

# ... With Feeling

*by crapperdapper24*

Hermione withstands a failing marriage while Severus seeks the help of a psychiatrist. Takes place during the time period of the Epilogue (19 years later).

## Day & Night, Past & Present

*Chapter 1 of 7*

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Disclaimer: Not mine.

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Chapter 1 – Day & Night, Past & Present

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"Hermione"

Drip... Thirty-four.

Drip... Thirty-five.

Drip... Thirty-six.

"And then I told her, 'You listen to me, you lousy pile of dragon dung; my wife could out-smart you any day, any time, you name it!' Ain't that right, 'Mione? Ain't that what I told her?"

Drip... Forty-two.

Drip... Forty-three.

"Mione?"

Drip... Forty-five.

"MIONE?! Earth to Hermione!"

I hear him of course, but the leaking faucet is far more interesting. I've heard this story a total of seven times today; he was kind enough to share what was, to me, the most humiliating moment of my professional career with everyone he encountered: his parents, the lady next-door, Hugo and Rose, Harry and Ginny, Minerva McGonagall, his brother Charlie, and most embarrassingly, a stranger who shared a lift with us in Muggle London. He thinks I like to hear how noble he was, standing up to my boss for me.

He knows nothing about me anymore.

"Hmm? Oh, yes, you were very kind, Ronald," I reply, my tone indicating just the opposite. He doesn't pick up on it

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"Severus"

"Steven? Steven, can we focus please?"

Her use of my "name" annoys me, and for a moment I'm tempted to advise her to call me "Severus." To do so would be unwise, however; it has been twenty years since anyone has called me anything but "Steven," and I fear the use of my former title would bring back memories long suppressed.

"What are you looking at, Steven?" she asks. She is Sheryl Schrienk, the top psychiatrist at the Reed Medical Center.

"I'm watching the pigeons gather on the pavement in the square," I state, still staring out the window.

"Why do you watch them, Steven?"

I choose to ignore her question, but she presses for an answer. "Steven, did you hear what I said?"

I begin to open the window. "It is stifling in here. Some dunderhead has turned off the AC," I say in the hopes of distracting her. I know the answer, of course: I envy them. The pigeons are able to experience the freedom I have longed to embrace for so many years.

"You never answered my question, Steven. I can't help you if you don't talk to me."

She can't help me anyway; she knows nothing of love, nothing of loss. "I don't know," I tell her. "I just find them interesting."

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"Hermione"

I haven't been sleeping well lately. My husband's embrace, which used to arouse feelings of security and satisfaction, is now a source of discomfort both physically and mentally. Ron's skin is slick with sweat due to the hot summer night, and his obnoxious snoring, which was cute at one point, keeps me awake until all hours. Every night he attempts to cuddle with me in his sleep, oblivious to the fact that I intentionally move away from him while he lies dead to the world. Tonight, he can't sleep either and opens his eyes to see that I'm also awake. He smiles at me in the dark, and I force a smile back at him. I'm sure it looks more like a grimace.

"Do you want to...?" he asks with a hopeful expression on his face.

I look at the clock. "Ron, it's 4:30 in the morning," I say. "I have to be at work by seven. I want at least another hour of sleep."

"Oh," he says, clearly disappointed.

"I'll make it up to you, I promise."

"Tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow."

"Alright," he says, obviously in a better mood. "Goodnight then, 'Mione."

"Goodnight, Ronald." I'm dreading tomorrow night already.

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"Severus"

Not all memories of the past can be stored away like old clothes or compact disks. I still dream of the way her hair smelt or the confident way in which she walked. I dream of how passionate she was about everyone and everything and how beautiful she looked when she blushed. I have nightmares of the day we parted ways. I have nightmares of the fact that I can't take any of it back.

I think it's safe to say I don't sleep much anymore. I haven't slept much in forty years.

I don't deserve to sleep soundly.

## Dunch

*Chapter 2 of 7*

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Chapter 2 – Dunch

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“Severus”

I’m scratching at the grime underneath my fingernails when Sheryl says my name again. “Steven?”

How many times can one use your name before it truly is worn out? “Yes?” I ask, as politely as I can while gritting my teeth.

“It’s Saturday.” She points this out as if it’s some big revelation.

“... Your point being?” I ask.

“When is the last time you went out?”

“I walked here, so,” I look at my watch, “about twenty minutes ago.”

“No, I mean out. As in ‘did something fun.’ Something that involved socializing with others?” she says. I’m starting to see where this is going and I don’t like it at all.

“I don’t know. Probably never.” This is a lie; I did plenty of socializing in my youth and nothing came of it except the death of a beloved friend and a Dark Mark upon my soul. “Why do you ask?”

“I was wondering if you’d have dunch with me.”

I don’t know if I should ask, but I do anyway. “Dunch?”

“A late lunch. Dunch,” she says, as if it’s the most obvious thing in the world.

“Are you asking me out on a date?” Please say no, please say no...

“It doesn’t have to be,” she says. I visibly sigh in relief. “Consider it two friends going out for a meal.” I consider her offer and agree to meet her at the café around the corner at 4 o’clock. I must be incredibly lonely...

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“Hermione”

I have mopped the floor and done the dishes. I have folded three loads of laundry and done two crossword puzzles. I have read the same line at least seven times in the newest *Potions Monthly* magazine. I think it’s safe to say that I am completely and utterly bored.

Ron and the kids are out at Harry and Ginny’s, which means I have at least a few more hours alone. I have to get out of the house or I will Avada myself. Hmm, maybe Sherry is free...

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“Sheryl”

“Sorry, Hermione, but I’m booked this afternoon. I’ve got a dunch date in about two hours,” I say earnestly.

“Please, Sherry, I need to get out of—wait, you have a date?” says Hermione. She sounds stunned, as if this is the last thing she’d ever expect to happen.

“You sound shocked,” I tell her.

“Well, I – it’s just – you haven’t actually been with anyone since you and Tom split. Are you sure you’re ready for this?” Nice save, Hermione.

“Of course. Plus, it’s not really a date; I’m just trying to get a client to lighten up a bit. You wouldn’t believe the size of the stick the poor man’s got shoved up his arse.”

“Oh, well, if it’s not a date can I come, too?” asks a hopeful Hermione.

I sigh dramatically. “Are you really itching to get out of the house so much you’d interrupt my dunch date?” I ask. She nods enthusiastically. “Fine. You’re lucky you’re you; if you were anyone else, I’d say no in a heartbeat.”

“Thanks, Sherr,” says Hermione. She has a real smile on her face, something that hasn’t been there in a very long time.

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“Severus”

I’m male; getting dressed should never take as long as it has. I have tried on every color button-up shirt I own and each has some fault: the blue one is, by far, too fancy for the occasion; the green brings back memories of snakes; I won’t wear red for obvious reasons. It seems I cannot win.

That’s it, I’m sticking to black.

## Insult

*Chapter 3 of 7*

Hermione withstands a failing marriage while Severus seeks the help of a psychiatrist. Takes place during the time period of the Epilogue (19 years later).

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“Severus”

It’s amazing what habits and compulsions one picks up as he goes about his daily routine. I have walked these same pavements for twenty years now; for fifteen of these years, I have counted my steps. Each square of pavement must include only two footfalls (no more, no less) and I must step over any cracks. I’m not quite sure why I do this; my mother has been in the grave for a very long time now, so I am at no risk of, as the superstitious say, “breaking her back.”

Today is different for some reason. I am unable to focus on the cracks or count how many steps I take in each square. I blame my psychiatrist.

She said this didn’t have to be a date, yet my palms are still sweaty. I haven’t sought the company of a woman in nearly thirty years. I am almost sixty now; I shouldn’t have to deal with this “sweaty palms” rubbish anymore.

I look at my watch and even it seems to have betrayed me; it reads 3:56.

Damn.

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“Hermione”

We’re sitting at the table when I finally ask the question I’ve been dying to ask all afternoon. “So, this client of yours... Is he cute?”

“Actually, no,” says Sheryl. This was not the answer I was expecting to hear; Sheryl generally has very high standards.

“Really?” I ask disbelievingly.

“Yep, not really attractive at all, I’d say.”

“Oh. Well, does he have a name, or should I simply refer to him as ‘The Client’?” I just realized that I’ve invited myself on Sheryl and her client’s dunch non-date and never thought to inquire about her client’s name.

“His name is Steven. Steven Pierce.”

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“Severus”

Merlin, Avada me now.

There is not one woman in her late thirties to early forties waiting for me as I walk into the café, but two. Even more unfortunate is the fact that not just one of them looks familiar, but both.

Oh, this is not good. Not good at all.

There is no mistaking the wild main of frizzy brown hair or the honey colored eyes. There is no mistaking the fact that Hermione Granger is sitting not ten feet away from me, an expression on her face that I’m sure mirrors my own.

Oh, this is not good. Not good at all...

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“Hermione”

I have been told many times in my life that I never shut up. At this very moment in time, however, all words have been reduced to mere syllables. The only word that seems to come out is a slightly accusatory, “You!”

Severus Snape stands before me alive and well, despite the fact that he’s supposed to have been dead for twenty years.

“You!” I say again, still reduced to monosyllables.

Snape regains his composure quicker than I ever could. “You’ve already said that, Granger,” he sneers. “Are you capable of forming other words, or has spending so much time around Potter and Weasley completely exhausted any brain power you once had?” Only Severus Snape can both compliment and insult you in the same sentence.

I feel rather than see Sheryl appear next to my shoulder. “You two know each other?” she asks, a surprised look on her face.

Oh, crap. “Mr. Pierce was my Chemistry teacher,” I say quickly. Snape picks up on the hint right away and goes with it.

“Yes,” he says, suddenly becoming very polite. “And Hermione here was my most annoying student.” His tone is matter-of-fact as he says this, and a nasty smirk appears on his face.

Ooh, I could just slap that smirk right off.

Bastard.

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Author’s Note: If any of you are worried this story is turning out nothing like the summary promises, I’m here to dispel your fears. This is only Severus and Hermione’s first meeting in twenty years; trust me when I say we’ll see much more of Hermione’s home life and many more of Severus’s therapy sessions.

Also, my plan is for a slow build-up of trust and friendship between Hermione and Severus. If you’re looking for them to jump in the sack right away, sorry, but you’re going to have to wait awhile.

# Bested

Chapter 4 of 7

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## Chapter 4 – Bested

“Hermione”

I want to move to another country – better yet, another planet. I want to pack all of my things, grab my two lovely children (and possibly Sherry), and migrate to the moon.

What was supposed to be a pleasant afternoon filled with delicious food and plenty of laughter turned out to be the most awkward evening of my life. I'd like to say this was all Snape's fault, but truly it wasn't; it was Sherry's.

When Sherry heard that Snape and I knew each other, she automatically wanted to hear stories. I don't know about Snape, but any stories that came to my mind were not exactly the types of stories one would tell if they wanted people to believe they were sane. I could just imagine beginning some of them: “Hey, do you remember the time when one of your incredibly unintelligent protégés hexed my teeth and you made fun of me afterwards?” or “Hey, do you remember that time where you killed the greatest Headmaster ever to reign over Hogwarts?” Something told me neither of these examples would bode well.

I had to think quickly. “Well – erm – there was this one time where I set him on fire.” I quickly looked over at Snape; he was glaring at me.

Sherry's eyes lit up. “WHAT?! Seriously?”

Here, Snape decided to join the conversation. “Yes, Miss Granger was one of my most careless and incompetent students,” said Snape, that loathsome little smirk still on his face. “She added two chemicals that should never be mixed together and nearly set the whole lab on fire.” It was my turn to glare.

“Oh, too funny!” says Sherry, a smile on her face. “So, you were about our age when you taught Hermione then?” she asks. Snape nods. “Was he a cutie back in the day, Hermione?”

I don't quite know who looked more murderous, me or Snape. “I didn't think so back then,” I said through gritted teeth. Sherry didn't pick up on the hint to stop talking and instead continued to press for answers.

“That was back then; do you think he's attractive now?” I was going to kill her.

But then I looked at Snape and a thought suddenly came to mind. “I see no difference,” I said with a smirk on my face ten times bigger than the one Snape was wearing earlier. At the expression on Snape's face, my smirk suddenly crumbled.

Right then was when I decided I wanted to move away. Move very, very, far away.

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“Severus”

Today one of the worst things that could ever happen to a person like me happened: I was bested by a former student. I couldn't outright tell her that she bested me, however, so I opted for the next best alternative – I insulted her. Again.

“Bravo, Miss Granger!” I said, clapping my hands sarcastically as I rose from my seat. “You have insulted my appearance in the hopes of feeling better about yourself! Congratulations! Did it feel good to finally get that off your chest after twenty-some-odd years of holding a grudge?” I started putting on my jacket as I continued. “You think you're clever, Granger, you always have, but I have a piece of advice for you that I hope you'll keep stored for later use: you are no different than the rest of the dunderheads I had to teach, Granger. No different. Oh, sure, you had every line of the text memorized and you could follow directions, but so could a monkey if you trained it well enough. You were not special, Miss Granger, and you never will be. You will die just like the rest of us, and the world will go on without you, no matter how many books you've read or hundred percents you earned in school.”

Sheryl Schrienk looked at me with a mixture of shock and revulsion written on her face while Granger sat there with her mouth opening and closing like a fish.

“Close your mouth, Granger,” I said as I walked passed her toward the door. “You'll catch flies.”

Now, as I sit at home staring at the telly, I realize it was actually a reasonably well-said impromptu speech; too bad I didn't mean a word of it...

Damnations.

# Strangers

Chapter 5 of 7

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## Chapter 5 – Strangers

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“Severus”

“I’m not going to lie, Steven, I don’t understand why you and Hermione dislike each other so much,” Sheryl tells me as I lie on her couch, repeatedly tossing a plush football up into the air and catching it.

“I was not her favorite teacher and she was not my favorite student,” I say, putting the relationship between Hermione and myself in the simplest of terms.

“Yes, I noticed that, but surely something must have happened that provoked such a... strong dislike toward each other.”

I close my eyes and exhale slowly. “You and I both know that I am not a pleasant man to be around.”

Sheryl hesitates for a second, then starts to deny any feelings of the sort, “Now I wouldn’t say that you’re unpleasant. I would say you’re...authoritative.” I scoff at this.

“You think I’m a bastard, especially after last night.”

Sheryl offers a small smile at this and looks down at her feet for a few seconds. “I didn’t like you very much when we first met, Steven, but you’ve progressed a great deal these past few months. When I first met you, you were a miserable wreck and unwilling to talk to me at all.”

I sit up and cast my eyes downward. “My temper and disposition have improved slightly, but the nightmares are still there,” I whisper dolefully.

“Still every night?” Sheryl asks sympathetically.

I nod. “But last night— last night was different,” I say, my brow crinkled.

“Tell me about it,” says Sheryl as she crosses one leg over the other and leans back in her chair.

“It’s still the same scene, I mean I’m still standing on the ledge... It’s just... usually she just attempts to push me and we struggle for a bit... but last night, last night she looked at me with those eyes...”

“Did she speak to you at all?” asks Sheryl, her hand stroking her chin.

“She— she told me to jump,” I say, pinching the bridge of my nose.

“And what did you do?” asks Sheryl, a curious expression on her face.

“Nothing,” I say.

Sheryl takes off her glasses, a gesture that means she’s ready to talk business. “Perhaps that’s your problem,” she says.

“I’m sorry?”

“Maybe you should listen to her.” Sheryl shifts in her seat. “Did you ever think that maybe she’s not there to haunt you? That it’s possible she’s trying to help you? I think you should listen to her and take the plunge.”

I look at her as if she’s the one who needs help. “Oh please, it’s only a dream, right?” She slaps my knee as she stands up. “What’s the worst that could happen?”

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“Hermione”

I must be crazy for doing this; Professor Snape does nothing but belittle and offend me every time I’m in his presence. He does not deserve my sympathy, yet here I am standing outside Sherry’s office door.

Sherry tells me to come in after I work up the courage to knock. I take a deep breath before stating the purpose of my visit. “I need Steven Pierce’s address.” There, I said it.

Sherry blinks, clearly not comprehending a word I just said. “I-I need Steven Pierce’s address,” I say again, as slowly and clearly as possible given the current situation.

Sherry’s eyebrows rise in surprise. “Hermione, I know you don’t like the guy, but I can’t give you his address just so you can go vandalize his apartment or burn it down or something equally as sinister,” she says warningly.

“Oh, hold your tongue,” I say. Hmph, honestly. “I’m not going to do anything to his apartment.”

“Oh, what do you need it for then?” she asks curiously.

“I feel like I owe him an apology,” I say forlornly.

“I asked him earlier about why you guys act the way you do toward each other. He wouldn’t give me a proper answer,” says Sherry.

“It’s a long story,” I say, but this is a lie. The story really isn’t that long at all; he was a bastard, I was a know-it-all, we hated each other.

Sherry starts to dig in her desk for a pad of paper. “Technically, I’m not supposed to give out any of my clients’ personal information. Since it’s you, however, and because it’s for a good cause, I’ll give it to you. Give me a second, I’ll write it down.”

“You know you’re a lifesaver, right, Sherr?”

“I am neither round nor fruity,” Sherry says dryly. I roll my eyes. “So how’s it going at home? How are Ron and the kids?” she asks, completely switching topics.

“Oh, Sherry, I feel so bad,” I tell her as I lay my face in my hands.

“What happened? Maybe I can help?”

“Me and Ron tried again last night,” I say, my voice muffled by my hands.

“Tried as in ‘tried to be intimate’?” asks Sherry. I nod.

“I can’t do it, Sherr. I can’t make love to my husband.” I pull my hair in frustration.

"Perhaps, there is no love to be made," Sherry suggests, treading carefully so that she doesn't upset me.

We both know she's right.

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"Severus"

I am dozing off on the sofa when my wards alert me to another's presence outside my door. My first instinct is to go for my wand, but I haven't pointed my wand at another being in almost twenty years. Instead I pick up the closest Muggle object heavy enough to do any damage as a weapon – a golf club. I can't risk any Ministry officials coming to find me after all these years.

I stand off to the side of the door, back to the wall, as the footsteps come closer. I hear a loud pounding followed by a successive number of rings on the doorbell. As quietly as I can, I step forward toward the keyhole and look through it.

Outside is none other than Hermione Granger.

Bugger.

I open the door reluctantly and am almost hit in the chest by Granger's fist, which is still in knocking position. Granger's eyes widen and she immediately lowers her fist.

"You!" I say, mocking her accusing tone from yesterday afternoon.

"Me," she says, her curls bobbing up and down as she nods her head. "Can we talk?"

I pause for a second before extending my arm to open the door further. Granger quietly slips under my arm and into my apartment. Unknowingly, she has also slipped into my life.

## The Unplanned, the Unintentional, the Unexpected

*Chapter 6 of 7*

Hermione withstands a failing marriage while Severus seeks the help of a psychiatrist. Takes place during the time period of the Epilogue (19 years later).

Disclaimer: Not mine.

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Chapter 6 – The Unplanned, the Unintentional, the Unexpected

"Hermione"

During the short walk to Snape's apartment, I managed to construct a sincere, heartfelt apology illustrating why he was right and I was wrong. The moment I actually stepped into his domain, however, any semblance of said apology was completely lost.

I now find myself ogling Snape's possessions in his small apartment in the hopes of regaining my thoughts. Snape doesn't own much; his walls are bare, his shelves devoid of photos. There is one redeeming quality to Snape's tiny apartment, however: the man has more books than I could ever dream of owning.

"Your apartment is very nice; you've got your own personal library here," I say. My eyes and hands are itching to browse the titles on the shelves.

"Cease the pleasantries, Granger. What the hell are you doing here?" asks Snape, clearly irritated by the fact that I'm in his home. I notice that he has called me "Granger" every time he has addressed me thus far. I find myself unwilling to correct him.

"I came to apologize," I say bluntly.

"Apologize for what? For insulting my appearance or for making me look like a fool in front of Ms. Schrienk?" asks Snape. He's gripping the golf club so tightly that his knuckles are turning white.

"Well, both actually."

Snape purses his lips as if contemplating something for a moment, then sighs and says, grudgingly, "It's fine."

Something tells me it's not as "fine" as he'd like me to believe, and I once again attempt to convey my feelings of remorse. "I really am sorry... It's just... I haven't seen you since I was a tee—"

"It's fine," Snape says again, cutting me off.

"Oh, ok then." We stand awkwardly for a moment; the feeling that I have overstayed my welcome has become nearly tangible. "I'll just be going then."

The moment my hand touches the doorknob, Snape asks a question both unexpected and unwelcome: "So you and Weasley were granted your 'happily ever after' then?"

For a moment I believe I've heard him wrong. "How did—?"

"You have a ring on your finger, Granger; I am quite capable of putting two and two together," says Snape. His arms are crossed in front of him, yet he continues gripping the golf club defensively.

I stare down at the aforementioned ring and place my right hand over it in the hopes of concealing what has already been seen. "I wouldn't call it a 'happily ever after'," I say sullenly.

Snape raises a questioning eyebrow. "Trouble in paradise?" he asks mockingly.

"If you make us both tea, I'll tell you about it," I say to him, initiating a challenge. Snape's eyes bore into my own for a moment before he turns and walks toward the kitchen, presumably to make tea.

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"Severus"

I return from the kitchen with a steaming cup of tea in each hand, only to spot Granger on the sofa, apparently making herself quite at home. Her feet are propped up on the coffee table in front of her, and her eyes are glued to the book lying in her lap. I clear my throat and she looks up at me, a sheepish expression set on her face.

Granger sets the still opened book text down on the coffee table. "Sorry," she says, blushing profusely. "The title made it sound interesting, and I couldn't resist."

I pick up the book and examine the title— *Wizardsing Philosophy: Delving Into the Minds of the Greats* by Artemis Dinks. I close the work and hand it back to her. "Yes, well, appearances can be deceiving; sorry to inform you, but that particular tome is dry as dust."

"Oh," she says, clearly disappointed.

I sit down on the sofa next to her for a few awkward moments before I finally break the silence. "I was under the impression you were here to talk about Mr. Weasley," I say condescendingly.

"Right, Ronald, right," says Granger. "I don't know where to start."

I glare at her, beginning to lose my patience. "You were the one that suggested we have this conversation in the first place."

"I know, I know, it's just – it's hard to explain," she says. She's fidgeting with her damn wedding ring again; I'm tempted to still her hands with one of my own.

"You were never one to back down from a challenge," I say. I realize too late that I have just complimented her.

Granger looks up from her wedding ring and stares me directly in the eye after that statement. "I have three children, and the eldest child is a pain in my arse," she says bluntly.

"Your eldest child is at the root of your and Weasley's problems?" I don't want to hear about any Weasley brats.

"Ronald is my eldest child," says Granger. Bitterness radiates off her in waves.

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"Hermione"

"It wasn't sudden," I find myself saying, my hands gripping my teacup tightly. Snape looks at me questioningly. I take a deep breath and begin to explain. "Falling out of love with him, I mean. Over time I began to notice that the things I used to think were cute about him were driving me crazy. I began to hate how his obnoxious snores kept me up at night and how he finds it acceptable to expel gas in public. I found myself feeling embarrassed that he probably could, quite literally, eat a cow. I noticed more and more how uptight he is with money, even though we are quite well-off. I haven't taken a vacation or gone anywhere exciting in six years. Six years, Snape! At first it felt like we simply weren't compatible maturity-wise; eventually it started to feel like we weren't physically compatible either. I felt like I was trying to have an intimate relationship with a fumbling 16-year-old boy trapped in a fumbling 30-year-old's body. I still feel that way." My eyes are downcast by the time I finish, my tone regretful.

Snape crosses one leg over the other and steepled his fingers under his chin. "How long has it been like this?"

"Seven years. Almost eight," I say, my hands lifting to rub circles in my temples.

"And you haven't talked to him about it?" asks Snape.

I scoff at this question. "I've tried, quite a few times actually. Ronald likes to convince himself that I'm 'just PMSing' and that 'I'll feel better next week' before avoiding me like the plague."

"You must corner him. You are clearly miserable; I suggest you either talk it out or you leave him."

"You make it sound so simple, as if I could just drop everything—"

"'Dropping' is not always the equivalent of 'shattering,' Miss Granger. Coming from a man who has lived a lifetime full of regrets, I suggest you talk to Weasley." Snape turns, his body language signifying that he is clearly done discussing the matter. I am studying my hands when Snape asks another unexpected question, this one quite a bit more appealing than the last: "Have you eaten?"

My stomach growls, and I realize I'm actually quite famished.

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When I first arrived at Snape's apartment, I hadn't planned on staying. I hadn't planned on talking over tea or browsing through his books.

I hadn't intended to tell him about Ronald. I hadn't intended to ask for advice.

I hadn't expected to eat Chinese leftovers. I surely hadn't expected Snape to make a joke.

As I was leaving, Snape thrust a book into my arms. "I believe you'll find the same information from a slightly superior source," he said before swiftly shutting the door in my face.

I examined said work and immediately began to giggle; the title read *Wizardsing Philosophy for Dummies* by Earnest Felt. I spent a great deal of the walk home with a smile on my face, not quite sure what it meant.

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Author's Note: Yeah, it's been awhile.

# Living Under the Same Roof

Chapter 7 of 7

Hermione withstands a failing marriage while Severus seeks the help of a psychiatrist. Takes place during the time period of the Epilogue (19 years later).

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## Chapter 7- Living Under the Same Roof

“Severus”

I glance at the clock in Sheryl Schrienk's office only to discover that we have been sitting in silence for nearly a quarter of an hour. Sheryl also notices that time is ticking and opens her mouth, most likely to ask a question.

“Steven, can I ask you a question without being too intrusive?” Sheryl asks me hesitantly. I let out a long sigh, hoping that my lack of response will demonstrate just how reluctant I am to answer her. Sheryl pretends she hasn't heard it and asks her question despite the lack of an affirmative on my part. “What did you do to this girl that she haunts you so?”

I can tell this is going to be one of the more meaningful discussions that often work their way in between trivial chit-chat- a discussion that will cause my insides to twist and my blood to boil.

I consider her question for what feels like an eternity before constructing a response that will not give too much away. “I may not have raised a finger toward her, but I am singularly responsible for her death.”

“How so?” Sheryl asks probingly. I glare at her as I have many times in the last few months. “I'm sorry, it's just... How am I supposed to help you if you can't talk to me?”

I let out a deep breath and bring two fingers to my face to pinch the bridge of my nose. “There are some things about me – about my past – that you don't need to know.”

“I respect that, honestly I do, but we've been here for months and you haven't even mentioned the name of the girl from your dreams. I think that even the smallest bits of information regarding your relationship to her mi-”

“Lily,” I state abruptly, my level of irritation rising quickly. I find myself unable to allow Sheryl to reduce Lily to a mere pronoun.

“What?” Sheryl asks, momentarily confused. “Oh! Lily... What a pretty name,” she remarks, almost consolingly. “Right, well as I was saying, I think a bit of background information regarding you and Lily might be useful in determining why she visits you nightly.”

“Hmph!” I snort. “Visits.’ You make it sound like she's stopping by for tea and biscuits.”

Sheryl noticeably bristles. “Oh, I'm sorry, how silly of me. I should have phrased it differently. I think a bit of background knowledge might be useful in determining why Lily attempts to murder you in your sleep night after night. Better, Steven?”

I put on my best derisive grin. “Much.”

“Right,” says Sheryl, still slightly irritated but recovering. “Now,” she begins, slapping her palms on her knees. “Tell me about Lily.”

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“Hermione”

I am sitting at the dining room table alone when Ronald bustles in, broomstick in hand. It's Wednesday, which means he's been playing quidditch with the boys from work. He smiles at me as he continues into the kitchen. I smile back hesitantly, almost regretting the conversation I'm about to start, but not quite.

“Ronald?” I ask nervously, following him into the other room.

“Hmm?” he asks, half-listening as he rummages through the cabinets, no doubt looking for food to stuff his face with.

I take a deep breath before I begin. “I think we need to ta-”

“It's awfully quiet. Where are the kids?” he asks, looking around.

“At your sister's.” I sigh, exasperated, and try again. “Listen-”

“Nice of her to take 'em off of your hands,” he remarks casually, turning his back to me.

“Yes it was, but that's not what I want to talk about.” I make sure to continue before he has a chance to interrupt or change the subject. “Ron, are you...happy?”

He stops what he's doing and turns around to look at me. “Happy?” he questions, as if he doesn't know the meaning of the word.

“Yes. With your life, I mean. Is this where you saw yourself after Hogwarts?”

“Well...” he pauses, taking a moment to ponder the question. “I've got a wife and two kids, a house not far from Harry and Ginny, and a job that I love. Sure, I'm happy enough. Why do you ask? Are you not?”

“No, I'm not,” I say, before I can back out.

“What is that you're not happy about?” he asks, his tone indicating that he is genuinely curious.

“Well... I also have two beautiful children, a wonderful home, and a job that, for the most part, I enjoy.” I say this hoping he'll pick up on what's missing, but he looks at me blankly before he responds.

“So... what's wrong then, 'Mione?”

I look down, memorizing the patterns on the kitchen tiles, my confidence beginning to wane.

"Hermione, answer me. What's wrong?" he asks insistently.

Tears begin to form in my eyes by the time I raise my head. "It's you. Me. Us," I state, gesturing at him, then myself, then between us both. As the words come out, tears start to fall freely down my cheeks.

"Wha-?" he starts to say. Before he can even begin, I interrupt him, something he has done to me too many times to count.

"I'm not in love with you, Ronald. I haven't been for a long time."