

A Lesson in Friendship

by HermioneWeasley1972

Now that the trio is over, they are facing new challenges. Can their friendship be saved?

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 9

Now that the trio is over, they are facing new challenges. Can their friendship be saved?

Thank you to my wonderful beta. I couldn't have done this without you. Btw, I am not JKR. I don't own these characters except those I have created. I thank JKR for creating this world for us to play in.

Severus looked at his daughter with mild amusement as she hopped from one foot to another, anxious to go on the trip to Diagon Alley. She reminded him so much of Hermione the first time he saw her at Hogwarts – excited, anxious, and ready to go.

“Nicoletta, it isn't as if you have never been to Diagon Alley.”

“Yes, Dad, but today is different. Today we are going to buy my *school* stuff. You know, my wand, my cauldron, my books, and everything else! What is taking Mum so long, anyway?” Her dark eyes went around the room, searching for her mother.

“I shall go see what is keeping her. You stay here and try not to make anything explode.”

“I haven't done that in months,” she protested but sat down on the couch.

“Then what did I hear coming from your room the other night?” Severus gave his daughter one last look before heading upstairs to find his wife. He finally found her in their room, sitting on the bed in deep thought. Going over to her, he put her arm around her shoulders and sat down next to her. “I can only guess what is bothering you,” he said quietly.

“It's been over fifteen years since I last saw Harry, Ron or Ginny. They don't even know about Nicoletta.” She looked up, and he could see that her eyes were bright with unshed tears. “I don't care about what they say to me, but how are they going to treat her?”

Severus sighed and drew his wife close. Years ago he wouldn't have shown much emotion, but being married to her had taught him that a show of emotion was not a show of weakness.

“It is my hope that Potter and Weasley will have matured since the last time you spoke with them. After all, they have children of their own and they will want to bring them up correctly.” He personally thought that this was too much to hope for, but he didn't want to discourage Hermione from wanting to go to Diagon Alley.

“Maybe...” Looking at her husband, she gave him a smile. “Let Nicoletta know that I will be down in a minute.”

Standing up, he squeezed her hand. “Very well. You know, our daughter reminds me a lot of you when you came to Hogwarts.” With one last look at her, he left the room.

Left alone with her thoughts, Hermione thought back to the last day she had seen her so called friends.

Hermione walked down Diagon Alley, trying to think of something to buy for Harry and Ginny's wedding gift. She had considered buying something in the Muggle world, but she knew that their house wasn't going to have electricity so her options were limited.

"Hermione!" she heard Harry's voice calling behind her.

"Hi, Harry," she said with a smile, but the look on his face made her own smile disappear.

"Ginny just got your wedding invitation response. What are you on about?" Harry asked, folding his hands over his chest.

"I was told that I could bring a guest."

"Yeah, but I didn't know that you were going to bring our Potions professor!" Harry's eyes widened in disbelief.

"In case you have forgotten, Harry, he hasn't been my Potions professor for several years now. And you and Ron didn't even bother to go back to Hogwarts with me."

"But he killed Dumbledore!" Harry shot back at her.

"On Dumbledore's orders, according to you. Or did you forget that night in the Shrieking Shack when he showed you his memories and we all thought he had died?" Hermione crossed her arms over her chest and looked Harry right in the eyes.

"Of course I didn't forget it! That's the night when I found out he fancied my mum..."

"Oh, so that's the problem? You have a problem with me dating him because he fancied your mum?"

Before Harry could answer her, another voice joined the conversation.

"What the hell are you bringing Snape to my sister's wedding for?" Ron asked angrily, coming out of Quality Quidditch Supplies.

Hermione's eyes burned with tears of hurt and anger, but she was too proud to let them fall. "I guess some things never change. You will never see Severus for the man he really is."

*"Oh, it's **Severus** now, is it?" Ron sneered.*

With a roll of her eyes, Hermione turned to Ron. "Did you really expect me to keep calling the man I am dating Professor Snape?"

Harry grimaced. "Hermione, you are a beautiful witch. Why don't you date someone closer to your own age?"

*Hermione gave Ron a sidelong glance. "In case you have forgotten, Harry, **Idid** date someone my own age. And he cheated on me. Severus makes me happy. If you were true friends, you would be happy for me and want me to be happy." Hermione looked from Ron to Harry, who said nothing. "I guess that tells me what you think of our friendship." She turned and walked away slowly, giving them time to stop her.*

Just before she got out of the range of hearing, she heard, "I can't believe she would choose going with that greasy-haired git over me."

Hermione went back to Ron and Harry. "For your information, his hair has not always been like that. It's from all the potion brewing that he has done over the years."

Harry looked uncomfortable. "Ginny is upset, Hermione. She would rather that the two of you not come to the wedding. If you come alone, you may still come. But..."

"I have accepted that Ron is with Lavender Brown. I don't see you excluding her from going to the wedding because he's not with me."

"Yes, but that's different. She's our age and she isn't our former teacher..."

"And she's not a Slytherin," Ron answered.

"If you can't accept me being with Severus, then you aren't the friends that I thought you were. Goodbye," she said softly and turned away. This time she didn't walk slowly and she didn't look back.

It was then that she knew that her friendship really was over with Harry and Ron.

She took out a tissue and dabbed at her tear-filled eyes as the painful memories came flooding back. Before she went down to face Severus and Nicoletta, she looked at her reflection in the mirror. She would have to wash her face before she went downstairs – she didn't want them to know that she had been crying.

When she went downstairs, Nicoletta ran into her arms.

"Ready to go, Mum?"

"Yes, I am ready to go." She looked over at Severus and gave him a reassuring smile. "Let's go get your things for school and maybe stop for an ice cream at Florean's."

This wasn't going to be easy, but she was a Gryffindor after all. She would face it with every ounce of bravery she had in her being.

58. Snape and Hermione and have a child that is Hogwarts age.

Hermione's friends have kind of shunned her since they got married.

Their child ends up going to school with Harry's and Ron's kids. What

chaos will ensue?

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 9

Now that the trio is over, they are facing new challenges. Can their friendship be saved?

A/N Thanks to my wonderful beta (you know who you are!), and thanks for reading my fic. Sorry about the cliffhanger, but hey, I have to keep you guessing, don't I?

Hermione walked nervously down Diagon Alley, which was full of parents and students getting ready for the coming school year. Severus had parted from his wife and daughter, saying that he would go and purchase the potion supplies for the coming year, since he had to purchase a few things for his private stocks anyway.

As she walked, she scanned the crowd, looking for people she knew. Until now, she had been fortunate enough to avoid her friends on prior trips to Diagon Alley, but she had a feeling that her luck was going to run out today.

Lost in her thoughts, she didn't realize that Nicoletta had spoken to her until she heard an impatient, "Mum?"

Snapping out of her painful thoughts, she looked down at her daughter and smiled. "Yes, Nicoletta, what is it?"

"Can I get a cat to take with me to Hogwarts? You know, like Crookshanks?" Nicoletta's dark eyes twinkled and a smile went over her lips.

"Yes, if you want. But we have to get your other things first, like your robes and your wand. Why don't you go over to Madam Malkins and get fitted for your school robes, and I'll go and buy your books. Here," she said, handing her daughter some money, "this should be enough to buy your robes. I'll meet you at Florean's in an hour."

"OK, Mum," Nicoletta said, then went off in the direction of the robe shop.

Hermione watched her daughter until she disappeared into the shop and then headed off in the direction of Flourish and Blotts. No matter how badly she was feeling a visit to her favourite shop always cheered her up.

Nicoletta felt a jolt of excitement as she entered the robe shop. It was true that she had been in Diagon Alley before, but this was different, as she had told her dad. After all, one only goes shopping for one's first year at Hogwarts once.

She was happy that her mum had given her an hour; there were quite a few children already in there, some being measured, some waiting in line. The one thing that was surprising was how many children with red hair there were.

One of the girls came over to her and smiled. "Hi, my name is Emily. What's yours?" The girl had long, red hair and blue eyes.

"I'm Nicoletta," she said, returning her smile.

"Pretty name," Emily said brightly.

"Thanks. I like yours too."

"Thanks. It looks like we have a bit of a wait. Want to go sit down?" Emily offered.

"Yeah, let's," Nicoletta replied, then followed Emily over to a window seat. "It's really busy in here today," she said, looking around at the gathered students.

"Yeah, I know. We all decided to come today. You see, most of the kids in here are my cousins." Pointing to a boy with darker skin, she said, "That's Fred," and then she pointed out each child in turn. "That's James, Molly, and Louis. We're all children of Gryffindors, so we will probably all be in the same house together. What house do you think you'll be in?"

"Well, I don't know," Nicoletta said, not sure whether she wanted to say that her dad had been a Slytherin.

"Are you a Muggle-born?"

"Oh, no. Well, my mum was a Gryffindor, and both my parents say that I am brave, and smart too, so maybe I'll be in Gryffindor or in Ravenclaw. My mum was almost in Ravenclaw when she was sorted, but the hat put her in Gryffindor."

"What about your dad?" Emily asked, looking at her.

"Emily Weasley?" Madam Malkin called. "I'm ready for you."

"Oops, gotta go. We're all going to Florean's afterwards. If you want to come, you can," Emily said as she walked away.

"OK."

It wasn't long before Nicoletta was called as well to be measured, and she stood there thinking over her talk with Emily. The other girl seemed nice, and Nicoletta had really wanted to have a friend. That was one reason why she was so anxious to go to Hogwarts. Her parents were great, but they had been overprotective of her for as long as she could remember. She hoped that she would make some friends when she went to Hogwarts.

It wasn't too much longer before the six of them were sitting in Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream parlor, enjoying different types of ice cream. Fred, she discovered, enjoyed playing practical jokes on everyone. She was really surprised when he offered an older girl a piece of candy and it turned her into a giant canary.

"Whoa! That was cool!" she exclaimed, smiling at Fred.

"You never saw a Canary Cream before? My dad and my uncle invented them back when they were in Hogwarts. Ever been in Weasley's Wizard Wheezes?"

Nicoletta shook her head. "Nope. I think I've seen it, though."

"Yeah. My dad and my uncle Fred, who I'm named for, started it."

"With help from *my* dad," James pointed out.

The two boys started bantering back and forth in a good natured way, and the girl named Molly turned to her.

“Just so you don't think we're all that strange, my name is Molly.”

“I'm Nicoletta,” Nicoletta said with a smile.

Emily smiled at her cousin and at Nicoletta. “I hope we're all in the same house together. That would be a lot of fun!”

“I think so too,” Molly said with a grin.

“We could be like the three Musketeers!” Nicoletta chimed in, holding up her spoon. “One for all and all for one!”

The time passed so quickly that Nicoletta didn't realize that her time was up until she heard her name.

“Come, Nicoletta, it's time to go.” Her father's voice intoned from the doorway to the shop.

“Alright, Dad,” Nicoletta said, standing up. “See you all on the Hogwarts Express!”

As she walked out of the shop with her father into the bright sunshine, she turned to him. “I thought Mum was coming to get me.”

“She found it necessary to go home early. You and I will finish shopping.”

Nicoletta didn't mind that her mother had to go home early because she enjoyed spending time with her father. He took her to get her wand and finally to get a cat. When they finally got home, she ran to her mother.

“Mum? What's wrong?”

Hermione looked at her husband, who nodded. “Nicoletta, it's time to tell you the truth.”

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 9

Now that the trio is over, they are facing new challenges. Can their friendship be saved?

A/N As always, thank you to my wonderful beta for her suggestions. I really hope you like the direction that the story is taking.

Hermione put her arm around her daughter. “I'm sorry that I had to leave and come back home before we finished doing your shopping, Nicoletta. Did you have a good time?”

“It's OK, Mum,” Nicoletta said. “And yes, I had a great time. I got talking to a girl named Emily while we were waiting to be measured for our robes. She was really nice.”

Hermione drew in her breath, but then put another smile on her face. “That's good. It's nice to meet other children.”

“Yes. After we got measured, she invited me to go with her and her cousins to get ice cream. I hope that's okay. I was supposed to meet you there anyway.” Nicoletta looked at her mother. “So, what did you want to tell me?”

Hermione didn't answer for a moment, but then said, “Your father and I have some exciting news for you. What is it that you have been wanting for a long time, besides going to Hogwarts?”

Nicoletta thought for a moment, and then a smile spread over her face. “A brother or sister.”

Hermione smiled. “Well, not long after you come back from your first year at Hogwarts, you are going to become a big sister.”

“That's great!” Nicoletta exclaimed, throwing her arms around her mother. “Is that why you came home?”

Hermione nodded. “Yes. Sometimes I feel a little sick, but I am feeling better now. Did you get everything you needed?”

“Yes! I can't wait to go to Hogwarts!” Just then, a little black nose peeked around the corner, followed by the rest of a small kitten. “This is Shadow,” Nicoletta said, scooping up her kitten.

“Hello, Shadow. Nicoletta, why don't you go play with Shadow, and we'll be down in a few minutes.” Hermione could tell that Severus wanted to talk to her.

“OK. Come on, Shadow.” Nicoletta cuddled the kitten to her chest and left her parents' bedroom.

Severus shut the door behind his daughter and then sat beside Hermione on the bed. “She is happy about the baby.”

“I knew she would be, but I doubt that is what you wanted to say to me. Are you wondering why I didn't tell her about Harry and the others?”

“No, I believe that was wise. Hermione, Nicoletta was happy today. She was sitting with their children and having a good time. It is better if she does not know, for now.”

“I know. If we told her about the feud, we would be no better than Harry, Ron and Ginny. She needs to make her own decisions.”

“Did you see them today?” Severus looked at his wife, but did not read her mind. He trusted her to tell him the truth.

“I did,” she admitted quietly. “I saw Harry and Ginny in Flourish and Blotts along with Ron and Lavender. Lavender looks pregnant again, and I heard Ron say something about Emily. I guess they had a little girl. I know they saw me, but they didn't say anything to me. After all I did for them, after everything that we all went through...” She shook her head sadly.

Although Severus wanted to say something, he kept his mouth shut to spare his wife's feelings. He put his arms around her and held her for a moment, but then he felt her pull away.

"Let's go downstairs and spend time with Nicoletta. After all, she will only be here for two more weeks before she goes off to Hogwarts."

Before Nicoletta, Hermione and Severus knew it, it was August 31st, the day before Nicoletta was going to board the Hogwarts Express. Hermione had made a special dinner for her daughter's last dinner at home until Christmas and placed warming charms on the dishes while she went to find Severus.

Knocking on his study door, she opened it to find him reading a letter that had just been delivered. His face was creased in a frown, and he sighed as he finished reading it and looked up at her.

"I have been asked to come back to Hogwarts and teach."

"For how long?" Hermione asked, walking over to his desk.

"For the year. Horace Slughorn has a family emergency."

"Is that something you want to do? Is she giving you a choice?" Hermione asked, thinking about what this could mean.

"She is not demanding it. She has left it up to me."

"What do you want to do?" Hermione knew that there were both good points and bad points to Severus going back to Hogwarts to teach. "Your book will have to be put on hold."

"I know that." He looked at her, both of them knowing the book wasn't the real issue. "She needs my answer tonight."

"Maybe we should ask Nicoletta's opinion. After all, it will affect her as well."

Together, the two of them went to Nicoletta's room where she was packing her trunk.

"Nicoletta, we have something we want to talk to you about," Hermione said, then looked at Severus.

"How would you feel if I was one of your professors?" Severus asked, his eyes on Nicoletta.

Nicoletta looked thoughtful for a moment. "What would you be teaching?"

"I would be your Potions professor."

"That could be cool, I think," Nicoletta answered. "Yeah, I think I would like that."

Hermione looked at Severus and shrugged. Perhaps it *would* be okay.

"Let's have dinner. I'll make a decision after."

Nicoletta looked into her trunk and made certain that she had everything that she needed for the next day. Books, robes, underclothes, cloak, potion ingredients, vials, wand...

"I think I'm all ready to go, Shadow. Just think, tomorrow you and I are going on a train. We're going to be living in a castle, and I'm going to learning all kinds of spells. Maybe I'll even learn how to turn you into a toad or something."

Shadow mewed in response, as if she didn't like that idea.

"Don't worry – it wouldn't be permanent. I'm sure that they will teach me how to turn you back."

A knock came at her door and her mum walked in.

"You should get some sleep, Nicoletta. You have a big day tomorrow."

"Alright, Mum, but I doubt I'll be able to sleep. I'm too excited!" Nicoletta got into her bed.

"Well, try and get some rest. I know you're excited, but it's a long trip to Hogwarts." Bending down, Hermione kissed her daughter on the cheek. "Sweet dreams, sweetheart."

"Goodnight, Mum," she said with a smile. She watched her mother leave and then realized that she didn't know what her dad had decided about the teaching job. Oh well, she would find out the next day.

Despite her protestations, it wasn't long after she closed her eyes that she went to sleep. No one in the house could foresee what the next day would bring.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 9

Now that the trio is over, they are facing new challenges. Can their friendship be saved?

A/N Thank you to my anonymous beta. You are the best. Sorry that it has been so long since I updated. I had trouble with this chapter.

Severus rolled over on his side and looked at his sleeping wife. She was so beautiful – the glow of pregnancy agreed with her. How could he leave her for so long? How could he take the option of working at Hogwarts again over being with his wife?

He thought back to the owl he had received from Minerva the day before.

Dear Severus,

I know that I am asking you at the last possible minute, but I am finding myself without a Potions professor. Horace Slughorn is unable to teach this year due to a family emergency, and I am asking if you would return to teach. The current books are already in your office, so you do not need to worry about purchasing them.

I understand that you are married now and that your daughter is starting her first year here. I would not ask you to do this if I did not have to, but I know that you are the best man for the job. You would, of course, resume your position as Head of Slytherin House. Of course, I will not forbid your wife from coming and visiting you after hours, so please take that into consideration when you are making your decision.

I would appreciate your answer this evening.

Sincerely,

Minerva McGonagall

Headmistress

After Nicoletta had gone to bed, they had spent several hours talking, just the two of them. He had shown her the owl that he had received so that she knew what was involved.

"Are you certain that you are OK with this?" Severus asked, holding his wife in his arms. "I realize that I have already sent my owl to Minerva, accepting the position, but I can always owl her back."

"Severus, you know my answer to that. You know what my feeling is about education. You **are** the best person for the job. And Nicoletta seems to be OK with it."

"Will you come to visit me?" he asked, drawing her nearer to himself.

"Of course I will," she replied. "After all, the nights will get cold and lonely without you. And the baby isn't due until the end of May."

He kissed her passionately, covering the side of her jaw with his small kisses. As he kissed her, he fondled her breast underneath her clothing until her nipple hardened under his touch. He loved pleasing her, loved touching her, loved hearing the gasps of pleasure that came from her mouth as they made love.

As he undressed her, he could already see the changes that her body was going through. She didn't have any obvious signs of pregnancy yet, but he could see that beautiful glow that she'd had when she was pregnant with Nicoletta. They made love to one another as if it would be years until they saw one another again, as if it was the first time and the last time all rolled into one.

A soft beeping reminded him that he needed to get moving. He had spent the night before visiting with his family, so he still had his own packing to do. He packed his robes and books, including the notes for his own book.

Leaning over, he tenderly kissed Hermione's cheek, watching her for a moment while she slept. He still had misgivings about taking the job, but he knew that Hermione would never forgive him if he passed up the opportunity.

He banished his trunk to Hogwarts, and with one last look at his wife, and then at his daughter, he Disapparated to outside the gates of Hogwarts. Truth be told, it wasn't only the fact that he was leaving Hermione that was making him hesitant. Hogwarts itself was also holding him back.

As he walked towards the castle, his eyes drifted in the direction of the Whomping Willow. Underneath its roots was the passageway to the Shrieking Shack, where he had almost died. He had never known who had saved him that day. No one had come forward as his saviour. But he wished that they would, because he was greatly in their debt.

It felt so strange returning to Hogwarts and not having to worry about being under the thumb of the Dark Lord. Never again would his Dark Mark burn. Never again would he be summoned to do the Dark Lord's bidding.

Never again would he see Albus Dumbledore.

As he entered the castle, he made his way to the office of Headmistress McGonagall. He had sent his Patronus ahead to let her know that he was coming, and she sent one back with her password. As he ascended the stairs, he wondered how Minerva would look. He estimated her to be in her mid nineties by now.

He raised his hand to knock, but the door swung open of its own accord. The large, spacious office was empty, but he heard his name spoken.

"So you have returned, Severus."

Severus looked around, and his eyes finally settled upon the portrait of Albus Dumbledore.

"I have."

"I told Minerva that you would. I hope you are well?" Albus' portrait smiled at him.

"I am very well. I have a wife and a daughter, and another on the way."

"Yes, Minerva told me. Nicoletta starts today, does she not?"

"Yes, she does. Along with a number of other children."

"Does that concern you?"

"A bit. Their parents and Hermione do not get along. I am concerned for Nicoletta," Severus said, surprised at the sound of his own words.

"Severus, Nicoletta has two strong parents," Minerva interjected, coming into the office. "She has her mother's bravery, and I am quite certain that you have taught her to stand up for herself."

"Nicoletta did quite well when the children were having ice cream. But I had to pick her up. They know that I am her father."

"Put faith in your daughter, Severus. I am quite certain that she will not let you down." Minerva looked at Severus and gave him one of her rare smiles. "Here is a note that Slughorn left for you," she said, handing him an envelope.

"Thank you, Minerva," he said, accepting the envelope. "I will go and set up my office now." He turned to leave the office, but she put a hand on his arm to stop him.

Looking at him, she said, "Severus, I want to thank you for doing this for me. I know that it could not have been an easy decision for you. Horace's departure was quite sudden. I would have liked to give you more warning."

"You are welcome, Minerva." With the slightest hint of a smile and a nod at Albus' portrait, he left the office.

Minerva watched him leave and then turned to Albus' portrait.

"I have a feeling this will be an interesting year."

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 of 9

Now that the trio is over, they are facing new challenges. Can their friendship be saved?

Nicoletta tried to keep her balance as she made her way along the corridor. The lurching of the train did nothing to help her in her quest, and she nearly lost her footing several times. She was going to need to find a compartment and fast.

Hearing some familiar voices, she peeked into one of the compartments and saw Molly and Emily sitting there, looking at Chocolate Frog cards. "Do you have room in there for me?" she asked, opening the door to the compartment a bit wider and smiling at her friends.

"Sure, come on in!" Emily exclaimed, getting up to give her friend a hug.

"We were wondering where you were," Molly said, getting up as well. "James, Louis and Fred will be back soon. They were looking at some kind of creature that another boy has. Here, sit down here. The boys will sit on that side," she said, pointing to the other bench.

Taking a seat with Emily and Molly, Nicoletta smiled at her friends. "Guess what? I'm going to be a big sister in May!"

"Yay!" Emily cried, clapping.

"That's great!" Molly agreed.

"Thanks. Yeah, that's why my dad came to get me. Mum wasn't feeling too well, I guess."

"Do you collect Chocolate Frog cards? Dad said they came out with a whole new series of them since he collected them. The ones that he had when he went to Hogwarts are rare now. Of course, he has a lot so he gave me ones he had extras of. Here, I'll share with you. I have some doubles, if you want to start collecting." Emily handed a handful of cards to Nicoletta. "Go on, I have lots."

Emily sorted through the cards that Emily handed her. She had heard of a couple of the witches and wizards, but when she got to two cards in particular, her interest was piqued.

Hermione Granger

Known as one of the brightest witches of her age, she fought alongside Harry Potter, Ronald Weasley, and many others in the Final Battle against Voldemort. During her years at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Miss Granger was often seen in the company of Mr. Potter and Mr. Weasley, and the three of them were sometimes referred to as the Trio.

My mother had been friends with Harry Potter and Ronald Weasley? Nicoletta thought. *Why aren't they friends anymore?* Putting those thoughts aside, she looked at the other card that had caught her eye.

Severus Snape

Severus Snape was known as one of the followers of Voldemort. In 1997, he cast the curse that killed the late Albus Dumbledore, but was later acquitted of it based on the testimony of Harry Potter. Severus Snape is known as a highly skilled Potions master and Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher and was appointed Headmaster in the fall of 1997 when Voldemort and his Death Eaters took over Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Severus Snape had been assumed dead when he was bitten by Voldemort's snake, Nagini, but he survived. How he survived remains a mystery.

My dad killed Albus Dumbledore? This surprised Nicoletta. Her mum and dad hadn't spoken about much of the past. She knew that her dad had been in Slytherin and her mum had been in Gryffindor, but beyond that...

A hand waved in front of her face.

"Oy, Nicoletta!" James' voice spoke up. "You want anything from the trolley?"

Snapping out of her daze, she quickly stowed her thoughts away in the back of her mind "Yeah, let me get my money out."

The rest of the train ride to Hogwarts was spent snacking, chatting and having fun with her friends. The information on the Chocolate Frog cards was forgotten.

Hermione walked into the house, which now stood empty, trying to hold her emotions in check as she realized that she was now alone. After she had seen the Hogwarts

Express off, she had gone shopping because she couldn't bear to go back to their house straightaway . She'd known that only loneliness and silence would greet her, and she'd not been ready for that. But fatigue and the events of the day had finally sent her back home.

She hoped that the loneliness wouldn't last for long; Severus had told her that he would speak with Headmistress McGonagall about her staying with him during the school year. The issue was, all the other professors had either been single or had spouses that had died. This year, however, there were Severus and Neville Longbottom – both of whom were married. A decision would need to be made.

Crookshanks, sensing her despair, wound his body around her ankles in an attempt to let her know that she wasn't *really* alone. Walking over to the couch below the window, she sat down, and he jumped up beside her. Petting him absentmindedly, she sighed. "I guess it's just the two of us, old boy," she muttered, then looked up sharply. "What was that?"

Drawing her wand, she listened intently. Yes, there it was again. The two of them weren't alone in the house. Casting a shielding charm around her body, she made her way towards the door so that she could get outside and Apparate.

She had almost reached the door when a figure entered the room, and her scream cut through the air, shattering the silence of the house.

The Hogwarts Express pulled into Hogsmeade station. Nicoletta sat in the compartment with Emily, Molly, James, Fred and Louis. All of them were wearing their new Hogwarts robes and eagerly awaiting the Sorting and the feast that lay ahead.

"Remember – if we are all in Gryffindor, we're the three Musketeers!" Emily piped up, and Nicoletta and Molly nodded in agreement.

It seemed to take forever, but it was only a matter of moments before they were at the castle and a figure was approaching them. Nicoletta's eyes grew wide as she recognized the man standing before her.

"For those who don't know me, I am Professor Snape. In a moment, you will be taken into the Great Hall to be Sorted. The four Houses are Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin. While you are in Hogwarts, your House is like your family. Triumphs earn you points for your House, rule breaking loses points for your House." A moment later, he said, "We are ready for you now. Please follow me."

Nicoletta could hardly believe that her father was Deputy Headmaster. She kept her eyes on him as he called each student to be sorted. James Potter, who had to be the son of Harry and Ginny Potter, was Sorted into Gryffindor. After countless minutes, she finally heard...

"Nicoletta Snape!"

She made her way to the front of the Great Hall, and it seemed as if all the conversation in the Great Hall stopped when she put the Sorting Hat on her head.

"Well, I haven't seen a Snape sitting on this stool for years. Now, let's see. Where am I going to put you?" the Sorting Hat said in her ear.

Two Aurors appeared outside of the house, alerted to possible trouble by a neighbor who had heard the commotion. After checking that the perimeter was secure, they entered the house and found the woman lying inside. Her body was still and surrounded by a pool of blood.

"Is she alive?" one Auror asked the other as he checked her vital signs.

"Barely. But we haven't much time. We need to get her to St. Mungo's immediately and contact her family. I just pray that we aren't too late."

A few minutes later, all that was left was a pool of blood and a large orange cat meowing sadly for his mistress.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 of 9

Now that the trio is over, they are facing new challenges. Can their friendship be saved?

A/N Thank you to my anonymous beta. You are wonderful.

The man's mouth twisted into a cruel smile. His day's work was done. That would send Severus Snape a message that he wouldn't soon forget. When he had heard that his former Death Eater friend had married a Mudblood, he couldn't believe it. And not even just *any* Mudblood. He had married the Mudblood that had bothered him for so many years. He had married the Mudblood that had been a part of the battle in the Ministry so many years ago. He had apparently forgotten the Dark Lord's teachings. Well, he would soon remember.

He had wanted to do the job as soon as he'd found out about the nuptials, but he'd had decided to wait. He knew that Snape would be keeping an eye on his wife. So he had been biding his time for years, waiting for exactly the right moment, for the right sign. And he had come up with the brilliant plan that put everything in motion. He had killed that idiot Slughorn and sent the owl to McGonagall himself. He had taken a chance that Snape would accept the invitation, but he had figured that it was a safe bet that he would come to the rescue. After all, look at all the times he'd helped to save the Potter boy even though the Dark Lord had wanted him dead.

He sat down with a sigh of satisfaction, thinking about the look of terror on her face and her screams as she went down, begging for mercy. He highly doubted that the woman was still alive. There had been too much blood for that...

Nicoletta sat on the stool, nervously waiting for the Sorting Hat's decision.

"You have some of each of the qualities of the Houses in you, Miss Snape. You are loyal, you are brave, you have a sense of cunning, and you are smart. Let's see."

Nicoletta looked at her father waiting and then looked at her friends. She knew where she wanted to be...

"Gryffindor!" the Sorting Hat shouted for all to hear.

Nicoletta looked over at her father, wondering what he thought of her being in Gryffindor and hoping that he wasn't too disappointed. There were murmurs around the room as she stepped down off of the stool and joined the Gryffindor table.

Emily and Molly smiled at her as they made room for her at the table. "I'm so glad you got into Gryffindor, Nicoletta," Emily said with a smile.

Molly nodded. "Me too! Now we will all be in the same room together."

"Oh, great, we have Snape's daughter in here with us," one of the older Gryffindors said. "Why isn't she in Slytherin like she belongs?"

"Shut it, Brian!" James said, looking down the table and frowning at the boy who had spoken out, then turned back to Nicoletta. "Don't pay him any mind. The Sorting Hat must have thought you belonged in here, and we're glad you are."

The Sorting was soon over and Headmistress McGonagall stood up.

"Good evening and welcome to another year at Hogwarts. Before we start our meal, I have a few announcements to make. We would like to welcome back Professor Snape, who has graciously agreed to take on the job of Potions professor and Head of Slytherin while Professor Slughorn has personal business to tend to. Students should remember that the Forbidden Forest is off limits, and Quidditch tryouts will be held in the second week of the school year. If you would like to try out for your House team, please speak with Madam Hooch. Now, let the feast begin!" Headmistress McGonagall took her seat.

The tables were then covered with food, and the chatter resumed. Nicoletta could feel the curious looks of her fellow Housemates and felt her face turning red, but she paid attention to her food and tried not to let it bother her.

Severus looked at his daughter and could tell how uncomfortable she was. He had mixed feelings about her being in Gryffindor. He knew that even if she had been in Slytherin, chances were good that she would have still been teased. At least in Gryffindor, it looked as if she had friends.

"Are you disappointed that she was placed in Gryffindor, Severus?" Minerva asked him.

Severus thought for a moment. "She is better off in Gryffindor. It looks as if she has friends there. I'm not so sure that would be the case in Slytherin."

Minerva nodded sympathetically and opened her mouth to say something, but then a large owl swooped into the Great Hall and landed before Severus. The owl impatiently held out its leg so he could take the parchment, nipping at his fingers until he took it.

Taking the parchment and opening it, he turned to Minerva. "I knew that it could happen, so I wasn't surprised." He turned his attention to the parchment and read it, his face growing even paler by the minute.

"What is it, Severus?" Minerva asked, seeing the expression on his face.

"It's Hermione. She's been injured. I must go to her." Severus stood up from his seat.

"Of course, Severus. Do you want Nicoletta to come with you?" Minerva asked, looking at the Gryffindor table.

Severus thought for a moment. "Yes, she should come." The letter had said that Hermione had been injured badly and that things were still touch and go, though she was stable for the moment.

He stepped out from behind the head table and went to where his daughter sat. "Nicoletta, I need to talk to you. Come with me."

Once they were out of the Great Hall, he put his arm around her.

"Father, I know that you are upset that I'm in Gryffindor..."

"That's not the reason. Your mother has been injured and we need to go to St. Mungo's."

"Mum? What happened?"

"I'll tell you later. Right now we shouldn't waste any time. Let's go to my office and we will use the Floo."

A few minutes later, they stepped through one of the Floos at St. Mungo's. One of the Healers came over to them at once.

"I'm so glad that you are here. I would like to talk to you, Mr. Snape. Perhaps your daughter could wait in the waiting area."

A nurse came over to them. "I'll stay with her. Come with me, dear."

Once Nicoletta and the nurse were out of sight, Severus turned to the Healer.

"What is wrong with my wife?"

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 of 9

Now that the trio is over, they are facing new challenges. Can their friendship be saved?

Thank you to my anonymous beta. You are wonderful.

Severus sat by Hermione's hospital bed, his hand holding on to hers.

"Your wife was hit by a powerful curse across the chest. She has lost quite a bit of blood, but there doesn't appear to be any permanent damage."

"And our child?" Severus asked, fearful of the answer.

"We were able to save the baby. Your wife and child are very lucky. If the curse had hit her just a few inches lower, she would have lost the baby. The curse hit her just below her chest, so your child was saved by mere inches."

He felt Hermione's hand move, and he looked at her to see her opening her eyes.

"Severus?" she asked weakly.

"I'm here. How are you feeling?" he asked, looking at her pale face, her dark hair a stark contrast against her skin that was as pale as his own.

"I'm sore and very tired," she said with a sigh. "Severus, what about the baby? Is the baby alright?"

She truly amazed him at times like this. "The baby is fine. Do you remember what happened?"

She shook her head slowly. "No."

"Maybe it's better if you don't," he said, though he wasn't sure if she was telling the truth or not. "The Healer said that you are going to be just fine and that there doesn't appear to be any permanent damage."

Smiling wanly at him, she tried to shift and grimaced in pain. "How did the Sorting go? What House is Nicoletta in?"

"I think she'd like to tell you that. Are you up to another visitor?"

"Of course I want to see her."

"OK, I'll bring her in." Severus bent down and kissed her gently, then stood back up and left the room.

Nicoletta sat impatiently with the nurse. She looked up at the door, where her father had disappeared, from time to time, hoping to see him coming out, but he never did. She wished someone would tell her something.

"Don't worry, dear," the nurse beside her said with a smile.

"He'll be out soon. What House were you Sorted into?"

"Gryffindor." Nicoletta was distracted; her voice held nothing of the excitement that had been in it less than an hour ago.

The door opened, and her father walked out. She could tell that his face was stern and that he looked worried.

"Dad? How's Mum?" Nicoletta asked, standing up and going over to him.

"She's fine, and she wants to see you. Just be careful – she had a little accident and got a cut on her chest, so if you hug her, be gentle." He father turned and looked at the nurse who had been sitting with her. "Thank you for staying with my daughter."

"You're welcome."

Nicoletta walked with him to her mum's room and went in slowly. She was glad to see that her mum was sitting up, propped up on pillows, and looking okay.

"Mum! I was so worried about you," she said, going over to her and giving her a gentle hug like her father had told her to do.

"I'm going to be fine, Nicoletta. Your father tells me that you have some news for me." Her mother's voice was soft, but clear.

"I'm in Gryffindor, Mum, just like you were!" she said excitedly. She felt a lot better knowing that her mother was going to be okay. "Mum, is the baby okay?"

"Your brother or sister is fine. We are both fine," Hermione said with a smile.

While Nicoletta was visiting with his wife, Severus was making plans. He couldn't let her stay at the house anymore by herself. It wasn't safe. Seeing the Healer who had taken care of Hermione, he went over to him.

"How long will it be before my wife can be discharged?"

"I would like to keep her here overnight at least to make sure that there aren't any lasting effects and so that we can monitor both her and your child's vital signs. If she is still doing well tomorrow, I can discharge her then."

"At some point tonight, I will need to return to Hogwarts. You will station an Auror at the entrance to her room. I want no one entering who does not have permission or who the medical staff do not know."

When Severus returned to his wife's room, she had fallen back to sleep. He stayed as long with her as he could, but he had to take Nicoletta back to Hogwarts.

"Hermione," he said, taking her hand and giving it a kiss, "I'll be back tomorrow, I promise. Please be alright." On his way to the Floo, he stopped at the desk. "I will be leaving now. I was assured that there would be an Auror here to keep an eye on my wife's room."

"Yes, the Auror is on his way. Your wife is in good hands."

"She had better be," he said, then made his way to the Floo with Nicoletta.

A few hours later, Hermione awoke and looked around. There was a man that was standing at her door, but he didn't look like Severus.

"Excuse me, do you know where my husband went?"

The man turned so that she could see his face along with his bright red hair.

"Ron!"

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 of 9

Now that the trio is over, they are facing new challenges. Can their friendship be saved?

Thanks to Robbie for the beta.

Ron turned and looked at her. He hadn't especially wanted to have this job, but since he was a capable Auror and not many people knew about the falling out of their friendship, he hadn't had a choice. He tried not to show the concern that he had for her. Despite the fact that she had married that greasy git Severus, he didn't want to see anything like this happen to her.

Putting up a ward that would alert him if anyone tried to enter the room, he reluctantly walked over to her bed. The paleness of her face shocked him.

"How are you feeling?" he asked quietly.

"I'm fine," Hermione replied curtly, not forgetting how her friends had been treating her. She attempted to sit up, grimacing as she did. "Well, maybe not completely fine."

Ron noticed her struggle and gently helped her to sit up. "If you are up for it, I would like to ask you some questions about the attack." He was careful to keep his voice businesslike and not to let any emotion into it.

Hermione's face contorted in pain, and she looked toward the button that would call the Healer. Realizing what she was going to ask for, Ron added, "It would be better if your mind is clear without being mucked up by pain medicine."

Sighing, Hermione looked at him. "Okay, ask your questions."

"What do you remember of the attack?" Ron asked, taking out a parchment and a Quick Quotes Quill.

Hermione's forehead furrowed in thought, and she sighed again. "I don't remember that much. I remember going home after seeing Nicoletta off, and then I heard a noise in the house. I was almost to the door when I was attacked."

Ron watched as the Quick Quotes Quill wrote down what she had said. "So you did not see your attacker?"

"No. But the Healers said that both the baby and I are doing fine," Hermione replied, a bit of coldness in her voice.

"You're pregnant? *Again*?" Ron asked, feeling surprised.

"Yes, I'm pregnant again," Hermione replied, frowning at him. "And Severus and I are very happy about it."

Ron tried hard not to roll his eyes. "Well, I think I have all the information that I need. If you think of anything else, please contact the Auror office. My shift here is almost over, and then someone else will be standing guard." Ron started walking toward the door and mumbled something about, "Another kid of the greasy-haired git..." not knowing that Hermione had heard him.

A gasp came from behind him. "Why can't you be happy for us? Do you hear me belittling your marriage or the fact that you are on your fourth child? You know, our children are friends. They are even in the same House together."

Ron heard Hermione's voice rising in octaves and finally dissolve into tears. Turning around, he went back to her side. "Hermione..."

"No, just leave me alone. You are never going to change. Never!"

Just then two Healers entered the room, and one of them escorted him out. "You are here to guard her, not to upset her. I am sorry, but you need to leave."

As Ron left the room, he looked back to see Hermione's tear-streaked face buried in her hands.

Later that evening, Ron was wrapping up his paperwork in his office when his door banged open, and a figure in a billowing black robe entered his office. Ron didn't have time to draw his wand before the figure picked him up by the collar and pushed him against the wall.

"How dare you upset my wife!" Severus demanded, holding his wand up against Ron's throat.

"Wha-" Ron started, but the hold on his robes by Severus left him little room to breathe, let alone speak.

"If I only had the guts I had years ago, I'd kill you right here, right now. But I will tell you this, Ronald Weasley. If you *ever* come near my wife or my child again, you will wish you had never been born. I may be a greasy-haired git," Severus said, his black eyes glittering with malice, "but look at what you have done to your friendship. You are a fool, Ron Weasley. A damned fool."

Ron felt the grip on his robes loosen and dropped to the ground, feeling his ankle turn under him. He watched as the figure left his office and struggled to his feet. His fists clenched at his sides, but he didn't know whom he was angrier at, Snape or himself.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 of 9

Now that the trio is over, they are facing new challenges. Can their friendship be saved?

After the confrontation with Ron, Severus felt an anger that he hadn't felt for a long time. He couldn't believe what Ron had done to the woman who had stuck by him through thick and thin, whom he had once professed to love. But that wasn't important now. All that was important was his wife and his unborn child.

Once he had calmed down sufficiently, he made his way back to the hospital where he found an Auror he was pleased to see was not Harry Potter, but another Auror whom he recognised. The Auror nodded at him and moved aside so that he could enter the room.

Hermione was asleep when he entered the room, and his heart broke when he saw the tracks of tears on her face. Not wanting to wake her, he took a seat next to her bed and gently took her hand.

"Hermione," he whispered softly, "I'm here for you. I promise you that he will never bother you again."

As he watched her, she stirred on the bed and eventually opened her eyes. "Severus? You're here?"

"Of course I am," he said, bending down to kiss her. "I wanted to come back and see you before I turn in for the evening. How are you feeling?"

Sighing deeply, Hermione looked at him. "I'm doing better now than I was earlier. They assigned Ron to come and guard my room. We got into an argument." She stopped and looked carefully at him. "You know, don't you?"

"Yes," Severus said reluctantly. "The Healer Floo'ed me and told me about what had happened. I could have wrung Weasley's neck."

"Severus, being angry with him isn't going to do any of us any good." She yawned deeply and took a deep breath. "I'm so tired, Severus."

"Then get some sleep. I'll stay until you fall asleep," he said, bending down to kiss her again. "I love you, Hermione," he added softly.

"I love you too, Severus," she replied, closing her eyes.

Several minutes later she was fast asleep. Severus bent and kissed her one last time before quietly leaving her room.

Ron awoke early the next morning to an incessant tapping on the windowpane of his and Lavender's bedroom. Moaning, he glanced at the clock which read 6:30. Who in the world was sending an owl this early in the morning?

He opened the window to allow the owl inside and recognised it immediately as an Auror office owl.

I need to see you in my office at 7:30.

Kingsley Shacklebolt

He gulped loudly and sighed. He knew what Shacklebolt wanted to see him about, and he had a feeling that the meeting would not go well. He turned back to the bed to see Lavender blinking at him.

"You're up early," she said with surprise in her voice.

"Yeah, I got an owl that Kingsley wants to see me. I reckon I'm in trouble for last night."

"Did that goody goody bookworm report you?" Lavender asked, making a face at him.

"Didn't have to. Two Healers came in, and one of them took me out of her room." He bent down and kissed her. "I gotta go shower. I'll let you know what happens."

An hour later Ron sat in the office of Kingsley Shacklebolt, looking at his boss, who had a very serious expression on his face.

"Weasley, you know that I consider you to be a good Auror. But I have gotten some serious complaints about what you did last night at St. Mungo's. Whatever your personal feelings may be about Hermione's choice for a husband, you can't allow it to influence your job. The way that you reacted last night was unethical and unprofessional, and I can't allow someone like that on my Auror team."

"You're firing me?" Ron asked, his eyes wide.

"No, I'm not firing you. But I am suspending you for one month without pay. I simply cannot have that type of behaviour from an Auror in this office." Kingsley's voice was grave and his eyes were steely.

Ron stood up and paced around the office. "How can you do this to me? I'm a good Auror. I've captured some of the worst Death Eaters over the years."

"I know you are, Weasley, and that is why I'm not firing you. I'm giving you some time to get your act together." He held out his hand. "I will need your badge. You can get it back once your suspension is over."

"I thought we were friends," Ron said, tearing his badge off his robes and throwing it on the desk.

"And I thought Hermione was your friend. I will see you in a month."

Ron stormed out of the office and slammed the door behind him. He couldn't believe what had just happened.

Neither Ron nor Kingsley knew that a third set of ears had listened to the exchange with a great deal of interest.