

Captivation and Obsession

by *_Levicorpus_*

Years after the Final Battle, a new professor strolls into Hogwarts only to captivate Severus to the point of obsession.

Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 15

Years after the Final Battle, a new professor strolls into Hogwarts only to captivate Severus to the point of obsession.

Chapter One

Author's Note: Oh, fan fiction... lovely pastime. As you all must know, It's gotten a bit difficult to write lately since JKR finished up the series so expertly. So here is a deviation for my brave readers. Prepare for an explanation of Snape's reappearance and for mayhem to break loose on all fronts. Enjoy...

She was his poison. She was his flu. She was his plague and his pain. She was his obsession, and she was his fear of the future embodied. She was far too dangerous. But she was also his passion. She was his indulgence. She was his morning sun and sickle-mooned sunset. She was a tantalizing mystery. And she was far too beautiful.

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He was sitting at the gathering table in the staff lounge. His eyes were scanning the pages of a dusty, leather-bound book. He ran a hand through his slick hair and returned to his habitual tapping of his overlarge nose. He was the bat of the dungeons, the sweeping-robed, mysterious Potions master. He was harder to read than the most dated Potions journal he could find, and he prided himself on it. He was a recluse, the greatest hermit a densely populated castle could boast of. Even the ghosts were more sociable than the dour professor.

His eyes glanced up at the opportune moment to fall on her curvaceous form. The new professor looked just as she had when she had been fresh out of the final battle with color-stained cheeks and bouncing hair. Simply looking at her neck felt illegal, so he chose to watch others react to her. The younger women shifted uncomfortably when she laughed; the older women looked wistful if they noticed her at all. Since there were not many younger men to speak of, the only word to describe the looks the other men gave her was lecherous. It didn't occur to him to label himself as such until later.

"Welcome Professor Granger," Minerva commanded. Everyone congregated in the room welcomed her, but most were miffed that a former student was now a colleague. Severus said nothing as he continued to stare at his Potions journal, reading the same line over and over again.

She sat with the younger ladies, smiling nervously. His eyes flickered back to the journal; the forbidden fruit of her beauty might as well have been drizzling out the corner of his mouth for how guilty he looked just for stealing a sideways glance. He concealed all emotion, however, when he straightened his back.

He hardly paid any attention to the conversation as it wended its way through pointless housekeeping issues. *She won't last a minute*, Severus thought. *She won't be able to deal with these dunderheads more than a day.* Her eyes were focused intently on the Headmistress, so he was home free to look at her, or rather the air above her shoulder, for three seconds at a time. But on one of these occasions, he glanced at her eyes to find her looking back at him. He averted his gaze, spasms occurring in his chest while his face remained an icy, stoic mask.

"Severus," Minerva was saying.

"Yes?" There was a titter of laughter. He didn't dare to see if she was among them.

"Since you charmed the new quarters, you will show Professor Granger to her room." *Shite. Bloody fucking shite.*

"Of course, Headmistress," he said. His mind was entirely devoid of anything snippy to say.

He looked up and saw Professor Malfoy, Draco that was, giving him a sympathetic shake of the head. The boy had decided to teach almost directly after the war. His family had been deeply shaken during the Final Battle, and nobody had questioned their sincerity. Lucius was no longer involved at the Ministry, thankfully, and was enjoying retirement from being a pain in the arse in the French countryside. Severus had been to visit twice, finding the place taxing and boring while he was there on both occasions. That and the lavender fields had made his allergies flare up like mad. It went without saying that he had been happy to return to his dank dungeons.

There was a shuffling of paper, and everyone stood. She looked at Severus expectantly while he took his time to pack up his blank note pad and book. By the time he was ready, they were alone, and he finally swept past her with a jerk of his head that indicated that she ought to follow him. He made sure to stay a good fifteen paces ahead of her for the whole journey. He flung open the door to her quarters, conveniently located right next to her classroom.

As he turned on his heel to leave, she called out to him, "Wait."

He spun around again, sighing for effect.

"That's it?" Her eyes were imploring. He met them with a shuttered expression and a raised eyebrow.

"What did you expect, Miss Granger? A pep talk?"

"That's *Professor* Granger to you," she replied, bobbing her head defiantly and crossing her arms over her chest. "And I thought I might get some kind of welcome."

"We all welcomed you back in the staff room." He smirked. "Would you like a gold star as well?"

"You didn't." It was quiet, and he hardly heard it as he pushed the creaky door a little farther open.

He turned around and cocked his head at her, looking her up and down for effect, cursing the dull shocks he felt in his fingers when his eyes slid over her chest. She waited, arms still crossed.

"You're right," he replied. "I did not."

And with that he left.

It seemed that as soon as the air was sighing out of his office chair, the demands started up again. There was a sharp rapping on the door. He let his head loll back in exasperation and called out a command to enter. It was his godson—bearing a bottle of liquor no less. Severus cleared a perfect rectangle on his desk and twisted his palms to face the ceiling in a gesture of allowance.

"Good evening, Godfather," the blond boy greeted, relaxing into a chair across the desk. "Care for a drink?"

Draco was craftier than Severus gave him credit for. Some sour, sharp, enchanted beverage was left in the bottle, and all of it was used in their two glasses—no drunkenness, just more relaxed shoulders and less inhibition for storytelling. They leaned back with their first sips, inhaling the woody aroma. Draco began to smile, his finger circling the top of his glass.

"What are you smirking about?"

"That Granger," the boy replied. Severus's attention was piqued. "A breath of fresh air, right? A swan among hags, you could say."

"Let's not forget Sumptuous Septima." Severus chuckled.

"Nah," Draco said. "No fun. This Granger though—"

"What are you plotting?" It actually came out as more of a flat statement than a question.

"Plotting?" Draco asked as though the idea had only just then occurred to him. "No plotting, only watching."

"Poor girl," Severus said, taking a sip to prevent an errant smile.

Draco laughed.

Here I am: A special thanks to SoulBound, greatest beta ever. Those of you who read my other chaptered tale, "Their Death-Marked Love," I look forward to hearing from you.



Chapter Two

Chapter 2 of 15

Years after the Final Battle, a new professor strolls into Hogwarts only to captivate Severus to the point of obsession.

Chapter Two

Two weeks passed before Severus and Professor Granger spoke again. He heard by way of the castle gossips and Draco that she was coping fairly well with her classes. She, apparently, ruled with an iron fist but was understanding and patient. This paradox, as Pomona Sprout pointed out, could only be achieved after teaching for years. She'd worn a satisfied, proud expression all five times Severus had seen her in the hallways. She greeted her favorite students in the corridors and appeared to be universally loved. Severus had not felt more than a twinge of envy at this. It surprised him mostly that she had not had a panic attack at the thought of not being able to answer questions herself.

He did not hear much about her from his students except for one ugly incident during a Potions lesson with the seventh-years when one boy announced that he'd like to "translate her ancient runes."

"Mister Lafolle, not only does that not make sense," Severus called from his desk, "but your grade in this classroom will be in even more serious jeopardy if I hear you talking lewdly about a professor again."

"Yes, sir," he replied glumly.

"Ten points from Gryffindor."

It was at sundown on one particularly crisp evening that Severus encountered the brand-new teacher again. It was a cold night for walking, but he was fresh out of chamomile, and the situation had become so dire that he had lapsed into drinking a little whiskey before bed to relax himself. Granger, too, was waiting for Pomona outside the door. The gardener was cleaning up and also in the middle of pruning a particularly angry shrub that had attempted to attack her with her own shears several times.

"So," the Granger girl began. He looked over like he had only just noticed her. He saw she was dressed very traditionally—grey robes fastened tightly at the neck and wrists with brass buttons. Her panty hose was black, and on her feet she wore high heels that matched her dress. She even had some makeup on. This set her miles ahead of the other female teachers, most of which had likely not looked in a mirror since their moustaches had turned grey.

"Yes?" he asked.

"Are you waiting for Pomona?" The silence was killing her. He loved it.

"I am."

"So," she said, her eyebrows knitting together, "how have your first few weeks been?" She sounded casual, as though she wasn't counting the days. He believed she really was as enthusiastic as she sounded.

"Tedious as always," he replied, his lips barely opening while his jaw remained clenched. He cast his eyes over the cold sunset and the barren grounds. The lake was rippled by light fingers of wind being drawn across its placid face. The thought of dragging fingers made a thin layer of cold sweat rise on his palms. He wouldn't look at her. He knew he couldn't.

"Really?" she asked, valiantly trying to spark some sense of camaraderie between them. "So you're still teaching Potions?"

"Yes," he replied. "I still teach Potions, Miss Granger. The title of 'Potions master' is not honorary."

"I see," she said with a laugh. She was so quick to laugh, so easy to smile. In that moment, at least, she was his polar opposite. Of course, this was long before he had considered a yin and yang effect.

"What are you here for?" He gave her a little rope, leaning against the wall to watch her fidget.

"Oh," she said. "Chamomile. It's the only thing that can get me to sleep."

He raised an eyebrow.

"What about you?" she asked.

"Potion ingredients," he lied.

"I see," she said, smiling.

At that moment, a dirt-streaked Pomona flung open the door. She looked at the two of them and shook her head.

"Here's your basil, Hermione," she said gruffly. "I'll be back with your chamomile, Severus."

They caught each other's gaze, and Hermione blushed. He folded his arms in front of his chest. She hastened up the path leading back to the castle, and he called after her retreating form.

"Enjoy your chamomile, Miss Granger!"

"Oh, my," Pomona said as she emerged with this satchel of tea. "Have I mixed up what you wanted?"

"No," he said, squinting his eyes as he watched her take her walk of shame up to the Great Hall. "You got them right."

Why would she have said Chamomile? he thought as he lay staring at his ceiling that night. Even an entire kettle of tea had not dulled the excitement of the evening *Why would she have said that?* His brain felt frayed from being raked over, so at midnight his only choice was to drift off. But he even dreamed about tea that night. It was not often that he dreamed. As a master of Occlumency, Severus's mind rarely got emotional enough to work a dream into existence. But that night, his tired mind gave him a taste of lust.

She was brewing a pot of tea on the stove. She crossed the room and poured him a glass. He watched her retreat, a heavy veil of lust falling thickly over him. She turned around and poured the tea into her mouth. Her lips closed around the tip of the kettle's spout as though it was cool rather than steaming. She poured it then over her breast bone, staining her white dress. She loosed her hair from its tight containment in a bun on the crown of her head and strolled up to him. She took her sweet time in sitting on his lap. She then lifted her kettle to his lips and poured. But it was much too hot. It scalded his throat as it went down, and suddenly he couldn't breathe.

He awoke with his face pressed into a pillow. He took a deep breath and rubbed his temples. It was five in the morning, so he resolved to start his day early. He straightened up his classroom and wrote the day's lesson on the board. He dressed and rinsed his mouth and then walked down to the Great Hall, nearly driving himself mad with his efforts to suppress his thoughts about the younger witch. It was, after all, inappropriate for business.

He arrived at the High Table just in time to see Draco wink at the very woman Severus had been dreaming about. Her eyes widened with shock, and she looked down at her breakfast, as though to convince him she had not seen him. Severus put his hand in his pocket so he could keep himself from slapping the boy upside the head as he walked past.

Chapter Three

Chapter 3 of 15

Years after the Final Battle, a new professor strolls into Hogwarts only to captivate Severus to the point of obsession.

Chapter Three

Author's Note: Thanks a million to SoulBound, my wonderful editor. =)

"Admittedly, it was a bit lecherous." Draco grinned.

"You think so?" Severus asked sarcastically.

"It's just so easy," he replied.

"Well, that's no excuse to sexually harass your colleague."

"It was just a comment on her clothing!" Draco said, holding his arms out wide.

"It starts that way."

There was a pause in which the ominous ticks of Severus's clock reverberated across the dark, grey study.

"Are you all right?" Draco asked. "You've been especially frightening lately."

It was true. Severus had assigned enough detentions that he hardly ever left his dungeons. He took meals in his room since the display at breakfast a few weeks prior. He hadn't had any more dreams, but his thought patterns did a constant tribal rain dance around their latest goddess—Professor Granger. It was like every time he did leave his study, he was assaulted by her image or reminders of her. Just her name on a student's lips made him think about her for hours. And it wasn't that he was thinking anything in particular really. No, he was simply remembering her. His mind hadn't yet had the gumption to think much about the future.

"I'm fine," he replied, discomfited as usual by inquiries relating to his well being.

"Are you really?" Draco grumbled obligatorily.

"Yes."

"So Father sends his greetings from France," Draco said, running his fingers through his blond hair. He was in every way the superior candidate in the race for Hermione's affections. With his six-foot three frame and striking features, what girl would not be taken with him—a Malfoy?

Severus gave a disdainful chuckle. "Is he enjoying the countryside?"

"He is," Draco said. "He is enjoying himself so immensely that he has even taken a French mistress."

"That's Lucius for you," Severus said.

"Indeed," Draco remarked distractedly.

He was off to bed soon after, and Severus retreated to his rooms to crack open a book. Even the dry literature couldn't soak the emotion out of him. He paced his room for a while. He then went to his classroom and wrote out lessons. Even after that, he couldn't get himself to sleep. His thoughts of her disgusted him and weighed him down with a sickly guilt that made his stomach feel as though it was afflicted by the flu.

"You look terrible," Malfoy remarked the next morning at breakfast.

"That is what happens when one does not sleep," Severus replied irately. He had, with his bleary judgment, decided to take breakfast in the Great Hall. Several first-years had actually jumped at the sight of him—with his darkly circled eyes sunken into a ghostly pale face. He was so tired, in fact, that he had not yet thought of her.

She came into the hall, tossing her glittering hair over her shoulder. His stomach turned with guilt and disappointment again. He would have given anything to escape sitting at the same table with her that morning. But, since fate was in no mood to accept bargains, he was forced to continue the dance.

Blissfully, she did not address him since she was busy talking with Pomona about one womanly issue or other. Severus never kept track. He left the table nursing a migraine that concentrated where his brows usually met when he was angry. He slammed into his first class after a trip to the lavatory to rinse his grimly arranged visage with cool water. The sixth-years worked diligently on copying down the notes he had left on the board without a sound.

They worked until a knock sounded at the door. Severus ordered them back to work, but most continued to watch as he flung the door open. Before him stood a trembling fifth-year. She stuttered out a few syllables, but ended up just looking around without making a sound.

"Yes, Miss Martin?" he asked irately.

"Professor Granger sent me down with this." She thrust a note at him. His face adopted a look of curiosity.

Please give a jar of fwooper feathers to Miss Martin. I will return them this evening after lessons.

A self-important signature followed. He tossed the letter into the waste bin by the door and walked back to his ingredients closet to fetch the rare ingredient.

"If you lose these," he said slowly, "you will pay for every plume. Do I make myself clear?"

The girl nodded and gulped as her knees trembled. He knew this threat would make an impact since she was a scholarship student. He returned to the classroom and sat regarding the students calmly. Well, it seemed calm to those who did not know Professor Snape. They knew if any of them did anything he could deduct points for, he would. They worked in silence and bottled their potions with shaking hands and brought them to the desk for inspection with trepidation.

He arrived at his free period after assigning four detentions, and it was only the middle of the day. He sat at his desk rubbing his temples and looking at an essay he didn't have the patience to grade quite yet. He jumped, yes, actually jumped, when he heard a glass bottle being set down on his desk.

"You don't have to harass them, you know," she said, glaring at him. He was altogether unprepared for the intrusion.

"Perhaps you don't," he said. "But you clearly have no scruples against barging into someone else's classroom while they are trying to work"

She scowled and started to pace. "It makes a terrible learning environment if you are constantly threatening people," she remarked.

"I'm glad that you've taken the time to impart your wisdom, but I really must insist that you—"

"Just don't scare my students."

"If they are in my dungeon, I will do as I please," he said calmly, leafing through papers he didn't even need to look at.

"But—"

"I will remind you, Miss Granger," he said, holding up a finger, "that I have a vast seniority over you here. As Deputy Headmaster, I could easily have you thrown out for barging in here and questioning my ethics."

"I won't stand for—"

"Bye-bye," he said curtly and sarcastically, opening the door with a wave of his wand. She stormed out and slammed it behind her.

"Defacement of school property!" he cried. She did not return.

It's Me!: I look forward to your thoughts. I've really been enjoying the reviews so far!

Chapter Four

Chapter 4 of 15

Years after the Final Battle, a new professor strolls into Hogwarts only to captivate Severus to the point of obsession.

Chapter Four

Author's Note:: I apologize a thousand bajillion times for not updating in so long!! Hopefully the excitement of this chapter will make up for my absence...

Severus had the castle to himself on the second weekend of October. All the older children were having a Hogsmeade weekend while the first- and second-years were scarce. He prowled the hallways whilst reading, which he had become quite good at. Minerva had required that he stay behind, which was fine by him. He was tired of rejecting invitations from other teachers. He simply did not care for drinking in the company of acquaintances. Close friends were an entirely different matter.

Each time he drank with Draco, a much more rapid occurrence now that the boy needed a receptacle for his lewd musings about the new Ancient Runes professor, he was subjected to one battle plan after another. He had to pretend he had not, just weeks prior, been entertaining an embarrassing, sickening crush on the same woman Draco mused about. The two were well suited age-wise, and so Severus soon became the most enthused supporter of Draco's ideas. This, he realized sometimes, was in an effort to drown what he himself had been feeling.

But your feelings had no basis in reality, he reminded himself whenever he strayed from his own battle plan. *Draco and Granger are of a similar age. You are the 'bat of the dungeon.'* He now had an even more substantial grounding for his self-loathing, which gave him a sick feeling of victory. But even so, he still thought Draco didn't have a chance. She was kind and good, and the two had been rivals since childhood. She was too smart to forget all that. So he took some solace in these thoughts beneath all the others.

Life had been so much easier for Severus before the new professor had come along. All had worked in accordance with a plan. But when a bright light came into a dark place, all a prisoner could do was watch it. And watch he did—with stolen glances at meals and when he passed her in the hallways. He watched her read in the teacher's lounge and watched the sparse sunlight concentrate itself in the radiance of her hair when she took her students out-of-doors. He, the cold, reclusive bat of the dungeons, had developed an undeniable obsession.

"Good afternoon, Professor."

He looked up from his book and saw it was she. It was as though his most worshiping of thoughts had conjured her as an illusion. She wore a long-sleeved black sweater that dipped in a vee that was altogether too sensuous for a British boarding school teacher. Beneath, her white camisole was in view. Her skirt was a little shorter than usual, though not noticeably to the untrained eye. Her heels were a little higher than usual too. An artificial blush coated her cheeks, and her eyelashes were upturned with charcoal. Her hair looked so soft...

"Are you going to Hogsmeade?" she asked, and all the coldness she had had in her voice the last time he had spoken with her was not there. *Forgiveness*, he mused.

Why, I'll be damned.

"No," he replied, lifting his hand carrying the book. "I'm watching the castle while you all go out drinking." He had not intended for it to sound self-pitying, but too late. No

excuses.

"Aw," she said, pursing her lips. "I should have liked to see what you'd have ordered."

"Would you?" he asked. He felt a jolt, comparable to his mind hitting a brick wall. He was flirting with her. *He was flirting with her.*

She grinned in response, swaying on the spot a little as she rearranged her feet on the stone floor.

"Herbridian Ale," he replied, his expression a little more giving than a smirk.

She raised an eyebrow. "Have a nice evening."

He turned and left, opening his book as though he hadn't a care in the world, even though his eyes were too jumpy to read it for quite a while after the encounter.

He watched the students return from the window in the clock tower. They came singing with linked arms, walking with hands in pockets and running after members of the opposite sex. The hormones, for once, floated up into Severus's lofty vantage point and stirred something within him. He decided that obsession only went so far. He had to talk to her, get to know her as a woman and not as his student. He had to make some progress. Severus turned around to pace the corridors, and he heard footsteps. He knew this was nowhere near a dormitory, so he was obligated to find out who was roaming about so close to curfew. He heard hushed giggling and whispers and hoped it might have been two girls out on a walk. He proceeded forward as the footsteps wended about several corridors until their location got more and more remote. As soon as their footsteps halted, he drew himself into a shadowy corner to listen.

There were first the sounds of ruffling fabric—warning sign number one. More giggling, and this time it was nervous—warning sign number two. Silence—warning sign number three. Last year, he would have plowed right in and separated the kissing teenagers, but now their passion in the face of his frustration and loneliness intrigued him. He felt a shock of heat run up his neck and coil in his throat when he heard a soft, lusty sigh. Clenching his fists, he tried to work up the courage to break them up. But the woman became louder, her gasps more deliberate. Her partner, decidedly male at this point, was becoming vocal as well. Though he continued to assume it was a pair of teenagers, his more reasonable side pointed out that no teenage boy he had ever met was capable of eliciting sounds like that from a woman. He listened a little longer, all guilt rapidly vanishing as he pushed his back into the cold wall and imagined that he was holding Hermione right there, like the two students held each other around the corner. He imagined her dazzling eyes catching the moonlight and her rosy lips stretched in a smile whose intent was utterly forbidden.

And that was when the feminine voice cried out, and all the heat in him quickly evacuated. Cold fury replaced his longing when he distinctly heard the voice cry, "Draco!"

Chapter Five

Chapter 5 of 15

-same as above-

Author's Note: Upon noticing how ridiculously short the last chapter was, I uploaded this one immediately! I hope this is enjoyable.

He stormed back to the dungeons in a violent rage. The image of his godson's blond hair falling over the mouth of Professor Granger was burned into his mind. Her black turtleneck and camisole discarded on the floor, the moonlight making her lacy, white bra glisten. He remembered the delicate whiteness of her gracefully arched neck and of her fingers clenched in her own hair.

When he got back to his study, he hurled a student's desk across the room. It bounced off a wall, and even that didn't satisfy him. He threw a bottle of pickled eel eyes and exploded the jar of rare fwooper feathers with his wand. Amid the chaos, a student walked in for detention. The feathers were still falling to the ground as Snape ordered the boy to disembowel his latest shipment of horned toads since he was late. The boy groaned, and Snape, in the wrong mood to be merciful, told him he'd also clean up the room with no magic.

He was blindingly, desperately angry. Even after the student received more than his fair share of aggression, Snape was not appeased. He exploded a feather pillow in his bedroom, cracked a mirror with a stone and was still in such a violent rage that he resolved to take a walk out to the lake. He stormed through the hallways and literally threw himself down on the grass on the shore to stare at the sky, cursing all the stars for his pitiful misfortune.

You are an Occlumens, he reminded himself. You shouldn't get so worked up. But the other, generally more truthful voice replied that he hadn't been in love since he was a child. He sat up. The word 'love' had crossed his mind.

"Fuck me," he cursed, sitting up and resting his face in his hands.

"No thanks," purred the alto voice of the woman standing behind him. "Just out for a stroll."

"Septima," he said, patting the grass beside him. She sat, her crinkled, blue robes fanning around her like she was an ethereal Priestess of the Oracle of Delphi.

"I haven't spoken to you all year, Severus," she remarked, running a hand through her voluminous black hair. Her face was entrancing once one escaped its bitterness.

"I have been more reclusive than ever," he replied, running a hand through his own hair.

"I noticed," she remarked quietly. He looked up. They had had their moments of lust in the past, never anything serious of course. He was too dangerous and she too bitter. But they had shared a single kiss at a school function many years back. And they were still there, both as alone as ever.

He let the conversation drift away while he watched the lake. Though he had been betrayed, he allowed for a second chance. He would not blot out whatever infinitesimal chance he might have had with Professor Granger. She would have another chance. Gods, he thought. Why? He didn't give himself time to answer that question. He plowed ahead in his sick circles—chasing his own tail around one landmine after another.

"Goodnight, Septima," he said, and he launched himself off of the slope. He thrust his hands into the relatively high pockets of his coat and crossed the grass up to the castle with ease. *She'll come around*, he thought. *This time she will.*

The next morning at breakfast, Professor Granger and Malfoy behaved the same as every other day. They cordially and politely passed the marmalade and made small talk about the weather. They were so inconspicuous, in fact, that Severus began to think that he had imagined the whole thing. Malfoy winked once, but that was commonplace these days. The idea that he was entitled to knowing Professor Granger's body made Severus so furious he had to fight not to smash something again.

He realized he hadn't imagined the hallway encounter when he heard Professor Granger make a soft sigh upon finishing her meal. The sigh made his jaw slacken a little as his mind flickered back to the night before—an arm against the wall, rosy lips parted in a perfect ring...

"So, Professor Snape," she said. He turned towards her to pay her attention, and his eyes flitted to her shoulder, where a lacy, white strap had fallen. It was the same brassiere from the night before. He swallowed a large sip of his juice.

"Yes?"

"Did you enjoy your chamomile tea, then?" she asked, setting down her goblet to speak to him across Malfoy.

"Immensely, yes," he said, raising a questioning eyebrow. Malfoy was on the verge of a pout, entirely left out of the conversation.

Classes that day passed with relative ease. He assigned no detentions since he thought he could probably tolerate being alone again somehow. He was still drifting on the high he got when he left his mind long enough to speak to her. He took some time to review how he was coming off to her—cool, collected, menacing, strong. He was doing his job well. If only she knew what was going on in his mind. Well, she might not ever look him in the eye again.

He retired to his bedroom after a scalding hot shower. He sunk into his thoughts, sorting them into their proper places for sleeping. He was closing off his emotions since he had let them get a little rampant in celebration of Voldemort's downfall. He was no longer being invaded by his master—or anyone for that matter. He was assuredly among the best Legilimens in the United Kingdom, so he had nothing to fear.

He did, guiltily, leave his most sensual images of Professor Granger loose without place. He let them drift through his head, dance through his thoughts, twist and taunt through his mind until he finally nodded off, succumbing to a series of misplaced dreams.

Author's Note: I do love the reviews!!

Chapter Six

Chapter 6 of 15

same as above. =)

Chapter Six

The castle hallways were a constant tunnel for a never-ceasing wintry draft as December stamped its feet into the stone walls. The grounds were white and frosted over, framing a certain black-clad professor against their blanched enormity each time he went for a nice, brooding pace about the lake. As the month drew into its middle, garlands and fairies appeared unexpectedly anywhere one happened to look. By the twentieth, a gargantuan pine tree was erected in the Great Hall. Flitwick spent an entire weekend levitating decorations onto the tree. Minerva saw to it that all was a replication of Dumbledore's days at the castle. It made the old Potions Bat a little nostalgic before it sickened him.

Speaking of sickening concepts, the relationship of Professor Granger and Draco was increasingly hard to figure out. He would see one sign that indicated that they, in fact, were having midnight trysts all over the castle. And almost the next moment, he would be entirely sure that their October encounter was a one-time situation. Maddening as it was, he really didn't have time to pay much attention. He was busy brewing a massive stock of birth-control potions for Madam Pomfrey. They had recently run out of a stock that was left over from Potter's glory days at Hogwarts.

He spent days cooped up in his workroom with his sleeves rolled up, grating fish scales and grinding teeth to put in the potions. He found it strangely ironic that he was working so hard brewing potions for the teenagers around him who were getting more action in a month than he had gotten in the past two decades. But no matter, it was his job. And he secretly liked it.

By much persuasion and under penalty of watching the castle during Hogsmeade visits for the rest of his life, Severus was coerced into attending the staff Christmas party. It was held on the evening of the twenty-fifth. That morning he awoke later than usual and found several parcels next to his bed. The largest was a basket full of homemade potpourri from Lucius and Narcissa. He placed it on his bedside table to be further examined later.

The second parcel was from the Malfoys' son. He unwrapped the bland brown paper and found a good quality, leather-bound journal with the inscription 'for your thoughts' on the front page. He placed it beside the potpourri, not assuming he would use it for anything.

The third parcel was a mysteriously small one. He opened it and found a wooden box whose edges were lined with gold. He unhinged it and saw a necklace. It was a small, silver ancient rune on a leather cord. His rune reading was a bit rusty, so he set it aside to search the paper it had come in for any kind of indication of whom it was from. His heart literally stopped when his eyes fixed on the elegant script of her name.

H. J. Granger

He took extra time leaving his quarters that morning due to the entirely obscene amount of time he spent obsessing about what the rune meant *Why did she send it to me?* he wondered, swinging the cord around his finger and pacing. *What does it mean that she sent me this?* He resolved to wear it tucked under his robes in case she cared to see it on him. Yes, he thought, *that's the ticket.* This way if she was too shy to talk about it, she wouldn't notice he was wearing it. It would be their little secret—the binding secret he had been waiting for.

He arrived in the Great Hall with a subtle smirk on his face. Not even the glowing fairies or enchanted indoor snow could dampen his spirits. He took his seat at the High Table and was greeted by Rolanda who sat next to him. She wore a lumpy green sweater, and her short hair was spiked as severely as usual.

"Merry Christmas, Severus!" she said happily, taking a deep sip of her no-doubt spiked eggnog. "Did you like your gift from Hermione?"

He froze, turned to her slowly. "Pardon?"

"She sent everyone on staff those charming rune necklaces." She grinned. "Didn't you get one?"

"I don't know," he replied sourly. "Likely she left me out." He was so embarrassed that all he could do was turn snide. Of course they were for everyone. What a fool he was!

"I wouldn't be so quick to judge her, Sev." She leaned in. "She respects you deeply, that Granger."

"What about me, Rolanda?"

He turned slowly in his chair and could hardly believe what he saw. There she was, wearing a rune necklace just like everyone else. She was in an especially short sweater dress with a white scarf hanging over her neck. She was grinning and looked absolutely radiant as usual. She was the glowing light in their dark lives. And here she was putting down her plate to sit next to him.

"Nothing, sweetheart," she said gruffly. "Sit, eat," she commanded.

"Good Morning, Severus," Professor Granger said merrily. "Where's your necklace?"

"I've always thought men who wear jewelry are compensating for masculine shortcomings, Miss Granger."

"Professor Granger," she corrected while laughing at his remark. She was very insistent about this 'professor' thing. She was asserting their status as peers.

"I think it's sexy," Rolanda said. "I could hardly keep myself away from Draco this morning!"

"Rolanda!" Granger exclaimed playfully. Severus felt plain sick. "I'm sure he would have enjoyed it, the egotistical ass."

Confetti went off in Severus's mind as his Granger-worshipping thoughts continued their primitive rain dance. Yes, he thought. *Finally*. He took an inconspicuous sip of his milk to hide the lower half of his face.

"Hermione, you mustn't," Rolanda insisted.

The other woman sulked in response.

The Deeply Guilty Author's Note: Okay, yes. This has been too long for an update. There have been mix-ups galore, and if there's anyone even left to follow this story, I'm sorry! My poor beta has been feeling overwhelmed, so I beta'd this one myself. [Everyone send happy vibes over to Soulbound!] Now that I'm back on the ball and conquering my fear of meticulous editing, updates should come much more quickly. Sorry for the delay!

Update!: Captivation and Obsession has recently been recommended by Valady at The_New_Library on Livejournal. Many, many thanks!!

http://community.livejournal.com/the_new_library/90658.html

Chapter Seven

Chapter 7 of 15

same as above

Chapter Seven

That night Severus found himself standing in the middle of a group of happily socializing teachers and other members of the magical community with a frivolous beverage in hand and a scowl frozen on his face. Lucius and Narcissa were there and accompanied by, controversially enough to suit the aging man's taste, Lucius's mistress. Camille was vivacious, curvaceous and reeked of good taste and frivolity. She wore a sun dress despite the cold of winter. Narcissa shot evil glares at her from across the room, where she was deep in conversation with some of the wives of high-profile wizards.

Lucius swaggered over to Severus's perch and asked him if he had received their potpourri basket. The response was a curt 'yes' without elaboration. At that point, Camille bounced up to them, her smashed cleavage bouncing along with her. She looked no older than twenty-five. Her black hair hung loose around her olive skin, kissed by the sun as lavishly as it must have been by Lucius.

"Hello," Severus said.

She looked worriedly up at Lucius. He nudged her.

"My name is—" she pronounced slowly, looking up at her master for reassurance. "Camille. I am guest of Mister Malfoy, Sir."

"Camille has always wanted to see Britain. Narcissa suggested she come along," Lucius said, grinning. "She works as the maid in our house. Charming young girl."

"Oui!" She squealed, accentuating the conversation at an appropriate pause. Severus found it hard to believe that Narcissa would have invited her, but the dynamics of marriage, of course, were way over his head.

She turned to Lucius and asked him a question in rapid French, and he replied in a slow, deliberate cadence. "Severus Snape," he finished after the jumble of French.

Severus quirked the edges of his mouth in the shape of a smile, and she grinned broadly before saying, "Drink!" and skipping off.

"Good catch, you old pervert," Severus said as soon as she was out of earshot, which wasn't very far due to the growing volume of the party.

"She keeps me young," replied the pervert in question. He winked in a sickening replication of his equally lecherous son.

Severus excused himself to take a seat on a couch in the corner of the magically-enlarged staff room. He surveyed the party with amusement as he got a little more sloshed with each drink he washed down. When he had his fourth in hand, a laughing Rolanda Hooch fell down next to him.

"Di-I-ever-tell-yoo—" she slurred, laughing absently. "I would cross over for you."

"Cross what—madam!" She passed out on his shoulder, spilling her drink onto his thigh.

An apologetic Professor Sprout removed her to vacate the seat next to Severus, which was quickly filled by none other than Professor Granger herself. He scooted over a

bit, disconcerted by her closeness. She was giggling and, by the look of it, fairly drunk. Her cheeks were charmingly pink and her eyes glittered with mischief.

"That was funny," she said, gesturing to Rolanda, who was now being fanned by her partners in crime.

"So where's your friend Draco tonight?" he asked mockingly. She swatted him on the shoulder with the back of her hand.

"Schmoozing the crowd, no doubt," she said. "Maybe he's snogging his father's girlfriend somewhere."

"So why this sudden hatred," Severus asked, "towards Malfoy of all people?"

She glared into her drink and shook her head. "It's a long story." She took a gulp of her alcohol and shivered. She laughed and then continued bitterly, "It's a tale riddled with arrogance, stupidity and loss of virginity. But that isn't the point."

"Virginity?" Severus asked, sincerely aghast.

"His, not mine, of course." She joked. Severus gave a shallow laugh.

"Oh, gods," she said, deliberately messing up her hair. "Why am I telling you this?"

"Because I won't judge you," he said, brushing his hand over her knee in a lingering pat of reassurance. She tilted her still downturned head towards him.

"Sure you will," she said. "'Know-it-all doesn't really know all!'" she said in a good mockery of his deep voice. She took another swig of her drink. He matched her intake, playing fair so he wouldn't screw up his chance.

She leaned over, licking her lips slowly as she thought. She looked him right in the eye when she finally spoke—looking just as indecent as she always had in his lewd dreams. He had to fight not to grab her and fling her against the wall that very moment. *You have no idea how god-damned long it's been, girl,* he thought.

"Hey," she said, running her fingers through her hair. "Do you want to—"

"What?"

"No," she said. "It's stupid."

He looked into her eyes and saw the answer to his question lingering on the forefront of her loosened mind.

"I'd enjoy a walk very much," he said. She smiled.

He left the room and waited outside the door for her to follow him. She appeared without her coat, and they strolled up several sets of stairs in silence. He was suddenly at ease now that he had the upper hand. His mind was clear, like the snowy landscape out the windows. They paused at a tall stained-glass window depicting a unicorn. She looked out the colored glass at the white grounds, colored green from where she stood, yellow from where he was.

"What are we doing?" she asked. "I irritate you."

"Shh," he said, pressing a brave finger to her lips. "You aren't irritating me now. Besides, we're just looking at the snow."

Severus had seen a few Muggle movies, and some had been romantic films. He always scoffed at the times when the lead characters turned to each other and spontaneously began to kiss. It all seemed so contrived and, quite frankly, cheesy. But when he looked into the wildly forbidden eyes of his comrade for wandering, he had to keep himself back from planting a hormonal, searing kiss on her right then.

She leaned up, and he bent his head a little to graze her lips with his. Goosebumps ran down his legs and shot like the arrows of Eros down to his fingertips. She tried to further things along, but he held her chin in place. He never truly kissed her; he instead used every drop of self control in his already taxed reserves to whisper against her lips.

"I am not the sort of man who takes kindly to being used to get past another." She whimpered and tried to move up against him, even opened her mouth to protest. But he pressed the pad of his thumb against her rosy lips to keep her silent. "If you ever truly want me, you know where to find me."

He released her and walked back down the corridor, regretting every step.

Chapter Eight

Chapter 8 of 15

same as above

Chapter Eight

Oh, God, he thought. Don't turn around.

He made it back to his bedroom and locked the door for good measure. He rubbed his face while he paced his bedroom. He was astonished at the she~~g~~*all* of what he had done—so uncharacteristic. Something about her aroused a different side of him. A side that cared what color she saw the snow through the stained glass; a side that licked his lips after being so close to her in order to taste the humidity of her warm breath. There was a rapidly emerging side of him that he had not been in touch with since his own days as a student at Hogwarts. All of this was aroused by a mere girl who had been successfully under his sexual radar for years. Fate was clearly having a nice chuckle.

He tossed and turned late into the night and even into the morning before he gave in to sleep. When he opened his eyes, the sun was high in the sky. He crossed to the enchanted window and let its prisms of light fall upon his face. They fell away suddenly when he heard pounding on the door of his office. He pulled a hand through his hair as he jogged to open it. What he saw made his hand fall limp to his side.

"Good afternoon, Professor Snape."

He nodded and shut the door behind her, his mouth slackened slightly from shock. She set a stack of papers down on his recently cleared desk and sat in his chair.

"Out," he said. He referred to the chair, she assumed to the room. She stood and made to leave, forcibly extracting a command to 'stay' from his lips. She turned on her heel at the word and sunk comfortably back into his chair.

"I've decided to come keep you company," she said with a mischievous smile that turned her rosy lips into an answered prayer.

"Company," he repeated disdainfully. She paid him no mind and started to edit the lengths of paper she had brought with her.

He retreated to his bedroom and changed his clothes only after forcefully locking the door in several places. He washed his face and gave himself an incredulous look in the mirror. *Can you believe this?* he asked his reflection. It couldn't either.

He opened the door and saw the soft, white curve of her calf muscle. Light undulated over her skin as she flexed her ankle. His hand trembled on the doorknob. He took a breath and strode into the room, tall and strong. He sat in the seat usually occupied by Draco and watched her work.

"You know," she said, "when I thought to come in here and grade, I pictured you reading or something."

He promptly stood and grabbed a Potions journal off of the wall. He flicked idly through it as her quill scribbled and scratched. The pages were worn and dog-eared. He had made every potion its pages recommended and had annotated every ingredient analysis section. He was a dedicated reader.

So as he read, he didn't truly absorb. Thoughts about the smell and taste of her skin floated in to distract him; carefree as the soft pink dress she wore to cloak the sensuality of her curves. How he longed to do away with the recluse within him that persistently prevented him from lunging at her. He was only grateful for his reservation when he caught her eye. The sheer ferocity of her determination and *youth* made him nervous. It was like looking into the bold, bright future while simultaneously being confronted with his expiration date. He felt like sour milk in the presence of dewy morning grass. He simply didn't belong in her world.

"Would you be offended terribly if I called you 'Severus'?" she queried, running the inside of her wrist across her hairline. *She's sweating*, he observed. *Control yourself...*

"Well it's not like I'm going to call you 'Hermione'." He replied with a sneer. *Yes, drive her away. Perhaps then you won't have to be scared, you old hermit.*

"Why?" It was simple, direct, and honest. The tip of her peacock quill ran along her dampened lower lip as she waited. Her soft brown eyes were trained on his. He couldn't look away now.

"Well," he said, hoping she might give up upon achieving the satisfaction of rendering him speechless. No such luck. "Well, you were a student..."

"And," she said, motioning for him to continue.

"Old habits die hard," he replied, the corner of his mouth quirking up in amusement.

"Why?" She repeated. Her lips were turned with melancholy again, and he felt shocks of heat run up his neck, just as they had when he saw her in the corridor. His eyes closed in an indulgent blink, imagining touching her. He decided to make an experiment. He looked into her questioning eyes with images of kissing her heavy on his mind. He patiently held her gaze, feeding her sensual images from his dreams and idle thoughts.

And something glorious happened. A blush spread across her cheeks. She averted her gaze and put down her quill, wrapping her arms around herself protectively.

"Cold?" he asked with mockery in his voice. He knew she'd never speak the truth.

"Yes," she replied, "since you insist on keeping this dungeon so damn bloody freezing."

He actually laughed. She looked alarmed at the sound at first, but soon joined him. This blissful moment of freedom only lasted a few more seconds, but it left a stain on his character forever more. There was no war on, no Dark Lord to answer to. There was only Hermione. There was only limitless leisure time to woo her. And the only thing holding him back was his own thoughts.

The last weekend of winter break passed slowly. She returned to his office both days to get her work done. In the evening before classes resumed they even shared a drink. Their conversations were quick and insignificant. But she was there. She was with him. That was all that mattered.

Chapter Nine

Chapter 9 of 15

same as above

Author's Note: Hi everyone! I am so sorry I have been so long in posting this chapter. I got so involved in real life that I forgot to update. I do hope you all enjoy this chapter. And as soon as it is posted, I will do my best to have Chapter 10 up. Enjoy!

Chapter Nine

"Welcome back from your vacation. Hopefully your knowledge of potions hasn't entirely vacated your small minds, since today you all will be concocting an especially difficult brew. Instructions are on the board."

He paced the aisles, shaking his head and critiquing. It seemed that they all had forgotten what they had learned in the previous semester. He let his mind wander to the sultry, alto tone Hermione's voice adopted when she was sufficiently intoxicated. He wanted nothing more than to have her, to love her. But he had to wait, to build the pressure a little more.

"Fewer mushrooms, Miss Walt," he commanded. "You are suffocating your shredded ginger root."

He paced a little farther, making his lap around the classroom a little broader to include the Slytherins in the back. He left his critiques unspoken, since he still enjoyed showing his House favor. He had been reinstated as the Head of House after Slughorn retired. Snape had returned to the job after a year in rehabilitation from his brush with death. After coming so close to the other side by Voldemort's hand, his views on life had been altered.

He had been told that a dedicated medical student had spent his first six months with him performing the tiresome magic to revive him. He had been in a magical coma for those months and unresponsive. It was only a few days after the student left for further education that he awoke. He was in painful physical therapy for another six months. He walked with a cane for a year after. After that he was almost back to normal.

Things were still excruciatingly awkward between Potter and himself since the final battle, however, mostly because the boy knew about Snape's feelings for Lily Evans. The healers said that while in his coma, Snape's passions had lessened. He believed them, since he had found an especial lackluster in all that he saw. He'd had to read potions journals for days on end while recuperating to be able to teach again. He took advantage of the situation to let his unhealthy obsession for Lily recede into the sands of time. It was time to let go.

The St. Mungo's staff had assigned him to a mental therapist, who gave up on Severus after a bout of rage in which he exploded the man's desk with his wand. Severus believed firmly that if there was any mental healing to be done, he'd do it himself. He had an efficient mind, always had. The Last Battle would be thoroughly forgotten in a few years. At least, it wouldn't trouble him in the daytime.

He was down to a monthly visit to his assigned healer, who was astonished at Severus's recuperation each time he saw his grouchiest patient. Yes, life had improved greatly once he was no longer the fraying rope used for Dumbledore and Voldemort's sinister game of tug-of-war. And since his true side had prevailed, the Wizarding World had improved.

"Professor Snape?" A student called, pulling him out of his reverie. "I'm going to put this bottle on your desk."

"Fine."

He relaxed into his chair behind his desk in his classroom with a groan. The table wobbled, and the bottles covering it clinked together like wine glasses after a wedding toast. He threw his head back and closed his eyes tightly. After the last class of the day, he always found himself exhausted. He was so close to sleep that he thought he was dreaming the soft fingers massaging his temples.

"Yes," he groaned again.

He dreamed that the hands ran over his scalp. Even through his fatigue, goose bumps erupted all up and down his body, especially on his forearms which were exposed by his rolled-up sleeves. He sighed in contentment. *Screw dinner, he thought, I'm going to sleep.*

The hands released him, and the sound of heels clicked around his desk. He opened his eyes.

"Shite," he said aloud when his eyes fell on Professor Granger, reveling in her witnessing his moment of weakness.

"Long day?" she asked. Rather than looking smug, she looked bashful. A blush crept up her neck. He stood and moved to stand across from her.

"Yes," he replied curtly. "Tea?"

She nodded, and he seized the excuse to run to his workroom. He slumped onto the bench and rested his face in his hands, panting. He stood shakily after a few minutes, listening to his breath echo around the room. He thought through every possible repercussion. He thought of his relationship with Draco, his job, his ghostly, lingering Death Eater morals—most of all he thought about her. Was it worth it to let a butterfly like her be committed to a salty, old codger like himself? Was it worth it to put his heart on the line?

"Heart..." he scoffed aloud as he threw three chamomile teabags into a kettle. He threw the kettle on to simmer at low heat and, with the sweeping motion, knocked several measuring spoons to the floor. A left over bottle of birth control potion fell off too, splattering all over the floor and lower cabinets. He let out a muttered stream of cuss words and dropped to his knees to clean up the glass.

"Is everything okay in here?" It was a timid voice. He looked up. She looked so helpless with her arms wrapped around her middle.

"Fine," he muttered, looking away.

"May I make an observation?" she said, clearly intending to voice her opinion regardless of permission.

"You may."

"For someone who tries to be so intimidating, you never seem to hold my gaze for very long." He looked up at her just then, and she took a breath in, fear in her eyes. "Now why is that, Professor?"

He closed his lips tight and stared down at the ground he still crouched on. She moved to crouch next to him, and he wished she hadn't. A piece of glass cracked under her foot. A tentative hand rested on his back. He looked up. He didn't realize that the time in which he turned his head would be the last seconds of his previous life.

Their eyes met. He pushed back all impulses with his famous self-restraint. But as soon as he was pep-talking himself, her soft lips were pressed against his. He raised his hand to the small of her back, hoping this wasn't a dream. Tongues tangled, and the heat built so he couldn't stand it any longer. He pulled her back from him and looked into her half-lidded eyes. He had to make a decision.

Chapter Ten

Chapter 10 of 15

After the wait of a lifetime...

Chapter Ten

"Oh, God," she sighed as he picked her up to her feet. He backed her up to the wall by his workbench and kissed slowly up and down her neck, savoring the naked flavor of her blushing skin.

"Oh, God, oh, God, oh, God," she chanted, the back of her hand pressed against her forehead. He had to grab a handful of her hair to steady himself for the persistent shivers running down his spine. Every time she leaned down to kiss him, he was sure he would die for how close he came to heaven.

Pulling away, she placed a hand on his chest to slow him. *Oh, no*, he thought. *Here comes the rejection.*

"Stop," she whispered, still panting, looking a little woozy. "We can't."

"I know," he said. "Deputy Headmaster and all..."

"No," she said. He looked back at her, challenging himself to hold her gaze. "I just want to take it slow this time."

He nodded in acquiescence and rested his forehead against hers, smelling the sweat on her cheeks. She was a goddess. He was holding her. The feel of her skin, the intricacies of her clothing—they were all things he never could have imagined. He was gathering proof even still that it wasn't a dream. He held both her cheeks in his hands, and he kissed her once more, tenderly, longingly.

Their heartbeats slowed together as they waited. The tension was building though, and he could feel her mood changing to the situation. Her hips gently ground against his from time to time, the movements becoming even bolder as time passed. Her impassioned breath stirred him to a place just short of arousal where he was content to rest until she warmed up to him. He slipped a hand under her shirt to hold the small of her back. He worked his way downward, kneading all the way. He groaned deeply when one of her nudges was accompanied by a soft whimper. It took all of his self-restraint not to just take her through her clothes.

He moved his other hand to her chest. He swirled the pad of his thumb over the rosy tip of her breast. Her breath became animalistic. He felt like he was witnessing something forbidden as she keened back and forth under his touch—just as he had felt looking at her on her first day. He knew she was ready when she wrapped a leg around him, pulling his hips into hers with a deliberate moan.

Not yet, he thought sadistically. *Not until you suffer like I have.* He ground himself into her, the heat radiating from her goading him to lose control. But he kept all his movement prolonged and slow. Her eyes fluttered shut as he opened his mouth to run the tip of his tongue up her neck to where he knew she would shiver, right where he had felt so much heat when he saw her in the hallway. But even he couldn't wait any longer when she put her delicate hands on him. She unbuttoned her shirt quickly and then shucked her bra. *You little vixen.*

He knew he had to do this the right way, so he led her into the next room and laid her down on the bed. He unbuttoned his shirt in record time, and she watched him with hungry eyes. She pulled down her skirt and yanked him onto her, sighing, pushing. She leaned against the headboard.

"Do you really want this?" he asked while embracing her, blessedly unobstructed.

"Yes," she said, looking into his eyes steadily.

But he was not fooled by the strong facade, for he could feel her trembling.

"Hermione," he whispered into her ear. He could feel his own hot breath refracting onto his lips.

"Please," she moaned.

He gave her mercy.

The following weeks were riddled with stolen moments. He kissed her in a corridor once. She nudged his leg at the dinner table. She drank with him. She laughed with him. He spoke with her. They shared their thoughts. But there was never a word about commitment. His noticing this absence shocked him, mostly because before the Last Battle, he disdained all to do with the concept. It wasn't that he thought he needed to voice it for her to know how he felt; it was just that he was unsure about her feelings towards him. It was the typical lover's trap.

One Saturday night, they were reclined on her bed. Both were on the edge of slumber. They had spent the evening as most other free evenings and now basked in the afterglow. His bottle of Herbridian Ale lay discarded on the rug. The white canopy rippled in a slight draft. That was all he saw before his eyes closed.

He didn't know how long he dozed before he heard banging on the door. There were three desperate pounds and then silence, then three more. Hermione sat up. She grabbed a handful of his undershirt while the other hand ran through her tousled hair. She jumped off the bed and pulled her hair into a high ponytail and put on a robe over her nightgown.

Three more pounds resonated through the room, shaking all the sleep out of the lazy lovers. Severus started pulling on his robes. He pulled up his pants and buckled them. He slipped on his shirt, then his frock coat. He fastened every button neatly and primly. He used her mirror to smooth back his hair. And then he turned the corner and hid in her bathroom after giving her a swift kiss on the cheek.

"If you need anything," he whispered urgently before he departed, "call for me."

She nodded solemnly and stepped to the door with a mug of chamomile tea in hand. He waited in the bathroom as he heard the door open. He heard a rumble of low voices. He heard the door shut. There were clicking footsteps. A breath of silence in which every one of his nerves stood at attention. The scraping of wood furniture across stone. Then breaking glass as her mug shattered on the floor.

Author's Note: Hey everybody! After one of those awful, painful fan fic breaks, I have returned to post the rest of this story. I have missed all of my readers, and I hope there are a few of you left! And I can't wait to find out if this chapter made up for my absence. I'm waiting for your reviews with bated breath...

Also, I recently received the sweetest email asking me to continue posting! I have been successfully "haunted" by PotterPlace users. And I got a beautiful banner:



Chapter Eleven

Chapter 11 of 15

Hermione and Snape receive visitors.

Chapter Eleven

He leaned against the door, waiting desperately for her call. His fists were clenched, and he beat the back of his head against the wood. *What the hell is going on out there?* His conscience warred with his chivalry—what if it was a teacher? What if it was McGonagall? But what if it was someone with crueler intentions? The ignorance welled up within him like a great writhing snake. He was in such a state of stress that his old aches and pains from the early Saint Mungo's days were flaring up.

And then the door closed outside. He heard the springs of Hermione's mattress groan as she jumped onto the bed. It was as though she had forgotten he was even there; she didn't call for him until six whole minutes later. He moved back into the room and saw her lying limp on the bed, staring up at the canopy. He sat next to her and smoothed her hair off her forehead.

"Who was it?" he asked gently. She didn't respond. Her lips were closed tight and her eyes vacant. She rolled over and closed her eyes, attempting sleep. He wiggled her shoulder but got no response. He gave up and gave her a soft kiss on the cheek. He crossed to the door swiftly and left without another word.

It was three days before he heard from her again. And even then it was just a moment in time. She stopped him in an empty corridor on their way to lunch to explain that she had been especially busy that week. She promised to 'check in on him' over the weekend. He trusted her.

She honored her promise. She surprised him just as he threw his reading glasses down on his desk for bed. He gave her a weary smile, rubbing his eyes. She knocked his antiquated tiredness right out of him when she crossed the room and pulled him by the collar into a hot kiss. Their bodies touched at each contour. He was especially aware of her pert, braless breasts pressed into his chest. She was still able to revive a youthful, hasty enthusiasm within him in moments despite their having gone through the motions as often as possible in the near month since their first coupling.

She changed their quick pace to slower, maddening, circling movements. Her hips ground sensually against his as though they were dancing. Something had changed since the last time they had been together, but he couldn't put his finger on it. Perhaps it was the time apart. Whatever it was did not matter, for it was working in his favor without a doubt. She was ready and aroused by his touch, even persistent at times. She seemed happiest with her eyes closed, and he saw to it that they fell closed in ecstasy just to please her logical side if nothing else.

He pushed her onto the bed, moaning at the sensation of one of her legs slipping between his. She closed her eyes as he brushed his lips over the sensitive flesh of her sternum. He worked his way through her cleavage, then took a nipple into his mouth—something he had never tried. She gasped in surprise and continued to pull him closer. Encouraged by her response he kissed her on the mouth. She shied away more quickly than usual, so he decided to further things.

"Take me," she sighed.

He needed no further compelling. Her legs still hung off of the bed as they moaned and pushed, pulled and sighed, thrust and bucked. All thought left him as he rode higher and higher into bliss. He flipped her in a quick movement to be on top of him. She was shrieking and dug her fingernails into his chest. He left his severe politeness to moan with her. They held each other as both convulsed in a sin so physical that they lost their personalities and merely became bodies achieving pleasure.

She fell onto him as their breathing slowed, saying words he had never expected to hear.

"I love you."

"What, now?"

She looked up, smiling. She planted a quick kiss on his still open lips.

"That was incredible." She rolled to lie partially on him, with one leg flopped over both of his. "I mean—~~wow~~."

He reached over to absently caress her breast. "I don't think I'll ever get out of bed."

"That would be fun to explain to McGonagall." She smirked. "Severus Snape—sexed to death."

"By none other than the devious sex goddess herself," he quipped. She laughed and did that thing where she cocked her head and intentionally messed up her hair.

"You're pretty sexy yourself, Professor."

"Come again?" he joked, pushing her back on the bed and delving his hand between her thighs.

"You—" she moaned, quickly forgetting herself. "Sexiest man alive..."

"That's right," he said, his teeth grazing her ear as he whispered sharply into it. "Don't forget it."

The following morning he did, regrettably, roll out of bed. She was already gone, and had tidied any evidence of her presence. But her passion-induced declaration plagued him so heavily throughout the day that it was as though he was giving her a piggyback ride everywhere he went. He found it hard to concentrate until he had a sobering encounter with an unexpected visitor.

"Good Evening," Draco said as he strode past Severus into his office. "It's looking clean in here."

"How are you, Draco?" Severus asked cordially, fetching the kettle of tea that had just begun to boil.

"Fine," he responded, fingering through the bookshelf, "Never been better, as a matter of fact."

"Tea?" Severus offered. Draco accepted a mug.

"I'm afraid, however," he began, "this isn't strictly a social calling."

Severus reclined into his seat, blowing the steam off of the top of his mug.

"The Headmistress seems to have appointed me as her errand boy for the evening," he said, handing an envelope across the table.

Severus recognized the logo in the corner of the heavy envelope and tossed it to the side of his desk.

"It's actually quite pertinent that you open that now," Draco said. "And do read aloud. I don't come down here to watch you frown over a confidential letter."

Severus scowled and opened the letter. He acquiesced and began to read.

"Professor Severus Snape:

"I contact you with news of the gravest importance. We have been running some tests on your Magic Fingerprint in our labs and we have some results that need your attention immediately. It seems that we will need to implement a new course of medication to keep your condition in check. Please make an appointment to come to my office at your earliest convenience.

"Warmest Regards, Healer McCormick."

"Gods," Draco said and whistled. "Just when you thought you had that monkey off your back."

"Dark Lord's dead and he's still torturing me." Severus chuckled. Draco laughed nervously, unsure of how to handle any situation that wasn't light or sarcastic.

Severus penned a quick response listing times that would work for him and set it aside for later. He really dreaded visiting Saint Mungo's.

Author's Note: I'm back with another chapter! I realize this one was slightly sparse of action, so I shall be uploading the next one as soon as I can. Still looking forward to those reviews... :)

Chapter Twelve

Chapter 12 of 15

Severus visits Healer McCormick and reflects on Dumbledore's absence.

Chapter Twelve

"Professor," the Healer said as Severus entered his office. The man was the leader of the wing, hence left all bumbling and inadequacy at the door.

"Healer," Severus greeted, shaking his hand firmly.

"So," he began, looking at his chart while Severus's eyes wandered over the doctor's various framed special program degrees. "It seems that you'll be taking heavier doses of the current potion and adding in a few more."

"What's wrong with me exactly?" Severus asked, frowning his brow against a creeping sense of vulnerability.

The Healer took a breath then exhaled heavily. He tapped his fingers on his desk. "It's always hard to deliver news like this."

"Hit me," Severus said, utterly dead-pan.

"The infection has spread to your stomach and has started to eat away at some muscle tissue." He paused, grimaced, and continued, "We're really just staving off death now."

Severus raised his eyebrows, but the tension from his grimace hadn't yet subsided from his features. "That's what they said last time."

"I'm truly sorry for any lapses in the system, Professor—"

Severus held up a hand. He had been dealing with Healers too long to sit through the spiel. "I didn't expect to live forever."

The man opened his mouth as if he were about to speak, but thought better of it and offered a bland smile instead. "Well, the good news is that you can continue to teach. But the bad news is that Headmistress McGonagall may soon have difficulty keeping you employed if the disease continues to get worse."

"What is it I have again?" he asked. "Some ridiculous acronym to be sure..."

"Well, yes," the Healer said, ashamed. "We call it Lethal Curse Survivor's Disorientation. We saw a lot of it after You-Know-Who fell—lots of grazes with death that year." He chuckled nervously, his hands jumping as he said the word 'death.' He averted his eyes.

People didn't seem to know how to act around Snape anymore. Pity mixed with fear, awe with respect, so that people were left with a jumble of emotions that no one could make sense of. Maybe this new situation made life more convenient. Maybe it made it just a little harder.

He left the man's office with a residual feeling of gloom, but not much more. He had faced his own mortality long ago. But every time he reassured himself that he didn't care, Hermione's face popped into mind; her plumped lips had formed the words 'I love you,' despite their oddly casual fling. Just thinking about it was dizzying.

He was summoned by McGonagall's Patronus to her office as soon as he set foot on campus. He rolled his eyes, but walked to his favorite set of gargoyles regardless of his stronger inclination to put a pot of tea on the stove and read a few articles in the most recent *Potions Weekly*. He stepped onto the revolving spiral staircase, and his thoughts turned to the late Professor Dumbledore.

He hadn't thought about him since the summer away from school. Snape had spent the summer immersed in Dumbledore's library at his vacation home. Severus was surprised that he had been summoned to the reading of Dumbledore's will, and was even more surprised when he received Dumbledore's lake house rather than a worthless trinket. But over that summer, thoughts of his mentor were passing and rarely penetrated his hours of peaceful solitude.

Now, it was a persistent buzzing that made him wish that he would find his old mentor at the top of these stairs rather than McGonagall. Dumbledore surely had more

insight into slowly deteriorating until one was on the brink of death. Karma had an odd sense of humor.

"Enter," Minerva called.

"Good evening, Headmistress," Snape greeted as he sat down. She nodded, her lips set in a severe line.

"How did it go?"

He laughed in the face of her concern. It was childish of him, and he should have known better, but in that moment he needed something to break the tension. "I'm slowly dying. But who isn't?"

"That's not funny." The paintings above them scoffed with her.

"Minerva," he said, "I can't afford to get myself worked up over this. I have a job to take care of. I have errands to see to. We have a school to run, here."

"You've always been so stoic," she responded accusatorily.

"True to form, Headmistress," he said, catching a glimpse of Dumbledore snoozing against the side of his frame. *He would have changed the subject.* Severus thought bitterly. *He would have understood.*

"You are dismissed," she said wearily, exasperated with him. He nodded his appreciation and descended into the dungeons.

~

Valentine's Day arrived with disconcerting swiftness. It was not his least favorite time of year simply because he had to break up so many couples, nor due to the pink confetti blasted at him by Peeves. No, he hated Valentine's Day because he suffered umpteen slights on his frigidity. First it was Sprout with a borderline lewd comment on his cold bed, and then it was Draco with several tasteless jokes about his nether regions. He smirked and bore it, satisfied by the fact that none of them knew that each night he seduced the castle's resident butterfly into the darkness and could make her cry out in ecstasy with an effortless flex of his long, elegant fingers.

Author's Note: Hello, everyone! I know, it has been absolutely *forever* since I last updated this story. I have been totally consumed by a new writing project that requires a lot of attention.

If you're curious about what's taking up my attention outside of the fan fiction world, come visit my blog inviteluxury.com

Aside from that, I am so happy to be back on track with this story and the whole fan fiction world! I've missed you all and hope to hear a bit from you in the comments.

-Lev

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter 13 of 15

A game of spin the bottle releases some tension...

Chapter Thirteen

It was a tranquil kind of party on the surface, but tension ran high beneath. Hermione and Severus were at opposite ends of the staff lounge, shooting each other the occasional secretive smile over their beverages. Severus was deep in conversation with Septima Sinistra about magical theory. Draco Malfoy sat on his own, staring into his drink. Hermione, to Severus's great chagrin, was engaged in conversation with Lucius Malfoy. She tilted her head back in generous laughter from time to time, and Severus noticed Lucius watching the way her shirt inched downwards with the shaking of her torso.

Upon considering it, Severus realized that everyone present was single, well, technically not. But Lucius hardly counted as married, as he had proved over and over again in their war days. There were Septima, Severus, Hermione, Draco, Rolanda, Lucius, and Lucius's Mistress. They had congregated as the only people who weren't ready for bed that night. And they all planned to stay up a little later. Minerva trusted them enough to keep up appearances. But Severus, having seen Professor Granger drunk, wasn't sure that trust was entirely deserved.

Hermione plucked a drained bottle off of the table and held it up. Draco smirked at the skin her shirt exposed, and Severus imagined clasping his hands around the boy's pale esophagus in a weak moment of fury. She was saying something to those who congregated about her.

"What is that objectionable girl doing now?" Septima asked snidely, taking a prim sip of her drink.

"Loosening up these prigs, that's what." He laughed, rolling up his sleeves as he walked towards the circle they had made around the bottle.

"Lucius Malfoy is hardly a 'prig' from my experience," she said, a hint of pride in her tone.

He raised an eyebrow as he sank to his knees. She sat beside him and pressed her thigh into his. He saw a flash of jealousy in Hermione's gaze. Holding her eyes, he pressed his leg back into Septima's, challenging her.

Draco placed the bottle in the middle of the circle. "Someone spins the bottle. They give two options to the one it lands on, Truth or Dare. We know how it goes from there."

He spun the bottle and it landed on Septima, the most unwilling of them all. Draco laughed, but Lucius looked sobered.

"Septima," he began with a wicked grin spreading across his devilishly handsome features. "Take the neck of the bottle into your mouth as far as it can go."

"I thought you said I could choose," she said huffily. "But you'd doubtlessly ask me something equally revolting for 'truth.' Here goes nothing." She then took it in three or so inches and then gagged. The men laughed disbelievingly. Lucius laughed loudest of all.

"There," she said, embarrassed. She spun the bottle and it landed on Camille.

"Truth or Dare," Septima said, narrowing her eyes. Lucius responded for her. Dare. His eyes glittered.

"I dare you to kiss Lucius." She clearly didn't understand the devious intentions of the rest of the circle. Lucius translated with amusement, and the two dove into a searing, passionate kiss. There was a collective sigh when they separated. Camille reached forward and gleefully spun the bottle. It landed on Hermione. Camille smirked. Lucius said 'truth or dare.'

"Truth," Hermione responded, eliciting a frustrated groan from Draco.

Camille whispered to Lucius who laughed. He then turned to Hermione and translated as Camille watched, intrigued. "Camille dares you to tell us if you've had a sexual dream about anyone in this room. And if you have, she wants to know who it was and what happened." Rolanda toasted her in appreciation.

Hermione met Severus's eyes tentatively. She bit her lip and looked around the room. "Once, when I fell asleep in sixth-year Potions, I had a dream about Professor Snape."

He subtly licked his lips at her, punctuating the gesture with a quick raise of his eyebrows.

"We did it..." she sighed, "...on his desk."

"How creative, Professor Granger," Snape said. Lucius was translating to Camille, who looked disappointed. She said something to Lucius.

"My, God," Lucius said, exasperated. "I can't believe she's making me translate this." He sighed, glanced at Severus, and continued. "Camille says that if she had been dreaming about Professor Snape, she would have been much more adventurous."

Severus lifted his glass to her, and she winked at him. Hermione spun the bottle aggressively and it landed on Draco. She rolled her eyes, unwilling to address him directly.

"Truth or Dare?" she asked, staring past him indignantly.

"Dare," he responded, rather roguishly if you asked Severus.

"I dare you to kiss Septima. Mouth open."

Draco smirked and crawled towards her. He kneeled and pulled her into his lap. She wrapped her arms around his neck. He eased his lips onto hers, and Severus was so close that he saw Draco's tongue tracing her lips. They plunged into a deep kiss. Their bodies were actually *undulating*. Her hands ran through his hair, and she whimpered as he caught her bottom lip in between his teeth.

"Okay," Hermione said, a blush creeping over her cheeks. Severus caught her eye and cocked his head to the side.

They separated, clearly having worked off a little excess tension. Draco smoothed his messy hair and spun the bottle again. Luck had it that it was Severus's turn for humiliation. Draco asked the question, and Severus responded with the same answer Hermione had given. Draco took a moment to think.

"Well," he said. "Since Professor Granger has shared her deluded little crush on you with us, why don't you tell us if you've ever dreamt about her?"

"Never." Severus responded, stone-faced. But his eyes caught Hermione's and he quickly dove into her mind, imprinting images of their sweaty bodies moving together on his work bench. She averted her eyes, stifling a grin.

Draco was crestfallen. He obviously had hoped to expose a secret. Snape spun the bottle and it landed on Lucius. They exchanged questions and responses. Lucius asked for a dare.

"I dare you..." Severus began, casting his eyes around the room, "...to kiss Septima. Now I'm off to bed." He stepped out of the room before he could witness anything forbidden.

Author's Note: Hello everyone! I hope that you have been enjoying the new chapters. I have really appreciated the wonderful reviews you have left.

Also, if you're interested, I'd like to invite you to come read my blog inviteluxury.com

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter 14 of 15

Severus witnesses something forbidden.

He took the long route back to his room, passing by Hermione's living quarters. He paced back past the staff room and heard that the party had adjourned. Satisfied, he continued down the hallway. He was sure everyone had gone to bed, but lo and behold, he heard rustling in an abandoned classroom. Intrigued and painfully aroused, he wordlessly cast a shadow spell on himself and slipped through the ajar door. He pressed himself back into the shadows of the room and saw Camille sitting on one of the desks. And then he noticed Draco, pacing in his boxers before her. She had plucked a feather out of the sunhat she had been wearing earlier and was brushing it over his exposed chest. *Well I walked past at the right time* Severus thought.

Draco turned and faced her. He attached himself to her neck with youthful impatience, sucking her until she squealed something in French. He drew back and admired his love bite. He clearly didn't care about what his father thought. *But maybe his Father consents*, Severus mused, the thought somehow arousing him further. Camille swayed under Draco's ministrations for a moment, but then switched their positions. She began to unbutton her red dress. She reached into her exposed black bra and grasped at her breasts, letting him watch just how much she didn't need him. She pouted at him as she unclasped her bra and let it fall off of her shoulders. She then slid her dress off of her hips, exposing fishnet stockings held up by straps that ran up to her underwear. He moaned and desire shot through Severus as he observed. *So that's how they do it in France...*

She pulled off her stockings and moved towards him. She pulled down his boxers, grinning madly, knowing just how beautiful she was when the moonlight framed her face. She then, surprising Severus so much that he nearly gasped from the shadows, encircled Draco's sex with her fishnets and proceeded to jack him off with her stocking. He keened back in forth in a manner that reminded Severus of Hermione. The movement made shadows play across his muscular chest. He was making low groaning noises in his throat, and she moaned with him, just to push him farther towards the edge. That woman knew how to please a man.

She threw aside the stockings and pressed her bare hand against him, moving quickly and skillfully enough that it could have been his own hand bringing him to completion. She ran her tongue over his cheek and that was what undid him. He came, crying out in a note that was an octave or so higher than his speaking voice. Severus was so turned on that he let his head rest against the wall as he bit his lip to keep from screaming with his godson.

But Camille was hardly done with him. Seeing the domineering hunger in her eyes made Severus want to free himself from his hiding place and fuck her into senselessness. But he decided to wait, resolving that all this visual stimulation would make his next encounter with Hermione that much more incredible. He looked up and saw Camille pulling down her underwear, smirking at Draco's renewed arousal. She pulled the fishnets back up, facing her perfectly sculpted buttocks towards Draco as she made sure the little bows on the stockings were over her knees. He grinned.

She then mounted him without preamble, teasing his lips with her nimble tongue. He hooked his thumbs under the tops of her fishnets. She moaned seductively into his mouth, loudly and without restraint. Severus grabbed the cool edge of a desk and leaned his head back again. She pulled Draco's hair back and was sucking his neck as she came. Severus couldn't take any more, so he sidled out of the room while their heaving breaths could still mask the sound of his footsteps.

He pushed open the door to Hermione's bedroom. She looked up from the book she was reading and smiled. But she wouldn't lead tonight. He pushed himself on top of her and she reciprocated willingly. He was in no mood for foreplay, no mood for his shy, schoolboy approach. He was taking no prisoners.

He pushed her nightgown up above her breasts before he pulled off his pants and underwear. He massaged her skin to get her ready. And then, the moment he had been longing for all night. He pushed into her, images of Camille's fishnets and Draco's neck filled his mind as he pulled at her, groaned into her mouth, pulled back her hair as he flew higher and higher.

"You have teased me for so long," he managed to hiss through gritted teeth. "You have tortured me into nights of sleeplessness. You make me so insane I can hardly keep from taking you every time I see you."

She gasped as they reached the edge together. Even as the initial shock faded into tiredness, they moved together, exploring each other, facing each other as equals. He wasn't afraid of her anymore.

Valentine's Day marked a distinct change in their relationship. She stopped being aloof. She gave up on the dramatic charades wherein she left for weeks at a time. He was contented with having her come to him for advice; he was more than contented with claiming back his role as the dominant partner. But he did notice a nervousness about her. Her eyes hardly held his as steadily as they used to. She was prone to changes as fear seized her like a tempest. She was fragile and hardly the sturdy woman he knew her to be. But he shrugged it off, remembering her during the Last Battle, remembering spending bits of time with her over the years. Maybe she was trying to find her identity. And when she did he'd still be right there waiting.

Chapter Fifteen & Epilogue

Chapter 15 of 15

The end of our story (and a little more).

The end of Winter brought with it a renewed vigor in Severus's relationship with Draco. One evening after dinner, after they had been meeting regularly for several weeks, Draco asked him why they had drifted apart. Severus hardly knew how to answer that without giving anything away, so he shrugged and refilled both of their glasses.

"You know," Draco admitted, "I did have a thing with Professor Granger."

"A thing?" Severus repeated.

"Yeah, it was quick, childish..." He shrugged. "I think we'll be fine now, though."

"What's changed?" he asked. "A month ago you two never spoke."

Draco got a serene smile on his face. One, Severus regrettably realized, that was not unlike the serene look he was overcome with as he came. "I don't know. Maybe we've just given up."

"So, how is your father?" Severus inquired, changing the subject.

"Fine," Draco responded. "Having some issues with Camille but that's hardly my concern." The boy had a knack for acting nonchalant.

"I enjoyed Camille very much. I do hope they work it out."

Draco scowled. Oh, there were so many secrets. They reclined into their chairs in silence, each man lost in his own thoughts.

"Well I'm off," Draco said abruptly, standing from his chair.

They shook hands and Snape watched him go, bewilderment in his eyes.

The following afternoon, he was roused from work on a potion by several light raps on his door. He called out an invitation to enter, and Professor Sprout was instantly leaning against the doorframe, looking dirt-smudged and outdoorsy as usual. He put a quick stasis charm on his potion and faced her, hands on his hips.

"I think you'll want to see your Chamomile plant," she grinned. "It's miraculous, actually."

He acquiesced, mostly because of his soft spot for his ingredient supplier and occasional confidante. They strolled out of the castle together, and he asked about some other crops he had a stake in. She explained that the greenhouses were doing quite well, but her hybrid tomatoes were being infested by a fly. He offered to brew her some pesticide and she responded that that would be lovely.

The day was warmer than it should have been. The sunlight was waning to the west and the forest took on a misty, enchanted glow. He inhaled the fragrant air and it brought him peace. They made their way down to the greenhouse furthest from the castle, and her hand stilled on the key as it entered the lock.

"What?"

"This was locked when I left," she said, confused. "Either I'm getting old or those randy little seventh years are in here again."

Severus laughed. "Have you caught them?"

"No," she scowled. "I only come back to find my pots moved, my windows steamed up, the floor in a disarray of pulled weeds..."

"How revolting," he said delicately.

He entered the room though, and sure enough, the greenhouse walls were fogged up in several places. Severus drew a finger through the sweat, then wiped it on his robes, sickened. And then they rounded a corner and his sickness turned to stomach-turning, heart attack-inducing shock.

He stilled, seeing Hermione in the embrace of none other than his godson. They were both barely clothed and her legs were wrapped around his hips. Hermione's eyes opened a fraction and when they landed on Severus, she let out a scream. He stood rooted to the spot, staring blankly ahead. Sprout's watering can clattered to the ground as she saw what had been happening.

And then Hermione was pulling on her clothes and Draco was sheepishly smoothing back his hair. He clearly didn't understand the scope of what had just happened, but Hermione was trembling violently, intently avoiding eye contact as she buttoned her blouse. Severus didn't care particularly what she was doing. He only stared blankly ahead, still rooted to the spot.

Sprout let out a stream of foul words, shaking her finger at them and telling them about the honor they had to uphold. Hermione's eyes sought Severus's, but he didn't give her any mercy. He stood looking at where she had just been, with his mouth in a tight line. He didn't move until Sprout was shaking him, and the two other professors were fully clothed.

In another dimension, where people could still speak and feel, Sprout was telling him that they needed to go to the Headmistress. Immediately. They were, as she recounted at least three times, under contract to report the lewd behavior. So their mismatched party began to make their way up the path Professor Granger had taken after their exchange over chamomile months ago. He followed Pomona up the stairs, noticing with an odd lightness the place where he had once wantonly kissed Professor Granger's neck, only fifteen minutes after the students' curfew had passed.

They all made their way up the spiral staircase to the Headmistress's office and Severus felt his feet root heavily to his stair as he wished with all his might for the counsel Dumbledore might have been able to offer him. But when he opened his eyes from a painfully generous blink, he saw that he was still in another world...the world where Hermione's confession of love was shite dripping off of his shoes.

Sprout pulled Draco by the ear into the Headmistress's office, as though he were still a boy rather than a man...a man who should have been able to make wise decisions. McGonagall stood and removed her reading glasses, her gaze finally landing on Severus. She asked him what happened, but he was still unable to answer, simply averting his eyes and shaking his head. So Pomona happily took the initiative and told the Headmistress what they had seen. There was a breath in which his eyes wandered to Hermione's. She expected pity from him, but he simply pursed his lips and raised a cruel eyebrow.

"Certainly you would agree, Headmistress," he began when he regained his voice, "That it is quite unseemly for two professors of this institution to be running around campus like randy little teenagers, and defacing school property, no less."

"Yes, Headmistress," Pomona said, the crossing of her arms accompanied by the jingling of heavy keys. "A few of my pots were destroyed."

"What on earth were you thinking, Hermione?" The fury in the woman's voice burned through even Severus's icy mask. "We clearly know what ~~you~~ were thinking, Malfoy."

"Headmistress," Professor Granger began, but she was silenced by Minerva's quavering hand.

"According to school policy, Professor Snape will have twenty-four hours to consider submitting his visual memory for review by the school board."

"What about me?" Pomona asked, not wanting to be left out.

"As you told me, Severus was the only one whosaw anything." She was suddenly weary, rubbing her temples. "You will testify at the board meeting."

She looked appeased. They were dismissed and Severus practically flew out of the room, eager to get back to brewing his potion.

"Severus!" Professor Granger's hoarse cry ripped through the air as she chased after him. "Severus, please! Wait!"

He wheeled around to face her, standing so close that he towered over her, looking down with unbridled vehemence into her shining eyes. "Professor Granger, you are a teacher. I must request that you control yourself in public."

And then he left. He was walking past the Great Hall when he ran into a group of boys getting ready to set off a Weasley firecracker. They were in Gryffindor, so he deducted thirty points from each of them. He didn't have the energy to smirk, so he merely turned around and started down the corridor to the dungeons.

"What is he on about?" he heard one of them say.

Without even turning around, he called out, "an additional ten points from Gryffindor for testing my patience, Mister Gregory."

He heard the boy kick something before he rounded a corner. He was in a cold part of the castle, reveling in the absence of anything that resembled joy. He gave the word at the painting that guarded his quarters and fell back onto his bed. He slept: a dreamless, black sleep.

He was awakened by knocking at his door. *Always the knocking*, he grumbled. He stood and discovered he had a pounding headache. *Maybe it was all a dream*, he mused. *I have the oddest dreams after I drink too much. Or maybe I inhaled some excess fumes from that potion* He moved to the door, almost half-convincing himself that it was Pomona, come to show him his chamomile plant.

He opened the door wide, and instead of seeing the friendly features of his old friend, his eyes fell on the wretched sight of Professor Granger. Her face was red and puffy, and her eyes were watery.

"Severus, may I speak with you?" she asked, fiddling with a handkerchief she had balled up in her fist.

"I don't remember authorizing you to be on such familiar terms with me, Professor Granger," he stated bluntly.

"May I come in, Professor?" Her voice cracked over his title as her breath shook.

"You have a lot of pluck to come down here," he said as he strolled back to his desk, leaving the door open. He sunk into his chair looking everywhere in the room but at her. She began to plead her case.

"Look," she began, wringing her hands, "I know what I did was wrong. I know that I shouldn't have led you on for as long as I have... Oh, won't you just look at me?"

And that was when he took the leverage and gave her a piercing stare straight in the eye. "Does your word mean nothing to you?" he asked quietly, carefully, giving off the impression for that moment that he wasn't blindingly angry. He held her gaze as she responded.

"My... word?" She looked utterly confused. *Oh, you twit.*

"Yes, Professor," he said with a smirk. "Well, you probably won't keep that title much longer..."

"Severus!" He lost control at the sound of his given name, and all the pain rushed into him at once...Draco's hands tangled in her hair, weeks and weeks of lies. He stood up, breathing heavily.

"How many times do I have to ask you to have some respect?" he roared, pushing everything on his desk off of it. "You led me on for weeks without a single word." He accentuated this by hurling a beaker full of acid against the wall, satisfied with the way she gasped in terror as the substance bubbled against the stone. "You have made me lose control of everything I've worked to be." He kicked his desk hard, in such a rage that he didn't feel the pain in his foot. She jumped back in her chair, hardly daring to look at him. "And now you ask me for forgiveness? Ha!" The laugh was bitter and sudden, mirthless and freezing.

"I..." she began, trembling.

"You what?"

"I think you might want to hear me out, Professor," she said, trying to look strong. He crossed his arms and waited. She took a breath. "Draco and I have been seeing each other since before Valentine's Day."

"What?" he asked, looking over at his shoulder at the calendar to verify that they were, indeed, approaching the spring equinox.

"I always thought it was a one-time thing and I never thought to tell you."

"You never thought," he repeated quietly. "That's the problem with you, Professor. You never think." He sunk back into his chair. "Clearly, book knowledge does not constitute common sense."

"I was really confused," she said tearfully, her chest heaving like she was three years old. "I didn't know what to think. And then Draco said he loved me, that he was really serious this time."

"When did he say that?" Severus asked, realizing the weight he suddenly could dump on her.

"Day before Valentine's Day," she said, a little, proud smile coming over her face. "He said he decided that he could be monogamous with me. So I decided to see what would happen. Then it just kept lasting, so I didn't know how to tell you. It just snowballed ahead of me."

"Would you like to hear a bit of trivia, Miss Granger?" he asked delicately. She looked at him incredulously, as though he might have just asked her if he could have a bite of her hand. At her silence, he refused to balk. So he plowed ahead, a sinister grin playing across his lips. "On the evening of February the fourteenth, as it happens, I was strolling through the hallway and I heard some odd rustling coming from a classroom not far from the staff room where our little party was held." She looked on in sickened intrigue. His tone remained light, but his eyes were stony and cruel, fixed on every twitch that played across her face. "And I happened upon a couple getting quite friendly with each other. You can imagine my surprise when I saw that Draco was, ahem, having his way with none other than his father's mistress, Camille. Delightful woman, don't you think?" He adored nothing more than the pain he saw in her eyes. *Revel in it, girl. I haven't even shown you the end yet.*

"Camille?" she asked.

"Surely you remember her?" Severus said, tapping his fingers on the desk, "Particularly vivacious, friendly French girl."

"Yes," she said, looking down at her lap. There was a moment of silence in which he felt a twinge of guilt. But he swatted it away, not unlike a mosquito.

"Well," she said, having lost all her momentum. "I just came to ask you not to submit your memory tomorrow. I just want to be a good teacher, Professor. I think I can be a good teacher."

"I find it utterly delightful that you think you can demand a favor from me."

"Well, not demand..."

"I've been given twenty-four hours to weigh my decision. If the scales lean in your favor..." He trailed off.

She looked at him hopefully.

"Well, to be perfectly honest, your future is looking dismal from here," he said, slightly snide.

She looked crestfallen when she finally had the grace to shuffle out and leave him in peace. But that was her problem now. Well, hers and that of her little blond boyfriend.

~

It was a covert, low publicity hearing held in the Headmistress's office. Snape was called in before the lovers were. The Headmistress's desk had been transfigured into a long table for the panel to sit at. Minerva was in the middle. Severus recognized the rest as prominent parents in the Wizarding community. There was also one teacher, Professor Sinistra. Severus wondered who she would side with...whether her propriety or passion would win in the end.

He took a seat before them, folding his arms over his chest. Minerva opened the floor.

"Now, this is nasty business we have to attend to today. But do not let the filthiness of the content put you in a rush. We have to handle this matter with the lawfulness and patience that befits our level of responsibility." With the speech out of the way, she turned her stoic gaze on Severus. "Now, Professor Snape's memory could close this case quickly and efficiently, because, under the school legislature, we truly only need his evidence and another testimony if he plans to surrender his thoughts into the Pensieve. But if that fails, we do have an eager testifier awaiting my call." There was an uneasy snicker as their minds turned to Pomona, waiting impatiently to explain how she had been wronged.

"So, Severus," she began coldly. "Have you decided to make this process easier on all of us?"

He took a breath.

"I have, Headmistress." He promptly walked forward and pulled the memory out of his temple, feeling a soothing cool break through the sweat that had gathered there.

He waited for McGonagall to play it, but first she called the two young Professors into the room. The blonde one's head hung as he stared at his shoes. They sat beside each other, but, surprisingly, Professor Granger stared straight ahead. She was collected and cool, a total transformation from the whimpering basket case that had been in Severus's office just the previous day. The face she had on was not unlike the expression she had been wearing when she went in for her OWL exams.

"Do either of you have anything to say before we survey Professor Snape's memory?" Minerva asked.

"I do, Headmistress." Professor Granger said. *This ought to be good.* Severus thought, glancing over at her.

"Go right ahead," she permitted.

"I have done something terrible. I've shamed the school and my reputation. But this doesn't have to be a witch burning, does it?" The panel looked about at each other questioningly. Even Severus furrowed his eyebrows. "I just want to ask of you that whatever scrap of dignity I have may remain intact."

"Continue, Professor."

"You certainly don't have to acquiesce, but my request is that you permit me to finish out the semester for the sake of my students and then resign without making a scandal. I think we can all agree that Hogwarts has tolerated quite enough bad publicity in the past." The paintings about the walls nodded in approval. Even Draco looked up from his lap in wonder at her quick thinking.

"That sounds perfectly reasonable to me, Professor," the Headmistress said as the panel nodded with her. "But what of Professor Malfoy?"

"I suppose to stave off the press, he could do the same." *Ah hah*, Severus thought smugly, *a loophole in your brilliant little plan.*

"You expect me to let you two remain in the same castle after all this?" she asked, aghast.

"Well, I have to admit that during the past twenty-four hours I've really only considered how to get myself out of this pickle. I assumed Professor Malfoy might be able to take care of himself." No one missed the bite in her remark.

"I suppose, then," Minerva began with a secretive smile to her fellow Gryffindor. "I suppose that Mister Malfoy will have to wait out the panel's decision." The change in title for Malfoy heavily foreshadowed what the decision regarding his future would be.

There was a moment in which they all gauged whether she was showing reason or favoritism. Reason won out.

"You are dismissed, Professor Granger." Then the girl bounced out with a huge grin plastered across her face.

~*~

The school year came to a close and Professor Granger took her leave with the students. Severus spent his last June afternoon at Hogwarts cleaning up his classroom upstairs. He put all the Defense textbooks back on the shelves and cleaned all the wooden surfaces by hand. He was blissfully calm ever since the tumultuous beginning of Spring. He and Professor Granger had maintained a cold silence. But, thankfully, he stayed on relatively good terms with his godson. After he vacated his job mid-year, Severus took over smoothly. The students were told that Professor Malfoy had gone away due to a health condition. The girls were visibly dismayed, but the boys couldn't have been happier. And no one was any bit the wiser than the others that their professor had actually been driven out by an embarrassing scandal.

Severus was planning on visiting the Malfoys in the French countryside, where the tension between Camille and the Malfoy junior would undoubtedly be so palpable that Severus might not even notice his allergies. This contented him somewhat. But before leaving he had one last bit of business to attend to. He cleaned every last corner of his classroom and had all his things packed up safely before embarking on his last errand of the school year.

He nearly bumped into Professor Slughorn on his way up the stairs, for he was so involved in rehearsing what he would say that he was hardly aware of his surroundings. The blunder was fixed with a quick apology and Severus was on his way again, muttering under his breath until he approached the gargoyles and spiral staircase that led into the Headmistress's office.

He knocked thrice and heard a call to enter. He took a deep breath and pushed the door open. Minerva sat at her desk. She smiled when he came in. She relaxed against her high-backed armchair and gestured for him to sit across from her.

"How are you, Severus?" she asked. "Glad the year's over?"

"More than you realize, Minerva," he said.

"Something leads me to believe this is not a social call," she said, smirking a little.

"Yes, well," he said, thinking over his rehearsed speech. "I've come to ask you a favor of sorts."

"Go right ahead, Professor," she invited, concern working its way into the corners of her sagging eyes.

"After the year's excitement, I've been under a lot of stress. I've served this school for a long time. And I think it's time..." He paused *Did it always sound so abrupt?* "I think my time has come to resign."

She gave him a faint smile, not seeming the least bit fazed. "I saw this coming, Severus. It was a hard year for you. I know that the little issue between Professor Granger and Mister Malfoy troubled you."

"Well it was hardly that..."

"Oh, don't lie to me, Severus," she said abruptly. "I'm old. I've seen infatuation a thousand times over. You and Professor Granger had something of a rapport. If you had had a little more time you two could have had a real relationship. I saw your cunning when you looked at her."

"I..." he stammered, bewildered.

"Don't look so shocked, for God's sake," Minerva said, laughing rather than sounding stern. "I was actually hoping you two would end up together. It's really too bad that nothing happened."

He chose that moment to look down at his lap. She interpreted his silence to be bashfulness and that suited him just fine.

"I hear it's not too late, you know," she said. "And after your resignation, you're a free man. You can do whatever you please."

He looked up from his lap with a faint smile. Her suggestion didn't surprise him, though, for he had already made up his mind on the matter.

Epilogue

Years after his peaceful resignation from Hogwarts, Severus Snape hardly noticed the change of semesters anymore. In fact, on that crisp September morning, he only noticed with slight nostalgia that it was the start of term. He had received a letter from his godson and his godson's delightful wife telling him that it was Scorpius's first day. If it had not been for Draco and Camille's letter, he might not have noticed that September had come. He was so secluded out in his lake house.

He strolled out onto the deck with a cup of tea in one hand and his cane in the other. He noted with some surprise that he hadn't really left the lake for a few weeks. He was so content in the place where his old mentor had once lived out his summers. He found an inner peace that everyone noticed, especially his doctor. The cane was mostly precautionary at that point. And, happily, he was down to taking two potions a night for his joints and heart. Life was serene and easy as he spent his days working on a spell and potion book including all his originals and variations.

He hardly ever had visitors, so when he heard a tapping on the door that evening, he assumed it was another pesky woodland animal. But he walked across the room anyway to be sure, since he was feeling particularly lonely that night. He opened the door, not really expecting anyone, so when he saw the face of a woman he hadn't spoken to in about fifteen years, his cane clattered to the floor and he had to grab hold of the door frame to keep himself from falling with it.

"Hello, Professor," she said.

"Hello, Miss Granger."

He leaned down to snatch his cane off of the floor.

"Well," she said once he had assumed his full height. "I'm actually Mrs. Weasley now."

"Oh," he said. "My mistake."

"So are you going to invite me in?" she asked, tucking a stray bit of hair into her loose bun.

He gave a noncommittal half-smile and then nodded. "Won't you come in?"

She laughed and stepped past him. She tilted her head back, casting her eyes into the rafters. He noted that she looked incredible for a mother of two. Her body looked almost the same as the days when she had worked at Hogwarts so, so long ago. She paced the open room, over the rug in front of the sofa, and then into the kitchen and around the dining table. It was all located in a large room, which was usually abundant in sunlight. But in the waning hours of the day, everything was bathed in a surreal shade of pink.

She apparently had finished her examination, for she turned to face him expectantly. He suggested that they sit, and she sunk into his favorite section of the sofa. He leaned his cane against the coffee table, feeling positively ancient as he lowered himself into a rocking chair. She waited happily, seeming not even to notice his wince.

"It's so beautiful here," she commented, smiling. She didn't seem to feel the least bit awkward.

"It is," he agreed redundantly, still a little disconcerted by her presence. "I apologize if I seem a little blunt here, but I'm not quite connecting the dots."

"Pardon?"

"I mean, we haven't spoken in a decade and a half, and here you are at my door, commenting on my living arrangements."

She laughed and put her forehead in her hands. "This must seem so odd." She peered up at him through her fingers before laughing at herself and leaning back against the sofa.

"A little out of place, yes," he smiled.

"I was at Platform Nine and Three Quarters today," she admitted, as though this might explain everything. When it clearly didn't suffice, she continued. "I was thinking about you. I mean, it was totally out of the blue. And it just felt wrong that I haven't spoken to you in so many years."

"Well it's understandable that we haven't spoken," he said quietly, casting his gaze onto the floor.

"Yes," she pressed on, "about that."

"What about it?" he wondered, meeting her gaze again.

"I never really got to explain myself."

"Well there wasn't much to explain." A coldness settled over him; a defense mechanism he hadn't needed in years.

"I was so all over the place then. I was so confused. I was so afraid, so self-conscious. I think maybe I got involved with Draco..."

"Please," he interrupted, holding up a hand to stop her. "I don't need to..."

"Yes you do!" she said. "When I told you I loved you, I meant it. I did, deeply. I was so scared of it that I had to run to Draco. But then I loved him too. Not because he loved me, but because of the things he said, the way he made me feel. I guess I couldn't separate the real thing from whatever it was I felt for Draco." She took a steadying breath. "I'm not going to say it was the past so none of it matters. It matters in a distant sort of way. I married Ron and we are so happy. We have two beautiful children. We have a happy home. But on our wedding night, all I could think about was that it wasn't you."

She stopped, looking shocked at her own words.

"How much did you practice that?" he asked, a little mockingly.

"Not enough, clearly," she laughed. He laughed with her and all the tension was released. They were just two people again.

"Does your husband know where you are?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, pressing her palms to her eyes to blot away the quivering tears the laughter and shock had drawn out of her.

"Well, then it wouldn't do for me to kiss you," he joked with a grin. She laughed a little, then sniffled.

They both stood, both in a kind of silent agreement. He enveloped her in a hug. She rested her head on his chest and he kissed the top of her head, rubbing her back a little bit with a flat, friendly hand.

"I'm sorry," she whispered, so quietly he hardly caught it.

"I know," he said, wiping a tear from her cheek with the pad of his thumb, "I know you are."

-fin-

A Note To My Dedicated Readers: I love each and every one of you and thank you so much for sticking with this little story. I have definitely heard an earful about how disappointing this ending is, and I want to sincerely apologize for how let down all of you are. To make it up to you I am now working on another Severus/Hermione story that is in a lot of ways a huge departure from my comfort zone (in a very exciting way, I think!). It's called "To Be Or Not To Be" and I hope you can expect its validation within the next few weeks!

-_Levicorpus_