will** petition for her. Besides the many Death Eaters and their sons who see it as a chance for revenge, others would see that she would be a great catch. I could always petition for her, but I refuse to force a woman into marriage that does not love me. I simply refuse!* He chose to ignore the voice in his head that questioned, "Yet, you would force her to have your baby and then leave it without ever knowing it?"

He sighed heavily and went to prepare for bed. The sight that greeted him stopped him in his tracks. Hermione lay on the bed, wearing his green silk pajama top, her hair flowing over the pillows, and a book on her chest. It looked so *domestic*. It looked so *right*.

*I could really get used to coming home to this sight every night. Merlin, but she is beautiful! And, she is in MY bed. Give me strength.*

Severus went to take a very cold shower and prepare for bed. He heard the first whimper as he was coming out of the bathroom. Ignoring it, he laid his wand on the night table on his side of the bed. Just as he went to lie down, he heard an ear splitting scream. He jumped up and looked at Hermione, who was writhing on the bed and shaking her head from side to side.

"NOOO! MUM! DAD!"

"Miss Granger! Wake up!"

Suddenly, Hermione sat completely upright and began to shake all over. She was screaming and crying so loudly that Severus thought she might wake the castle. He did the only thing he could think of; he wrapped his arms around her and held her tight. She fought him at first, but she relaxed soon after. Once she calmed a bit, she gently pulled out of his embrace, embarrassed.

"I apologize, Professor. It seems I am more stressed than I thought. That is when the nightmares usually come." She couldn't even look him in the eyes.

"It is quite all right. How long have you had them?" As soon as he asked, he knew it was a stupid question. *Of course she has nightmares!* Why had he never thought of that before?

"Ever since I found my house burned to the ground with my parents and Crookshanks inside."

*Crookshanks? Ah yes, her familiar. I remember now.*

"I will be okay, Professor. I just need a moment to calm myself."

When Severus looked at her though, her bottom lip started to tremble. He asked, "Have you been taking Dreamless Sleep Draught?"

"Only when I have them for at least three nights in a row, but I can't take it now, not with the pregnancy and all."

When he saw the first silent tear fall down her cheek, he held his arms open. "Come here. I will help you fight your demons this night."

Gratefully, she snuggled in his arms, and after a while, she drifted off to sleep. Severus lay there staring at the ceiling, wondering to himself *Who is going to help me fight my demons?*

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The weeks thereafter passed quickly, and Hermione and Severus got into a routine. He always rose and showered first and left their chambers completely for her to do her morning things.

Soon, it was time for her twelve-week appointment. They were both looking forward to this one, as Poppy had told Severus they would get to hear the heartbeat this time. Just as they started to leave, however, a frantic knock sounded on his office door. *Bloody hell!* Severus thought.

"Enter!" Severus bellowed, obviously angry.

When the door opened, a very nervous second year slowly entered the room. "Professor Snape, you need to come to the common room, sir. Those Everly twins are at it again, and this time I think Bryan broke Ryan's nose."

Severus looked ready to kill. He turned to an amused looking Hermione. "You may as well go on ahead; I will be there as soon as I get this mess straightened out."

"Are you sure? I would be happy to wait."

"No, go on. I really don't like keeping Poppy waiting. Hopefully, I won't miss the entire appointment." If the Potions master ever pouted, this was how he would have looked. Hermione felt amused at his expression and sorry he was going to miss the appointment all at the same time.

"If you are sure, sir, I will go then."

Severus sighed. "Yes, go on. I need to get to the common room before those two dunderheads destroy it and themselves to boot."

Hermione and Severus both left, each heading in different directions.

Once she got to the infirmary, Poppy was waiting for her. "Where is Severus?"

"Oh, he had to take care of some students this morning, but hopefully, he will be here shortly. He asked that we not wait."

"Very well, hop up on the scales. Hmmm, still the same, but that is fine. Today, we get to hear the heartbeat." Poppy took out her wand and took Hermione's blood pressure, which was normal, and then cast the spell to hear the heartbeat.

Hermione heard the wush, wush, wush and tears came to her eyes. She smiled at Poppy and sniffed some, caught up in the moment. It was soon obvious that Severus was not going to be able to make it.

"Poppy, may I cast this spell for the Professor later? He will be disappointed that he didn't get to hear this."

"I don't see why not. Here, let me teach it to you."

After Hermione learned the spell, she went back to their chambers to finish up some university work. She certainly didn't want to fall behind at this point. She was looking forward to graduating early and not having to worry about that during the last months of her pregnancy.

As she was walking back, she saw the Professor talking with Mr. Filch. The Professor looked ~~very~~ upset about something. Hermione guessed he was inquiring as to when her room would be ready. She didn't stick around to listen, as they were both becoming very loud.

Severus entered their chambers with ten minutes to spare before classes started. "How did your appointment go? Were you able to hear the heartbeat?"

"Yes, but before we get into all that, can you tell me what Mr. Filch said about my room? I assume that is what you were talking to him about."

"Yes," Severus sighed. "He claims he has not been able to get to it as yet. He told me he has a list of things to repair, and they have to be repaired in order *of importance*, and apparently your room does not rate as important. So, how did the appointment go?"

"Everything went well and all is good. I did hear the heartbeat. Poppy taught me the spell; would you like to hear it?" She looked at him with those warm brown eyes and smiled.

"Indeed? Yes, I would like that very much." He couldn't help but slightly smile back in return.

Hermione very deliberately moved her wand and said the words that Poppy taught her. Suddenly, a loud wush, wush, wush could be heard through out the room. *That is my baby! Her little heartbeat! Oh gods, Severus, you can't shut me out now!*

When she looked up, she had tears in her eyes. The dark professor had an expression on his face that she couldn't interpret. He almost looked...in awe of the sound. Suddenly, he cleared his throat and told her he had to get to class, leaving abruptly.

Once he closed the door to his office, he leant back on it and took a deep breath. Things were getting too emotional in there. He had seen the expressions playing on Hermione's face and was able to pinpoint the main one, love. She was beginning to love this child, and he didn't know how he felt about that.

He did know one thing, though. He had some serious thinking to do about this contract.

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**A/N:** Snape can be tiresome, I know, but I think everyone will start to feel better about our favorite couple soon! As you will find, Snape is not the one you need to be worrying about...

**Up Next:** Hermione will have tea with Minerva, attend a lingerie shower, and have a disturbing conversation. Severus will attend a bachelor party. LEMONS will be up next as well.

**Southern's Notes:** Sometimes I'd like to jump into this fic and kick Snape's arse...really. I think it's horrible that he can see that she wants her little one, and his pride won't allow it. Let's hope his thinking allots for this.

**Meredith's Notes:** All I can say is that I'm glad I already know the ending.

## Chapter 9

Severus decides that he wants an heir. He chooses Hermione to be the surrogate mother, but will she agree? My response to the Surrogate Mother Challenge posted on WIKTT.

**Disclaimer:** All these lovely characters belong to JKR!

**A/N:** I really want to thank my wonderful betas, southern\_witch\_69 and Meredith. They put a lot of time and effort into my story, and I could never really thank them enough! Smooches, ladies!

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## Chapter 9

The days began to pass quickly for Hermione, seemingly in a blur. She concentrated on her university work more than ever before, and Severus began to be concerned with her habits. He didn't know that she would be graduating early, as she had decided not to tell him. So, when he saw her begin to study like she had during her N.E.W.T. year, he decided to question her.

"Miss Granger, what, pray tell, are you doing surrounded by all those books, studying as though you are going to take midterms? It is only one week into November, and midterms are not until right before Christmas break."

Hermione looked up at the Professor and debated if she should tell him or not. These were her finals that she was studying for. She would take them when everyone else would be taking midterms. "I am not studying for midterms. But if I were, I would start studying for them now. Christmas break is not that far away," she replied briskly, and then went back to her revising.

"What are you studying for then, if I may ask?"

Hermione sighed. She knew he would not leave her alone until she told him. *Ruddy pest! Gives me attention when I don't want it!* She was starting to get annoyed at his interruptions to say the least. "I am studying for my final exams. If all goes well, I will be graduating at the end of the semester."

That got his attention. "Why? How did you manage that?"

Hermione glared at him and slammed her book closed. It was obvious that there would be no more studying until she told him everything. "It's simple. While I have been locked up in this bloody castle with nothing else to do and hardly anyone to talk to, I have been concentrating on my university studies. My professors told me that because my work is so far ahead, and with the quality of said work, that I could graduate at the beginning of the new year. I agreed so that I would not have to worry about university work while in the last stages of my pregnancy."

*There's the little know-it-all I know and love!* "I see. Well, do not overexert yourself, and do remember to eat something. Did you take your vitamin potion at lunch today?"

"Yes, yes, I took it. I take it everyday! You bloody well know that!" Hermione snapped, then sighed. "I am sorry, sir. I suppose I am a little cranky right now. My back is killing me, and these hormones are all over the place," she grouched. *Not to mention that sleeping in your bed every night and not getting to touch you freely is driving me NUTS!*

Suddenly, Severus moved behind Hermione to rub her shoulders. He felt her stiffen momentarily before relaxing under his touch. "Umm, that's nice," she purred. Severus chuckled and moved his hands lower whilst she continued to purr like a Kneazle. He bent forward and inhaled the scent of her hair deeply. *She is so intoxicating!* With a start, he realized what he was doing and backed away a little. When his hands reached her lower back, he found a very hard knot there and began rubbing it in earnest.

When Hermione had first felt his wonderful hands on her shoulders, she tensed immediately. She wasn't sure if she could handle the physical nearness, but she decided to just relax and go with it. It felt too good to stop him anyway. *Merlin! Is he sniffing about in my hair? Why?* Hermione stiffened when he hit a sore spot, but she soon relaxed.

They both jumped when a house-elf popped into the room. Severus was annoyed that he had been interrupted and would have to stop touching Hermione. There was nothing else for it since he couldn't ignore the blasted creature.

"Yes, what do you have there?" Hermione politely asked.

"Begging pardon, miss, sir, but I's has these three letters."

"Thank you. Now, if that is all, you may leave!" Severus knew he sounded harsher than he intended, but he was feeling the loss of Hermione under his hands already, even if he had been only massaging her.

Hermione pinned him with a stern look and thanked the house-elf again. She saw that two of the letters were for her and gave the other one to Severus. When she opened the first one, she groaned out loud.

Severus raised an inquisitive eyebrow. "Bad news?"

"No, not really. Mrs. Malfoy is hosting a hen party for Ginny a couple of weeks before the wedding. It appears that there will be a stag party on the same night. This is my invitation. We're to all buy lingerie. I guess you must have your invite there for the stag night?"

"Yes, it appears so. I suppose I shall have to make an appearance to that dreaded thing," Severus spoke as he read the invitation. "Bloody stag night! I suppose Potter likes the name, what with his stupid Patronus!" he muttered. A puzzled expression came over his face. "It is the first Saturday in December. Usually they have such things closer to the wedding, don't they?"

Hermione laughed. "Normally. According to my note here, Ginny told Draco he had to have his at least two weeks early so he wouldn't show up to the wedding looking horrid and having to have had a bit of Sober Up Potion. She wants her special day to be just that, special and perfect."

Severus shook his head. *Youth today.* He remembered how drunk he and Lucius had gotten for Lucius' stag night. "Will you be attending the gathering for Miss Weasley? I would like to see you model some of that lingerie, although my pajama top suits you just fine."

"Oh, yes. I am looking forward to it. I just hate to have to be back in Malfoy Manor. I will probably go this weekend and pick something out for her. I think I will call on Luna, Tonks, and Susan to see if they want to make a day of it. Maybe we could even get some lunch out. There is a place in Muggle London, Coco de Mer, that I want to go to."

"Just try not to wear yourself out. I still don't think you have gained enough weight. You can't even tell you are pregnant!" *I am anxious to see you round with my child! You will be even more beautiful to me, if that is possible.*

Hermione rolled her eyes. "I am only 13 weeks. I will be big as a house and waddling around soon enough, thanks!" *Then I will look like some beached whale, and you will hate to look at me.* Hermione opened her other letter and smiled. "Minerva wants to me to come to her chambers for tea today. I think I would enjoy that very much. I hardly get to see her here lately."

"Do you think you will be able to put aside your studying a few hours for that?" he asked sarcastically, smirking at Hermione. *She is so beautiful when she is riled up, and it is so easy to do so.*

"Humph!" She folded her arms across her chest. "Excuse me for taking my education seriously. I really would like to be finished by the Christmas holidays, and this way I can. Then, after the baby comes, I can start looking for someone to do my year of apprenticeship with."

"What is wrong with Professor Flitwick? By the time the baby is born, Mr. Boot should be finished with his apprenticeship."

Hermione stared intently at the professor. *Insensitive PRAT!* "Because, sir, I would be living in the same place with my baby of whom I can never know, and it would tear me apart knowing he or she was just below me in the dungeons."

With a heavy heart, Hermione picked up her books and put them away before quietly leaving the dungeons for tea with Minerva. She was hoping her mentor wouldn't notice the depressed expression on her face or the sadness in her eyes.

Severus sighed heavily. *What was I thinking by suggesting that? I really am a heartless bastard. No, just an insensitive one. I didn't mean to hurt her. It just seemed natural that she'd still be around. I really do need to think about what to do about this contract.* He ran his fingers through his oily hair. *The only reason that I have to keep up the facade of being cold and wanting to keep things on a business level is to prepare myself for the void in my life when she leaves. Could I handle her working near our child and me? I've always been strong and able to hide my emotions. Why couldn't I concede slightly?*

Severus got up to call the house-elves for his own tea and biscuits, as Hermione had gotten him used to the daily ritual. While he was sipping the warm liquid, he began to think.

*It is obvious she really does love this child. I should have anticipated this. What harm would really come of letting her be in the child's life? Maybe eventually she could start having true feelings for me as well, and we could become a real family. And if not, then the child would at least be loved by both its parents.*

*Of course, if nothing happens between us, she will have to eventually marry with the marriage law coming up. Marry and have more kids with another man. A sudden thought occurred to Severus. DAMN! If she has to marry and have another baby, then it's possible the two would attend Hogwarts at the same time! I wonder if she has considered this. Would having another baby with another man place MY child second in her eyes? I won't have my child be pushed aside, especially by its mother!! It is better for the child to not know its mother at all than to be pushed aside by her!*

*But, Hermione wouldn't do that. She is too loving and giving...too Gryffindor... to do that to her own child. She would love this child. She already loves this child. I can not make this decision lightly. I need more time to think on it.*

With another heavy sigh, Severus went to mark some essays. He would not make this decision quickly. He knew one thing, though. Hermione loved his child. He just wondered if she could love him as well.

*Maybe I should stop the business nonsense. I am not fooling either of us with that. It's more personal than anything. Maybe we could start out by forming a friendship of sorts and see how that goes. At any rate, I don't have to decide today.*

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Hermione arrived at Minerva's right on time for tea. Minerva already had her Earl Grey prepared just the way she liked it. Hermione sat down and gratefully took the offered cup.

"Hello, Hermione. How are things going with you and Severus? Any luck on renegotiating the contract?" Minerva inquired as she sipped her tea.

"Not too great at the moment. He is more business-like with me than ever before. I swear if I hear 'Miss Granger' come out of his mouth one more time!" She knew she how she sounded, but after that last comment the professor made, she just couldn't stop the bitterness from coming through.

Minerva raised an eyebrow at this. Hermione seemed to be strung very tight at the moment. *Hmm, what is going on in those dungeons?* Minerva knew Hermione's emotions would be running high right now, so she decided to change the subject.

"Have you had any progress on your room being fixed? It looked really bad last I saw it. *It won't be fixed the whole time you are here if we can help it!*

Hermione sighed heavily. "No, Mr. Filch says he has a list of things that have to be repaired, and he has to repair them in order of importance. Apparently my room doesn't rate as *important*. Dumbledore keeps telling me he's working on the magical integrity charms, and while he's started them, they take time.

"I see," Minerva replied. "Well, where have you been sleeping?" Inwardly, Minerva smiled. She knew very well where Hermione had been sleeping.

At this question, Hermione blushed. "I have been sharing a bed with Professor Snape. Don't look at me like that, Minerva! Nothing has happened between us at all! *Not right now, anyway and not by my choice either.*" But, the professor says if my room is not fixed by Christmas, he will have to find me another set of rooms close to his."

*Oh no! We can not allow THAT to happen! I shall have to speak to Albus at once!* Oh, I am sure it won't come to that, Hermione. Filch will have your room ready before Christmas. What plans have you and Severus made for the holidays? They will be here before you know it."

"Umm, I don't know about *him*, but I will probably go to the Burrow on Christmas day for a few hours. I have done that for years, even when my parents were alive. *Oh, how I wish WE were making plans together!*

"Well, I am sure the Weasleys wouldn't mind him going; why don't you invite him along? He usually just sits around the castle anyway. *And, it would put you together in a couple situation.*

"I don't know, maybe. What do you think of this marriage law Fudge is proposing? It seems a little. *outdated*...don't you think?" Hermione deftly changed the subject. "I mean, there can't still be arranged marriages in this day and time, can there be?"

Minerva eyed the girl intently, only slightly surprised at the abrupt change of topic. "Hermione, desperate times call for desperate measures. We have got to ensure our world's existence. I think the concept is a good one, although I wish Muggle-borns would not be *forced* to marry, but I can see where there is no other choice."

Hermione was gobsmacked. She had thought *for sure* Minerva would agree with her. She couldn't believe what she just heard. "I agree something needs to be done, but this is no better than slavery! And besides, I have read up on Wizarding marriages; they are forever. No divorce! With the fidelity charm, no other lovers as long as you are bound together! Now, what if I had to marry someone like, like...Crabbe or Goyle? What would I do then?" *Oh Merlin! What if I DO have to marry someone like those two? Or worse yet, one of those two? This is all becoming too much for me.*

"Hermione, calm yourself! Surely by the time the law is passed, if you are not already married, we can find someone suitable for you. *Like Severus Snape!*

Hermione suddenly changed the subject again. "Are you going to Ginny's hen party?"

Minerva raised her eyebrow at the second quick change in conversation, but she let it pass. "Yes, I received my invitation today. I assume you will be attending as well?"

"Yes, I am going to ask the girls...Luna, Tonks and Susan Bones...to see if they would like to go to Muggle London this weekend. I want to go to Coco de Mer. Would you like to join us if we decide to go?"

"No, thank you, but I can't. It is my turn to chaperone the Hogsmeade weekend, but you girls go and have a good time. I say, it will do you good to get out of those dreary old dungeons once in a while!"

Hermione laughed, and feeling more comfortable, told her favorite professor about graduating early. Minerva was very happy to hear this. She was very proud of Hermione and told her so. Hermione blushed and told her she needed to get back and that she would see her soon.

After Hermione left, Minerva rushed to Albus as fast as she could go.

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Hermione became so engrossed in her studying, she was barely aware of the passing days. She wanted to get the highest marks possible. She worried that with her being Muggle-born, she would have a hard time finding a Charms master who would apprentice her, so she wanted to make sure that her grades would not be an issue.

As busy as she was, she had noticed subtle changes in Severus. Giving her permission to call him by his first name had been one of them. He had told her it was time to start addressing each other by their given names, and she couldn't have been happier. To her, it was an intimacy coming from him, as he very rarely allowed anyone to call him Severus.

Before long, it was the day of the parties. Hermione was looking forward to going and spending the day with Ginny and her friends, even if she would have to see Lucinda Malfoy. She was just going through her clothes trying to decide what to wear when someone knocked on their door. *Who could that be this early on a Saturday?*

She heard Severus call, "Enter!" She walked out to see who the visitor was. To her surprise, it was Mr. Filch.

"The headmaster asked me to come down and get Miss Granger's room fixed up, Professor Snape."

Hermione's heart sank. She didn't want to go back to sleeping alone. She rather enjoyed waking up in Severus' arms every morning.

Severus scowled at Filch. "Very well. Get to it then. You know where it is."

It took about half the day for him to finish, but by the time he left, her rooms were in order. Hermione sighed. "Well, Severus, it looks like you won't be bothered by my presence in your bed any longer." She tried to make light of the situation, but her heart was heavy.

Severus didn't know what to make of the expression on Hermione's face. She looked disappointed. "True, although if you start to have nightmares again, do not hesitate to come to me. I don't want you suffering those alone." *Any excuse to keep you in my bed.*

"Well, to be honest, they usually get bad during Christmas. I am not sure if you remember, but that is the time of year my parents were killed.*She hated to admit this weakness to him, but it was the truth.*

"I see," he said, and he did. He knew it was costing her to admit this to him, and because she couldn't take her Dreamless Sleep Potion, she would need his help during the holidays. He planned on making it easy for her. *And not just for me*, he tried to convince himself. "Then perhaps you might consider staying in my bed during the holidays and while you are studying for your finals. I know stress also triggers your nightmares, and I could tolerate one more month, I suppose."

Hermione beamed at Severus. "Are you sure? I hate to put you out any more than I already have.*Please say yes; please say yes!*

"Certainly. It would put me out more to have to come running to your room in the middle of the night to awaken you from a nightmare."

"Of course, Severus. I didn't think of that." Hermione blushed. "I need to go get my bath and get started getting ready. I don't want to be late. How about you? Are you ready for tonight?"

"I suppose as ready as I will ever be."

"You are truly not looking forward to this?"

Severus sighed. "Hermione, my idea of a good time is not sitting in a club off Knockturn Alley with a bunch of drunken wizards smoking cigars, watching a bunch of witches dance around, and then watching them take off their clothes." He shook his head in disgust. *I would much rather be grading papers and watching you study by the fire.*

*What does he mean by witches dancing around and taking off their clothes? STRIPPERS? I knew Muggles had that tradition, but I didn't expect pureblood wizards to. I wonder if Ginny knows. OH! I wonder if Narcissa Malfoy knows. Molly Weasley? Minerva? Oh well, what do I care anyway what Severus does?* A moment later, another voice answered the question. *"Because I love him, that's why.*

Severus watched Hermione with a contemplative expression on his face. *Why, she ALMOST looks...jealous.*

"So, those things don't sound like fun to you, Severus?"

He chuckled. *Yes, most definitely jealous.* "Not really, not like they used to when I was younger."

"Well, I hope you have a good time anyway."*I so DO NOT hope you have a good time!*"I am off for my bath!"

Severus raised an eyebrow as she bounced out of the room. *Very interesting, indeed.*

A couple hours later found Severus waiting in the sitting room for Hermione. He wanted to escort her to Malfoy Manor and leave for the party with Lucius. When she walked into the sitting room, her beauty once again stunned him.

She was wearing a Muggle dress that should have been simple, but on her, it was lovely. It was the shade of dark chocolate with an empire waist and a scooped neckline, the hem falling just above her ankles. Anyone who didn't already know it wouldn't be able to tell she was pregnant, but Severus noticed the subtle changes. She looked at him, smiling brightly, and it took his breath away. Her eyes were so expressive and warm; she simply glowed.

*Wow, thought Hermione. Severus looks really good. Too good to be going to see a bunch of strippers!*

He had on slightly formal dress robes, black of course, but these had little silver and green threads around the collar, cuff and hem. He had that same clasp of the entwining snakes with the emerald eyes, and he had done something she had never seen before. He had his hair tied back with a black leather strap.

*Merlin, help me, but he is sexy!*

He slightly smiled at her and offered his arm. "Are you ready?"

"Yes, let's go. Don't worry about escorting me home. The girls said they would make sure I returned safely. I want you to have a good time tonight!" *But not TOO good!*

"Glad to hear it. I have no idea when I shall return, so don't wait up." He inwardly laughed at the sullen expression on her face.

When they arrived at the Malfoys', Lucius was waiting for them in the entranceway. He was ready to get away from all the cackling witches in the parlor. Severus smirked. "Anxious to get away, are you, Lucius?"

Lucius fixed Severus with his steely grey eyes. "Severus, I have been listening to those witches go on and on about weddings, lingerie, and gods know what for the last forty-five minutes! Yes, I am anxious to leave!"

At that, Hermione laughed out loud, a sound that warmed Severus. "Well, then you better go, I say. Have fun you two!" And before she knew what she was doing, she kissed Severus good-bye on the cheek.

Lucius smirked at his long time friend's slight blush. It was something Narcissa had done right before they got there. She had also kissed his cheek *Do they even realize how domestic they look? Severus has it bad for this girl!*

Before either of them could say anything, Dippy appeared to take Hermione's cloak. When she turned back around, Severus and Lucius were gone. With a smile, she headed for the parlor.

Ginny was in the middle of a huge pile of gifts. She was smiling so brightly and looked so in love. It was obvious that she was a very happy woman. Hermione smiled warmly at her best girlfriend. "Hello, Ginny!"

"Hermione! It's so good to see you. Where is Minerva? I thought she would come with you."

"Well, Severus wanted to escort me so that he could meet Lucius here. I expect she will be here shortly."

Lucinda Malfoy raised an eyebrow at Hermione. "Severus, now is it?"

Hermione cringed. Lucinda's voice was like nails on a chalkboard to Hermione. "Yes, Miss Malfoy. He has asked that I call him Severus."

Lucinda stuck her nose up and eyes down. "I see." *Okay, this is getting out of hand. I have got to figure out a way to get this Mudblood away from Severus. He was mine FIRST! But until then, I can have a little fun with her tonight.*

Hermione started slightly at the evil grin that Lucinda was giving her. *What is going through her mind? She looks positively evil!*

"Come sit by me, Hermione," Tonks had noticed the look Lucinda was giving her friend, and she didn't like it at all.

"Thanks. So, Ginny, what are the men up to tonight?" Hermione wanted to see if her friend knew what Draco was going to be doing tonight--not to mention if Tonks, Luna, Susan, and the others knew.

"What did Lucius say, Narcissa? That they are going to that men's club right outside Knockturn Alley? I hope Draco enjoys himself." Ginny smiled at everyone in the room.

"Yes, I Flooed the Disrobing Illusions Agency myself and got the girls lined up. They are going to have a harem tonight. Only the best for our men! They should all have a wonderful time, Ginevra."

Hermione was stunned. "You mean to say that you don't mind them being with those strippers? Mrs. Weasley, you don't mind Mr. Weasley going then?"

The ladies giggled, even Tonks. "Hermione, they are not going to *be with* those ladies. They are just going to watch them strip."

"What makes you so sure? They will be drinking as well. They could get drunk and do something they regret later!" Hermione couldn't believe how calm these ladies were being. Just the thought of Severus sleeping with one of those women made her stomach turn.

Mrs. Weasley looked at Hermione amused. "Hermione, dear, let me tell you what will happen. First of all, we trust our men. The men will go to this club, smoke cigars, drink some Ogden's Firewhisky, and have a good time. When they have been there a few hours, the ladies will arrive. They will do their exotic dances, and then our men will come home where *we* will reap the benefits of it."

"Yes," Narcissa chimed in, "and without doing *any* of the work." All the ladies laughed at this.

"Well, all but the single ones of course," Lucinda added. She made sure to stare at Hermione. "Like, for instance, Severus. He may be inclined to take what will be *offered* since he has no one to go home to."

Hermione seethed at that remark. *Well, he didn't take you up on YOUR offer, did he, honey?*

Luna, sensing Hermione's distress said, "I would say that is more Crabbe's or Goyle's speed. Maybe even Blaise Zabini's. Definitely NOT Professor Snape's."

Lucinda laughed deeply and loudly. "Don't bet on it. He WILL be intoxicated, and he's a man, after all."

*Well, maybe you should go find him, LUCY dear* Hermione thought, *that could be your only chance!*

"I am ready to start opening my gifts!" Ginny wanted to stop this before it got out of hand.

"Here, darling, open mine first." Narcissa smiled fondly at the woman who brought her son so much happiness. It had been hard at first, not only because of the Malfoys' association with Voldemort, but because everyone knew that it had been Lucius who had given Ginny the diary of Tom Riddle in her first year. Lucius had no excuse for his admittedly reprehensible behavior. At the time, he had every intention of seeing Ginny's demise for his own purposes and had been angry that his plan had failed. When Draco and Ginny had begun seeing each other, neither the Malfoys nor the Weasleys had been happy with the couple's newfound interest in each other.

When it became obvious to everyone that Draco and Ginny were in love and serious about each other, both families attempted to set aside their prejudices and grudges for the sake of their loved ones. Lucius apologized to Ginny and the Weasleys for his actions and after that, the families began to warm to each other. They all had a long way to go, but they were making the effort to get there. They got on as well as could be expected, in any case.

Ginny smiled at Narcissa and took the offered gift. She gasped when she opened the box. It was an emerald green lace nightgown that had an elegant row of sequins near the neckline. It had a split up to the top of the thigh and a low v-neck that came almost to her navel. It came with a beautiful satin robe. "It's absolutely gorgeous!"

"Well," Narcissa told her, "Draco loves you in green."

"Thank you, Narcissa," Ginny said, smiling at her future mother-in-law. She set the gift down and picked up the next box.

"That one is from me," Minerva told her.

"Hello, Minerva. I didn't see you come in."

"Oh, I just got here! I sent my gift ahead to make sure you'd get it when you started unwrapping." Minerva smiled at Ginny and settled herself into a chair.

Ginny opened the box to reveal a sheer red nightgown with shimmering golden thread shot through the bodice. "Oh, this is lovely!"

"Yes," Minerva agreed. "We don't want Draco to forget his wife is a Gryffindor, do we?"

Everyone laughed. It was just the icebreaker they needed, and for awhile, everyone was had a good time gossiping and carrying on as Ginny continued opening gifts. Then, Ginny got to Hermione's gift.

"Oh, Gin, that one is from me," Hermione told her. Ginny opened up the box, revealing an ivory silk gown and robe set.

"Hermione, this is absolutely exquisite!"

Lucinda looked at the gown, rolled her eyes, and smirked. "Oh, isn't *that* romantic? Here, Ginevra darling, open mine. I saved the best for last!"

"That's a matter of opinion," Minerva said tartly, causing everyone to smile broadly.

Ginny took the gift from her soon to be aunt. She opened the box and gasped with embarrassment. "Umm, thank you, Aunt Lucinda. I don't know what to say."

"Well, darling, don't just sit there! Show everyone," Lucinda demanded.

Hesitantly, Ginny took the items out of the box. The first thing she pulled out appeared to be an oddly shaped vase. Lucinda took that from Ginny and said, "Watch, darling." She whispered, "*Vibreo*." The vase promptly shaped itself into the form of a man's penis and started to vibrate.

"Now, to stop it when you two are finished using it, you simply say *Scourgify* to clean things up and then say *Vaseo* to turn it back to a vase. That way you can leave it on the table right by your bed."

Ginny blushed deeply. It was clear that she'd been embarrassed. Nonetheless, she reached into the box and pulled out matching leather outfits complete with collars, chains, and handcuffs.

"Thank you, Aunt Lucinda," Ginny said with false appreciation before hurriedly putting the items away.

"Where did you get those, Miss Malfoy?" Susan asked. Everyone looked surprised, but Susan only shrugged, saying, "Neville can surprise you sometimes." A bit of laughter ensued, once again lightening the mood.

After a light supper of soup and salad, Narcissa handed each lady there a small box. "These are my gifts to each of you. Please, enjoy them."

Each lady opened a box to reveal a beautiful satin nightgown. Everyone there had a different color. Hermione's was nude.

"Miss Granger," Lucinda purred like a cat with her claws out. "I do hope yours fit you. You look as if you have gained a stone at least. All that rich food at Hogwarts must be getting to you."

"I dare say that Hermione has lost weight since she's been at the castle," Minerva said, glaring at the woman. "Whatever are you scrutinizing her figure for?" Hermione's mouth gaped open. Minerva must have been into that gillywater again! "Taking an interest, are you?"

Tonks unknowingly defused the situation by running up to Hermione with her box. "Wotcher, Hermione! Have you ever seen a bubble gum pink satin nightgown before?" Her Aunt Narcissa obviously knew Tonks well. The nightgown set matched her hair perfectly. "Harry will love this!"

Hermione smiled at Tonks, grateful for the interruption. "Tonks, I am tired, and my back hurts. I'm going to head back to the castle."

"Okay, I'll go Floo after you. I want to go home and be ready when Harry gets there." She wiggled her eyebrows up and down for effect. They both gave their regards to Narcissa and Ginny, then retrieved their cloaks from Dippy.

When Hermione got back, she decided to take a relaxing bath. She couldn't get Severus and those strippers out of her mind. It killed her to think he might have sex with another woman, *ANY* other woman, when she would so willingly make love to him herself. With a heavy sigh, she left the tub and dried off, then put on Severus' green pajama top.

She decided to go to her own bed that night. *I refuse to sleep in the same bed with him if he has been with another woman* She had just closed her eyes when the silent tears fell.

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Severus Snape was well on his way to becoming very drunk. After a meal of steak and baked potatoes, the group had headed to the men's club. Nothing but the best brandy, whisky, and the finest Cuban cigars would be had there.

However, no matter how much he drank, he couldn't keep his mind off Hermione and those beautiful, expressive eyes of hers. ~~He~~*new* she had been jealous when she found out there would be strippers present. It did his heart good to think she would be jealous over him. *Maybe that hadn't been the potion talking all those months ago, after all.*

The men had been at the club a good two hours, drinking and talking, when loud Arabian music started playing, and the most beautiful harem girls he had ever seen started dancing on the stage.

All the men moved closer to the stage to get a better view without even realizing it. They were just drunk enough not to be embarrassed by the gyrating hips moving about. Some were unknowingly moving their hips as well. Crabbe and Goyle were drooling.

Lucius looked over to Severus to see if he was enjoying the show. He appeared to be lost in thought and not even watching the girls *Time for a little fun!*

Lucius made his way to one of the girls on stage. After whispering something to one of the girls, he made his way over to his long time best friend.

"I hope you are enjoying yourself, Severus. You deserve a fun night out, my friend."

"Thank you, Lucius. This has been a most agreeable evening. It has been a long time."

Lucius chuckled. *What else has it been a long time for my friend?* "What do you think of the girls? Lovely, I say."

Severus smirked. "Yes, I suppose after tonight several witches at home will have a very pleasant surprise for them when their wizards get there. I hope you told Narcissa to be ready for you."

"Oh, she knows. She is the one who contacted the agency for me. I dare say she was looking forward to it almost as much as I was."

Before Severus could reply, a beautiful harem girl started dancing in front of him. Lucius discreetly moved back to watch Severus in private. He had purposely chosen this girl to see how his friend would react.

The woman mesmerized Severus. She seductively danced up to him and put one of her sheer scarves between his teeth and started slowly dancing backwards, moving her hips in a figure eight motion. Severus watched, becoming somewhat aroused, as she was slowly undressing and watching him with those icy blue eyes. *She has icy blue, cold eyes. They are not the warm, expressive brown of Hermione's. She has long, straight, blonde hair; it's certainly not like the brown and curly hair that graced Hermione's head. The flat hard stomach is offensive. It is nothing like the slightly swelled stomach that held his growing child within that was waiting for him at home.*

Severus groaned, and the woman took that as a sign he was enjoying her little dance. She put her arms around his neck, put one leg around his, and started moving her hips slowly against his.

"Enough!" Severus gently moved her off of him and stalked away to the bar.

Lucius suppressed his glee as he followed his friend to get a drink. "What is the matter, Severus? Were you not enjoying the dance? I hand picked her for you myself, remembering what your taste in women are."

"Tastes change, Lucius."

"Indeed?" Lucius smirked. "What do your tastes run to now, dear friend? Could it be brown-eyed, curly-haired Gryffindors?"

"Don't be absurd, Lucius! Hermione is only carrying my heir, and that is all there is between us."*Not that I would tell you if there were.*

Lucius simply smirked at the dark Potions master. "Whatever you say, Severus. Please, enjoy the liquor if not the ladies."

Lucius walked away, and Severus decided to observe the room while he drank his tumbler of Ogden's Old Firewhisky...the best around. He was only slightly amused to see Albus in the middle of two dancers. *I hope Minerva is up for this when he returns.*

After awhile, all the women were totally nude and dancing, not only on the stage but on the floor as well. A few were even coupling with some of the single men in various corners. The married and spoken for wizards were not having any problems watching and touching either. He was becoming aroused again watching the displays everyone was putting on. He was also more than a little drunk, having consumed nearly an entire bottle of Ogden's by himself.

To his credit, however, he wobbled only slightly as he made his way to Draco to take his leave. He chuckled at the sight when he found him. Draco was sitting in a chair with his hands under his thighs; as though he were trying to make sure he kept them to himself while a naked woman straddled him and moved against him in an intimate way. Severus could tell Draco was enjoying it by the bulge in his pants and his flushed face. Not to mention the heavy panting.

Severus took a moment to see what Weasley and Potter were doing. Pretty much the same thing Draco was doing, it seemed. He could tell this party would end soon, as these wizards wouldn't be able to take much more. He decided not to interrupt Draco, found the Floo powder, and left to his chambers. Albus had opened the grates to Floo for tonight only, anticipating the state they would be in when they left.

When he arrived home, his head was humming, and his groin was aching. He wanted relief. He wanted *Hermione*. He went to seek her, only to find his bed empty. His first thought was that something had happened to her, but he dismissed that quickly. Someone would have contacted him if that were the case. He very quietly went to her bedroom and saw her lying on her bed.

She looked so beautiful to him, and she still wore his top. As she was lying on her back, he could see the slight swell of her stomach and the curve of her breasts. His groin twitched as he watched her breathe and then sigh slightly. He wanted her so desperately. Ever so gently, he sat down on the edge of her bed, then picked up her foot and started nibbling at her toes. She stirred slightly. "Stop it, Crooks!"

Severus chuckled and licked up her leg to the back of her knee. Hermione sat up at that and looked him right in the eyes, a startled gasp escaping her.

"Why are you not in my bed, Hermione? I thought we discussed this," Severus said, before kissing her leg just above the knee.

"I just thought it would be better if I slept in here tonight."*Get a grip, girl!*"What are you doing?" *What are you doing to ME?*

Severus didn't answer her. He simply continued kissing and caressing her leg before setting it down and reaching over for the other. To his pleasure, she groaned softly. "Are you drunk?" she asked.

Instead of answering her question, he simply said, "I want you. Come to my bed,*pur* bed, Hermione."

She didn't know what to say. She had wanted him like this for so long, but he was drunk. If she went to his bed, would he regret it in the morning and blame the alcohol? She even wondered if he had been with a stripper, but she decided it wasn't likely. If he had, he wouldn't be so randy. As she was debating, he set her leg back down, stood, picked her up in his arms, and carried her to the bed.

He gently set her down *on their* bed, as he now decided it was. She looked up at him with those warm, brown eyes, and he knew he was lost. He settled himself onto the bed next to her and gazed at her full, pouting lips before bending his head to taste her. He hadn't kissed her the last time he'd had the chance, and he decided now that he was an idiot for not having done so. He knew the alcohol had a lot to do with his actions, but at the moment, he didn't care. Hermione wasn't drunk, and that was what was most important. She had full control of her faculties, and she was so far not complaining.

Hermione stiffened at the first touch of his lips to hers. She had wanted Severus for so long, and now that it looked like he wanted her too, she couldn't get past the fact that he was drunk.

"Severus, stop. This isn't right; you're drunk," Hermione whispered.

Severus nibbled her lips a moment longer before moving to her neck. In between kisses, he asked, "Do you want me, Hermione? If you say no, I will stop right now, and you can go back to the other bed. If your answer is yes, then please allow me to continue."

Hermione was torn, but she couldn't really think clearly with his mouth doing all those delicious things to her. He slowly moved down her body, quickly unbuttoned her...*his*...top, and gently took one breast into his mouth. He laved her nipple, nearly coming undone when she moaned aloud and jerked her hips up to meet his.

"Yes," she groaned.

"Yes, what?" He took her nipple into his mouth again, suckling it, smiling to himself as she cried out.

"Yes, I want you, Severus," she replied.

That was all he needed to hear. As he moved even further down her body, he gently caressed her stomach *That is my child in there. OUR child. Gods, I love you, Hermione!*

He went even lower, and as he got to her curls, inhaled her musky scent. He became even more intoxicated, loving her scent. He couldn't wait any longer; he had to taste her. He moved his tongue to her slick folds, groaning at the essence of her. He began thrusting his tongue in and out of her, as his thumb reached up to massage her sensitive nub.

Hermione gasped. She rose up on her elbows to see him, becoming even more aroused at the sight of him pleasuring her. She watched him love her with his mouth until her body began to convulse. She fell back onto the bed just as she came with his name falling from her lips.

That was all that Severus could stand, and he quickly spelled off his clothes, then positioned himself at her entrance. Holding himself up on his elbows so as not to put any weight on her stomach, he caught Hermione's eyes. She nodded at him, giving him silent permission, and he thrust inside her, breaking her barrier with that first smooth stroke.

She grabbed his shoulders and tensed, grimacing at the pain. However, soon the feeling became tolerable, and she nudged his hips with hers. That was all he needed to get started, and he gently began moving inside her.

She felt the tension building and moaned in his ear, "Harder, Severus! Faster!"

He began to thrust in earnest until they were both spent, whispering each other's names as they came. Severus fell to the bed at Hermione's side and pulled her close, kissing her face everywhere, finally meeting her lips. She kissed him back in a slow passionate kiss, her hands on either side of his face. *I love you so much.*

Soon the tiredness of her day took over, and Hermione drifted off in Severus' arms as sobering thoughts broke through his foggy brain. *Have I just complicated things more? Was I selfish in loving her like this? Am I imagining that she really wants me as well? I do not want her to have regrets in the morning.* Severus sighed and thought of only one thing as he drifted off. *She feels so right in my arms*

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**A/N:** Oh yes, liquor, the liquid courage! They are getting closer and closer, I think! Southern is right, one step at a time!

**Southern's Notes:** Well, it's about time he does the "right" thing. Pity the liquor had to lead him there. Every little step counts, I suppose! His arse better not pull the stunt he did last time.

**Meredith's Notes:** I'm still glad I already know the ending.

## Chapter 10

*Chapter 10 of 13*

Severus decides that he wants an heir. He chooses Hermione to be the surrogate mother, but will she agree? My response to the Surrogate Mother Challenge posted on WIKTT.

**Disclaimer:** All these lovely characters belong to JKR!

**A/N:** I really want to thank my wonderful betas, southern\_witch\_69 and Meredith. They put a lot of time and effort into my story, and I could never really thank them enough! Smooches to you ladies!

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### Chapter 10

Hermione had been awake for nearly twenty minutes. It was fairly early still, only around 7:30 or so. She was hesitantly happy as she lay spooning with Severus. He had his arm draped over her waist possessively with his hand resting gently on her stomach. She sighed contentedly, wondering what would take place when he woke. *Besides him needing a Hangover Potion, that is,* she thought wryly. As she started to snuggle closer to him, she felt him shifting and knew he was waking up.

Severus groaned. He felt like a giant had clubbed him in the head. *I knew that last bottle of Ogden's was a bad idea.* He cracked one eye open and looked down at the bushy hair resting on his chest. He wasn't alarmed at first; it was not unusual for them to awaken in each other's arms. That was when reality hit him. They were both naked, and her delicious little bottom was snuggled right up against his aching crotch. *I hate these morning erections!* Thinking that she was still asleep, he allowed himself several moments to enjoy the feel of her nestled in his arms. What could he do to soothe things between them? Their coupling had been pleasing, all he'd hoped for.

He couldn't understand why she'd been so accepting of his advances. Well, that was utter rubbish. He understood completely *She must actually care for me. I was right to start questioning her true feelings.* Severus kissed her bare shoulder and squeezed her once affectionately. Things were confusing. Dare he try to have a true relationship with her? Would it be worth the heartache if she changed her mind after she had the child? *What if she would be up to trickery? She may only want me to change the contract to gain rights to the child.* He sighed. *She would never do that. My Hermione is not that type of person.*

He started to ease himself away from her when she reached back and grabbed his leg. "Don't go." He gently took her hand and laid it on the bed beside her and eased away. He got out of the bed and quickly put on his dressing gown. When he felt he had some control, he turned to face her and realized that was a mistake, as she looked like a true goddess wrapped up in *his* sheets after a night of lovemaking. Lovemaking with *him*. Her lips were still swollen from *his* passionate kisses; those were *his* love bites on her person. It looked as if he had marked her as *his* territory.

"Hermione," Severus began hesitantly, "we need to talk about last night." He would gage her feelings for him through her reaction to his words. If she wanted something more with him, she would become indignant and upset.

Hermione sighed and crossed her arms under her chest, the sheet barely covering her. She *knew* he was going to do this! "Okay, so talk." She wasn't in the mood to be nice. After that incredible night, he was going to tell her it was a mistake, and she didn't think she could take it. She could just feel it. The tone of his voice was laced with regret and uncertainty.

Severus cleared his throat. He might as well start from the beginning. "Last night, I got highly intoxicated at Draco's party and..."

She very quickly cut him off. "OH, YOU DAMN SLYTHERIN! Don't you *dare* blame last night on alcohol! Don't you *dare* say you did not want me!"

Shocked by her abrupt outburst, he decided for once to just be completely honest with her. It wouldn't do to draw his tale out any longer. "If you will refrain from shouting, I shall continue." He could see her chest rising and falling in emotional heaves. "I will not lie to you, Hermione. I *did* want you, and I have wanted you that way for some time. While I will not blame the *entire* incident on the alcohol, I will say that if I had not been drunk, I would have never have come to you like I did." He held up his hand to keep her from interrupting. "I imagined our first time in such a different way, no liquor, just us. Of course, I never believed you would be so accepting. You have to understand that this type of relationship cannot continue. Not right now." *No matter how much I wish it to.*

Hermione's heart lurched. "I am sorry, but I do *not* understand at all. We are both consenting adults who happen to want each other in this way. I won't have you acting like...like loving me was some sort of mistake you wish you could take back!" She was desperately fighting the tears that wanted to spill from her eyes. "I care about you deeply. This hurts," she admitted.

"Not a mistake, Hermione. Never that." Severus sighed and pinched the bridge of his hooked nose. "I am not saying I wish I could take it back! I shall never forget our night together no matter what occurs. I won't allow myself to be taken advantage of, nor will I allow myself to take advantage of you." He sat next to her on the bed and took one hand in both of his. "What I am trying to tell you is that in the end, if we continue in this direction, it will be harder on both of us if things wouldn't work out between us." He met her eyes. "It will be that much harder for me when you have to *leave* us."

Hermione stopped trying to keep her tears from falling, allowing their escape. "But, Severus, if you would want me to stay, I would not go. We can carry on as we wish."

He shook his head. "No, Hermione. We can't carry on like last night. It wouldn't be right."

"I see. So, you get drunk and randy from watching a bunch of witches dance around naked, come to me then for a bit of playtime with Hermione, and that's okay? That is acceptable to you? *Now*, you decide our relationship cannot continue in this direction without even asking how I feel about it? Well, this is the second time you have done this to me, and I am tired of it!" *Don't you see? I don't want to leave. Ever! I want to make love to you.*

"It was very wrong of me to take advantage of the situation. That's all I'm saying here."

"No, I do not see that you are right. You are making it sound...cheap and sordid when *time* it was anything but. So, no worries, *Professor*, I will be out of your bed tonight."

He wanted to shake her, wanted her to read between the lines. "I can see that you are feeling used and that was not my intention. I apologize for that. I am trying to tell you that I care for you."

"C-care for me?" she stuttered, searching his eyes.

Severus sighed. "If things progress for us, I would like it to be at a leisurely pace. We shouldn't rush in. I want you to be certain before I will commit to it completely."

"You want a relationship with me?"

"I would like some time to get used to the idea. Also, I would like for you to think hard about what I am saying. It's not a decision that can be made lightly." He squeezed her hand once. "Do you understand what I am saying?" He hoped that she did. There was only so much he could say without telling her that he loved her. It was too soon to voice that. He would never speak those words to her until he was certain she returned the sentiment.

"I do. No sex. No intimacies." She smiled shakily. "It's a lot to think on. You're right."

"Last night..." His words abandoned him. He moved away, not daring to look at her. Instead, he went to the bathroom to relieve himself and drink some Hangover Potion. He also needed to collect himself. The conversation had gone better than he'd expected. They'd each established that they did have feelings. He almost wanted to go back and tell her that they shouldn't wait...that they could continue to make love at will. *Do not give in! If you continue this way, if she leaves you, and shemay leave you, it will break you!*

When he returned to the bedroom, he noticed she was dressed in the pajama top and gathering her books and parchments that had accumulated in these past few months. "Where are you going with that?"

"Under the circumstances, I thought I should just go back to my own room. It would ensure that things didn't *progress* too quickly. Well, that, and I don't wish to burden you with my presence any more than necessary." *Can't you see how much I love you and never wish to leave you? I don't want our relationship to come to an end, you stubborn man!* She knew that she would bide her time. She could prove to him that she truly returned his feelings. She would prove to him that she would never abandon their child or him.

"Hermione, I still think you should sleep in here throughout the holidays at least. I do not want you to have to face those nightmares alone. I am sure they cannot be good for you. I can promise that last night's activity won't be repeated...until we decide together that it should be, that is." *Please stay! I didn't mean for you to go back to your room.*

*Now, this is interesting. He still wants me in his bed, thinking we can keep out of each other's arms. If I am smart, which I think I have been known to be at times, I will use this to my advantage. I simply need to approach this differently.* "So, no going back to the stiff business arrangement like we had before, right? You still wish to maintain the friendship we have started, hoping, as I do, that it develops into something more?"

Severus sighed with relief instead of tension this time. "Yes, if it would be acceptable to you."

She smiled brightly at him, and it must have unnerved him some, as color suffused his face. "Of course, I think that would be just fine. *You are not going to know what hit you! I am tired of playing by your rules. Now, we play by mine. There won't be much more of this waiting, Severus.*

Severus cleared his throat. "Right then. I will just shower, and if you like, you can call for our breakfast. *What is that woman up to? She had a mischievous glint in her eyes and an impish grin!*

"That sounds fine."

While Severus was in the shower, Hermione went to get a dressing gown. She didn't want to dress until she had her shower, which would probably be after breakfast. She flooded the kitchens to ask the house-elves to bring them some breakfast. Just as she was sitting down to eat, Severus arrived freshly showered.

"You seem to be feeling better lately. No more morning sickness?" He picked up a piece of toast and buttered it.

"No, none at all. I am very grateful for that," Hermione said, shoving an orange slice in her mouth.

"How was Miss Weasley's party? Did you enjoy yourself with that lot of gossiping witches?"

"You can just wipe that smirk off your face, Severus Snape! I had a lovely time. I never realized how charming Narcissa Malfoy could be. She seems quite taken with Ginny as well, and I am happy about that."

"Yes," Severus agreed. "Narcissa can be very loving and sweet to those she considers worthy, but heaven help you if you are considered an enemy. I feel very fortunate to be able to call her friend."

Hermione's heart lurched at these words. She could hear the fondness in his voice. Not once did she think to equate his relationship with Narcissa to hers with Harry and Ron. "Not to mention," she said, "she is quite beautiful."

"Indeed, she is."

He didn't notice the sad look in Hermione's eyes. She knew she would never be that beautiful in his eyes, and it pained her. No matter how much ~~he~~ cared for her, she'd still be as plain as ever. Abruptly, Hermione changed the subject before she became too saddened by these thoughts. "How was the stag party? Did everyone have a good time?"

Severus raised an eyebrow. "It was tolerable. I cannot speak for everyone else, although it seemed they were all enjoying themselves."

"I bet they were." She didn't mean to sound so sarcastic, but just the thoughts of witches dancing around naked in front of a bunch of drunken wizards just didn't set right with her. Then again, both friends and enemies had accused her of being a prude more than once in her life.

"Problem with the stag party, Hermione?" Severus was really enjoying the jealously Hermione was portraying.

"Not really. I just don't see the point; that's all. If a wizard wants to see a naked witch dancing around, why can't he ask his wife or girlfriend to do it? Why would someone with a partner choose to go watch another person for pleasure when he or she could just as easily be pleased at home?"

Chuckling, he asked, "In other words, if Arthur Weasley asked, you truly believe that Molly Weasley would dance around the Burrow naked? How about Minerva? Susan Bones? Would *you*?"

*I think Susan Bones would surprise you* she thought with a mental snort. She decided that this was a good to begin with her plans of seduction. She would show him that there was nothing wrong with a relationship between them. *Okay, sweetheart, let the games begin!* Looking him right in the eyes, as seductively as she could, she told him, "If my husband or lover asked me? I certainly would. I would rather he look at *me* and get turned on than by looking at another woman. The real question is, Severus, would he ask?" *Now, what say you to that, eh?* "Better yet, will *you* ask me when we are a couple?"

Now, *that* surprised him. *Would she, indeed? I would love to put that to the test.* Raising an eyebrow, he just smirked at her momentarily, weighing his words. "I suppose if you were the one doing the dancing, he, that is to say, *I*, would ask." Was she purposely trying to tempt him...even after their talk? He could see that his statement made her blush, and she appeared to be rethinking her strategy. He decided to save her from herself...and save himself in the process. "I was surprised that Filch came by and fixed your room yesterday. He seemed in no big hurry to complete the task any time I asked him to do so."

Hermione smirked. "Yes, well, I may have had something to do with that. I had a theory I wanted to test, you see. I had a talk with Minerva. I fibbed a little. I said that if my rooms were not fixed by Christmas, then you were going to find me somewhere else to stay until they were repaired. As I guessed, she went straight to Albus, and here we are."

"I am impressed. That was very...*Slytherin* of you, I dare say. What theory were you testing?"

"I have been suspecting, as I am sure you have, that those two, in addition to Ginny and Draco, had something to do with the accident anyway. I have searched thoroughly, and I can see no reason as to why the pipe would have suddenly busted and shifted to pour water into my room on its own. Magic had to have been used. This proves that they planned it somehow. My only question is, why would they do that?"

"Yes, why would they? Meddlesome fools!"

Laughing, Hermione said, "It wasn't all that bad. I think it's funny now that I look back on it, and at least it got us to share a room. I really like that. I guess they deserve some credit." Severus just folded his arms and "humphed" loudly. This made her laugh even harder.

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Time went by quickly, and on the Monday before the wedding, Hermione left for university to take her final exams. She knew she was as prepared as she was going to be, but she was still nervous nonetheless. It didn't help that her mind periodically wandered to the affectionate squeeze Severus had given her or the soft smile he bestowed upon her.

After eight exhausting hours of sitting in very uncomfortable chairs, she returned to the castle just in time for tea. Severus looked up as she walked in. "How did it go? Would you care for some tea?"

"It went well, I think. My professor said I should know by this Friday since I took my exams before everyone else. He said he would be able to go ahead and grade them. As for tea, no, thank you. What I want right now is a long soak in the tub to ease these aching muscles of mine."

As she left for the bathroom, she decided to play with her lover and see just how indifferent he could remain with her. Ever since that wonderful night with him, she had wanted more. She just didn't know how to approach the subject without making him think she didn't have regard for his feelings. He wanted her, wanted a relationship, but he also wanted them to be sure before moving on. They'd been getting along well, and aside from the fact that they had not made love or kissed, it seemed as though things were developing nicely. She knew he would not come to her again in such a way until *he* thought they were ready. The fear of rejection kept her advances down to a minimum. She respected him all the more simply because he was guarding his emotions. It must have taken a lot for him to admit that to her. She shrugged and formulated a plan. A small test would not be amiss.

After she filled the tub with warm water and vanilla scented bubbles, she quickly lathered her body, and it was then that she called out to him. "OH, SEVERUS! Could you come here please? I need your help!"

Hearing her scream for him, he immediately ran into the bathroom and stopped right in his tracks. He had not expected her to already be in the tub, but there she lay in a tub full of bubbles looking like she needed to be devoured. *Devoured by me, that is.* Keeping his tone as neutral as possible, he asked, "You needed something?"

Sliding one long leg out of the water and resting her dainty foot on the wall of the bath, she told him, "Yes. My calf has been aching all day, and I can't comfortably reach it. Would you be willing to massage it like you did my back?"

He stood there mesmerized as he watched the bubbles slide down her leg. She cleared her throat to get his attention, and when he looked up into her eyes, he remembered himself. "Yes, of course. If you can wait until you finish your bath, I have some muscle cream I can apply." *OH, NO! Here we go again! I very well remember what happened last time I applied a cream to Hermione.*

"Oh, no problem. I am finished now." She rose from the bath watching him intently. He never took his eyes off her. It was like he was in a trance. "Could you hand me that towel please, Severus?"

He snatched the towel up quickly and all but shoved it at her. "I will leave and give you some privacy." He abruptly left and stalked to the bedroom.

She inwardly smirked, calling out, "Its nothing you haven't seen before!" She was surprised at her own brazenness, but if she planned to seduce this man, she was going to have to be a little bold. He needed to see that she wanted to remain with him and their child always, that she wanted *him*. After drying, she entered the bedroom wearing his pajama top, like always. However, as her chest and belly started to grow, she knew she would not be able to wear the top much longer. That thought saddened her.

A happy sigh escaped her lips as she saw the cream. For one thing, she really was having cramps in her leg. Poppy had told her to try to eat more foods filled with potassium, but it was quite common for pregnant women to get cramps in their legs anyway. Secondly, she remembered what happened the last time Severus rubbed cream on her. He had made her a cream for stretch marks and had insisted she start applying it right away. When she'd tried to insist it was too early, he'd told her it was not too early, and it only needed to be applied for two weeks, claiming it could be too late if she waited. However, she really wanted and *needed* a repeat of what happened the last time he rubbed cream on her, as her hormones were going all over the place.

She lay on her back at the head of the bed surrounded by pillows. Severus sat at the foot of the bed and just as he started to apply the cream and massage her calf for her, she put her foot on his chest. "For easier access," she told him as she raised her arms and put them behind her head, causing the top to ride higher on her thighs.

Swallowing hard, he dipped his hand in the cream and started applying it to her calf, massaging as he did so. Hermione almost forgot her seduction plans, as it felt so good. When she remembered, she started to softly moan knowing he liked to hear those sounds from her. "Mmmm, Severus! That feels *so* good! Please don't stop!"

*What the bloody hell is this little witch playing at? She should know that this is torture for me, yet here she is, appearing to want to seduce me!* Testing his theory, he all but purred in his best silky voice, "Oh, don't worry. I have no intentions of stopping. Is there anywhere else you wish to have...massaged?"

Opening her eyes, she looked right at him. *So, he wants to play, does he? Well, this is one game I intend to win.* "I ache just about everywhere after today, so take your pick of which body part you'd like to caress, and start rubbing."

He smirked as he picked up her other leg and started to massage it as well. He slowly moved up her leg and started rubbing her thigh. After a bit though, the events of the day, in combination with the massage Severus was giving her, became too much, and she drifted off to a much-needed sleep. All plans of seduction forgotten.

He just watched her sleep for awhile, then put the jar of cream away. Perhaps he'd been wrong. Maybe she hadn't meant to seduce him. He smirked. *No, she wanted me, but her taxing day simply took hold of her. I wonder what she has in store for me next?* In a few weeks, she would be over the halfway mark in the pregnancy. It excited and saddened him at the same time. He knew people thought he hated children, and he supposed he did hate some dunderheads. Most of his loathing came from his days spent spying, however, as he'd always had a role to play. After pretending so long, his role became real. But, he was actually looking forward to his role as a father. He was looking forward to doing a better job than his father had done. He would make sure his son or daughter knew they were loved, first and foremost. Would she truly want to stay and be a family? Could he learn to trust in her words and actions?

*The only thing that would be missing is the role of the mother...unless I agree to renegotiate the contract, that is...or if she and I truly become a couple!* Feeling equally knackered, Severus got into bed, covered Hermione and himself with the duvet, kissed her forehead, and drifted off to sleep.

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Draco and Ginny could not have picked a more perfect day for their binding if they'd tried. Although it was December and rather chilly, the sky was a beautiful blue, according to the magical window Severus had installed for her benefit. It reflected what she would see if she'd be looking outside. She smiled to herself as she lay in Severus' arms, where she woke every morning, and felt a great peace wash over her.

She had gotten her university results the day before and had made one hundred percent on all of her exams. Even though she'd known that she'd been as prepared as possible, she'd been pleasantly surprised nonetheless. Severus had taken her out to dinner to celebrate, and then they'd made it an early night, knowing they had a busy day ahead of them the next day. Before they'd let sleep overtake them, she'd whispered cheekily that she'd enjoyed their date. He'd seemed startled that she'd seen their outing as such, but he'd merely agreed with her.

She felt Severus stirring and knew he was waking. He gently rubbed her belly as he did each morning as part of some waking ritual. He said grumpily, "Good morning. I trust you slept well." Removing his hands, arms, and legs from her, he moved to get out of bed.

"Good morning to you. I slept fine, thanks." It really amazed her that sleeping in the bed with Severus had kept away her nightmares. "You go have your shower while I Floo the kitchens for breakfast. I want to eat and shower; you have to leave for Malfoy Manor soon, and I need to get to the Wandless Magic Salon."

"Yes, don't remind me. Order something more than fruit and toast, if you don't mind. I am not sure when we will be eating again."

"Okay, love." With that, Hermione left him standing with his mouth agape. It wasn't until she'd gone to Floo the kitchens and read the *Daily Prophet* that she'd realized what she'd called him. *Love*. She smiled and wondered if he'd noticed and heard how right the word sounded. She slid the paper over near his plate. Severus always liked to read the paper while he ate. Therefore, she usually tried to have it finished before breakfast was served. She decided not to mention the escaped word in case he hadn't noticed.

The full-page photo of Ginny and Draco that was smiling up at her from the front page made her smile. She would save this for her scrapbook, along with many other items she'd been accumulating. She noticed *Photo by Colin Creevey* at the bottom of the picture and smiled again. Ginny had insisted he take the photos for the wedding, much to Lucius' dismay. They'd even had a small row over it, but Ginny had gotten her way in the end.

She heard Severus coming into the room and was just handing him the paper as their breakfast of scrambled eggs, bacon, potatoes, and toast arrived. She poured Severus his coffee and tea for herself. While he sipped his coffee and glanced at the *Prophet*, she piled food upon a plate and handed it to him. After, she did the same for herself, and they began to eat with each vaguely realizing how like a true couple they had become.

When she finished eating, Hermione got in the shower and didn't linger as she usually did. She was meeting Ginny, Narcissa, Molly...who had insisted she use her first name...Luna, Tonks, and Susan at the Wandless Magic Salon in Diagon Alley to get their hair and make-up done, as well as pedicures and manicures. She dressed casually, donning a Muggle sweat suit and her heavy cloak. She gratefully accepted when Severus offered to take her gown to Malfoy Manor for her, blowing him a kiss as she left.

Rushing through the doors of the salon, Hermione greeted everyone. "Sorry I'm late!"

Laughing, Ginny told her, "You are right on time! Stop rushing so! Oh, no! Hermione," Ginny cried, "where are your dress robes? Please don't tell me you've forgotten them?"

"No, don't worry, Gin. Severus is taking them for me. This way I wouldn't have to bother with them. He is going early to be with Lucius and Draco...something about pre-wedding things that the guys do."

"Well, isn't that sweet," Lucinda drawled. "Isn't *our* Severus the attentive one?"

Hermione cringed. She hadn't known *Lucy* was going to be there. "Yes, I thought it was rather sweet of him. He is always anticipating *my* needs." She turned to Lucinda with an eyebrow cocked as if to ask if there was anything else she wanted to add.

"Everyone ready to get started?" The stylist asked. She could see the claws drawn a mile away. If she knew anything besides hair, it was when two witches wanted the same wizard. She made up her mind to keep those two on separate ends of the salon.

"Yes, thank you, Marci," Narcissa said. "We really don't want to get behind schedule. Please start with Ginevra and send your girls for the rest of us."

"Yes, Mrs. Malfoy, will do. Come this way, Miss Weasley. Did you bring your veil?"

As they were walking off, the other ladies began talking among themselves and meeting their stylists for the morning. Despite Lucinda being there, Hermione was starting to relax and have a fun time. She did, however, decline the wine that was being offered to her. Even though she had read a glass of wine occasionally was okay, she wasn't going to take any chances with Severus' baby. *Our baby.*

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Severus arrived at the manor with his and Hermione's robes. Lucius himself answered the door, much to Severus' surprise. "Lucius," Severus greeted with a nod. "Is Draco ready for the big day?"

"Yes, I suppose so. I thought you were Professor Flitwick. The warming charms Narcissa put on the rose garden are wearing off already, and I contacted him to come and add some longer lasting ones. I was so hoping he would arrive before Narcissa returned. Ah, there he is now."

"Lucius, Severus," Flitwick greeted the men. "Show me to the garden." Flitwick also wanted to get this done before Narcissa returned.

"Dippy!" Lucius called. When the house-elf arrived, Lucius told him to show the tiny professor to the garden while they went back upstairs to see to Draco. The others present were Ron, Harry and Neville Longbottom...of all people.

"What have you got there, Severus?" Lucius asked, wondering why the dark man had two sets of robes.

"Oh, I have my and Hermione's robes. I didn't want her worrying about hers whilst at the salon."

Lucius chuckled. "Taking care of your little Gryffindor, are you? How...*husbandly*."

"Oh, for Merlin's sake, man! I just didn't want the girl worrying about her robes whilst she was getting her hair done, that is all! There is nothing *husbandly* about it!" It wouldn't do to let Lucius goad him about his personal life...and feelings...in front of the present company.

"Well, I am very sure she appreciates you, old man."

Severus just rolled his eyes and moved past Lucius to place their things on the side.

When the women arrived back, looking lovely, they had a little over an hour to get dressed. Keeping with the Christmas theme, most of Ginny's side wore some shade of red while those on Draco's chose some shade of green to wear.

Ginny had chosen an ivory robe rather than white, much to her mother's dismay. Molly felt Ginny should wear traditional white, but Ginny explained that ivory looked better with her complexion, and that was the color she was wearing, no matter what.

Before long, it was time for those representing the elements to cast the circle. Hermione kissed Ginny on the cheek and wished her luck before they moved forward. As she was making her way outside, she noticed Lucinda talking to some man who looked to be in his early twenties. The man looked a lot like Draco. *He must be related somehow.*

As soon as she walked into the garden, Severus' breath caught. She had on rose-red, crushed velvet robes that looked wonderful on her. Her stomach was only protruding slightly, but her cleavage was more than noticeable with the low neckline. When she looked up at him and smiled brilliantly, he nearly forgot to breathe. He quirked his lips up in approval. *I don't believe I have ever seen anyone more beautiful in my life.*

Hermione's first thought as she walked into the garden was that she'd entered Eden. As she looked around at all the beautiful roses of different colors and sizes, she thought there couldn't have been a more perfect place for Ginny to bind with Draco. There was an arbor where Ginny and Draco would stand set right in the front, and the circle was to be cast around that. The arbor had small baby roses of red with lots of greenery wrapped all the way around it.

When she saw Severus, she couldn't help but smile at the sexy man before her. He had his hair tied back like he had it the night of the stag party, but that was the only similarity. Instead of the usual black she had expected to see him in, he was wearing dark green. He looked *very* handsome in that color, and her mouth watered some at the sight. He nodded to her, smiling slightly, and she took her place.

She knew Ron was going to represent fire in the binding and was curious who was going to represent water. As it turned out, the young man Lucinda Malfoy had been speaking to held that honor. He looked very much like a Malfoy, and she simply knew that he had to be related somehow.

As soon as the music started, Draco walked in. Hermione smiled as she watched him. Even though they had never gotten along, she could appreciate his appearance. He really wasn't her type, but he was very good looking nonetheless. As she was looking at Draco, she suddenly noticed his sharp intake of breath. She turned slightly to see Ginny walking towards them. Hermione thought she truly looked like an angel.

When Hermione looked back towards the circle, she noticed Severus studying her. *I swear I could get lost in his eyes. I wish I knew what he was thinking right now* She was so intent on watching him watching her that she barely noticed when Albus came in, wearing only a set of white robes and matching hat. When he started the ceremony, Hermione almost missed when she was supposed to say her part. Severus, however, spoke his words clearly and precisely.

When she noticed the bright, white light binding Ginny and Draco together signaling the ceremony was complete, Hermione was dazed. She couldn't have told anybody one word that had been spoken. The only thing she noticed the whole time was her dark-eyed Severus Snape.

Severus could not take his eyes off Hermione. She practically glowed with her pregnancy. When he watched her, she was surrounded by dozens of roses, and it truly made her look like a goddess. *I want you. I want you to be mine. I want you to have a binding ceremony with me. Most of all, I want you to stay with me, and help me raise our baby.* Severus had never been so happy to see a ceremony end. He was very happy for his godson, but he desperately needed a drink. *Right! Remember where drinking got you last time, old fool!*

When Ginny and Draco turned to the crowd and started to greet their guests, Severus went straight to Hermione. He extended his arm, and she gratefully accepted it. Just as she looked up and smiled at him, there was a bright flash. They both looked to see where it came from and noticed that Colin had taken their picture.

"Ginny wanted me to make sure I got at least one picture of everyone here," Colin explained.

They went to their table, and Hermione readily took her seat. She was more than ready for something to eat. She was happy to note they were sitting with Harry, Tonks, Ron, Luna, Susan and Neville. Severus was not so pleased with the seating arrangement, but he knew Miss Weasley...no, Mrs. Malfoy...had done it for Hermione. As they were just about to start eating their Beef Wellington, Lucinda came to sit next to Severus.

"There you are, darling," Lucinda purred. "I have been looking everywhere for you!" The woman looked around distastefully. "I never thought I would find you *here*." At that moment, her eyes raked into Hermione.

Hermione gritted her teeth while Severus sighed. *It never ends!* "Whatever for, Lucinda? What could you possibly need with me?"

"Why, Jean-Paul is here! I want you to come and say hello!"

Severus noted that Hermione raised an inquisitive eyebrow. Jean-Paul was the son of Lucinda Malfoy and Maurice Bedeaux, a very wealthy pureblooded French wizard from old money. Jean-Paul was only a year older than Draco was. Maurice took him to France when he was eleven and whispers about Harry Potter starting Hogwarts the

next year whirled about. While Maurice tried to remain neutral, Lucinda openly ran with the Death Eater crowd, even though she never took the Dark Mark herself, and Maurice wanted his son away from all that.

He had made an arrangement with Lucinda, and she agreed to let the boy move to France and attend Beauxbatons Academy. After all, he would start school the next year anyway, living most of the year at school rather than at home. They visited one another often, and she never regretted her decisions of not marrying and of letting Maurice raise the boy.

She thought he had turned out perfect. He was currently engaged to Vivienne Delacour, a distant cousin of Fleur and Gabrielle Delacour. Vivienne was also part Veela. Lucinda didn't care much for that part, she had wanted her son to marry a fellow pureblood, but for the most part, she was pleased.

"I will stop by to greet Jean-Paul after my meal, Lucinda. I would like to catch up with him, as well." Severus looked to Hermione and saw the look of pure loathing she was directing at Lucinda and doubted she even knew she was looking at the witch that way. Though he hated for her to be uncomfortable, he knew it only meant that she cared.

"That's fine, love. We shall be waiting. He is most anxious to speak with you, as it has been years. See you in a bit then." She kissed his cheek and was off.

Hermione was seething. *Love? Where does she get off calling him love? She can bloody well take her love and...* She looked away. *Love is my word. I'm the only one that should call him that.* She ate in silence, not wanting to look at anyone. It would be likely that they'd notice her anger. After she polished off her slice of cake, she leant back in her chair and began fantasizing about Lucinda tripping in the midst of everyone. That would have made things much more entertaining.

"Would you care to dance, Hermione?" Harry stood there with his hand outstretched in offering.

It took her a few moments to realize Harry was asking her to dance. When she came back to focus, she smiled warmly at Harry, causing Severus to scowl. "Yes, thank you, Harry. I would love to."

As they moved to the dance floor, Hermione realized that Jean-Paul must be the person who represented the water element in the ceremony. She decided to scan the room for him. Harry interrupted her musings once again.

"How long, Hermione?"

"Sorry? How long what?" *What is he on about now?*

"Well, I never noticed it before tonight, but it's obvious you are in love with that greasy git! What is going on? How long have you had these feelings? And please, don't lie to me."

Hermione took a deep breath. She looked Harry right in the eyes and told him, "I have been in love with ~~Severus~~ Severus since we worked on that potion together that helped defeat Voldemort."

To her surprise, Harry remained calm. "I see. Does he feel the same?"

Exasperated, she told him, "I don't know if he feels as deeply as I do, but I do know he feels something. I mean, he cares and has said as much, but why would he love me? Does it truly matter if he doesn't feel the same at this point...deeply in love, I mean?"

"Well, he looks at you like he loves you," Harry grumbled. "From the moment you entered the garden, throughout the ceremony, and even now, he hasn't taken his eyes off you."

Hermione looked at Harry. "Why are you being so calm at a potential relationship between Severus and me, Harry? That is not like you." Inwardly, she hoped that what he'd seen was true.

"I guess because I've had time to think about it. Dating Tonks has made me realize many things. I realized it is your life to do with as you wish. I will never lie to you about my feelings, though, and I will never like Snape. We both know he will never like me, but I am finished fighting with you. Life is too short to be fighting with our loved ones."

Hermione beamed at him. *Thank you, Tonks! Wow, Harry is in love, truly in love. I hope he doesn't mess things up with her! She'd been a positive influence on him!* "I love you, too, Harry. Thanks for saying that!"

When the next song started, Harry felt a tap on his shoulder. Expecting it to be Ron, he turned. Instead of smiling, he smirked when he realized it was the Draco look-a-like. After all, smirking is the proper way to greet any Malfoy. "Yes?"

"May I cut in? I would like to dance with this lovely lady."

Harry raised his eyebrow in question to Hermione, and she nodded her acceptance. "Hello, Miss Granger. I am Jean-Paul Bedeaux, first cousin to the groom. Nice to meet you."

"It's nice to meet you as well, Jean-Paul, but you have me at a disadvantage. How do you know who I am?"

"Are you kidding me? Everyone knows exactly who any of you three...Hermione Granger, Harry Potter, and Ronald Weasley...are. You have made quite the names for yourselves. Not to mention that my fiancée, Vivienne, is a cousin of Fleur and Gabrielle Delacour. Both of them spoke of nothing but Hogwarts and of the great Harry Potter and his friends all during Fleur's last year when they returned to France."

Hermione laughed deep and rich. "Well, I don't know what to say to *that*, but I will say it's nice to meet you. Were you and Draco close growing up?"

"Yes, very. Even after I moved to France, mother often brought Draco to visit me, or I would come here to the manor for a week or so to visit. Father never liked me to stay in England long while there was a war going on here."

"Oh, I can imagine. So, your father raised you?"

"Yes, for the most part, but that's enough about me. How far along are you? *Are you carrying Severus Snape's child? I'd be willing to bet half my inheritance mum doesn't know that.*

"What? You think I am pregnant?" *Oh no! I didn't think you could really tell in this dress! Well, he is holding me rather closely.*

He smirked. "Yes, I can tell you are, but don't worry, your secret is safe with me." *Until after this dance and I find mum, anyway.*

The song ended then, and he offered his arm to lead her back to her table.

Severus had watched Hermione the whole time she was dancing with Potter. He really disliked Potter, even though Hermione loved him. If he were going to be a part of her life, in any way, he would have to accept that Potter was going to be around. *What? If I am going to be a part of her life? Perhaps it was time to start thinking on terms of when not if. Nothing could keep me from having some type of relationship with her. The urge to make love to her and make her my own for all time is becoming even more powerful with each passing day.*

When the song ended, he'd watched Jean-Paul cut in for the next one. *What is he playing at? Why would he ask Hermione to dance? He doesn't even know her! Why is he holding her so tightly?* The previous desire to speak to the boy was replaced with the desire to strike him.

As Severus was seething, Lucinda noted his distress and walked over to him. *Let's see just what this Mudblood means to Severus.* "She looks happy in Jean-Paul's arms, doesn't she? Too bad she is a Mud...um, Muggle-born witch. They make quite a couple."

Scowling, Severus told her, "I think she looks as if she is making polite conversation with a stranger who has asked her to dance, and she has no idea what to say. I wonder about the dance itself," he said dryly. "Why *would* he do that?"

*So, he is bothered by someone else showing that Mudblood attention? This is beyond ridiculous! She has got to be taken care of!* Why, Severus, he is just performing his duties as a Malfoy, and, if I may add, doing so quite admirably."

"He is not a Malfoy. He is a Bedeaux."

"Part Malfoy, then, darling. How have you been? I really would like for us to get together real soon, love. I wish to mend old grievances and settle down. I miss you."

Severus sighed at her dramatics. "No. I have no wish to get together with you or mend anything with you. I am certainly *not* your love and have not been for quite some time, if I ever truly really was. You need to look ahead, and not back, for there is nothing for you here, Lucinda." He enjoyed the shocked expression upon her face. Nobody, save his Hermione, would speak to him so familiarly.

*I will have you back, Severus Snape. I refuse to be bested by a Mudblood! You will see!*

Just then, Jean-Paul and Hermione returned to the table. Jean-Paul bowed slightly to Hermione and looked at Severus. "Professor," he nodded. "It has been a long time. How have you been?"

"I have been well, Jean-Paul, and yourself? How is Maurice?"

"Father is fine. He is sorry he missed the wedding, but he had a business meeting he could not get away from. I don't know if mother told you or not, but I am engaged to Vivienne Delacour. We plan to get married in three months. I would love to have you there, and of course, you are welcome to bring Hermione." He smiled down at Hermione who had sat back down and was sipping from a glass of pumpkin juice while glaring at Lucinda.

"We will see," Severus said noncommittally. Turning back to Hermione, he asked, "Would you care to dance?"

Hermione set down her drink and smiled warmly at Severus. "Yes, I would love to, but could we wait until the next song? I want to rest just a bit."

"Certainly. I do not wish to tire you."

Jean-Paul turned to Lucinda. "Mother, care to take a turn with your son on the dance floor?"

"That would be lovely." With a nod to Severus and completely ignoring Hermione, Lucinda swept to the dance floor with her son.

"Well," Lucinda demanded. "Did you find out anything of use to me?"

Jean-Paul smirked. "Is the fact that she is pregnant useful to you?"

"What are you on about? Pregnant? Surely Severus would not impregnate a *Mudblood*?"

"Don't know if it is *his* baby, but she all but admitted to me she's pregnant. If it is not the professor's, why is she living with him?"

"Oh, Merlin! What has that bloody fool gone and done now? This ruin *everything*! He will never leave her if she is pregnant. I need to think about this."

Hermione was enjoying watching the couples dance while sitting peacefully with Severus. She smiled to herself as she watched Draco scowl because Harry was twirling Ginny around the dance floor dramatically. Tonks seemed to be enjoying Draco's distress just as much. As if he just couldn't take another minute of it, he went to take Ginny from Harry's arms.

"Go get your own woman, Potter, and leave mine alone."

Harry smirked. "No worries, Draco. If I want a bit of a slap and tickle with Ginny, Tonks is more than capable of making that happen." He really loved to rile Draco. As with Hermione, Ginny was like a sister to him, but Draco still could not believe Harry did not see Ginny the way he did. Ginny just shook her head and rolled her eyes.

Draco paled at those words. He had almost forgotten his cousin was a Metamorphagus! "You wouldn't *dare*, Potter! Tonks would never allow that!"

"Wouldn't she though?" Harry asked cheekily before he burst with laughter and left a very red-faced Draco in his wake.

Hermione shook her head at the boys and their juvenile ways. She looked over at Severus to see him watching her. She smiled and before he could stop himself, he smiled back. She told him, "I am going to the ladies' room, and when I return, I would like that dance."

"As the lady wishes."

As Hermione was finishing up in the ladies room, washing her hands, Lucinda walked in. "Miss Granger, I have received some news, quite distressing, mind. I demand you tell me at once if you are carrying Severus Snape's baby!"

Hermione paled. She wished that she'd have thought to lock the outer door. The bathroom had been altered to resemble public toilets, many stalls and sinks added in. She simply hadn't thought of Lucinda following her in. *Shite! Her ruddy son had to have told her! Couldn't wait until everyone had left for the night, could he? The wanker! It hardly matters who told her. It only matters that she knows. What do I say?*

"Miss Malfoy, who are *you* to make demands of me? My affairs are none of your business. And, as far as *l'm* concerned, Severus Snape is none of your business either!" Hermione turned to storm out of the bathroom only to be stopped by the parting sentence behind her.

"Do be careful, Miss Granger. We wouldn't want you to have an...*accident*, now would we?"

Not falling for the bait, Hermione left silently with an air of confidence, although she was truly quite shaken. After a few moments, Lucinda left as well. Neither woman realized that there was a petite blonde in the last stall, taking in everything.

When Hermione got back to the table, Severus could tell something was the matter. "Are you all right, Hermione?"

"No, I am not. Would you mind terribly if we said our good-byes and went home?" She regretted missing the chance to be in his arms, but she felt too uncomfortable to remain there.

"Not at all. Are you ill? Do we need to go to Poppy when we return?"

"No, it's nothing like that. I am just very tired, as it's been a long day. I want to take a warm bath and go to bed. My back and legs are starting to ache as well. I hope you don't mind."

"Not at all. Lets go." After saying their good-byes, Hermione and Severus went back to the castle. The first thing she did was take off her shoes and head straight for their bedroom to get ready for the bath. Severus walked in behind her. "I would be happy to rub your back and legs for you, Hermione. You have been on your feet a lot today. It will ease your pain."

Now that she was back home, she was starting to feel safe again. Lucinda Malfoy and her vague threat were slowly heading to the back of her mind. Hermione raised an eyebrow. "In the tub?" She was starting to vastly enjoy her little flirting sessions with Severus, and she suspected he was as well.

"I don't think I would be able to apply the cream in the water. I will wait for you in bed."*She is so sweet, innocent, and extremely sexy all at the same time.*

"Sure I can't tempt you with a back washing? I am quite good, you know."

*Yes, my temptress, you are quite good.* Smirking, he just pointed at the bathroom door.

She sighed in defeat and went to bathe. Once done, he massaged her aching limbs and back, rubbing in the salve as he did so. Before long, she became drowsy. The last thing she remembered before dosing off was his lips on her brow, and the sensation of being pulled against his body.

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The next morning at breakfast Hermione asked, "Severus, what are your plans for Christmas? It is only four days away."

"I usually stay here for Christmas. I have no family to speak of for visiting. Do you have any special plans?"

"I go to the Burrow every year for Christmas dinner. I would love it if you would join me."*Please come with me! I don't want to spend one minute of Christmas day without you.*

"I'm sorry, but I do not wish to go to the Burrow on Christmas or any other time, really. Whilst I greatly enjoy Arthur and Molly's company, I do not wish to be surrounded by their brood."

Hermione's face fell. It really hurt her that he would not even consider going with her. It seemed that he didn't even care she wouldn't be there with him at Christmas. Well, she'd only be gone part of the day, but still! He wasn't even trying to change her mind. "Oh, I see. Well, that's okay. I will just send your best then."

Hermione went to her room and shut the door. She was upset that he wasn't going, and she didn't want him to know that. She also didn't want to seem to be nagging after the easygoing relationship they'd had for the last few weeks. She wanted time alone to finish his present anyway.

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On Christmas morning, Hermione woke to the oddest noise. *Why, that almost sounds like Crookshanks! What is that?* Sitting up and trying to orient herself, she noticed right away that Severus was not in the bed beside her. "Severus?"

"Over here, Hermione." She looked at the foot of the bed, ignoring the Christmas packages there, and saw Severus holding a small ball of orange fur *What on earth?* Smiling slightly, Severus held out his bundle and said, "Happy Christmas!"

She laughed out loud at the miniature version of her beloved Crookshanks. "Oh, thank you so much! He looks so like my Crooks! I love him!"

"I am happy you are pleased. I wanted you to have a new familiar as you seem to miss the other one so much." He was surprised as she placed two quick kisses upon his cheeks before continuing her inspection of the pet. Part of him wished that he'd been ready for her affectionate assault. He might have returned her kisses.

Gently setting the Kneazle on the bed, she picked up a wrapped package from the pile on the foot of the bed and handed it to Severus. "Happy Christmas to you, too." Severus took the gift and opened it. Inside was a beautiful, hand-made baby blanket of green and white. As he took it out of the box to get a closer look, he noticed the SS in the corner.

"Where did you get this? I had a baby blanket myself with this same embroidery in the corner and this same shade of green, although mine was a solid green."

"Well, I hope you don't mind, but I was looking through your trunk one day for a blanket and found it. I wanted you to have a special gift this year, so I got some white yarn and decided to create something for you with it. I made that myself." What she didn't tell him was the white part of the blanket came from her own baby blanket.

"I don't mind at all. This is very beautiful, Hermione; I like it very much." Severus gently rubbed the blanket between his fingers, enjoying the feel of the soft yarn.

"It looks like all that time I spent knitting scarves and hats trying to free the house-elves has finally paid off," Hermione joked.

"Indeed it has," Severus agreed, a slight smile playing upon his lips. "Are you going to open your other gifts?"

Hermione smiled at the small pile of gifts. "No, I have to be at the Burrow soon, so I want to get ready. Yours is the only gift that mattered." She grinned sheepishly, and reached down to gently pet the new Kneazle. "I will open them when I return. Are you sure you won't come? We only have to stay a couple of hours."

"No, but I do appreciate the invite. I will wait for your return to open my gifts."*Damn those Weasleys for taking my Hermione away today, even if it is only a couple of hours!* He'd privately decided to give her a treat. He hadn't wanted a tree in their quarters for the holiday season, but a small one might not be amiss. As soon as he could, he would summon a house-elf to snatch one from the entryway, as there were many there that some of the younger students had decorated. Once that was done, he'd place their wrapped gifts under it. She'd be pleased with it and with him. His plans were to kiss her after she opened her other things. It would prove to be a nice setting.

"Right then." Hermione went to shower and dress. When she came out, there was a letter waiting for her on the dining table near the plate of fresh fruit and toast that Severus obviously prepared for her. "What is that?"

"I don't know, as it is for you. It has the Malfoy seal on the back though."

Hermione's heart sank as she remembered the threat of Lucinda Malfoy. When she opened the envelope, however, she realized it was an invitation for tea with Narcissa for the next day. She smiled and wrote her acceptance and borrowed Severus' owl to send her reply.

After breakfast, Hermione went to finish getting ready and make sure her Kneazle was settled in. When she began to gather the gifts she'd bought for her friends, she realized how much she had to lug around. She wished she'd have sent them by magic like everyone else had done, like she normally did. She shrugged the thought away, knowing the pregnancy was allowing her to feel a bit lazy at times. *Hell, I'm not weak, only pregnant.* When she found Severus, he was sitting in front of the fire reading. "Well, I am off. I should be back around three if not sooner."

"Take your time and enjoy yourself." *I want you to stay here with me, but I'll not let you know that. I won't make you choose.*

"I will." *As much as I can without you, that is.* She Flooded from his quarters to the Weasleys.

Once she was gone, he made arrangements with Dobby to bring an already decorated tree in. After that was done, he summoned all of their gifts and placed them around the little tree. Who would have thought that he'd ever allow a tree in his quarters? He had to admit that it didn't look that bad. Part of him wished he'd have allowed it before, only to see her smile each time she gazed upon it if nothing else. Just as Severus was settling back into his book, there was a knock on his door. *Now, who in the devil could that be?*

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**A/N:** Yes, things are looking up for the couple! What could possibly go wrong now?

Also, I would like to say a *special* thanks to southern\_witch\_69 and Meredith for the additional efforts they put in this chapter. Honeyduke's finest to you both!

**Southern's Notes:** I'm so glad that things are looking up for the pair. I wonder who is behind the door. I hope it's not that ruddy Lucinda, the biatch.

**Meredith's Notes:** Finally, requited love! Can they get back to shagging now?

## Chapter 11

*Chapter 11 of 13*

Severus decides that he wants an heir. He chooses Hermione to be the surrogate mother, but will she agree? My response to the Surrogate Mother Challenge posted on WIKTT.

**Disclaimer:** All these lovely characters belong to JKR!

**A/N:** I really want to thank my wonderful betas, southern\_witch\_69 and Meredith. They put a lot of time and effort into my story, and I could never really thank them enough! Smooches to you, ladies!

*Comment by Meredith:* Especially Southern, who is the most absolutely fantabulous, amazingly talented beta and comma guru! Three cheers for Southern!! We're not worthy!! We're not worthy!!

*Comment by Southern:* Actually, Meredith goes through it before I even see it, and she does a magnificent job, giving up much personal time.

*Comment by Christy:* I am not worthy of Southern or Meredith! They both put a lot of time in each chapter. Thanks so much guys!

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### Chapter 11

Severus was surprised to hear a knock on his door. "Now, who in the devil could that be?" He got up to open it and saw Albus and Minerva, each exuding holiday cheer.

"Happy Christmas, my boy! Care for a drink with us before we head off to my cottage for a few days?" Albus asked, holding up a tray of hot toddies.

*Merlin, Avada me now!* "Please, come in." Severus opened the door wider to allow them entrance. Twinkling and grinning, Albus swept by Severus and into his sitting room. Although surprised by the Christmas tree, he wisely chose not to mention it.

Everyone situated themselves and began to sip their drinks.

"Is Hermione about?" Minerva knew exactly where Hermione was. She just wanted to see what Severus thought of her being away without him.

Glaring, Severus sat his drink down and said, "She has gone to the Burrow for Christmas dinner."

"Were you not invited?" Albus innocently inquired as he sipped. He knew that Minerva had advised Hermione to ask Severus along, and he was wondering if she had followed the advice.

"Yes, Hermione asked me to accompany her. I did not wish to be surrounded by *Weasleys* today." He knew he was brooding, but he honestly hated to be away from Hermione for an entire day.

"What about Hermione, then?" Minerva asked.

"Apparently, she *did* want to be surrounded by Weasleys."

Minerva chuckled. "No, Severus, I am asking if you wanted to be around Hermione today or if you are glad to have some time to yourself for awhile."

*No, I am not glad to be rid of her! I never want her to leave my side!* It has been...*quiet* with her away."

Albus and Minerva shared a knowing look. Albus told him, "I suppose you will be happy when she delivers and is out of your hair. I know how she always grated on your nerves as a student. Has living with her been a burden to you?"

"A burden?" *What are these two playing at this time? Meddlesome old fools!* "No, it has not been a burden having her here. She has become somewhat pleasant to be around; now that she has grown up and matured, that is."

That one statement told the two older lovers more about his feelings than Severus could have imagined. Albus decided to talk to him before he ruined the best thing that had ever happened to him. He desperately wanted Severus to be happy, and he knew, without a doubt, that Hermione and their baby was what he needed.

"Severus, I want to give you some, no doubt, very unwelcome advice. If you have what you want right where you want it, you should ~~everything~~ in your power to keep it there." Albus took a small drink before driving his point home. "Even if that constitutes being surrounded by Weasleys for a couple of hours." Albus' eyes twinkled mischievously as he spoke the last statement, knowing Severus hated to be in crowds.

This statement made Severus think. *She really is everything I want and more than I could have imagined. We have certainly grown close these past few months. Closer, still, these past couple of weeks. I have already told her I care for her, and she has said she cares for me as well. Maybe I should court Hermione and see how that goes. After everything else we have done and confessed, a little courtship would not be amiss! And really, as things stand now, I have nothing to lose either.*

"If you two would excuse me, I have somewhere I need to be."

"Certainly, my boy! Certainly!" Albus and Minerva were very happy that Severus seemed to be taking the advice to heart.

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Hermione arrived at the Burrow with a slightly heavy heart. She wanted to see everyone at the Burrow, but she hated to leave Severus. Now that he had finally admitted he did care for her, she wanted to spend as much time as possible with him to prove to him that they could be a family. She was hurt that he had refused to accompany her without a second thought. *Oh, well, I am just going to enjoy my time here and not think of it any longer!*

Before she could step away from the fireplace, Molly grabbed her by the hand and pulled her into the room. "Hermione, come in! It's so good to see you!"

Molly began brushing bits of soot and ash from Hermione's cloak. Hermione smiled at Molly and let her carry on with the mothering. She considered the Weasleys her 'adoptive' family anyway. Ron walked over and helped her with her many gifts. Even though she had shrunk them, she still had quite a few.

"Hermione, why did you not magic these here? It would've been so much easier on you!" Ron shook his head at her.

"Because, Ronald," Hermione sighed, wishing she had done just that, "I wanted to watch everyone open the gifts I brought them!"

After all of Hermione's gifts had been handed out to everyone, she sat down on the couch next to Tonks. She really missed Ginny, but she and Draco were on their honeymoon. "Hi, Tonks. Happy Christmas!"

"Wotcher, Hermione! Happy Christmas to you, too! Did you exchange gifts with Snape?"

That caused Hermione's heart to ache a bit. "Yes, he got me a Kneazle kitten that has a striking resemblance to Crookshanks."

Tonks looked surprised. "Wow, that was a thoughtful gift. I didn't know he had it in him! What did you get him?"

"I knitted a blanket for the baby using his old one. He seemed very pleased with it."

Tonks noticed a depressed expression pass over her friend's face and decided to change the subject, knowing silliness would smooth things over. "Well, since Harry liked the new nightgown Aunt Narcissa gave me so much, he gave me a gift certificate for Coco de Mer. Although I told him the nightgown hadn't come from there, he told me that it's okay, as any lingerie shop would do! He said that was the only lingerie shop he knew by name because his aunt Petunia used to receive the catalogs, but only his uncle Vernon would actually look at them when he thought nobody was about."

Hermione laughed and looked over to Harry, who was trying, yet again, to beat Ron at Wizard's chess. Of course, he would only occasionally beat Ron, but never stopped trying. As she was gazing around the room watching everyone, she realized this was the first time in many years that this family was completely together, with the exception of Ginny and Draco, and at peace with no threats of Dark Lords or Death Eaters looming over them. Even Percy and his wife had joined them. This made her smile the most.

She had been there about an hour when Molly announced dinner was ready. Just as she stood to go to the dining room, there was a knock on the door. Arthur went to answer it, and to everyone's surprise, Severus Snape was standing there, holding a bottle of Caliterra Chardonnay, which Hermione knew Severus liked particularly for the vanilla and spice flavor.

"I hope that I have not missed dinner," he said as he handed the bottle to Arthur.

"Severus," Arthur greeted. "Do come in. You're just in time."

He looked up to see Hermione beaming at him, and his chest swelled at the sight. Obviously, he had made the right decision by coming. He walked over to her, returning her smile, and offered her an arm to escort her to the table. After he seated her, he took the seat beside her and looked around at all the gobsmacked faces staring at him.

"Everyone, tuck in!" Molly said. She had been more than surprised to see Severus Snape join her family for dinner, but he was most welcome. *Something must be going on between those two*, she thought as she watched Hermione and Severus quietly talking to each other.

"Thank you for coming, Severus," Hermione shyly said. "I must say, I am pleasantly surprised to see you."

Severus smiled genuinely and told her, "I just decided I would rather spend the day with you than be alone with nothing to do other than read." He delighted in the slight blush that warmed her cheeks at his words.

The conversation around the table was jovial and lighthearted, and Severus was surprised to find he was actually enjoying himself. He had even joined in on a conversation with Potter and Weasley about Quidditch. The two boys had been surprised their ex-Potions master was so knowledgeable about the sport.

"I do not know why you two are so surprised by my knowledge of Quidditch; you both know I have refereed before. I also played whilst at school."

Now that they thought about it, they did remember that. Plus, he never missed a match. Both Ron and Harry always thought it was because he was Head of Slytherin and had never considered that he might actually enjoy the sport. Actually, they hadn't cared.

When Severus noticed Hermione yawning, he told her it was time for them to leave. They said their good-byes and left for Hogwarts, both very content. Before they even stepped from the fireplace, Hermione saw the tree Severus had arranged for her and gasped in delight.

"Oh, Severus! You did this for me? Thank you! I love it! To me, it just seems more like Christmas with a tree." Hermione was glowing, her face alight with happiness.

"You are most welcome, Hermione. I must admit, I am enjoying having the tree. I only wish I had thought of it sooner. We may keep it up until the new year if you wish." Severus was very pleased that he was the one who had caused her face to light up so.

"Yes, I would like that very much," she said. A glance at the clock startled her. It was half past seven! She had never stayed at the Burrow that long before. She looked at Severus and saw a very peaceful expression upon his face.

"Thank you for coming today. I was very happy you came."

Severus smiled. "It was truly my pleasure. I am surprised I enjoyed myself so much, and I can hardly believe I stayed so long. You must be exhausted."

"Yes, I am rather tired. I believe I will take my bath now, and when I am finished, what say you to opening the rest of our gifts?"

"I would enjoy that immensely," he replied.

Severus had completely forgotten about the other gifts under the tree. Just as he turned to look, the baby Kneazle rubbed up against his leg, purring contentedly. Static

caused its fur to crackle. Hermione smiled while Severus scowled.

"Come on, little Snarky-Puss! Come with me." Hermione walked over to Severus and picked the Kneazle up.

"Snarky-Puss? What, pray tell, is a Snarky-Puss?"

Hermione giggled. "Well, that's his name. I wanted to name him something that reminded me of you since you gave him to me, and since you are always so snarky, I thought it fit."

"I see. I suppose that is the polite way of saying it," he said, smirking at her.

Hermione only grinned and headed to the bathroom for her bath. When she walked through the bedroom, she laid Snarks on the bed and got out her silk pajama top. She seriously debated wearing her new nightie that Narcissa had given her, but she wanted to be wearing Severus' pajama top while she opened the rest of her gifts. When she put it on after her bath, she realized the buttons were starting to strain against her stomach. *In another week or two, I won't be able to wear this.*

When she finished, she left Snarks on the bed and went to join Severus in the sitting room. He smirked when he saw the pajama top. "You are about to outgrow your attire, I dare say."

"Yes," she sighed. "I dread it too; this material is so comfortable." *And, it's your top against my skin.*

Severus handed her a box. "Shall we? I did get one other thing for you. I hope you enjoy it."

Delighted, she opened the box to reveal a maternity nightgown. It was made of the same material and the same color as the pajama top she had on. She vaguely wondered if he had tired of seeing her wear the same shirt to bed each night. Dismissing the thought, she said, "Oh, Severus! Thank you so much! It's beautiful! I also got you one other thing," she told him. She quickly picked up a nearby package and handed it to him.

Severus was stunned when he opened the gift. It was a rare, limited edition Potions text, *The Book of Secrets of Albertus Magnus*, published in 1525. He had been searching for it for months. "Where did you find this? How did you even know I wanted it?"

It was her turn to smirk. "Do you remember that day you let me use your study to do my homework?" He nodded. "I saw the title written on a piece of parchment and asked Lucius to help me. I believe he found it in Germany."

"Thank you, Hermione. You don't know how much this means to me." He leant into her and kissed her on the lips. Severus intended it to be gentle, but as they continued, the kiss became more passionate. When they finally broke apart and caught their breaths, Severus rubbed her cheek with his thumb and kissed the tip of her nose.

Feeling the need to distance himself a bit, he told her, "I thank you again for taking the trouble to find this. Both of your gifts were very thoughtful, and I shall always treasure them."

"You're welcome," she replied, a soft smile on her lips. "Here. I think this one is from Lucius and Narcissa."

Hermione was reeling from that kiss. Happy that they were making progress in the right direction, she sat back to see what the Malfoys had sent Severus! *It's only a matter of time, Severus Snape! You will be mine!*

Severus opened the present and smiled at the fifty-year-old scotch, his favorite brand. The note inside read, *To celebrate when your heir arrives.*

They continued until all the gifts had been opened. Hermione's favorite, next to those Severus had given her, was from Ginny and Draco. It was a trip to an all day spa that specialized in pampering pregnant women. Hermione sighed contentedly and looked around her. This was the first Christmas since her parents died that she had been happy.

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The next morning after breakfast, an owl arrived for Severus just as Hermione was getting up to shower. She noticed that it was a Malfoy owl and stayed to see what the letter was about. "Is everything okay? Nothing wrong with Ginny and Draco, is there?"

"No, Lucius is inviting me over today for a drink when you meet Narcissa for tea. If you don't mind, I think I shall accompany you there. Then afterwards, if you'd like, we could go out to dinner." *No time like the present to start courting you.*

"Yes, I would like that very much." *Another date? Yes, I do like that very much, indeed.*

Hermione spent the rest of the day writing thank you notes for her Christmas gifts and playing with Snarks while Severus read his new book by the fire until it was time to go to the Malfoys. When they arrived at the manor, Dippy took Hermione to the sitting room and Severus to the study.

"Hermione, it is so nice to see you again. You are looking very well," Narcissa said, her warm smile welcoming.

"Thank you, Mrs. Malfoy. You look lovely, as usual. I must say, I was surprised, albeit pleasantly, to receive your invitation."

"You are already calling Lucius by his given name, so please, call me Narcissa. Have a seat," she said graciously. Narcissa rang the bell for tea, then turned back to Hermione. "I admit to having an ulterior motive for inviting you to have tea. Lucius and I absolutely adore Severus. All we want for him is his happiness. He *deserves* to be happy. We both think you could make that happen, but there are some things you need to understand about him first."

Hermione was a bit taken aback. *Me? Narcissa Malfoy thinks I could make Severus happy? Wow, I am surprised she would think that about me*

"I don't understand. Why would you think I could make him happy?" She wanted to tread carefully with this conversation, not wanting to expose her own emotional attachment if it wouldn't be necessary. There was still the contract to consider even though she and Severus had been interacting differently with each other.

Narcissa smiled. "I have eyes, you know, and I am a woman. I observe things. I know that Severus has feelings for you, and I can see you do for him as well. As to the extent of these feelings, time will tell, I am sure."

Narcissa paused as the tea tray arrived. In keeping with the Christmas spirit, peppermint tea was served, along with assorted cakes and biscuits. After she and her guest had been served, Narcissa continued her conversation with Hermione.

"Severus is a very complicated and private man, Hermione. He has been that way as long as I have known him. That's since I was fifteen, and he was eleven. He had a very abusive childhood, and his early years at Hogwarts, as a student, were not all that pleasant either. I will not go into detail on either of these matters, however, for those are his tales to tell. I will say that he and Lucius seemed kindred spirits, having similar home lives." She looked saddened at the memory.

"I think that is what caused Lucius to even notice a first year, as he was in his seventh, and take him under his wing. Of course, I was not in the picture until my fifth year. That is when Lucius noticed me, thanks to a function my family attended, and Severus noticed Lucinda later on when they were both in their sixth year."

Hermione visibly cringed when she heard that name, remembering her encounter with the witch in the bathroom after Ginny's binding ceremony. Narcissa continued with

her story.

"When I started dating Lucius, and later, when Lucinda started dating Severus, everything seemed perfect. We all got on so well. It was during this time that the Dark Lord started gathering followers. His ideals seemed so right, and Lucinda and I encouraged Severus and Lucius to join his *cause*."

"To rid the world of Muggle-borns and half-bloods?" Hermione asked, her manner tense. "To keep the purebloods *pure*?" Hermione knew she sounded bitter, and truth be told, she *was* bitter. She had faced these prejudices the whole time she had been in the Wizarding world and had lost her parents to this *cause*.

Narcissa sighed. "Hermione, what you need to understand is that purebloods are taught from birth that they are superior. It is ingrained into them from infancy. We don't know any other way. So, when this man came along with a plan to ensure the continuance of those ideals, we were more than happy to align ourselves with him. At the time, we had no idea what a monster he was or the lengths he would go to."

Hermione looked into her barely touched tea and asked, "Do you still believe those things, Narcissa? Do you still see me as a *Mudblood*? As someone *beneath* you?"

Narcissa smiled warmly, wanting to reassure Hermione. "No, I do not, and before you ask, neither does Lucius. Well, Lucius thinks himself the superior of everyone, not just Muggle-borns." This caused Hermione to chuckle, and the mood was lightened, as was Narcissa's intent. "Severus no longer believes those things either. He did choose you to carry his heir, after all." Hermione nodded, thinking about what she was being told.

Narcissa continued with her story. "When the Dark Lord was destroyed the first time, we all felt free. Draco was a baby, and Severus and Lucinda were engaged. Things were going well. Then one day, Severus went to surprise Lucinda, and he caught her in a...*compromising* position. He ended things with her right then and never once looked back. So, due to his upbringing, his involvement with the Dark Lord, and his experience with Lucinda, he has a very hard time trusting and opening up his heart to anyone. He has dated a few witches, but he has never let things get serious. I have never seen him look at anyone, Lucinda included, the way I've seen him look at you."

Hermione was surprised by this because she herself had a hard time being able to read Severus or being able to tell what he was thinking. "Do you think I have a chance with him? He has already admitted to caring about me, but do you think he could truly love me?"

"If you are patient, understanding, and willing to go the distance, I am sure of it. Please do not hurt him, Hermione. I feel that would be easy for you to do now that he has already admitted to caring for you. He needs someone to love and call his own, and I am sure he wants that person to be you."

Hermione was encouraged to hear these words from Narcissa. Even though she knew that Severus had not admitted to Narcissa that he had these feelings, Hermione felt if anyone would be able to tell, it would be Narcissa and Lucius. "I would never hurt him. I love him and have told him so," Hermione admitted.

Narcissa smiled at her and set her teacup down. "Now, tell me. What was going on with you and Lucinda in the bathroom after the binding ceremony?"

Hermione was taken aback and unsure how much to say. She hadn't known Narcissa knew anything about the confrontation in the bathroom and didn't know how close the sisters-in-law were. "Well, she had learned I was pregnant and became upset."

Narcissa smirked. "Obviously. I was in the last stall of the bathroom whilst you two were having your *talk*. She did threaten you, did she not?"

"In a round-about way, I suppose she did. I think she was just upset at the time. She doesn't know the circumstances behind the pregnancy, and I wasn't about to offer her any additional information."

"Do not underestimate her, Hermione. She is very vengeful, and she'll not hesitate to follow through with her threats. She does not issue idle ones, I assure you."

"I see. Thank you for the warning, but I am sure I will be safe. I am hardly ever alone anyway."

"Be that as it may, please be careful." Narcissa felt it was time for a happier subject. "I am having a very small gathering on New Year's Eve and would personally like to invite you and Severus. I usually have a huge bash, but with Draco and Ginevra just getting back from their honeymoon, I would like to have just a small gathering of close friends and family. Would you join us?"

"Oh, yes! I will need to ask Severus, of course, but I think we will make it. Why are Ginny and Draco coming back so soon?"

"Draco wants to take more time in the summer. This time of year is busy at our offices."

"Oh, that makes sense. I can't wait to see Ginny!"

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"Severus, old boy, how are you?"

"Fine, Lucius. You are looking well."

"Have a seat. There is a matter that I feel needs to be brought to your attention."

Severus raised an eyebrow at the abruptness Lucius showed. "Oh? What might that be?"

Lucius eyed his longtime friend and his son's godfather intently. He knew Severus was going to be very upset when he told him of Lucinda's threat to his heir and his Gryffindor. "Let me pour you a brandy." After Lucius handed Severus his drink and poured one for himself, he said, "I think it would be wise to keep a close eye on your Gryffindor until your baby is born, if not after as well."

Severus shot a look at Lucius that had most people cowering in fear. "Why would you say such a thing *old friend*?" His voice was low and deadly. *Surely, Lucius is not threatening Hermione!*

Lucius sighed. "Lucinda found out Hermione is pregnant. When Jean-Paul was dancing with her, he discovered it, and he told Lucinda. She issued a veiled threat to Hermione in the bathroom at the binding."

"Merlin's balls, man! How veiled? What exactly did she say? *I knew* Jean-Paul was holding her too damn close!"

"Narcissa said she told her to beware of having an accident. She was in one of the stalls and overheard the conversation. I just wanted you to be aware of the situation, as we both know how Lucinda is."

"Yes, thank you, Lucius. Now, *you* need to be aware of this. If anything happens to Hermione or my child because of Lucinda, *I will kill her*. Make no mistake of that."

Lucius only smirked in reply. He had known very well that Severus would react that way. He intended to have a talk with Lucinda himself when she returned from France the next day. She had wanted to escort Jean-Paul home and meet with Vivienne's parents to discuss the binding arrangements.

"Tell me, Severus. What are your plans for your Gryffindor?"

Severus paused. He really needed someone to talk to, and he thought Lucius was probably as good, maybe better, than anyone else. "I plan to court her these next few months and see what happens. When we leave here, I am taking her to that new restaurant in Diagon Alley, the Crystal Ball, for dinner."

"Excellent! Narcissa and I took Draco and Ginevra there when they informed us of their engagement. Well, after the idea settled with us, of course. Very nice. I dare say, she will have a splendid time!"

Severus only smirked at his friend's obvious approval.

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Hermione and Severus were both very impressed with the Crystal Ball. The food was excellent. Severus dined on baked Edam with Curacao lamb while Hermione had grilled veal chop with spinach and pecorino.

The conversation flowed easily between them. He talked of his childhood and his abusive father without going into too much detail, and he also spoke of his time at Hogwarts as a student. He touched briefly upon his days as a Death Eater, and then, he jumped to later days when he lived as a spy. He didn't dwell on any subject very long. It was enough for Hermione to appreciate that he had made the effort to open up to her. She knew what it had cost him to disclose such personal events from his past.

She also talked of her childhood and of her many adventures at Hogwarts with Ron and Harry. She playfully chastised him for his remark about her teeth in her fourth year when Draco hexed her. In return, he commented on her theft of his Potions supplies.

They were both surprised that by the time they had finished their dessert of baked Alaska Devon Cream several hours had passed. He decided it was time to return to the castle, and they left. Hermione was very tired and a little achy, so after her usual massage, she fell into a restful sleep. As he drifted off, Severus thought to himself that she had not had one nightmare since she had been sharing his bed, aside from the very first one. He smiled as sleep overtook him.

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The New Year's Eve party was in full swing by the time Severus and Hermione arrived. To her dismay, she hadn't owned any dress robes that fit her, so they had made an emergency stop at Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions. She chose a simple black dress robe, as she had little choice, being hurried. As it was, the shop had just been closing when they arrived, and Severus had paid them extra to stay open thirty minutes longer.

When they walked into the room, Hermione scanned the crowd for Ginny and found her surrounded by the usual gang...as Hermione had come to refer to her friends. She found her way to them as Severus headed towards Lucius and Goyle, Sr. He scanned the room for Lucinda and slightly relaxed when he did not see her in attendance. He did keep Hermione in his sight at all times, however.

As soon as she reached Ginny, Hermione threw her arms around her in a crushing hug. "Welcome home! How was the trip?"

"Great," Draco answered for Ginny. "We never left the room!"

"Oy, Draco! That's my sister you're talking about!" Ron bellowed, causing those around them to laugh.

As it neared midnight, Hermione noticed couples starting to look for each other, and she automatically searched out Severus. She spotted him walking straight towards her and smiled brightly. When he reached her, people had already begun counting down. As they counted one, Severus took Hermione's face in both his hands and gently kissed her on the lips. "Happy New Year, my little lioness."

"Happy New Year to you, too," Hermione said softly. She was surprised he had kissed her at all. She'd thought he'd be the type to avoid public displays of affection. It made her heart swell to know he would willingly kiss her in front of everyone, not that anyone was watching. Most were kissing their own partner.

After that, Severus went to the study with Lucius and the other men for a celebratory cigar, and she went back to the gang. She was beginning to ache a bit, but she didn't want to tell Severus because she wasn't ready to leave just yet.

When Hermione started to get tired, everyone went to sit on the couches by the fireplace, and Draco rang for some hot chocolate. They were all laughing, sipping their chocolate, and having a good time talking about the honeymoon and Christmas gifts when Susan suddenly started to feel sick.

"Neville, I think we need to go home now. I don't feel well," Susan all but moaned. It was obvious to everyone that something was wrong, as a light sheen of sweat appeared on her brow.

"Wow, Susan," Tonks said. "You look really bad. Maybe you should go to St. Mungo's instead."

"No, I think it may just be the flu or something. I will be okay in the morning, I'm sure."

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Neville Apparated them back to his flat. They were not completely living together yet, but Susan had several personal items there and even a few robes. They both knew it was only a matter of time before she moved in completely. He already had plans to give her his mom's engagement ring on Valentine's Day.

Susan was feeling so bad she just threw off all of her clothing and got into bed without bothering with a nightgown, keeping only her knickers on. She was now sweating profusely and didn't want any more clothes than necessary making it worse.

About two hours later, she woke with severe cramps and saw blood all over the sheets. She was so nauseous that she barely made it to the loo in time. Neville heard her retching and got up to check on her. When he stood, he saw the blood on their bed. "Susan? Is everything all right in there?"

"No, it's not. I think I am going to have to go to St. Mungo's, after all. Could you please bring me my dressing gown and slippers to put on?"

"Sure, love. Let's go. I don't like that blood I saw on our bed. It shouldn't be that time of the month already, should it?" She shook her head in reply.

By the time they Flooed to St. Mungo's, Susan was much worse. She could not even stand on her own. When the Welcome Witch saw how sick she was, she was taken to a room right away.

The Healer came in to check her, assisted by a Trainee Healer, and Neville told him the symptoms she'd been having. He then left the room for a few minutes so that an examination could be performed. Afterwards, the Healer asked Neville to come back in the room so that he could speak with them both.

"Miss Bones," the Healer started, "I have no idea what Healer gave you that potion, but you should have stayed in a medical facility for the whole night to be monitored after you took it. You could have had some very bad lasting results taking that unmonitored as you did."

Susan was genuinely confused. "I'm sorry, sir, but I did not take any potions this evening. I've no idea what you're talking about. What is it you think I have taken?"

The Healer looked at her in disbelief. "I don't think it, *know* it. Your body is reacting to an Abortion Potion that was taken, I would estimate, as recent as a few hours ago."

Neville was gobsmacked. "Why on earth would Susan take an Abortion Potion? She is not even pregnant!"

"Well, she certainly isn't now, at any rate. There is a test I can run to see if you were pregnant when you took the potion and if it was indeed effective, which I'd say it obviously was."

Susan was starting to panic a little and becoming very upset. "By all means, run the ruddy test. I have never been pregnant and *did not* take a bloody Abortion Potion!"

The Healer left to run the test, and when he returned, both Neville and Susan could see his confused expression. "I apologize, Miss Bones, Mr. Longbottom. You were not, in fact, pregnant. However, that *was* an Abortion Potion in your system. If you did not knowingly take it, I suggest you find out what is going on. You will have to stay here until I deem you well enough to leave. Your reaction is worse being that you were not pregnant."

"Why on earth would someone give *me* an Abortion Potion?" Susan questioned. Then, suddenly, her eyes went wide, and she looked to Neville with a horrified expression on her face. At the same time, they both said, "Hermione!"

"Neville, you have to go to Hogwarts immediately, and tell Hermione and Professor Snape what happened."

"I will first thing in the morning, love. I am sure they are in bed at this hour." Neville leaned down and kissed Susan on the cheek. "Rest. I will stay here with you tonight, and I will leave early to see them, I promise."

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Severus cracked one eye open at the sound of a loud banging on his door. He looked at his clock, and when he saw it was only seven, though *Bloody hell! Who is that at this early hour on New Year's Day?* Checking to make sure the banging had not woken Hermione, he got out of bed and pulled on his dressing gown.

He reached his door and threw it open to find a very anxious looking Neville Longbottom standing there. "Longbottom, what on earth would bring you *any* door at this ungodly hour?"

"Professor Snape, I really need to talk to you! It's very important, sir!"

Severus sighed. "Do come in, and get this over with so that I may go back to sleep. And, keep your voice down, boy! Hermione is still abed."

Neville came in, and he blurted, "Susan was given an Abortion Potion!"

Severus raised an eyebrow at this. "Well, your grandmother will certainly be disappointed. However, I don't see what that has to do with *me*. I have no potion that could stop it once it is already underway."

Neville started running his hands through his hair and pacing. "No, sir, you don't understand. Susan was not pregnant. Someone *slipped* her that potion. It had to have been at the Malfoys' party. We were there when she started feeling ill." At Severus' blank stare, he continued. "Don't you see? We think it was meant for *Hermione*!"

That got his attention. Just as he started to speak, he felt a hand on his back and turned to see Hermione. "Neville, that is horrible! Is Susan okay? Where is she?" Hermione was beside herself, and she subconsciously laid a protective hand on her stomach. "I want to go see her!"

"Calm down, Hermione," Severus told her. "It is early yet. Go back to bed for a couple of hours."

"How can you say that? Bed? After hearing this?" she asked incredulously. Looking back to her distraught friend, she asked, "How is she, Neville?" Hermione's eyes were tearing up, and Severus put his arm around her shoulder, giving her a single, quick, comforting squeeze before dropping it again.

"She was very sick last night, vomiting and bleeding, so I took her to St. Mungo's. The Healer said she would be fine, but they wanted to keep her until they were certain the potion had run its course. She will probably get to come home in a couple of days. I wanted you to be aware, because we are certain that potion was meant for you, Hermione. Please, be careful!"

"I will, Neville, and thank you so much for stopping by. Please give our best to Susan, and tell her we hope she feels better soon. I'll come to see her later today. Now, you go get some rest; you look drained."

After they said their good-byes, Neville saw himself out. Severus watched Hermione standing near the doorway. She looked so vulnerable that his heart actually ached. She still had her hand on her expanding stomach, and he knew, without a doubt, that she would give her life to protect the baby. *Our baby*. Instinctively, he pulled her close to him, knowing a reassuring embrace would be exactly what she needed. He kissed her temple and guided her back to their bed. He turned to walk into the loo. He came out moments later, fully dressed, and he told her, "Stay here. I should be back in about an hour."

"Where are you going?" Hermione asked, slipping out of bed again.

"To Malfoy Manor, where else?"

Hermione started to pace nervously. "At this hour? Do you not think it's too early?" At the intense stare he leveled on her, she replied, "Fine, then! I am going with you."

"You absolutely *will not* go with me! You will stay here where it is safe, and I will find out what the bloody hell is going on!" When she lifted her chin defiantly, Severus softened his tone. "Please, Hermione. If someone at the Malfoys' party did indeed give Miss Bones that potion, then it is not safe for you to go there." He knew this next sentence would be the stopper. "Nor is it safe for the baby."

Hermione sighed in defeat. She may risk herself, but she *would not* risk her baby. "Please be careful, Severus, and come home soon! I will worry until you get back."

"Don't worry about me, love. I can handle Lucinda Malfoy." He leant in and softly kissed her. Without looking back, he left. He was halfway to the gates when he realized that he had called Hermione his *love*. He snorted. *What the hell does it matter at this point in our relationship anyway? It's obvious my feelings for her are not as guarded as I'd previously believed.*

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Lucinda was sound asleep when the door to her bedroom was forced open, and a very irate Severus Snape walked in. He had forced Dippy to show him where her room was. Reaching her bed, he grabbed her by the arm and jerked her out of it.

"What is the meaning of this, Severus? You know I like it rough, but I do require *some* warning," she said, winking at him.

Severus wanted to strangle her right then and there. "I know you tried to give Hermione an Abortion Potion, Lucinda, and I want you to know that *Will. Kill. You.* if you so much as *look* at Hermione the wrong way again."

Lucinda actually had the nerve to smirk. "I have no idea what you are talking about, darling. I was not even at the New Year's party, as you well know."

An evil grin appeared on Severus' face as he wrapped his fingers around Lucinda's neck and squeezed. He purred dangerously, "I never said it happened at the party, Lucinda." He slightly lifted her off the ground.

"Severus! That will do!" Lucius bellowed. "Stop this *at once*! What is the meaning of this?"

Severus loosened his grip, but by no means did he let her go. "Your dear sister tried to administer an Abortion Potion to Hermione last night. I told you what I would do to her if she tried to harm Hermione or my child in any way. Luckily, the potion was added to the wrong drink, and Susan Bones spent the night at St. Mungo's, although I doubt Miss Bones felt very lucky last night."

"What the hell is he talking about, Lucinda? Is this true? What have you done?" Severus' story infuriated Lucius.

Severus loosened his grip a little more so that she could talk, although her voice was strained. "I have no idea. As you know, I was not even here last night. I was out with Ludovic Bagman last evening."

Severus dropped her, and she gagged and coughed as she hit the floor with an ungraceful thump. If looks could kill, Severus would have died instantly. "You did not have to physically be here, Lucinda, to do such a thing. Even a house-elf could drop a potion in a drink." Severus was so angry, he was trembling. "Listen to me well. This was your first and only warning. If you harm one hair on Hermione Granger's head, or if anything happens to my child, *I will kill you*. Make no mistake."

He nodded once to Lucius and stormed out of the manor in a flurry of black robes with only one thing on his mind: Hermione. He needed to get back to her as quickly as possible. Around noon, an owl from Neville told them that Susan was still beside herself and didn't wish to have any visitors, so they decided to wait until the next day. Severus spent the afternoon comforting her, and in return, she did the same. Both knew what could have happened had she drank from the cup Susan had.

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When Hermione awoke the next morning after a fitful sleep, the first thing she wanted to do was shower and go visit Susan. Severus, however, was having none of that, to her total dismay.

"I am sorry, Hermione, but I simply cannot allow you to leave the castle unescorted. It is too dangerous."

Hermione folded her arms over her chest and humphed. "I am certain that St. Mungo's would be quite safe, Severus. You can't believe any harm would befall me there, can you?"

"No, I cannot be sure of that, and until I am, you will remain here. If I could take you, I would, but I simply can't miss the staff meeting today. Not to mention, I feel Albus should be made aware of what happened to Miss Bones. Now, eat your breakfast."

As he said this, Hermione's eyes narrowed. She was waiting for her pat on the head and the words 'good girl' to come out of his mouth. "Well, what if I had another escort? Perhaps Ginny and Draco would like to go. It *did* happen at Malfoy Manor." Hermione held her breath while waiting for his response.

"Fine, if Draco...not just Ginevra...agrees, then I have no problem, but you are to go only to St. Mungo's and back. I have made you an appointment at Madam Malkin's today at three. You need to get some new robes. I have told her I want you to have the ones that alter themselves to fit your body as it grows. I expect you to get seven sets...charged to my account, of course."

"Thank you, Severus. Will you be accompanying me there?"

"Unfortunately, no. I have an appointment with Lucius today. Nymphadora has agreed to escort you. She is coming to the staff meeting with Harry. It seems there are some questionable former Death Eaters that have drawn attention to themselves in Muggle London, so a few Order members will be here directly after the meeting."

*Will it never end?* With a sigh, Hermione nodded her acceptance. She began eating again so she could finish up and shower. She wanted to owl Ginny and see if she and Draco would go with her. She wanted to be ready when they got there in case they agreed.

Severus noticed her solemn face and wanted to cheer her some. "What say you we go for an early supper tonight and to the Muggle cinema? It won't be long before the students are back from holidays, and we won't have much time for outings then."

Hermione beamed at him. If she didn't know any better, she would say this was the *third* date. *Hmmm, I wonder if the three date rule will apply to us?* I would love to, Severus. There is a movie out I would really like to see called, 'Love Actually.' I have heard it is brilliant!"

"That is what we will do. Take your time with your breakfast and with getting ready. I will owl Draco personally." Severus rose to get some parchment and a quill, as he was already finished with his meal, and leant over to kiss Hermione on the lips. He really didn't mean to. It was an instinctive move.

In a daze from the impromptu kiss, Hermione finished eating and stood to go shower, bending down to scoop up Snarks as she went. Although she had only had the Kneazle for a week, she was already in love with him. She nuzzled him as she made her way to the bathroom.

Severus chuckled at the sight.

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After returning from St. Mungo's, Hermione felt somewhat better. Susan seemed fine and had assured her, Ginny, and Draco that there would be no lasting effect from the potion. They sat with Susan for nearly an hour before Neville arrived to take her home.

It was a nice day for January; the sun was out, though it was still terribly cold. Hermione was tired of being cooped up in the castle, so she decided she would go to her favorite greenhouse and read awhile. She loved one in particular because of all the exotic flowers Professor Sprout was able to grow there. It was amazing to Hermione what magic could do, even now after she had spent so much time in the Wizarding world. It was nice and warm inside, so she settled in to read her Charms book.

Professor Flitwick told her that since she had passed her exams, she could start working with Terry and him after the holidays. She figured she could knock five months out of an apprenticeship and readily agreed. She also felt it would look good to another Charms master.

She had no idea how long she had been sitting when she heard a hissing noise above her. Slowly, she sat her book down and looked up. She gasped, seeing a large, brown snake with black stripes slowly making its way out of the umbrella-size plants hanging from the roof. It was coming towards her. Hermione froze, not knowing what to do.

Suddenly, she heard more hissing sounds behind her, and to her immense relief, she turned to see Harry and Tonks. Harry had stopped the snake, seemed to be conversing with it, and then got rid of it with a quick incantation of *Vipera Evanesca!*

"Bloody hell!" Harry exclaimed. He was visibly shaken.

Tonks looked to her beau. "Did the snake tell you anything, Harry? What was it *doing here*? I have never even seen that sort of snake around these parts before!"

"Yes, well, that's because that sort of snake, an Aspisviper, is originally from France." When Harry discovered he was a Parselmouth, he did a lot of research on snakes. Harry looked to Hermione then. "Are you okay? Do you need to go see Madame Pomfrey?"

"No, I need you to tell me what that snake was doing here, Harry! How did it get from France to Hogwarts, of all places?" Hermione was feeling slightly hysterical.

Harry sighed. "He said he didn't know, that he arrived in a box, then was put in this specific greenhouse. That's all he said before I banished him back to France. Hermione, it would be really easy to find out this is one of your favorite places here at the castle. Hell, nearly everyone knows. Why would someone put it here knowing that?"

Hermione stood and started pacing. "First, Susan Bones was given an Abortion Potion at the Malfoy party, and today a French snake just happens to be *in this* greenhouse? Well, I suppose the snake could have been coincidence because how would she know that I would come out today to read anyway? I mean, *it is* January! It's hard to conclude that this was *her* doing...except that the snake is specifically from France, where her son is living, and where she just came from visiting!"

Tonks was getting tired just watching Hermione pace back and forth. "Hang on! Who are you talking about, and what do you mean Susan was given an Abortion Potion?"

"Oh, Severus is going to fill everyone in on that at the meeting. You two had better go before you are late. Tonks, are we still on for shopping afterwards?"

"You bet! That is why we came looking for you...to confirm our plans. When you weren't in the dungeons, we figured you would probably be here. Let Harry and I escort you back to the dungeons. You shouldn't stay out here alone after that. Are you sure you shouldn't visit Madame Pomfrey?"

Hermione sighed and shook her head. "No, I'm fine. I am just a little shaken, but I do want to go back inside." She gathered her things and headed for the castle with Harry and Tonks on either side of her. She would speak to Professor Sprout...just to rule out the possibility that the snake was placed there purposely by anyone on the school grounds if nothing else.

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**Christy's Notes:** Yes, I do love to hate Lucinda. She can be much worse, I'm sure.

**Southern's Notes:** Whew! What a chapter. I'm certainly glad that our couple seems to be getting on better, but I still want to smack Lucinda around.

**Meredith's Notes:** Problem is, Southern, she'd probably enjoy that! I say we tie her down and release the fire ants.

## Chapter 12

*Chapter 12 of 13*

Severus decides that he wants an heir. He chooses Hermione to be the surrogate mother, but will she agree? My response to the Surrogate Mother Challenge posted on WIKTT.

**Disclaimer:** The characters all belong to JKR...except that horrid Lucinda!..... The plot is mine though.

**Author's Notes:** I'm still not worthy of Southern\_Witch\_69 or Meredith as far as writing is concerned, but I'm very happy to have them!

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### Chapter 12

Severus was very worked up by the time he arrived at the Leaky Cauldron. He and Lucius were meeting to discuss the supposed Death Eater activity, but all he wanted to talk about was the snake that Potter had told him about. Although he could not prove it, he knew, without a doubt, Lucinda had somehow sent that snake. Lucius arrived shortly after Severus.

"Severus," Lucius greeted, "how did the meeting go? Did you learn anything?"

"Yes, I learnt something quite interesting. I think your *dear* sister tried to hurt Hermione again. I cannot prove it was her, but *someone* sent a highly poisonous snake, *originally from France*, to Hogwarts, placing him in a greenhouse that Hermione often goes in to read. I have told you what I would do, Lucius, if Lucinda tried to harm Hermione or my child, and I mean it. I will *not* tolerate this!"

Lucius was very upset by the news. After his talk with his sister, he was sure she would leave Severus and Hermione alone. This was most distressing. "I will speak with her on this, Severus, and I will also contact Jean-Paul to see what he knows. This sort of thing will not happen again."

"See to it that it doesn't. This is no game here, Lucius. Now, about the Death Eaters, it sounds like it could be some of the last initiated that joined right before the Dark Lord was defeated...the ones that slipped through prosecution. I don't think the Aurors will have any problems catching these dunderheads."

"Well, that is good news at least. I don't want to worry about some Death Eater bent on revenge to come threatening my family. Narcissa will be relieved. Now, what say you to actually having a late lunch?"

"Thank you, but I must decline. I want to get back and make sure Hermione is okay. Goodbye, Lucius, and remember what I said."

With that, Severus Disapparated back to the gates in front of Hogwarts, intent on seeing to Hermione. To his dismay, she had gone on the shopping trip anyway. He became angrier with each passing minute. *How can she be so careless after what happened today! Stupid witch! I am going to wring her pretty little neck when she gets home!*

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The shopping trip was exhausting for Hermione. All she wanted to do was come home and soak in the tub before *he date* with Severus. However, this was not to be. As soon as she walked in, he pounced.

"Why, in the bloody name of Merlin, did you leave Hogwarts with Nymphadora today after what happened with that snake?" His tone was smooth and deadly.

Hermione, who recognized that tone, lifted her chin slightly, and put her hands on her hips. "Severus, I have to have some maternity robes! None of my clothes fit me anymore! What do you want me to do? Walk around naked? Besides, I was with Tonks! She is an *Auror*, you know!"

*I wouldn't mind having you walk around our quarters naked.* "From now on, you are not to leave this castle without me. Nymphadora was also at the party. She was sitting right there when Susan was slipped that potion that was meant for *you*, was she not?" She started to speak, and he lifted his hand to stop her. "Hermione, I just can't risk it. Please."

She averted her eyes, defeated. She would usually not give in so easily, but she had the baby to think of. Also, the pleading tone in Severus' voice almost broke her heart. "Okay. I will agree to leave only when you can escort me, but I want to go to the spa sometime soon." At his confused look, she explained, "Ginny and Draco got me a gift certificate to that spa that specializes in pampering pregnant women, remember?"

Severus fought the urge to snort. *A spa, indeed. I could massage her right here just as well...probably better, as I have been doing every night!* "Yes, love, I will escort you there. Just make it on a Saturday, okay?"

Hermione's eyebrows shot straight to her hairline. *Did he just call me love? Again? He must be getting more comfortable with the endearments. That is something I could get used to hearing on a daily basis!* Blushing, she told him that visiting the spa on a Saturday would be fine.

"Okay, go have your bath, and ready yourself for our outing. I made reservations for us at six at Chez Moi. It, too, is in Muggle London."

"Oh, really? I love French food! I have always wanted to dine there, but I could never afford it." She started biting her lower lip in a way that made Severus want to take it in his mouth and soothe it.

"Hermione, I assure you, I can more than afford it. Do you have any Muggle dresses that still fit you?"

"Yes, I can still fit in that dress I wore to Gin's hen party, I think." She frowned, thinking that would be too casual.

"Perfect. Now, go get ready. I will be ready when you are finished."

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Chez Moi turned out to be a wonderful restaurant, as Hermione had suspected. After an appetizer of mushroom caviar, she had flat out refused to eat snails, much to Severus' amusement; they had their first course of avocado stuffed with crab salad.

Then came the main course of roast pork tenderloin with shallots and asparagus for Hermione and roasted cod with red pepper puree for Severus. The conversation flowed easily for them. They both spoke a little more of their childhoods and families. This time, however, Hermione felt brave enough to ask a couple of questions, and to her surprise, Severus answered.

She felt she was getting to know him a lot better. He was starting to act more like the Severus she worked with all those months, and she was very happy about that. He seemed to be opening up to her and slowly letting her in.

For her part, she was trying to be an open book for him. She wanted him to know her and to see how she really felt. She wanted him to know that under no uncertain terms did she plan to leave him or their child. For once, since her parents died, things were starting to look up for her.

By the time their dessert of chocolate and peanut butter sandwiches came, nearly three hours had passed. They were both amazed how quickly the time had gone by. They ended up having to go to a later show than they'd expected, but it was worth it.

For his part, Severus was amazed at how much he was willing to reveal to Hermione. The words just seemed to flow out of his mouth whenever he started talking to her. Not that he minded, really, if they were going to have the kind of future he wanted them to have together, then she needed to know about his past. Even the unpleasant parts. *Especially* the unpleasant parts. He wanted her going into this with her eyes wide open.

He found he quite enjoyed spending time with his witch, and the more he got to know her, the more he wanted her. He'd known that he had loved her for quite some time, but he didn't realize he would actually *like* her as well. It looked as if she was on her way to becoming a friend, as well as a lover, to him. He knew it was only a matter of time before they succumbed to those feelings again, and he was rather looking forward to it.

He knew she had been flirting with him and attempting to seduce him. It amazed and delighted him that she put the effort in, but he was very glad she did. He always wondered what she would do next. It was rather endearing, watching her in all her innocence trying, and succeeding, to be alluring.

Severus was very happy and content at the moment. For once, since the Dark Lord had been defeated, things were starting to look up for him.

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Soon, it was the middle of January and time for another visit with Poppy. Severus had only missed one appointment, but he was looking forward to this one anyway. It always amazed him to listen to the heartbeat of his child. He watched as Hermione sat his breakfast in front of him and then started to make her own plate. She was becoming more and more beautiful to him. *I wonder if she knows how she glows? I wonder if she feels the life inside her moving and kicking about?*

"A Sickle for your thoughts." Hermione smiled warmly at Severus. He had been staring at her ever expanding belly *What goes through your mind when you look at me?*

"I was just wondering if you can feel the baby moving in there."

"Sometimes. It is getting stronger each day though. The next time I feel a few good

movements at once, I will let you touch."

"Thank you. I would really appreciate that, Hermione." Severus sighed. "We had better get going. I want to get to my class soon after the dunderheads arrive."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Severus, why in the world do you teach if you hate it so?"

"What else am I going to do, Hermione? Disguise myself and become a gigolo? I have been doing this too long to stop now."

"I suppose. Although, I think you would be brilliant at research. Did you ever consider leaving, doing your own research, and creating your own potions? *We could set up a lab together. I do know we work very well on potions together. Maybe I could even incorporate some of those charms I have been studying up on.*

"I used to think of nothing but leaving, but I have found my place here acceptable. I am content with doing my projects during the holidays, and with the baby coming, I don't want to move out of Hogwarts anytime soon."

"Yes, I can see your point there. Well, it's time to go. Are you ready?" Hermione wanted to go before that portion of the conversation continued. She did not want to think of the baby being born and having to leave. She was still holding out hope she would change his mind, and it looked like he was going to, although they have not spoken of it in a long time.

He leant over, kissed her lips, as he had started to do every morning after breakfast, took her hand, and led her to see Poppy.

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As Poppy was finishing up the examination, she told them, "Everything looks really good. Hermione, this is almost a textbook pregnancy." Severus smirked at that *Of course, it is. I would not expect anything less of my little know-it-all!*" Everything is exactly the way it should be at twenty-five weeks. If you haven't already, you should be feeling the baby move. It doesn't appear as though you have any stretch marks, although it would be quite normal if you had."

Severus smirked. "I had prepared a cream for Hermione to apply in the first few weeks of her pregnancy to prevent that. It is a highly complicated cream to make, but I can say it was worth it."

Hermione blushed, remembering what happened when he'd applied the cream. "Yes, it was worth it, indeed." She locked eyes with Severus and knew he was remembering as well.

Poppy went on as if she didn't notice the exchange between Hermione and Severus. "Hermione, the heartburn you are experiencing is normal. You may take a potion for

that once daily. You can also try eating smaller meals more frequently and less fatty foods. Now, would you like to know the sex of the baby, Severus?"

Severus noticed the way Hermione looked just then. He could tell that she really wanted to know, and if he were being honest with himself, he did as well. "Yes, I would." He felt guilty that Poppy had directed the question to him only, which was how it should be. It just felt so wrong to him. He'd been thinking of the child as *their* baby...not just his.

"Congratulations, you are going to have a son." Poppy practically beamed at Severus when she made this announcement.

Severus looked at Hermione to see tears glistening in her eyes. He was starting to get a little choked up himself, so he did the only thing he could think to do at the moment. He nodded once and left to go to his classroom.

Hermione was not offended by his abrupt exit. Now that he had gotten to know him, she knew it was his defense against publicly showing emotion. She rubbed her belly and smiled, thinking, *I am going to have a son* as the tears fell from her eyes.

Severus stopped outside his classroom door to get his emotions in check. *A son! Hermione is giving me a son! Of course, I would love my child, no matter the gender, but I am very pleased. I think I will take her to that spa of hers this weekend to celebrate.*

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Before long, it was the week before Valentine's Day. Hermione wanted to get Severus a special gift, but she was having a hard time deciding what to purchase. Her limited choices were beside the fact that Severus watched her like a hawk and would not let her leave the castle without him. In addition to that, she still hadn't been to the spa yet. The weekend Severus was going to take her, Filch got sick, and Severus had to do his rounds. Severus was busy with preparing the students for the O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s that were coming up and with grading tests and essays. Therefore, their evenings were spent with him in his office...him grading and her going through his many books. As much as she enjoyed reading, she was starting to feel a bit claustrophobic to say the least.

To top it all off, she was having an extreme craving for those chocolate and peanut butter sandwiches she had eaten at Chez Moi. Needless to say, by the time Severus came in from making his rounds that night, she was in a foul mood. "I have had it, Severus. I absolutely can't take it any more!"

Startled, Severus looked to Hermione. "What's wrong, sweet? What can I do to help?"

"For one thing, I am going stir crazy in this ruddy castle! I have got to get out! And, for another thing, I am having an absolutely maddening craving for a chocolate and peanut butter sandwich from Chez Moi. I have simply got to have one right now!"

"Hermione, it's midnight! I doubt they are even open at this hour!" Severus really did not feel like going out at this time of night, especially for something as silly as that.

Tears welled in her eyes. She knew she was being unreasonable, but she couldn't seem to stop herself. "Fine! Just forget it!" She stomped off towards their bedroom.

Severus sighed. *Witches!* Still, he decided that letting her have her way wouldn't hurt anyone. He'd be damned if he were going to tromp through Muggle London at midnight to get them though. Instead, he summoned a house-elf.

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By the time she had gotten out of the tub and dried off, Hermione was still craving those sandwiches, which was odd to her, considering she'd only had them that one time. She had just pulled her gown over her head when she felt it. It was a very strong kick followed by a series of wave-like movements. Knickers forgotten, she ran into the bedroom to look for Severus.

He was sitting on the bed with his back against the headboard, legs stretched out in front of him, crossed at the ankle, wearing only his pajama bottoms, and reading a journal on potions. She only vaguely noticed the chocolate and peanut butter sandwiches on the nightstand. She called, "Severus!" In the next instant, she pounced on the bed and straddled him.

"Hermione, what on earth?"

The next thing he knew, she was lifting his hand and placing it underneath her nightgown on her stomach. He looked at her in astonishment for a few seconds until he felt a thump. "Is that..."

"Yes! That's the baby! That's our son doing that!" She beamed at him as he felt the small movement. Then, he lowered his hands to her hips to pull her belly closer to his and discovered she didn't have on any knickers. *Good Lord! How could I not have noticed that?* He raised his head to look in her eyes, and the mood became intense.

She leant forward and kissed him passionately. When she stopped to catch her breath, she told him, "I want you so very much, Severus. Will you still refuse me?"

Pulling her face to his so that they were only inches apart, he said, "Not now, not ever again." He kissed her then, and his hands were suddenly everywhere. He could not get enough of her. He lifted her gown over her head, threw it onto the floor, and gently took the nearest nipple into his mouth. She moaned with pleasure, pushing firmly into him.

She wanted to be as close to him as possible. His erection was very obvious through his pajama bottoms, and feeling him through the fabric was not enough. Reluctantly interrupting his laving tongue's ministrations on her breast, she started easing down so that she could pull his pants off. After she had thrown them onto the floor near her gown, she straddled him again. "I want you *now*, Severus. I can't wait any longer!"

After making sure she was ready for him by sliding one finger into her depths, he lifted her slightly and positioned her over him. She slowly lowered herself onto him, and they both moaned with pleasure. He nudged his hips upward and helped her establish a slow rhythm, allowing her confidence to build. He could feel the trembling in her body and knew that she was nervous. Before long, she threw her head back, increased the pace a little, and started riding him without his guidance.

He was in awe at the sight of the goddess above him. He lifted his knees for her to lean back against and gently tugged a nipple. She moaned and started riding him harder. *Oh, she likes that, does she?* Having his back against the headboard already, the position gave him complete access to her breasts, so he took the nipple between his teeth and bit down gently.

"Gods, Severus!"

"Do you like that, sweet? Do you know how good you feel to me?"

His voice was doing things to her...especially when he spoke in that silky purr he used when trying to be seductive. It made her shiver. She grasped his shoulders to keep her body steady as her strokes increased, and he grabbed her hips once again with one hand. He could tell she was close. He used a finger from his other hand to further stimulate her and moved his hips a little faster. Suddenly, she stiffened and called his name. After she relaxed a little, seemingly coming down from her peak, he started moving again, faster and harder, until he found his release with a whispered, "Hermione."

She leant down and kissed him, asking, "Are those sandwiches for me, love?" She had been craving them so much, and now that she had fully noticed them, she just *had* to have one right then. Talking would have to wait a few minutes.

Severus burst out laughing, deep and rich. He couldn't believe the first thing out of her mouth *after that* was about food! "Yes, I summoned a house-elf to fix them for you."

Please, enjoy them. I got you three." He'd made sure the house-elf had brought milk also, and luckily, it had left their quarters just before Hermione had come bounding into the room. Severus watched in amusement as she ate all three sandwiches in what had to have been record time. *She must have really been craving those!*

When she was finished, she looked to him shyly. "Severus, *please* tell me you are not going to stop things this time. I want our relationship to move forward, not backwards. To me, this just seems like the next natural step for us. I want you, and you want me. We care about each other, and this is an expression of our feelings, I say."

"I agree. I want to move forward as well. No restrictions this time. We have waited long enough." After she finished the last of her milk, he pulled her to him, wrapped her in his arms, and kissed the top of her head. "Sleep now. It is growing late. I will owl Draco tomorrow and see if he and Ginny can escort you to that spa sometime soon."

She sighed contentedly before asking, "Should we put our pajamas back on?"

He grinned evilly. "No, I like you just the way you are, sweet." They settled in, spooning tightly with his hand draped possessively on her belly.

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On the morning of Valentine's Day, Severus awoke Hermione with a gift. Snarks had snuggled up to Hermione once Severus had gone for the present, but he picked the Kneazle up and set him on the floor before nudging Hermione awake. "Good morning. I have something for you."

Hermione stretched languidly before opening her eyes to see Severus smiling at her, holding a package. She smiled brightly and said, "Just a second! I have something for you, too." She leant over, opened the drawer of her nightstand, and pulled out a small wrapped box.

When she handed him his gift, he told her to go ahead and open hers first. She opened the package to find a beautiful set of onyx Chinese hair sticks, each side inlaid with beautiful emeralds. "Oh, Severus, these are gorgeous! Truly lovely! Thank you, very much."

Severus smirked. He knew that most people thought that the emeralds given by his family, and most Slytherins, were because of their Slytherin heritage. However, the giving of emeralds in his family was started by his great-grandfather. Severus' great-grandmother let him read a letter her fiancé wrote her when he gave her the engagement ring that had been passed down through the years. He told her he chose the diamond in the center for consistency, but the emeralds stood for hope, fidelity, and the preservation of love. Severus' great-grandparents had been very much in love, and he'd always liked them very much. He hoped that someday he would be able to show that letter to Hermione.

"You are welcome. I was growing tired of seeing you walk around with a quill stuck in your hair to try and hold it up," Severus joked.

She smiled and told him, "It's your turn." She bit her bottom lip nervously. She really hoped he liked the gift.

He opened the box to find a set of cufflinks in the exact shape of the clasp on his dress robes...S-shaped snakes with small emerald eyes. "How did you find these? They are superb."

The cufflinks had put a huge dent in her savings account, but she was glad she'd had them made for Severus, if the look on his face was anything to go by. He seemed nearly awed by the gift, and that made her very happy.

Hermione wondered if he knew what emeralds and onyx really represented. She doubted it. During the Christmas of her sixth year, her father wanted her to help him pick out some jewelry for her mum, so she did what she did best, which was researching all the gems and stones. She knew exactly what each represented. She figured that all Slytherins must give emeralds at one time or the other, so she doubted there was any more to it than that for him.

"I had those made for you. Tonks and Ginny helped me," she said sweetly. Her tone changed to that of exasperation when she added, "Since I can't leave the castle."

"I am sorry about that, sweet, but I won't risk you or the baby. I know it is hard on you, but Lucius said when Lucinda goes back to France next month for Jean-Paul's wedding, she is staying. I will feel much better then. Thank you for these." He placed the cuff links on the nightstand and turned to face her. "Draco said he and his wife will be able to take you to the spa Saturday next. I have a Hogsmeade weekend, so I won't be able to accompany you. Now, I must prepare to go. My class will be starting soon."

He bent to kiss her. Just as he was starting to rise, she deepened the kiss and cupped him, pleased to hear him groan. "None of that! I have class. However, I would most definitely like to pick this up later," he said with a mischievous grin.

"Later is good. I have always wanted to get you in the tub, you know. I have tried several times."

"Yes, I do seem to recall that. Well, I am here to please," he said with a smirk.

She stood up and kissed him again. "Okay, until tonight."

With that, he strode away to get ready for his first class of the day.

\*\*\*\*\*

Hermione was in a very good mood. She had never received such a beautiful gift on Valentine's Day. She was also starting to feel really good about where she stood with Severus, and it had been over a month since they had any bad "Lucinda accidents," as she had taken to calling them. Good things never last sometimes.

As she was getting comfortable in her chair, two things happened at once. A house-elf that Hermione didn't recognize popped in with a card, and there was a knock on the door. "Just a minute," she called out while she took the card from the elf. It was in a bright red envelope, and she smiled to herself thinking Severus must have sent her a card. The door momentarily forgotten, she started to break the seal. Just as Snarks jumped up on the table, the knock sounded again.

She rose, placed the card on the table, went to the door, and opened it. "Hi. Ron. What brings you here?"

"I haven't seen you for awhile. I have the day off and thought you might like to have lunch with me. Hey, what's that Kneazle got there?"

Hermione turned to see Snarks playing with some kind of particles that were floating from the card. Just as she started to go see what it was, the Kneazle started hacking and fell over.

"Snarks? SNARKS!" Hermione started to run to him, but she was grabbed from behind with a hand placed over her mouth and nose. She was quickly drug outside the room, and the door was forcefully shut behind her.

"Ron! Let me go! Something is wrong with him!"

"Think, Hermione! That was some kind of poison, that was! You can't breathe that stuff in! As a matter of fact, I am going to have to take you to Madame Pomfrey right now."

"Oh, no! Ron, the baby! Oh, please let him be okay. I don't think I inhaled any of it."

Ron took her to the infirmary and went to get Professor Snape as fast as he could go.

\*\*\*\*\*

Severus was in a really good mood. He was very pleased with the way things were progressing with Hermione. He had even made an appointment to go see his solicitor during the Easter holidays. He had some things he wanted to discuss. He was walking around his classroom looking over potions when a loud banging on his door brought him out of his thoughts. The sudden noise startled a student, causing him to drop too much of an ingredient in his cauldron. Immediately, the cauldron melted, and the potion was ruined.

Snarling, Severus said, "Ten points from Ravenclaw for allowing yourself to be distracted." Then, he yelled, "Enter!"

He was surprised to see a frightened looking Ronald Weasley enter his classroom. He didn't even know the boy was visiting the castle. "Mr. Weasley, what on earth are you doing here disrupting my class?"

"Professor, you need to come to the infirmary right away. It's Hermione."

Severus didn't need to be told twice. He ran to Hermione immediately after yelling, "Class dismissed!"

After being told what happened and being assured that Hermione and the baby were fine, he went back to the dungeons to take care of Snarks and get rid of the poison's remnants. He wanted to make sure it was safe before Hermione returned. He was saddened by the little Kneazle's death. He knew how devastated Hermione would be once the situation sunk in.

After he got her settled in and calmed down, he turned to Ron. "Weasley, would you be able to stay with her a bit? I have somewhere I need to go."

"Yes, I can stay as long as you need, Professor."

\*\*\*\*\*

Severus arrived at the Ministry of Magic in a flurry of black robes. After checking in, he headed for level two where the Auror Headquarters was located. After spotting Harry, he walked over to where he was seated.

"Potter, I would like to have Lucinda Malfoy picked up for questioning. She is trying to fatally harm Hermione and my son."

"Do you have solid proof, Professor?"

Severus told him what happened at the castle earlier and about the Kneazle dying. "If Hermione had inhaled that, then she and my son would both have died. I want something done immediately before that witch succeeds in her plans!"

"Severus," Tonks started, "I agree something needs to be done, but we can't just waltz into someone's home and bring them in for questioning without solid proof of a crime. You can't just *know* she sent that card. You have to *prove* she did."

"I see," Severus said. "And, while I am waiting for this *proof*, she has more chances to kill Hermione and my son in the meantime? Have you forgotten the Abortion Potion that Miss Bones consumed? What about the snake in the greenhouse? Hermione talked to Pomona, and she had no idea what that snake was doing there. What *more* proof do you need? Are you waiting for Lucinda to be standing over a dead Hermione shouting that she's the culprit? Never mind. I will see to this myself!"

Before Harry or Tonks could say anything, Severus turned around and walked out.

\*\*\*\*\*

Malfoy Manor was quiet. Lucius and Draco were likely still at the office, and Severus had no idea where Narcissa and Ginevra were. At the moment, he did not care. All he wanted was Lucinda. He strode past Dippy and started bellowing, "Lucinda! I want to see you at once! Show yourself now!"

Just then, he heard a voice at the top of the stairs. "This is getting to be a habit with you. What can I do for you? Oh, no," she said as he moved to stand at the bottom of the stairs, "stay where you are. What do you want, Severus?"

"Your head on a platter for starters. I am tired of your attempts to harm Hermione and my son. It stops now." The look in Severus' eye was nearly murderous.

"I have no idea what you are talking about, darling. I have done no such thing. I could care less about you *Mudblood*, and besides, one would think you would be happy not to have reproduced with such filth. Merlin, Severus, what has happened to you? You used to be so proud and noble. Now, you lie with filth."

Severus started slowly up the stairs towards Lucinda as she tried backing away. Suddenly, she found herself backed against a wall. She quickly drew her wand from a pocket, but before she could cast any spell, Severus had countered with his own incantation and disarmed her. He held his wand to her throat, trapping her.

"It is none of your business where or with whom I lie. I have already told you what I would do if you were to make any further attempts to harm my family." Severus showed no sign of meaning anything less than what he was saying. "I will not let *anything* risk them, and *you* are a risk."

For the first time, Lucinda looked truly afraid. Just as Severus started to speak to cast the most unforgivable of curses, he heard a voice call him. He turned quickly, throwing one hand up to Lucinda's neck, pinning her to the wall, and pointing his wand in the direction of the voice.

"Professor, no!" shouted Harry as he ran up the stairs, wand at the ready.

"Stay out of this, Potter!" yelled Severus. "I warned her of the consequences of her actions!"

"You can't kill her, Snape," Harry said, hurriedly climbing the last few stairs. "You're no good to Hermione and your baby in Azkaban."

Both men turned to Lucinda. Her eyes were wide, and her breathing was labored.

"Do you have a suggestion? Because if you do not, there is only one thing I can do to ensure that my Hermione and my heir are safe." Severus said, breaking the silence.

"I can't do anything in an official capacity, and I'm sure she knows that," said Harry, eyeing Lucinda with extreme distaste. "I can, however, put a tracking spell on her and another to alert me if she or anything she touches gets too close to Hermione."

Severus stared at Harry incredulously.

"It's Auror stuff," Harry said with a shrug.

"Fine," he reluctantly agreed. "We can try that, but I say again, if she makes another attempt to harm my family *will* kill her." Severus slightly tightened his grip on Lucinda's throat momentarily, then released her to allow Harry room to work. After Harry had completed the incantations, they turned to leave.

"You can't do this to me, Severus!" Lucinda yelled. "You'll have Lucius to deal with over this!"

"Lucinda, I hardly think Lucius will bother concerning himself over you," Severus replied, looking up at her from the bottom of the stairs. "After all, don't they always say bad blood tells? I expect he'll want to wash his hands of you as quickly and painlessly as possible."

Lucinda shrieked at him and moved to come down the stairs. Severus merely lifted his wand and spoke, *"Incarcerous!"* Lucinda was instantly immobile and fell forward onto the landing. She began screaming anew as Severus and Harry left the manor to Disapparate back to their respective locations.

\*\*\*\*\*

Hermione was very depressed about Snarks' death. Nothing could cheer her up, though Severus tried daily. He was very happy when the Saturday for her to go to the spa had arrived. He thought that was just what she needed. Severus made arrangements with Draco to surprise Hermione by planning to meet them for supper when the day was over.

During breakfast, he noticed Hermione had barely touched her eggs. He sighed. "Hermione, you need to eat. I know you are upset about your Kneazle, but you have our son to think about."

Hermione jerked her head up and looked him in the eyes. *"Our son? He said our son! I don't think he even realized what he said"* Suddenly, Hermione was very hungry. "You're right, love. I do need to snap out of it."

He smirked as she started attacking her eggs. *"I really enjoy her calling me love. I can't wait to surprise her over the Easter Holidays with news from my solicitor!"* Draco and Ginevra should be here soon. Are you looking forward to going?"

"Yes, I am. For one thing, I need to get out of this castle for awhile. For another, a day at a spa will be heavenly. I do wish you could go with me."

"As do I. It is just not possible. However, now that Lucinda is being tracked, maybe you can start going out more. With an escort, of course," he amended.

"Of course." At that moment, an owl that neither Hermione nor Severus recognized stopped in front of Hermione with an invitation attached to his leg. Severus reached out and took the envelope before Hermione had a chance to take it. After performing many spells, he deemed it safe and handed it to her to open.

She smiled brightly as she read the card. "It's a marriage invitation. It seems that Neville finally asked Susan to bind with him. The binding is going to be in June."

"I suppose you will be going?"

"The invitation is for us both, Severus. Would you accompany me?"

She knew he would figure out what she was really asking. The baby was due at the end of April, and she wanted to know if she was still going to be in their lives in June.

"We shall see," he said noncommittally.

*"Well, at least it was not a definite no! That is a good sign."* I better go shower. Draco and Ginny will be here soon."

With that, she stood up, kissed him, and headed for the loo.

\*\*\*\*\*

They arrived at the very posh spa, and Hermione was immediately taken aback. She'd never been in such a luxurious establishment. Ginny asked if they could fit her in, and with her being the new Mrs. Malfoy, they quickly found an available spot for her. Even though they *specialized* in pregnant witches, they serviced all witches. Ginny told Draco to go check on Hermione while she went to ready herself for her own massage.

Just as Draco came to the stairs that would take him to the second floor...the floor where they took the expectant mothers...he heard shouting. Stopping at the bottom to see what was happening, he recognized his aunt's voice.

"You are nothing but a *Mudblood!* You should not even be allowed to breed, much less reproduce with a pureblood of Severus' stature!"

"Oh, get over yourself you *stupid cow!* I have had enough of you! You will not intimidate me any longer. Now, kindly move so that I may get on with my massage."

"How *dare* you? You ill-mannered, rude, dirty-blooded freak! I will not allow you to speak *to me* this way."

Draco decided he had better go up there and put a halt to it before it worsened *"What is Lucinda doing here anyway? She's supposed to be keeping far away from Hermione."*

He was almost to the top when he saw Hermione try and shove her way past Lucinda. Enraged that she was being dismissed by someone so obviously beneath her, Lucinda grabbed Hermione's shoulders to shove her back to where she wanted her, and Hermione lost her footing.

With her arms flapping in a circle and trying to gain some balance, Hermione started falling backwards down the stairs. Just as she twisted her ankle and went back, Draco caught her. "Aunt Lucinda, *what do you think you are doing?* You could have seriously hurt Hermione or the baby! Have you lost your bloody mind?"

"Me? You think I have lost *my* mind? What about Severus mating with a Mudblood? I think it would be in his best interests if she *did* lose that child."

Hermione struggled to free herself of Draco. "How dare you speak of my child like he is nothing? Anything to do with *me, my child, or Severus* has nothing whatsoever to do with *you*, you stupid bint!" When she jerked her arm free of Draco, she slapped Lucinda with everything she had.

Stunned momentarily, Lucinda staggered and grabbed her cheek. "You will regret doing that, I assure you."

"No, I only regret not doing it sooner."

Just then, Harry arrived at the scene with Lucius. He had been notified that Lucinda had breached the perimeter he had set for Hermione and Flooed Lucius.

"Lucinda, I have had enough. There is only one thing I can think to do now, short of sending you to Azkaban." Lucius looked her right in the eyes, and she immediately knew what he was going to do.

"You cannot be serious. Not the Malfoy Banishment Curse? I would never be able to return to my home, Lucius!"

"It's either that, Azkaban, or possibly death when Severus gets finished with you. There are witnesses here, and Severus has made himself perfectly clear on the matter. I must say, I quite agree with him. You are like a woman possessed, and I fear his heir would not be safe if you remained here. It has to be done. You need to go back to France and stay there. This will ensure that you do."

Lucius knew he would have to do this quickly, so he hurriedly concentrated on the boundaries that he needed to set. Before she could protest any further, he moved his wand in a series of difficult flicks and swishes, spoke the word, *"Expulsum!"* With a pop, she was gone and would be unable to return to Malfoy Manor or ever be near Hermione, Severus, or their baby unless Lucius decided to remove the spell. He explained to Hermione and Harry that Lucinda could not even send letters to them while under that particular Banishment Curse.

When they asked why the spell even existed, he told them, "Many years ago, there were two Malfoy brothers in love with the same witch. The eldest brother created this

curse to be rid his brother, thus leaving the way open for him to court the witch. It has only been used one other time, to my knowledge, when a husband banished a wife for adultery."

When Hermione's nerves caught up with her...causing her to wobble...they decided to get her back to Hogwarts to see Poppy. She sighed*Well, no massage for me today!*

\*\*\*\*\*

Severus was beside himself when he returned from Hogsmeade. Although Lucius had assured him Hermione only had a sprained ankle, he would not be satisfied until he saw her for himself. He hurried to their quarters where Hermione had been sent after her ankle had been healed to find her lying on their couch, foot resting on a pillow, reading in her Charms book. Had he not been frantic with worry, he would have smiled at the sight.

"Hermione," Severus called to her. Relief flooded through him as she looked up and smiled.

"I am fine, and your son is fine, as well. She has been banished, and we will be okay."

"I just want to hold you, sweet. I *need* to hold you." *I need you in my arms, and I may never let you go!*

She held her arms out. "Come here."

He went and settled on the couch, moving her up a bit so that he could sit behind her with her between his legs. He put his arms around her and laid both his hands on her belly protectively. He was glad Lucius had banished his sister. Severus had discovered one thing through all this. He did not want a life without Hermione Granger in it, and he was going to do everything in his power to make sure he did not have to worry about that.

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**Christy's Notes:** Now that Lucinda is gone, what could possibly go wrong?

**Southern's Notes:** I'm glad things have progressed this much, and I am certainly glad that the ho...er...Lucinda is handled. I would have liked to see her arse fall down the stairs after Hermione smacked her. Nothing liked a bruised ego and arse at the same time, eh?

**Meredith's Notes:** Finally! The bitch gets slapped! Does that qualify as a genuine bitch slapping? Hmm...yep, it sure does! Go Hermione!

## Chapter 13

*Chapter 13 of 13*

Severus decides that he wants an heir. He chooses Hermione to be the surrogate mother, but will she agree? My response to the Surrogate Mother Challenge posted on WIKTT.

**Disclaimer:** The Harry Potter universe belongs to JKRI!

**A/N:** A heartfelt thanks goes out to my wonderful betas, Southern\_witch\_69 and Meredith. They helped me more than I can say. I could never have done this story without them! Love you guys!

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### Chapter 13

With the threat of Lucinda gone, things slowly got back to normal. Severus and Hermione were both still shaken by all the close calls she had caused Hermione, but gradually, they began to relax. As March rolled in, Severus started thinking about the upcoming Easter holidays. After a long talk with his solicitor, he was anxious for the Easter break to be upon them, and at the right moment, he would speak with Hermione about his new plans.

"What do you say to spending the holiday with me in my home, Hermione?" he asked, as they were finishing up breakfast one morning.

Hermione was startled, albeit pleasantly. "I think that would be very nice, thank you."

"You don't have a yearly tradition with the Weasleys for Easter? I will be able to pass the day peacefully without seeing flaming red hair at every turn?" Severus smiled when she laughed. Her laughter was bright and sunny, and he knew he could listen to her laugh for hours.

"No, no yearly traditions there." Hermione revealed in the fact that if she'd had plans with the Weasleys, he would have readily accompanied her. "I am curious to see your home actually."

"Well, remember, curiosity killed the Kneazle." At the sight of her crestfallen face, Severus immediately regretted saying anything, even as a joke*Merlin, how could I be so daft? What was I thinking by saying that?* "Forgive me, Hermione. I was clearly not thinking."

"No worries," she replied. At his piercing look, she amended her comment, saying, "I won't try and deny that Snarks' death still hurts, but I don't want you, or anyone, walking on eggshells around me. I am not as fragile as that."

"So it would seem. I shall make the arrangements for us to go to my home then."

"That sounds wonderful, love."

She still blushed somewhat when she called him that, even after all of their lovemaking, and he found it endearing. He found just about everything to do with her endearing these days...especially at night when she welcomed him to bed with open arms. He was still amazed that he got to touch, hold, caress, and make love to this beautiful witch whenever he felt like doing so, which was quite often. In humor, he wondered to himself if someone had doused Hermione with the Harlot's Potion, because she was so responsive when he touched her now...not nearly as timid as she originally had been. He'd simply have to thank the person if they had, which he knew wasn't the case. He was just in awe of his good fortune.

He remembered the bath they had taken together the previous night. She had admitted it had been a fantasy of hers to get him in the tub, and he had been more than happy to help her fulfill it. Although it had been hard to manage, with her belly so full and round with their son, he had made the best of the situation. It hadn't been ideal,

but it hadn't been bad either. At one point, without realizing what he was saying, he'd told her, "After the baby comes, this will be much easier on us." Thankfully, she'd let that comment slide.

For her part, Hermione wondered what Severus was thinking. He was flushed, as if they had just made love, and it made her ache with want for him. She knew she would never get enough of him, no matter how much they were together.

Her thoughts were interrupted when Severus informed her it was time for him to take his leave. "Just one more month of this, and we will have a blessed week free of dunderheads." He kissed her goodbye and left for his first class.

\*\*\*\*\*

As soon as her visit with Poppy was completed, Hermione and Severus were going to leave for his home. Even though it had become a routine to have positive visits, she still felt relieved when she and the baby received a clean bill of health.

"I will be visiting my family for the holidays, Severus, so if labor starts while I am away, take her to St. Mungo's. Here is a copy of her chart, just in case." Poppy handed the chart to Severus before tidying up.

"Thank you, Poppy, but I think we will be back in Hogwarts before the baby arrives," Severus said.

"Be that as it may, you never can tell with babies. I have seen witches deliver anywhere from thirty-eight to forty-two weeks."

"I see. Well, in that case, I *will* take the chart." Severus turned to Hermione. "Are you ready to go?"

"Yes," she answered. She was anxious to see the home where her baby would spend his holidays and summers. *Hopefully, I will be there, too.*

When they left, Poppy pretended not to notice the possessive way that Severus took Hermione by the hand to lead her from the room.

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To say that Hermione was surprised to see that a quaint English cottage was the home of the dreaded Potions master was an understatement. He noticed her astounded look and chuckled. "What were you expecting, sweet? A cave and coffin perhaps?"

She smirked at the image of him lying in a coffin as a vampire would. "To be honest, I was expecting a manor similar to Malfoy Manor. However, this is really beautiful! Not too overpowering. I can see our son here quite nicely." *And myself as well, bound to you, living here as a family.*

*Can you see yourself here as well, my love, as my wife? Living here and being a mother to our son?* "To be honest, I have owned a manor such as the Malfoys, but I sold it whilst I was still under the Dark Lord's thumb. I had no need for such a manor, as I never entertained, and I certainly did not wish to host any revels in my home. So I sold it and bought this cottage instead. I have christened it as Redemption. It seemed more suited to my needs, and, I daresay, it is big enough."

"Well, I have yet to see the inside, but from here, it certainly seems appropriate. The name, Redemption, is quite fitting." Hermione smiled at him as Severus led her inside.

She soon discovered the cottage was easily big enough. It had four bedrooms, two huge baths, a basement, a spacious kitchen, dining area with a sitting room, and a formal room for entertaining. As she looked around, she pictured in her mind all the things she would love to do with the cottage. A vase here, a picture there, not too much. Actually, the picture of her and Severus that had been taken at Ginny's binding ceremony would look lovely in the sitting room. Hermione loved that picture. In it, she was smiling brightly while looking into Severus' eyes, and he was *almost* smiling back, as he escorted her to the table.

What really took her breath away, however, was the garden in the back yard. It was not a very large garden, but it was certainly big enough and had a wrought iron bench in the middle of the flowers. There were flowers of all kinds growing within the area. "I have always thought of growing my own potions ingredients here and setting up a lab in my basement, if I ever decided to leave Hogwarts," Severus said, coming up to stand beside her.

"What a great idea. This place is beautiful, Severus. I can actually picture your potions ingredients right there in that far left patch."

"Yes, as could I. Are you ready to eat?" Severus was starting to feel hungry, and he knew that Hermione must be as well.

"I could eat. Then, I would love to find myself a wonderful book, strictly fiction, and read out here in the garden," she said, smiling up at him.

Chuckling, Severus told her, "That could be arranged. However, I have something I would like to show you before you start a book."

Raising an inquisitive eyebrow, she simply asked, "Oh?"

"Yes. It is a letter my great-grandfather wrote to my great-grandmother when they became engaged. He is one of the few in my family that I hold in high esteem."

"Oh, Severus, that would be so nice. I would love to read it." She tried not to get her hopes up or to read anything in the gesture of him asking her to read a love letter, but she had to admit that it made her heart beat a little faster.

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After they had dinner, she read the letter Severus had offered her. Now, unable to sleep after their lovemaking, only one thought came to her mind. *He does know the meaning of emeralds, and he wanted to make sure I knew it, as well.*

*I do wonder at the reason for this visit. It almost seems as if he wanted to get me alone while away from Hogwarts. He most definitely wanted to show me his home, as if he were awaiting my approval. I have the feeling something very special is going to happen this week!* She was almost giddy by the time she finally fell asleep.

Severus was also unable to quiet his thoughts. *Now she knows why I chose emeralds for her gift. I didn't say as much, but she is clever. She will figure out my motives for having her read that letter. She seems to enjoy my home. If she only knew how much I want it to be our home! One thing is for certain. By the end of this week, we will know exactly, without a doubt, where each other stands.* Willing his mind to rest, Severus drifted off into a restful sleep.

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The next morning after breakfast, Hermione decided to go read in the garden while Severus went to the basement to see how a lab could be set up. The more he thought about it, the more he liked the idea of having a lab in his cottage. After the arrival of his son, he planned on spending more time here than he usually did, so creating a lab now would not be amiss.

Hermione had been having slight cramps all morning, but she thought nothing of it. She had read in a Muggle book on pregnancies about Braxton Hicks contractions, and with just a little under two weeks left, she figured that was what she was feeling.

As she was reading, an owl startled her. Thinking it must be for Severus, she was surprised to see it addressed to her. She opened it and discovered it was from Ginny. She and Tonks were going to have a hen party for Susan, and they wanted to know if Hermione wanted to go shopping and have lunch in Diagon Alley the next day. Nothing too exhausting was planned since Hermione was close to her delivery date.

She smiled and went into the cottage to look for a quill to answer the letter. After she accepted the invitation, she went to the basement to find Severus and let him know of her plans. The sight before her made her laugh. It looked as if someone had given *him* a detention. He was wearing only a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up, black pants, and shoes while elbow deep in hot water, scrubbing cauldrons.

"Something amuses you?" Severus raised an inquiring eyebrow at her laughter.

"No, no," she assured him, as she tried to stop her giggles. "Just surprised to see *you* scrubbing a cauldron for once. What are you up to? Do you need any help?"

"No, love, I do not need you to help with this. If I needed help, I would have called upon a house-elf. I have decided to start preparing the basement to set up a lab. All that is neither here nor there. You should be resting."

"I am fine, Severus. I need to continue to walk at the very least," she said with a teasing smile. "I came to find you to let you know I will be going to Diagon Alley with Tonks and Ginny tomorrow. We are going shopping for Susan's hen party and having lunch together. I will come back home directly after."

"Oh, Merlin. Please don't let me be invited to another stag party!" *That actually works out perfectly for me. Whilst she is gone with those two, I can finish up everything with my solicitor tomorrow and collect the papers I had him draw up.*

"Well, as you were invited to the binding, I daresay, you will also be invited to the stag party. You will go, won't you?"

"Yes, if you insist, I will go. If I am invited, that is."

She gave him a beaming smile and then went back to the garden to continue with her book.

*Merlin*, Severus thought, as she walked away. *The things I do for that witch. Attending a stag party for Longbottom, of all people!* He shook his head and continued scrubbing.

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The next morning, Hermione woke early to shower and get ready for her outing. She noticed that the contractions she'd been having were a little stronger. However, since they were not painful, she didn't concern herself about them.

She was happy the house-elves had breakfast ready by the time she was finished dressing, as she was anxious to see Ginny and Tonks. She needed to stop by Gringotts Wizarding Bank first to withdraw some money to shop with.

After she finished her meal and had said her farewell to Severus, she Flooed to the Leaky Cauldron to meet Tonks and Ginny.

The pregnant witch was happy to find her friends already waiting for her. "Ginny, Tonks! It's so good to see you! How have you both been?"

Ginny answered first. "Wonderful! Being married to Draco is the most wonderful thing in the world. I swear that I never thought that the ferret boy of Hogwarts would ever turn into the wizard I am married to now. I don't think my life could get any better."

Ginny's words made Hermione and Tonks wistful. They both had a certain wizard they wanted to be bound to. "What about a baby? Do you ever think of that?" Hermione wondered if Draco would be the type to want children. She supposed he would, all pureblood wizards felt the need to carry on their line.

"Well, of course we do! Although, I would like to wait a few more years, as it is taking some time to get used to being the new *Mrs. Malfoy*."

Laughing, Tonks told them that she and Harry were just fine. They had been talking about her moving into Grimmauld Place, but nothing had been decided yet. Hermione silently wondered what Molly Weasley would have to say about that, as she considered Harry one of her own.

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When they arrived at Gringotts, Griphook, the goblin at the front desk, informed Hermione that because she was so far along in her pregnancy, it was unsafe for her to ride in the cart to her vault. Instead, they would show her a statement of her holdings, and a goblin would be happy to make her withdrawal for her.

As she looked at the statement, she became puzzled. "Sir, this statement is incorrect. It is showing thirty-five thousand Galleons more than I should have."

Insulted, Griphook looked down his nose at her. "It most certainly is *not* incorrect. Goblins *do not* make mistakes. Let me see." After she handed him her statement, he told her, "It says right here that a deposit was made into vault 647 on behalf of Miss Hermione Granger by a Mr. Severus Snape."

"Why? I don't understand why Severus would deposit any money, much less that much, into my account." As soon as the words left her mouth, it hit her like a Bludger. Of course! The baby! He was giving her this money to have his baby and leave quietly after, which meant she had read everything wrong. Her breathing became shallow, and her head spun.

*How could I be so stupid? Here I was thinking he was planning a future with me when all along he was planning to pay me off! All those evenings together and the dates we had, not to mention the lovemaking! He told me he cared about me!*

*I don't understand why. I have already signed that bloody contract. He didn't need to pay me as well, unless he thought it would entice me to go quietly. Well, if that is what he thinks, he has another think coming!*

"I would like to withdraw the entire thirty-five thousand Galleons please."

"As you wish," Griphook answered her, non-concerned, issuing a voucher to her in that amount.

After Hermione had the voucher, she walked back over to where Tonks and Ginny stood. "I'm really sorry, but I am not feeling well today, after all. You two go on ahead. I will pick something up later."

Tonks looked at her with concern. "Are you sure, Hermione? We would be happy to take you back; it's no trouble."

*No way! I need to see Severus Snape alone!* "No, that's quite all right. I just get tired so easily now. You two go on. I will owl you later." She offered a small smile, trying to keep her emotions in check.

"If you're sure..." Ginny inquired. When Hermione nodded, Ginny said, "All right, but please let us know if you need anything. You really are starting to look pale."

Hermione agreed and walked back to the Leaky Cauldron to Floo back to the cottage. By the time she got there, she was boiling with rage. Severus, however, was not there. She decided to wait in the sitting room, as she could do nothing else. The longer she waited, the madder she became.

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Severus was in a very good mood. He had gone to see his solicitor and had all the changes made exactly the way he wanted them. Tonight was the night he was going to talk to Hermione. The timing seemed to be perfect. Everything was falling into place.

He was amazed at how well he and Hermione got on. He had never dreamt that he would meet a witch he could love as much as he loved her. He wanted everything to be just right, so he had made a few stops on the way home. He still had about an hour before lunch, so he figured he had plenty of time to set things up. He wanted to do it immediately and take her out to celebrate. He had no doubt they *would* be celebrating.

He was very surprised to see Hermione in the sitting room when he arrived. "Did you finish early, sweet?"

*Sweet, my arse, the ruddy tosser!* "No, I didn't shop at all. I had an unexpected problem." She winced as she said this. Her contractions had been getting stronger as the day had progressed. She had thought it was because she was so angry, but now, she had to wonder.

"Oh? Nothing too serious, I hope. Are you okay?"

"Well, that is debatable. If you can properly explain this," she spoke as she pulled the voucher and thrust it at him, "then I will let you know."

*Merlin! I wanted to explain that before she found out! What must she think?* "Hermione, it's not what you think--"

"What I *think* is that you deposited these Galleons into my account as some sort of payoff. What *think* is you want me to leave quietly after this baby is born. What I *thought* was that we were building some sort of relationship and that you might want to continue it after I deliver. What *thought* was that I could *trust* you!" Her voice had increased in volume with every statement, and she waved her arms in the air, frustrated.

"Why, Severus? Why did you do it? I thought you'd started to see me as more than a 'rent-a-womb!' I wanted to be more than that to you, to our son!" She felt another contraction hit and placed a hand on her stomach, vaguely wondering if she ought to be timing them.

"That will do!" Severus was fighting desperately to stay in control. He was afraid he was fighting a losing battle. "Yes, I placed those Galleons in your account, but it was *not* as some sort of pay off, as you seem to *believe*. If you would just let me explain--"

"No! I don't want to hear your ruddy explanations! You *used* me! You purposely led me to believe something was happening between us when obviously there isn't!" The next contraction caused her to have to sit.

Severus was outraged by her exclamation. He'd had enough of this. She was going to listen to him if he had to cast *Silencio*. "I most certainly *did not* use you! I went to see my solic--" He was interrupted by a sharp gasp from Hermione and was startled to see her face contracted in pain.

"My water has broken! Severus, I am going into labor! I have been having contractions all yesterday and today, too. I thought they were Braxton Hicks."

"Your water has to break NOW of all times?" *What in the name of Merlin are Braxton Hicks?* He softened his tone when he saw her wince. "Come! We need to go to St. Mungo's. I will just get your bag and chart."

To her credit, she only hesitated slightly to his outstretched hand. Severus gathered her bag and chart, then they Flooed to St. Mungo's. While Hermione was being admitted, Severus owed Albus to let him know.

Returning to Hermione's room, he sat in a chair by her bed. After the Healer examined her and left the room, Severus said, "Hermione, I swear that money is not what you are thinking." As a strong contraction hit her, he amended, "I know now is not the time to discuss this. Just please promise me you will keep an open mind and *listen* to me when this is over."

Hermione wanted to believe him and knew she owed it to him to at least hear him out. "I promise," she agreed. "And if it is truly not what I believed, then I am sorry. You just can't imagine how hurt I was to have discovered those extra Galleons, especially when it was confirmed you were the one to deposit them." She tensed as another contraction hit.

"Relax, love. Hold my hand." As she took his hand, he continued, "I never meant to hurt you, Hermione. I believe you will understand once I am able to explain. For now, let's concentrate on bringing our son into the world." He rubbed small circles on the back of her hand as he spoke, hoping to calm her. It seemed to work.

After five hours of labor, Severus was starting to get worried, and Hermione was way beyond irritable.

"I assure you, Mr. Snape, that labor can last many more hours than this! I have seen witches in labor for two days!" the Healer bellowed at him. She was getting exasperated with Severus' insistence that something must be wrong.

"It's *Professor* Snape," Hermione snappishly informed her, "and the only labor I am concerned about at the moment is *mine*!"

"Of course you are, dear," the Healer said in a condescending tone. "You are doing fine. Would you like some ice chips?"

"No! I would like to get this baby out of me!" Hermione sounded slightly hysterical, even to herself.

"Hermione," Severus began, using calming, low tones, "look at me. Focus on me, and we will get through this together." Difficult as it may be, he knew he needed to stay calm so that he could help her.

His voice did indeed seem to calm her. She focused on his face and began to relax.

Another three hours went by before it was time to push, during which Severus never left her side. After another hour of pushing, she finally heard the wail of her son. Smiling brightly at Severus while tears were streaming down her face, she said, voice weakened, "We did it."

Not trusting his voice at the moment, he leant down to gently kiss her. He rested his forehead against hers for a minute, then finally said, "We did indeed. You were wonderful, love."

After the baby was cleaned and wrapped in a soft blanket, the Healer laid him on Hermione's belly. He had dark black hair with soft curls and had one small fist held up to his cheek. "Thank the gods he has your nose," Severus teased.

Hermione smiled and told him, "Yes, but he has your eyes, the shape and color."

Severus began to get choked up and decided to distance himself a bit. Until he spoke with her, and knew for sure what she wanted, he had to keep his emotions in check. "I am sure Albus and Minerva are in the waiting area. Whilst you are being cleaned up, I will go inform them the baby is here." He couldn't resist, so he leant down to kiss her once more before exiting the room.

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Severus was taken aback when he entered the waiting area. Not only were Albus and Minerva there, but others were there also: Lucius and Narcissa, Draco and Ginny, Harry and Tonks, Ron and Luna, and to his utmost surprise, Neville and Susan. *I will be cursed with Neville Longbottom for the rest of my days! It's bad enough I have to put up with the boy-who-lived-to-defeat-the-Dark-Lord and his sidekick, but Longbottom as well?*

Everyone looked expectantly at him, and he stated simply, "My son has arrived. Both he and his mother appear to be fine. After they have finished getting Hermione settled, I will bring him out for your inspection."

He walked back in the room to gather his son and found Hermione peacefully sleeping. After showing the baby off a bit, and listening to everyone exclaim over him, he decided to go back to his cottage for a shower, a change of clothes, and to pick up a few things. All their visitors had left, promising to come back the next morning to see how Hermione was.

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Hermione was woken by a Healer she had yet to see. It was very early in the morning, barely five. "Your son needs to be fed, mummy. He is very hungry."

Hermione started to object, and then, she thought better of it. *This may be the only chance I get to nurse him. I want to know what it feels like to feed my son.*

After showing Hermione how to help her son latch onto her breast, the woman left the room. Hermione was gazing at the baby when emotions suddenly overwhelmed her, and she began silently crying. *I never knew I could love so deeply!*

After Severus got back to his cottage and showered, he decided he should have a nap whilst Hermione was sleeping. He had been exhausted and had dropped into a deep sleep. When he awoke, he became mildly alarmed, as he hadn't expected to sleep so long. Getting up quickly, he hurriedly dressed and Flooed back to St. Mungo's.

The sight that awaited him when he entered Hermione's room stopped him in his tracks. Hermione was nursing their son. He was speechless. She looked up suddenly, seemingly startled.

"Severus, I am so sorry!" She knew she was going to ramble, but she couldn't seem to stop herself. "When the Healer brought him to me, I just couldn't resist! Here, let me hand him to you."

He held up a hand to silence and stop her. "Please, continue. I daresay, that is the most beautiful sight I have ever seen." He paused for a moment to gather his courage. "I have some things I would like to tell you, Hermione." The tone he used was brisk, but he needed to get through this. He took a deep breath, stared at the wall just above her right shoulder, and began explaining things.

"First of all, I want to explain the deposit of the Galleons. It is not uncommon for a pureblood wizard to gift his wife when she provides him with an heir. That was my intention: to gift you. It was not to pay you off, as you believed." Hermione blushed at this and felt a leap of renewed hope when he said *wife*.

"Second, I went to see my solicitor and had a new contract drawn up." At her intense look, he continued quickly. "I have decided to give you joint custody of the baby. He is equally ours. This provides you with a child, and thus, it releases you from the constraints of the marriage law." This made Hermione's tears start again. *He is letting me stay in the baby's life, and I won't be forced to marry someone else!*

"Third, I have spoken with Filius. He is willing to have you complete your apprenticeship with him provided you wish to remain at the castle that much longer. You could continue to stay in our quarters, or if you would rather, I am sure Albus would provide you with some of your own." *Please stay and continue to live with me and the baby in our quarters!*

"Also, Bill Weasley contacted me a week or so ago. It appears the goblins want to offer you a job as a curse breaker when your apprenticeship is complete. He asked me if I thought you would be interested. With your Arithmancy score and becoming a Charms mistress, the goblins feel you would be an asset." This shocked Hermione to the core. The goblins had not said a word to her when she was in Gringotts yesterday.

As she digested everything, he finally looked her in the eyes. Gathering all his courage, he asked the most important question of all to him. "Hermione, do you truly love me?"

Her heart stopped beating for a second. She decided to be honest because she knew he was asking for a reason. Never taking her eyes from his, she said, "Yes, I do. Very much so."

He let out a breath he didn't realize he was holding. "I love you, too. I was wondering, Hermione, if you would consent to becoming my wife?"

Tears welled from her eyes. *Will I ever stop crying? Stupid hormones!* "That would make me the happiest witch in the world."

Severus finally walked over to her and the baby. He bent down and kissed his son's head and his fiancée's lips before he placed a ring on her finger. Hermione recognized it as the ring she had found in the trunk, and she knew this had to be the ring his great-grandfather had given his great-grandmother by the description Severus had given her after she'd read the letter and questioned him.

The proud papa propped himself on one elbow beside his betrothed and snuggled her and their baby close. "I have a name I like, should it meet with your approval. Silas, for my great-grandfather, and William, for--"

"My father." Her heart was heavy with love, and she couldn't help beaming at him. "Silas William Snape. I like the name very much. Who shall we ask to be his godparents?"

"I had thought we would ask Albus and Minerva, if you are agreeable."

"Perfect. I think they will be wonderful and very happy to have been asked."

Both happy and content, Severus and Hermione fell into a light doze with Silas between them until a soft knock on the door woke them. "Come in," Hermione called out.

The door opened, and all of her friends spilled into the room to crowd around to see the baby. In addition to those who had been at the hospital while Hermione was delivering, Arthur and Molly had joined the crowd. Hermione was amazed that St. Mungo's would let so many people in the room at one time. A Muggle hospital would never allow that.

Narcissa was the first to congratulate them. Handing Hermione a box, she spied the engagement ring. Picking up Hermione's hand, she asked, "Is that what I think it is?"

Hermione looked to Severus, wanting him to answer. He understood and told everyone, "Hermione has consented to become my wife. As soon as she is released and back on her feet, we will set a date."

"No!" Hermione yelled. At everyone's startled look, she explained, "I mean, that is to say, I don't want to wait." She looked at Severus. "I should very much like to return home a family."

Awed, Severus looked to the headmaster. "What say you, Albus? Do you feel like performing a binding ceremony today?"

Twinkling and beaming at the proud parents, he told them, "I certainly do! Give me an hour to get everything in order."

Hermione opened her mouth and said the first thing that had come to mind. "What will I wear? Nothing fits me right now!"

"Open your gift," Narcissa told her. Hermione did so and found a lovely, white silk nursing nightgown with a matching robe. "Oh, Narcissa, this is beautiful! Thank you!"

"As you already know, I love lingerie," Narcissa told her with a laugh. The other women in the room, and Lucius, nodded in agreement. "When I saw this, I thought of you. I think it would be perfect."

Ginny had a thought. "I wonder if Marci from Wandless Magic would come here and fix your hair!"

Hermione could hardly keep from rolling her eyes at that, but smiled instead. "Ginny, really, I don't think I feel up to having Marci here just now. Don't you think you could just brush it out for me?"

"Oh! I'm sorry, I wasn't even thinking!" said Ginny. "Of course I'll help you with it."

When the women started talking about hair, Severus looked pleadingly at his wife-to-be. "If it is okay with you, sweet, I will go and prepare myself. I will be back in one hour."

"Yes, and I will be ready when you return." She smiled softly and then whispered, "I love you."

"Love you, too," he said, a little choked. He couldn't believe that in an hour, he was to be married to the woman of his dreams, with a son to boot. Life couldn't be any better.

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An hour later, everyone had gathered again in Hermione's room. She asked the Healer to bring Silas back in to her so that he could be a part of the ceremony. Hermione and Severus had decided who they wanted to represent the four elements before everyone returned. Ginny would represent fire, Minerva would represent earth, Lucius would represent air, and Draco would represent water. Harry and Ron were honorary family to the bride, as Hermione had wanted them to have a special part.

Hermione had sent Susan and Tonks to Diagon Alley to purchase a ring for Severus. She wanted a solid platinum band with no designs on it. She laughed to herself at the turn of recent events. *I certainly have the Galleons to purchase it now.*

When the ceremony was over, Severus told everyone that sometime before the start of the new school year, he and his wife would hold a small reception at Redemption. He would owl everyone the date and time. At that moment, Silas made his presence known. He was hungry and wanted to be fed.

Everyone graciously left the room, and Hermione began nursing her son while her husband sat on the bed with her to watch. "You asked me once why I picked you to be my surrogate out of all the surrogates in England. Do you remember this?"

"Yes, I do. Why did it *have* to be me?"

"Because you are the only *you* there is, sweet. It could never have been any other. And there never will be any other for me. I loved and wanted you even then."

"It was the same for me. I loved you, too, Severus. Always."

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### *Epilogue*

Hermione stood at the buffet table and looked around at all the people gathered at the Burrow. For the past five years, Molly had been hosting a huge family dinner every fourth Sunday. It was hard to believe that Silas was five already. Time sure flew. As she rested her hand on her expanding belly, she looked over at Severus, who was cradling their two-year-old daughter, Serena. She had fallen asleep nestled against her father's chest, head on his shoulder. Severus was in a discussion with Arthur and Lucius about Merlin only knew what while Lucius reached out to stroke Serena's back every so often.

When Serena had been born, Hermione and Severus had made Lucius and Narcissa her godparents. Lately, Lucius had started calling her *Rena*, and she'd informed him that her name was Serena Jane Snape, if he pleased. After all, not even *daddy*, her favorite person in the world, was allowed to call her *Rena*! That applied to Lucius as well, even if he did spoil her at every turn.

Hermione's gaze turned to Silas, who was playing with Veronica Weasley. Veronica was the daughter of Ron and Luna, and she'd recently begun insisting that she be called Ronni. Frank Longbottom, Neville and Susan's son, played with them also. Even though Ronni and Frank were a year younger, the three were destined to be the next Hogwarts trio. Hermione was certain Silas would be sorted into Gryffindor; he was far too adventurous for any other house, much to her husband's dismay. However, she was equally certain Serena was destined for Slytherin. She was a schemer already.

She turned her attention to the Potters. It had taken the passing of the marriage law to force Harry's hand. Tonks had received many offers...most based solely on her abilities as a Metamorphmagus. Harry was not a pureblood, but the minister had given him special permission to petition for Tonks, as he was the wizard who had defeated Lord Voldemort. He even extended their restrictions. After their binding, Harry and Tonks had decided to wait a bit before having a baby. At least, they were waiting as long as they could get away with it, as the marriage law had been adjusted for them, requiring a child to be produced within six years of marriage.

Ginny and Draco had only recently decided to have a child. Draco had been thrilled to learn they were having twins; Ginny had been a little more apprehensive. She had grown up with Fred and George, after all.

The marriage law had affected nearly all the other Weasleys, as well. Bill, who was already married to Fleur, Ron, and Ginny had been unaffected, but Fred and George had ended up marrying Angelina Johnson and Katie Bell, respectively. Percy had married Penelope Clearwater, and Charlie married Alicia Spinnet. Everyone was still shocked by that. Nobody had been aware that Charlie had even known who Alicia was.

Aside from Ron, the only Weasleys who had children were Bill and Fleur. The others kept insisting they were working on it. Hermione smirked. *Practice does make perfect.* As she was lost in thought, she felt a pair of arms snake around her waist and rest possessively on her belly. She leaned back, glad to be in Severus' arms, her favorite place on earth.

"All right, sweet?" He had tended to worry in the last two months of her prior pregnancies, but this one more so for some reason. Maybe it was because they had decided this was going to be the last. They were both a little sentimental about it.

"Just fine, love. But ready to head home soon. I am getting tired." They were going home to Redemption for the summer holidays.

Severus had decided that once Silas started Hogwarts, he would resign. He had several personal potions journals he had written over the years, and he wanted to start testing and revising his theories. Hermione was undecided as yet if she was going to resign from her Gringotts position to work with Severus or continue with her job. She enjoyed her work, but she absolutely hated working with the goblins. She had decided it was only Bill Weasley's personality and easy-going attitude that had kept him there for so long.

After gathering up Silas and Serena, who had awoken and was now protesting leaving, they Flooked home. Soon, the baths and bedtime stories were completed, and Hermione rested contentedly in her husband's arms, sated from lovemaking. The cottage was quiet; all was peaceful.

As she drifted off to sleep, she couldn't help but thank God for that ruddy contract. What had been a trial in the beginning had brought her the most happiness she had ever known, joined her with the one man she loved with all her heart and soul, and gave her the family she had always longed for. Life was most definitely good.

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**Christy's Notes:** I would like to thank each and every one of you guys from the bottom of my heart for sticking with me and reading my story. It's been a fun ride! I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did. I have another story in the works that will be posted soon. It's another challenge fic, so be watching for it!

**Southern's Notes:** I am glad that the story ended so sweetly. For awhile there, I was just plain annoyed with our pair and that ruddy Lucinda. It's been fun.

**Meredith's Notes:** Awwww!! I just love happy endings.