

Guilt and Suspicion

by *snuggleslut*

Hermione is just starting her life as an Unspeakable when something happens to her in the Department of Mysteries, forcing her to deal with her inner turmoil with some unwilling help from Severus Snape.

Her First and Last Day

Chapter 1 of 5

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Chapter one

Her First and Last Day

Hermione was ecstatic. She was living her dreams; well, the concept of dreams wasn't the right term for Hermione. She wasn't one to indulge in flights of fancy, imagining her life as in some alternative universe where the impossible was real. After all, even magic couldn't always make wishes come true. Hermione Granger did not have dreams. She had goals, and today was a day of accomplishment. She had met her goal and now was preparing to live it.

Everything was in order. Any books that existed on the subject of the Unspeakables and the Department of Mysteries in which they worked had been memorized, all four of them, three of which just referenced the subject in passing. She was determined to make the best impression possible. To show all of them that she was worthy of the chance they were taking on accepting her as an apprentice straight out of Hogwarts... the first ever. After her work in the downfall of the Dark Lord and the record-setting number of NEWTs, Hermione could have had any Ministry job she wanted just shy of the Minister's position that was still held by Kingsley Shacklebolt.

Her righteous nature rebelled against the fact that this had anything to do with the war, insisting that her grades and not circumstance had gotten her the job. She knew others (namely the three other apprentices who had graduated Hogwarts before she even started and worked their way up the totem pole) would think otherwise.

As she entered the Ministry, her body hummed with nerves, and her hair took on a life of its own, uncoiling from the band she confined it in. Her purse clutched to her side was stocked with random things from clothes to money; instead of constant vigilance, she was constantly prepared for anything.

*I can do this. I deserve this. This chance is mine. I proved myself at Hogwarts and in the war; **will** show these Unspeakables just how **worthy** Hermione Granger is.*

Determined as always, she felt that nothing could throw her off today. Hermione met the glares she received from the other apprentices as she exited the lift on floor 9, holding her chin high. She had anticipated this reaction. It had been just over a year since the Dark Lord's fall, and things were still chaotic at the Ministry. Feelings were sadly mixed about the war; there was still too much anger and fear for the magic world to have found peace.

"You must be Miss Granger. I'm Mrs. Pendergraft," the shortest of the three apprentices said while extending her hand in greeting. She was a plump witch, who could have almost been pretty if it weren't for the piggish-like nose in the middle of her round pink face. At least she seemed cordial, which was more than could be said for the other two. They remained stiff and tight-lipped.

Not about to turn away the proffered olive branch, she took the shorter witch's hand in hers with a firm grip like her father had taught her. "Mrs. Pendergraft."

Thinking about her parents was still painful; she had never been able to restore their memories. They were happily living in Australia and did not know that their daughter was turning into a strong woman. They didn't know to be proud that they had raised her, proud of her success, but she knew they would be. It was little comfort but it was all she had from them. Hermione figured Mrs. Weasley would have been proud if she hadn't been shunning Hermione after her ill-fated romance with her youngest son. It still hurt, but Hermione was sensible enough to be proud of herself. How could she not be? This was what she wanted, wasn't it?

No more pleasantries were exchanged as the four apprentices waited quietly for their supervisor. Hermione knew him or her only by last name: Jacobs, the name that had appeared on her acceptance letter. It was obviously a last name, but there was no Mr., Miss, or Mrs. attached to it. She wasn't worried. Gender wouldn't make a difference; her professors always adored her and her diligent work, even if it was a bit over the top; that is, all but one.

Thinking about that professor was also painful. The guilt in her heart was a heavy burden, a burden that was too heavy for her mind to carry. It was illogical, but the guilt was there, worse than the guilt she carried for her own parents' situation. At least they were alive. She hadn't watched them die.

Hermione pushed all nauseating feelings of remorse deep inside her as the heavy door to the lobby of the Department of Mysteries opened, and the person she could only assume was this strange Jacobs waved them in.

"Welcome! I am Jacobs, your supervisor. Please come in. No need to be shy. Very few people go missing down here." Jacobs had a booming voice and cartoon-like smile. Even after seeing and hearing this Jacobs, Hermione still had no idea if her supervisor was a man or woman. Jacobs's features were too distorted with wrinkles to be considered masculine or feminine. There was no facial hair, and the floppy purple hat and robe hid the shape of Jacobs's figure.

The other three looked equally confused as they introduced themselves: first the tall dark-skinned man with perfect teeth, Ortez Bowden; then, the plain Nigel Stadick; and, third, Tristan Pendergraft.

"So that leaves Miss Granger," Jacobs squeaked in excitement before Hermione could introduce herself. "The most NEWTs in Hogwarts history! We are so very honored to have you here."

He beamed at her and she blushed at the attention, slightly thrilled even as the other three shot daggers at her.

"Now, let us begin with a simple tour before the four of you make the first of many commitments to secrecy and take the Vow of the Unspeakables." With that, the walls moved around the circular room, each with a door identical to the other dozen. Hermione kept her eyes on the black marble floor, remembering how the blue flames had made her dizzy. When the walls stopped, Jacobs led them to the right. She had no idea if Jacobs knew what room they were entering or if it would be a surprise for him too. She couldn't picture herself ever knowing which room was which no matter how long she worked here.

The door opened into a long rectangular room with low hanging lamps on golden chains. There were even more doors along the walls and six desks around a large tank filled with green liquid and strange white creatures floating lazily in the murky water. Hermione knew they were brains. She had been unconscious during Ron's experience and after hearing about it later in the hospital wing had wondered just what they were for.

"First rule: don't touch anything. If you do, being fired will be the least of your problems, I assure you," their supervisor explained. The other three looked timidly at the tank, wondering who in their right mind would want to touch whatever those strange fishy things were.

"Can anyone tell me what is in this tank here?" Jacobs asked.

"Sir--um, are they brains...?" Hermione stammered, hoping she hadn't offended Jacobs by addressing him as sir if Jacobs was a female. Either way, the supervisor paid no mind, so Hermione assumed that he was, in fact, a he.

"Very good, sharp eyes you have there, Miss Granger," he nodded. "These are brain. But, what kind of brains?"

This was puzzling. Hermione didn't know there were different kinds of brains, and looking at the other three, they didn't either.

"Are they human brains, ma'am?" Mrs. Pendergraft asked. Jacobs didn't correct her for addressing him as a her, and Hermione thought that perhaps she had been too hasty in her judgment. Instead he or she just smiled that cartoon-like grin, which looked a little horrifying next to the large tank with swimming brains.

"And where would the Ministry get human brains from...?" Jacobs pondered, seemingly to himself or herself, as if the Department of Mysteries weren't bizarre enough. Jacobs then turned towards another one of the identical doors, signaling for them to follow.

They found themselves in a room of chests and boxes of all different sizes. Some were big enough to fit a full-grown man, and others were as small as jewelry boxes. One of the smallest boxes caught Hermione's eye. It seemed that the room shrank, and her gaze could not be torn away from the tiny wooden box. It was a dark wood, almost black, and the rims on the top were carved with runes. The box was dusty, as was the larger trunk it rested on.

Hermione could hear Jacobs speaking to them, but the words were nothing but a humming in her ears. She saw the others move forward, following their supervisor, who was still talking, but she couldn't hear Jacobs's voice. She was too focused on listening to the music. The light lullaby emanating from the jewelry box seemed to call to her heart. It was so soothing; she longed to cradle the small box to her chest. She wanted, no, needed to touch it. Without realizing what she was doing, she found herself hovering above the tiny jewelry box. The music was louder. The beat had picked up and the tempo was faster. Hermione reached her hand out and touched the lid. It was warm and pulsing.

Jacobs hadn't noticed Hermione until her fingers were already undoing the clasp.

"Miss Granger!" the supervisor yelled, and Hermione's last thought was that Jacobs was, in fact, a woman before she opened the jewelry box. The light that shot out of it was blinding, but she was paralyzed by the pulsing lullaby and could not move to shield her eyes.

She saw stars and, on closer inspection, planets too; so tiny, spinning in circles slowly until they stopped altogether and changed directions, picking up speed. They went faster and faster until she had to close her eyes.

Hermione Granger became one of those few people who went missing in the Department of Mysteries.

There was no pain. There was nothing but the hum of the lullaby; it was soft again, easing her into a deeper sleep anytime her eyes started to stir behind their lids. Hermione did not dream, nor did she move. Even her hair behaved. All she did was sleep, and it soothed the pain in her heart. But the guilt was still heavy, pulling her down, deeper and deeper.

When she did awake, it was to the sterile, white walls of St. Mungo's. The first thing Hermione noticed was a quiet beeping noise. She counted each beep wondering if she would be given another chance at the Department of Mysteries; after all, it wasn't as if she had done this on purpose, and she wasn't exactly sure what had happened. She was not hurt. She could wiggle her toes and move her fingers. She felt fine, perfectly normal.

I hope I don't lose my job over this, she groaned to herself, still counting the beeps. She had gotten to 72 before a Healer entered the room. The beeping stopped when she saw him enter. Hermione started to pull herself up.

"Please don't move just yet," he instructed, putting his large wrinkled hand on her collarbone and lightly pushing her back down. "I'm Healer Tipton. Who are you? Can you tell me your name?"

It seemed strange that he didn't know her name. Even if he didn't recognize her personally, she felt that Jacobs would of have told the Healers her name. Something felt wrong, but just as quickly the feeling went away, and her cheeks reddened. *Of course, he's just making sure I know my name.*

"Please, Miss, we need to know your name. Who do we inform that you're here?" the Healer pressed. "Do you speak English?"

Now that was just ridiculous. Of course, she spoke English. Her brows furrowed; the wrong feeling was back and stronger. "Why didn't they tell you who I am?"

"Who are they?"

Something was wrong.

"The Ministry workers in the Department of Mysteries."

His eyes widened. He summoned a clipboard, looking it over once. "They reported not to know who you were."

What have I done!? Panic set in. "Are they hurt?"

The Healer's kind, brown eyes softened, and he put a reassuring hand on her shoulder. "No, everyone is fine." He looked her over, his eyes hardening after looking at her chart again. "Now, please, we need to know your name."

The feeling of wrongness doubled.

"My name... is Hermione... Hermione Granger." He wrote her name down on his chart.

"Good... that's good that you remember. They need to know for their database," he muttered to himself before looking up at her. "Your clothes are on the chair, I will leave the room so that you can get dressed. Other than being unconscious, you came here in fine shape. The Aurors should be in shortly."

Her eyes widened in shock "Aurors? Why would Aurors be coming in?"

"Now don't be alarmed, dear girl. They are just going to ask you some questions." His voice was soft, but his eyes were hard. Her unease increased, covering her skin in goosebumps.

He left. She was alone, naked, and confused. Fear set in. Hermione swallowed it down, removing the bedsheet that was wrapped around her. She stood up and began dressing. She found her purse with her clothes; she only truly felt safe these days if she had her purse and her wand. The latter was missing. She shook out her robes and checked her pockets, even searching through her purse. *Why would they take my wand!?* Hermione became frantic. She had a long history with danger, and she knew when she was in it.

"Ma'am, are you finished?" asked a deep voice from the other side of the door. It was not the voice of the kind, old Healer.

"N-no... I'm not decent!" Hermione lied, her heart racing. She looked around, searching. It seemed the only option was the window, partially opened because of the summer heat. It wasn't a long jump but hitting the ground still hurt, causing her to limp out of the alley to the sidewalk. She hadn't noticed the man in the shadows who had watched her jump. He wore a perplexed expression on his face. She had abandoned her robe in the hospital room. She hadn't needed it to blend in with the Muggles, something Hermione was born to do.

After jogging two blocks down, she hailed a cab and gave the driver her home address. *Why did I have to give them my real name! Who knows how long I'll have before they find out where I live.*

Hermione had moved back into her childhood home even though she avoided being in it as much as possible. The memories were painful, but she couldn't bring herself to sell it, not when she knew how much it meant to her parents... or how much it had meant to them before she had destroyed their memories. The hurt rose in her throat, choking her. She ignored it. There were things she needed to do. She needed to figure out what was going on. She needed her wand, or any wand for that matter. She needed Harry. *I'll contact him when I get home, he won't mind helping me sort this mess out.*

An hour passed before the cab arrived at her home. She steeled herself to face the ghosts of her past and was both horrified and heart-warmed to see her mother gardening in the flower garden as her father mowed the lawn.

With watery eyes, she prepared to leave the cab, too happy to see her parents to realize the impossibility of what was before her... until she saw herself. She was playing in the dirt next to the woman who had once been Hermione's mother.

The world broke at the sight of the small child in the silly pink dress with a riot of brown curls, who was no older than two.

Aurthor's notes: a great big thank you to bookofsecrets for cleaning up my mess.

Back to Hogwarts

Chapter 2 of 5

Hermione returns to the one place in the wold of magic that feels like home.

Chapter Two

Back to Hogwarts

In a numb haze, she gave the cab driver the address to the Leaky Cauldron. *How could this be?* Hermione thought perhaps her parents had returned and brought with them their new child, who they had in Australia, but that was not possible. Their memories had been destroyed; they would never return home, and Hermione knew her mother

had had her tubes tied when she was about eight years old. Her mind couldn't cope with what she had seen.

What have I done?!

It all fit together in a foggy sort of way: the box, the Healer, the Aurors, and her parents with that little girl. Hermione knew who that little girl was; her mind was just too mixed up to admit it.

What have I done?!

She was lost. Everything was all wrong. The world was broken. She needed a wand and she needed Harry, if there even was a Harry.

A wand first... if I have a wand, at least I can defend myself! It was that logic that led her to Ollivander's. The bell rang from somewhere deep within the shop as the light door shut behind her. Ollivander came out from the back, beaming. He looked a lot healthier than she remembered, and of course, he had no idea who she was.

"Why hello, ma'am. What can I do for you?" he asked, sizing her up with his gaze. Ollivander never forgot anyone or his or her wand. "You must be new around here."

"Yes, very new. I need a wand," she informed him sharply.

"Did something happen to your old one?" he asked, no longer smiling. Mr. Ollivander took wands very seriously and did not look favorably on those who allowed something to happen to theirs.

"I just need another one," Hermione said, cutting off any further inquiry into her missing wand. He sized her up again; wand matching was an art form. He turned and signaled for her to follow, pulling several long white boxes off the shelves as he went by.

She had to try five wands before they found the right one. Her breath hitched as she held the wand up to the light. It was identical to her former wand, the exact same shape and wood marking. Even the dragon heartstring inside was from the same species. It was all so clear.

Hermione was familiar with time travel; but this, this was beyond disastrous. It was too much for her to handle. She wanted to cry, scream, and yell, maybe even smash something.

How did I do this? How can I fix this? What can I do?

Hindsight is always 20-20, and on looking back, she knew Apparating wasn't the smartest decision. She had never splinched herself before. It burned. The moment she popped into the middle of Hogsmeade, she felt the searing pain light up her left arm. The last thing she saw was whiteness as she lost consciousness again. In her mind, it felt like the second time that day, but in reality it was 16 years in the past.

Hermione awoke in a hospital, but it was not St. Mungo's. For that, she thanked every deity she could name but quickly cursed them all as she realized she was in the hospital wing at Hogwarts. She had a sinking feeling that being here was just going to confirm her fears about what had happened to her in the Department of Mysteries.

With her eyes held tightly shut, she clung to the hope that the jewelry box had simply made her lose her mind *Being insane would be much easier to deal with than this.* Tear drops began to trace their way down the slopes of her cheeks. She wished harder than ever that she still had her mother. She wasn't ready to face the magical world alone. She wasn't ready to be an adult. The loneliness in her heart was stronger than it had been her first year at Hogwarts. She wished with everything she had that she weren't so alone, but not even magic can make wishes come true.

The tapping sound of footsteps approaching reminded Hermione that she didn't have time to break down, not when she needed to be on her guard. She willed herself to stop her silent crying and opened her eyes to see the familiar face of Madam Pomfrey. Her face was familiar, but different, younger; Hermione preferred to ignore this.

"You did a nice job splinching yourself, young lady," she scolded. "Luckily, your arm made most of the journey with you; in fact, it was only a few yards away from your body, according to the professor. He saw you arrive in the street from the Hog's Head," she nattered on, pulling out some glass vials from her white Healer's robe. "Cheers, deary."

The potion burned her throat and tasted like copper. Blood replenishing potion. Hermione wondered how much blood she had lost. She did feel slightly lightheaded, and on examining her left arm, she noted her skin was paler than normal. *At least I still have my left arm.*

"Thank you," she told Madam Pomfrey. Her voice was hoarse from the potion.

"Yes, well it's a bit slow around here anyway. Now get some rest. The Headmaster should be along shortly." She turned away, walking past the rows of empty beds.

Oh god, no. She considered running again, but in her condition, jumping out of windows was not an option. Even if Hermione did make it out of the school without detection, where could she go to from there? The forbidden forest? No, she would have to face him. *Maybe he'll help me?*

There was once a time when she thought him the savior of all, a beacon of light in dark times, but she had learned that he had his priorities. She doubted helping her would coincide with what must be done for the greater good.

Hermione knew he was there, but she kept her eyes closed, not wanting to face him. If it were really him, there would be no more denial.

"I see Madam Pomfrey set your arm back in order. It was very fortunate that you were brought here so quickly. Are you feeling better?" the old man asked, seating himself in the chair beside her bed. Dumbledore. His beard was just as long and white. His nose was still crooked, and his blue eyes with the half moon glasses still twinkled.

Damn him! she thought.

"Yes," she replied tightly.

"Curious... very curious. It seems there was an incident at the Ministry of Magic today. In the Department of Mysteries, a girl just appeared out of thin air." He gestured to the air around them.

"She was unconscious, so they took her to St. Mungo's, where, upon waking, she disappeared."

He gave her a hard look, a very un-Dumbledore look. "The Ministry decided that the incident dealt with itself and is, therefore, no longer a matter of importance. But, then again, it's very unusual for someone to jump out of a window at St. Mungo's."

Hermione paled. *Damn him!*

"Telling me your name would not be amiss. I myself am Albus Dumb--"

"I know who you are," she cut him off.

"How curious. I, however, do not know who you are."

Her eyes narrowed. "I feel for the sake of the **greater good**, it would be best that you didn't."

Dumbledore held her eyes for a minute before sighing. "Perhaps you should come up with something for me to call you then, my dear." Hermione just continued to glare. "Do you have anywhere to go?" he asked, his eyes taking on that charming twinkle.

Thrice damn him! She shook her head, not wanting to hear the truth out loud.

"It seems we are both in a bit of a situation, but perhaps we can help each other." That got her attention.

"How so?" she inquired

"Well, you see, I'm afraid I am short a staff member, and I'm running out of time to fill the position. You did graduate, didn't you?"

"A record setting number of NEWT's." *Not that it matters now*, she thought darkly.

"Astounding! Would you consider lending the school your talents until your **situation** straightens itself out?" How could anyone say no to those twinkling blue eyes?

"I think that may work," she concluded. "But I have no intention of finishing out the year."

"I'd be thankful for any time you have to spare." Dumbledore stood to leave.

"I have a few major time issues at the moment," she sighed, exasperated.

"I can imagine. Be sure to get some more rest; I'll have a house-elf take you to your chambers later. I'm afraid the school is rather empty this time of year. It's just Poppy and me for the most part. I think she worries about my health." He gave her a look and she rolled her eyes.

I'm not telling you anything, you old coot. But she was tempted.

"Oh, and the school's Potions Master uses the lab to brew potions for St. Mungo's. I assume you know your way around the school. Meals will be at the normal time."

She rolled over and bit her fist to keep from screaming in frustration. Dumbledore was bad enough, she couldn't handle seeing **him**.

What am I going to do...?

The moment Dumbledore left the hospital wing, Severus Snape was at his side.

"Well?" he demanded, impatient from waiting on, first the girl to wake up, and then Dumbledore to talk to her. He had wasted too much time already and was going to be behind on his brewing.

"I think I've found someone to be our new DADA professor."

Severus stopped. He was still naïve enough to be hopeful, and Dumbledore was wary about crushing him again. Severus Snape did not have much to hope for, and Dumbledore worried that the proud man behind him might break. He turned to face him. Severus's face was an expressionless mask, but the fact that he wasn't glaring or scowling spoke volumes.

"Severus..." Dumbledore warned. The dark man glared at his boots, silently berating himself for being so foolish. *Of course he doesn't mean me* "We've been over this..."

"One would think that someone who leaves hospitals by jumping out of windows would be a flight risk," Severus growled, still staring a hole into his boots.

"Look at me, Severus," Dumbledore commanded. There was no twinkle in his eyes. Severus glared harder. "We will not speak about this again; you will remove this matter from your thoughts. No good will come from you investigating what you saw. Do you hear me?" His tone left no room for negotiation.

"Yes, Albus." His outrage deflated, he retreated into himself, something he had learned to do at a young age. Dumbledore continued walking, leaving Severus standing in front of the hospital wing.

Despite what Dumbledore had told him, he was not going to let it go. He headed back to his dungeons, his thoughts with the strange girl in the hospital wing. She was too young to be a professor, as was he, but Severus wasn't about to admit that. No, he didn't care what Dumbledore said. He would investigate. For the first of many times to come, Severus wished he had just let the silly chit bleed out in Hogsmeade.

Author's notes: thank you for the reviews, everyone! And again thank you to my wonderful beta bookofsecrets.

Down in the Dungeons

Chapter 3 of 5

Hermione adjusts to the idea of being the DADA Professor in the past. And Snape botches a potion or three.

Chapter Three

Down in the Dungeons

It was well past dinner before Madam Pomfrey let Hermione be taken to her rooms by a house-elf, named Bimpy. Hermione felt emotionally exhausted from the days events. She hadn't been able to get much sleep in the hospital wing; Madam Pomfrey had talked her ear off. It turned out she wasn't worried about Dumbledore's health; she was just avoiding her sister, whom she had a falling out with the past summer over some new Healer from Russia. Hermione hadn't paid much attention, but the distraction had been nice.

Hermione was not pleased with her chambers; they were spacious, home-like and inviting. She would have found them to be wonderfully lovely if it weren't for the fact that they were too close to the dungeons for her liking. She wasn't sure how she would feel if and when she saw him, though she knew it was a matter of when not if. How could she possibly avoid him? At least she knew he wasn't in the dungeons at this time of night. It was late, but she was wrong.

Deep in the underbelly of Hogwarts, Severus was hard at work. He was tired, sore, and filthy. His skin was slick with sweat from the hot fumes of his bubbling potions, causing both his clothes and his now matted hair to cling to his body like a wet cat's fur. He longed to be in bed even though he feared the nightmares that he knew would come. Severus felt too tired to even Apparate home. He would be staying at Hogwarts that night. Despite how worn he felt, Severus still had several more batches of potions to brew if he was going to keep up with his work load. And so he worked late into the night. While Hermione bathed, Severus worked; while Hermione read, Severus worked, and even when Hermione was safely asleep in her new bed dreaming about the life leaving his dark eyes, Severus worked. He worked until he was so tired he collapsed and slept on the drafty dungeon floor for three hours. A house-elf found him there and used her elf magic to carry him to his proper bed, where he dreamed about the broken girl he had carried to Hogwarts. Her dried blood still clung to his clothes; he would have to have the house-elves burn them in the morning.

The morning hit Hermione hard and fast. She was in a panic before breakfast, trying to figure out how she was going to teach Defense Against the Dark Arts. It was, after all, her worst subject, not counting Divination, which Hermione never did. She had still been in the top five per cent of her class, but she didn't feel that qualified her to teach the subject.

Hermione needed to make a syllabus for all seven years, assign books, and figure out what subject matter was appropriate for each age group. She, herself, had experienced such a wide variety of DADA professors, only two of whom were really running the classroom up to standard: Professors Snape and Lupin... well, three if one counted the Moody imposter, but Hermione concluded that introducing the Unforgivables to fourth-years was not appropriate for their age.

That week was spent remembering all of the DADA books she had used as a student at Hogwarts and tracking down the correct version of those books for this year so as not to assign books from the future. She reread all of them, even the ones she had memorized, and created a syllabus for each year. She familiarized herself with the DADA classroom and found a few boggarts to use for classes.

It was relieving to throw herself into work, cutting herself off from the others in the castle, except for the house-elves, who delivered all of her meals to her office. Dumbledore hadn't stopped by, though Hermione suspected he was having the house-elves keep an eye on her.

With work to consume her time, she didn't have to worry about all of her other problems. She had done the same thing in her own time. After the war and all of the losses, including when she had failed to retrieve her parents and restore their memories, she had been devastated but determined not to break down, not to stop, and she hadn't. It was how she had earned a record-setting number of N.E.W.T.s, and it was what had driven Hermione and Ron apart. Even after that, she hadn't stopped. Being thrown into the past didn't stop her either; if she stopped, Hermione knew she would break, crumble, shatter, and fall.

She was finished. Everything was prepared, and Hermione felt empty. It would be two months before the school term started, two months in which she had nothing to do. She thought about trying to find that blasted jewelry box that had caused this entire mess, but she had a feeling that showing up at the Ministry of Magic, Department of Mysteries would only cause more problems for her... If only she had Harry's invisibility cloak with her or knew where she could find it in this time. She entertained the idea of using Polyjuice Potion like she had done when she was younger, in the future, but she would have had to impersonate someone who was already working in the Department of Mysteries. Even if she did that, she had no idea how to get in the Department itself. There would be no Death Eaters making sure that she gained entrance.

Out of desperation for something to do, Hermione began wandering around the castle, re-familiarizing herself with Hogwarts' many secret pathways and hiding places, excluding the dungeons. Several times that day, she found herself at one of the entrances into the dungeon; the same ones she would take to get to her Potions classroom when she had been a student. It was hard for her to think of him as alive, much harder than it was with Dumbledore. *But I didn't see Dumbledore die.* Hermione knew that she should stay as far away from him as possible. Knowing what she knew now, about everything he had done and all that he had gone through, she wondered if she would see him differently than she had before.

It was on her fourth trip down near the dungeons that she heard the crash and, without thinking, ran to his office. The door was closed but not locked. He wasn't there, but another door further in the room was left slightly ajar. She could smell the fumes from where she stood. *What if he's hurt?* She worried. It was illogical, even impossible, but all Hermione could think was that she couldn't bear to let him die again.

Severus Snape was having a horrible week. Not that any of his weeks for the past few years had been anything resembling good, but this one was particularly dreadful. He kept dreaming of that silly chit lying on the ground at his feet, bleeding. Ever since Lily's death, he had been tormented by dreams of his imagination's version of the last few moments of her life. He was both relieved and devastated that, for the first time since that dreadful night, his dreams were of something else. Instead of being haunted by the woman he had failed to save, he was taunted by the one he had. On top of that, he was still behind in his brewing. Severus was so stressed that he had ruined three batches of burn paste, something he had never done before in his life. Severus Snape did not botch potions!

He tensed when she entered his lab but did not turn around to face her, praying that she would just go away so he could pretend she hadn't come in the first place. Hermione stared at him, standing there, his back turned to her, stirring his potion in graceful figure eights, not hurt at all. Next to him was an overturned bench and some broken glass on the floor.

That explains the noise, she thought.

After a moment of nothing, Severus sighed and turned to her with his most vicious scowl plastered on his face. He froze, his harsh words dying before they ever reached his lips. He did not see her as she was before him but as the broken, bleeding girl in his dreams. She, too, was horror-struck; even as he stood there in all his proud, livid glory, she saw the fallen man on the floor of the Shrieking Shack with red and silver pouring from his mouth, ears, and throat as he lay dying. She had seen him die, seen him as a dead corpse, and now it was like the whole thing had never happened because it hadn't happened... not yet.

Both of them were pulled from their dark memories by the orange potion, hissing and bubbling over.

"Shite!" Severus swore, starting to slowly stir in the same smooth figure eights as he had been doing prior to the bushy haired woman's arrival in his lab. He sprinkled in some white powder horn, trying to save his potion even as it bubbled up and burned his wrist and palm. He kept stirring, ignoring the pain. *I will not ruin another potion!* The potion hissed at his thoughts and turned a pale brown.

"Damn it!"

The potion was ruined. He had failed. Severus knocked the cauldron to the floor, letting the wasted potion spill and steam into the air.

"You're hurt," Hermione whispered, suddenly at his side, grabbing his right arm and inspecting his injured hand.

"No thanks to you!" he roared turning on her like a rabid dog, baring his crooked teeth that weren't quite as stained as she remembered them.

"Me? I didn't do anything!" She glared, deftly undoing his cuffs and pulling his sleeve back so she could examine his injured wrist as well.

"You! You distracted me."

"You can be distracted?" she asked doubtfully.

Severus clenched his jaw and growled in the back of his throat. *How dare she!*

"Get. Out," he hissed in his most venom-filled tone.

"You're going to need some burn paste on this. Do you have any?" Hermione asked, ignoring his fierce glare. She could deal with this; she had seen him acting like a spiteful child throwing a temper tantrum before.

"I said out!" he repeated louder than before.

"Oh, that's burn paste potion on the floor that you just botched. Did you make anymore?" she turned away from him, looking around his lab and the many crates filled with potions on the floor.

"I did not botch the potion; you did," he accused as she knelt down at a crate labeled 'Burn Paste'. "Stop! That's for St Mungo's. You can't use that."

"Fine," she sighed, "I suppose I might have some."

"I don't have time for this nonsense! I have potions to brew, and I want you out of my lab now! You have no right to be here... no reason to come here!" he yelled at her as she searched through her purse before pulling out some burn paste and gauze.

"Just let me treat your hand," she conceded, taking his arm again. Hermione was a little surprised that he let her.

"So you're a medi-witch as well as a DADA professor?" he spat bitterly as she squeezed the orange goo onto the gauze and wrapped it around his wrist and palm.

"One picks up a lot of skills to help protect the ones we care about during war-time." She froze, and he stiffened at her words. Fear struck Hermione. Had she said too much? But of course the war had recently ended in this time, as well. *Poor Harry*, Hermione sighed, thinking of her best friend as a small toddler living with the Dursleys. It took her a moment to realize that the man whose arm she was still holding onto was staring at the floor looking completely ashamed.

"I... I shouldn't have said that..." she stuttered. Severus pulled his arm from her small hands and glared.

"I'm very busy; please see yourself out as you saw it fit to see yourself in." he spoke in a cold, polite voice with his anger and grief in check.

Hermione studied his face closely for the first time since she had entered his lab. *How?... he almost looks the same...* Unlike Madam Pomfrey, Severus did not look younger. He looked half-dead, skinnier than Hermione had ever seen him, even with his bulky robes. His face was thinner, more sullen; his skin was just as pale with his standard sneer and hooked nose. But his eyes, they were different. Blood-shot with deep purple bruises under each. *What is he putting himself through?*

"Let me help you!" Hermione blurted, desperate to do something for him.

"GET OUT!" he bellowed, unleashing his anger again, but Hermione would have none of it. She stood straight, squaring her shoulders and lifting her chin. She was ready for a fight.

"When was the last time you slept?" She demanded.

"My sleeping habits are no concern of yours!"

"Have you even eaten anything today?"

Severus turned from her at that, clenching his fist as he leaned on his workbench, breathing heavily.

"Get out! Or so help me, I will throw you out, woman!" He swung around, grabbing Hermione by her upper arms roughly and shaking her for emphasis. She had her wand at his throat in a heartbeat.

"Severus Snape!" His eyes widened in shock as she hissed, "unhand me this instant!"

Severus dropped his arms to his side, stepping back with his eyes again glaring at his boots, looking dejected.

"Please... at least let me brew the burn paste I..." she paused to swallow her pride, "ruined for you?"

"You'll just waste my ingredients. I doubt you can brew anything to my standards," he said to the floor.

Hermione gasped. That stung more than he knew; she never did meet his picture of the ideal student in Potions. "Perhaps not, but I can brew to St. Mungo's standards."

"I don't need anyone's help!" he barked. "Now leave, you insufferable woman."

Hermione sighed, "Fine."

But I'm coming back... with sandwiches.

Author's notes: thank you to all for reviewing and to my lovely beta bookofsecrets

The Renaming of Hermione Granger

Chapter 4 of 5

Severus shows more worrisome behavior, and Hermione seeks help from Dumbledore on his behalf.

Chapter Four

The Renaming of Hermione Granger

Hermione almost lost her nerve at the entrance to the Hogwarts kitchens. *Maybe I should just send a house-elf down with some food for him* But no, the house-elves didn't deserve his anger. She still had them prepare the food, knowing how devastated the elves would have been if she had shown up in their kitchens insisting on preparing food herself. The elves were delighted to be at her service and eager to impress the new professor. Hermione's head still spun at the thought that she was now a professor. It felt as though she had just been a student at Hogwarts, but that was because she had just been a student at Hogwarts.

The house-elves, as usual, outdid themselves, preparing Hermione an array of sandwiches, biscuits, cakes, fresh fruit and cheese. She hoped Severus would be willing to eat something on the platter and that he wouldn't just throw said platter at her.

Hermione arrived at the Potion master's office door with his platter of food hovering behind her like a trained pet. She half expected the door to be locked and warded against her and was pleasantly surprised to find that it wasn't; however, this meant that there was no excuse for her to turn back. If she did, it would be because of her own shameful fear. But Hermione was a Gryffindor, and she was not about to let fear stop her.

Severus was at his desk in his office, holding his head in his hands as he rubbed small circles around his temples, when Hermione entered the room. She sat the plate of food down before him and wordlessly fished a headache potion out of her bag, setting it next to the food.

"Were you sent here to torment me?" he asked, still holding his head in his hands.

Hermione looked thoughtful for a moment. "I suppose it's a possibility." She doubted, however, that the jewelry box fiasco in the Department of Mysteries at the Ministry of Magic had anything to do with the harsh man sitting before her.

He snorted at her reply and swiftly downed the headache potion, still not looking at her.

"You shouldn't take that on an empty stomach," she chided him.

"I **am** a Potions master, you know." He glared, and she smiled. *Arrogant chit.*

"Then, eat up." Hermione gestured to the food before him.

"I don't need to be coddled, damn it!" Severus snapped, berating himself for not warding her out of his office after she left and questioning his sanity for letting her stay.

"You need to eat," she told him, "and after that have a bit of a lie down. I'll go remake a batch of burn paste potion since I ruined your other one."

"Just who on this god-forsaken planet do you think you are?!" Severus demanded; he couldn't just ask her what her name was. That would be unacceptable. That would be admitting to himself that he was curious about her, which he wasn't, not in the least...

"I'm He--," She stopped herself short. She had already been foolish enough to give her name out once and was not about to do it again, especially to someone who would know her in the future as a student. She hadn't thought about a new name since her conversation with Dumbledore.

Despite what many people believed, Hermione could lie. She had lied to Umbridge under threat of torture, and she had lied to Bellatrix Lestrange, while being tortured. However, she could not lie to Professor Snape, not to his face. His eyes narrowed at her hesitation.

"I'm a concerned colleague," she finally said lamely.

His face didn't show it, but he almost laughed, a bitter anguish-filled laugh. His anger flared. *How dare she come into my office, force herself and food upon me, and then deny me her name!* "Your concern is most unwelcome, I assure you," he said, spitting the word concern out like it was something foul-tasting upon his tongue.

Hermione shook her head. *Of course it is; you're Severus Snape.*

"Just eat." She turned and entered his lab, shutting the door behind her. She thought about locking it but felt that would be crossing the line, something that she had already done in Severus's eyes.

The first thing she did was clean, starting with the spilled potion and cauldron, then fixing the broken glass and bench that had either been knocked over or more likely, because this was Professor Snape, kicked. After that, she started the burn paste potion.

On the other side of the door, Severus sat glaring at the food before him. His traitorous stomach growled, and he covered it with his hand, trying to stifle the noise, which was alarmingly loud in the silent room. He was too tired to fight but too stubborn to give in. And he was hungry, very hungry. He conceded to himself that he would eat her food and let her brew the potion, which would just go to Poppy anyway. St. Mungo's wouldn't accept it; that would be against the Ministry's regulations that they had him under. She couldn't help him, and he wouldn't let her anyway. After he felt stronger, more like himself, he would yell at her and berate her until she left in tears, and he would be free. And then, the dreams would stop. *Yes, he thought, they will stop.*

He dreamed of her again. Only this time, she was on his office floor instead of in Hogsmeade. The strange, nameless girl was broken and bleeding like in all of his other dreams in which she played a starring role. She wore the same plain Muggle clothing.

Severus was at her side the moment he saw her. Pulling out his wand, he tried everything he knew to stop the bleeding, but nothing worked. The blood kept coming, her breathing became erratic and shallower, and her skin paled as the color drained from her.

No... no, hold on... Out of desperation, he tried to stop the blood-flow with the hem of his robes, putting as much pressure on her wound as he could without causing her more damage. She looked so small and young, like one of his students, but he had only ever seen her once before that day in Hogsmeade, and that was her jumping out of the window at St. Mungos.

Her eyes slowly opened, and she looked at him with such worry he nearly found it touching. Gently, she placed her hand, the only hand she had, on his shoulder.

"Are you all right?" Hermione asked, still bleeding, slowly dying.

"What?" he asked. This had never happened before in his previous dreams.

"You didn't eat anything." She put her other, unnoticed hand on his other shoulder and gave him a gentle shake. "Are you okay?" she persisted.

He blinked, and the room spun around him. Now he was looking up at her, his face resting on a few smashed sandwiches. She looked so worried he could almost pretend he was special, but Severus would never think something so pitiful even in his delusional state. He touched her left hand with his.

"You.. You're not bleeding." It was Hermione's turn to be confused, but before she could question him, his eyes closed and his arm fell back to the desk as Severus went back into his dreams.

After Hermione had finished with the potion, she returned to the office where she found Severus, face down on the sandwiches. For one horrible moment, she thought he was dead, but, after checking his pulse and even gently trying to wake him, she concluded that he was alive, just in desperate need of both sleep and food. *What is he doing to himself?* she wondered. *Even when he was a double agent, his health was never this dreadful.*

The room was silent other than the soft slow breathing of one who was fast asleep. Hermione stood, torn; she knew Severus would be furious if she stayed. Just seeing him in such a defenseless situation would further cement his hatred of her, but it didn't feel right to leave him lying there.

After giving it some thought, she summoned a house-elf. Bimpy popped into the room with a loud crack. Severus stirred at the noise but did not wake.

"Bimpy, please take Professor Snape to his chambers and put him to bed," Hermione instructed. The house-elf nodded eagerly, and, using that powerful elf magic, levitated him in the air before snapping her fingers. They were both gone, leaving only Hermione and the echo of their departure in the room.

Hermione knew trying to help him might be pointless, but it was in her nature. At the moment, she felt the only way to do that without making Severus hungry for her blood was to talk to the Headmaster, Dumbledore. Besides, she owed him an apology.

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Making a mental list of every Muggle and wizarding candy she could think of, Hermione approached the entrance to the Headmaster's offices. The stone gargoyle met her with a cold, lifeless stare.

"Lemon drops?" she guessed.

Nothing...

"Chocolate frogs?"

Nothing...

"Sugar quill--" She was cut off mid-word by the stone gargoyle turning away, revealing the spiral staircase that was being descended by none other than Dumbledore himself.

"Professor!" Hermione called, catching him off guard. "I was just looking for you."

"Ah, and it appears you've found me. I was planning on finding you, myself." Dumbledore came to her wearing rich purple robes with light blue moons in various stages of waning and waxing that matched his twinkling eyes. His Father Time-like charm was unmistakable. "It's lovely out; would you mind letting me escort you on a walk around the grounds?" he asked, holding his arm out in invitation.

"Not at all," Hermione replied, accepting his proffered arm.

They walked in silence, side by side, to the Entrance Hall and then out of the castle. It was a beautiful summer day. Hermione had never seen Hogwarts in the summer before. The grounds were alive with warmth; even the giant squid periodically rose to the surface of the Black Lake to enjoy the sun. The castle, however, looked a bit depressed, like a mother suffering from emptiness syndrome. It just wasn't the same without any students.

Dumbledore steered her towards the lake first, explaining to her about the giant squid and mer-people. She humored him, going along with his silly ploy of taking her on a tour around the grounds.

"So, do you, by chance, have a name I can address you as, dear girl?" he inquired as they made their way towards the border of the Forbidden Forest. Hermione didn't think he would actually take them into the forest itself.

She sighed at his question. "No. I haven't given it any thought whatsoever. I've been so busy preparing to be the DADA professor. It must have slipped my mind."

"Your dedication to your work is admirable. Perhaps I could help you think of something. I've never named a person before. Would you mind indulging the whims of an old man?" he asked her, giving his most grandfatherly smile.

"Be my guest; you've been more than understanding about this, and I apologize for being short with you before," Hermione told him, absently toying with a strand of her curly hair. It was unlike her to be disrespectful.

"Don't let it trouble you. I've never splinched myself, but, if I ever did, I imagine I'd be a bit grumpy afterwards," he explained nonchalantly.

"May I ask you what made you trust me?" Hermione questioned, stopping in the umbrage of the forest. She could see Hagrid's hut and wondered if he was home. Dumbledore hadn't mentioned him being there for the summer, but she couldn't think of him living somewhere else.

"Legitimacy," he stated and, seeing her chalk-white face, continued, "very gently. I only saw that you were telling the truth."

"Oh," she sighed.

"...and I saw the box," he added. Hermione glared at the forest.

"What do you think happened to me?" she asked sounding sulky, which was childish and very unlike her, but Dumbledore needed to learn that sort of thing was not okay. Hermione thought, though, that her pouting would probably not make any difference in Dumbledore's code of conduct.

"I'm afraid I haven't the slightest idea. I'm sorry I cannot be of more help," he told her, his voice full of sincerity. She always found it hard to be mad at him, even when it seemed like he had sent them off on a never-ending quest after his death.

She shrugged. "You gave me a job."

"Yes, and now you need a name," Dumbledore pondered, taking her arm in his as they started walking in the direction of Hagrid's hut again.

Hermione was silent beside him, trying to think of a way to bring up her concern for Professor Snape while he thought of names for her.

"Jennifer?" he suggested

"No," she said simply.

"Jamie?"

She gave him a stern look. "No male names."

"Well, what kind of name would you like?" Dumbledore asked, stopping again, this time next to Hagrid's garden.

She gave it a moment's thought. "Something I can remember, of course. What name do I appear to be?" she asked him.

Dumbledore turned to her with a searching look; Hermione avoided direct eye contact while he sized her up.

"Helena." It was a statement not a question. She had been named by Dumbledore and was unsure whether she felt honored or lost.

Hermione nodded her assent. "Helena," she repeated. "Helena Taber." Taber was the maiden name of Hermione's mother.

"A lovely name! I'll deal with the paperwork for the Board of Governors, and trust me, nothing will be amiss," he concluded.

"I don't doubt it, but there was something else I wished to speak to you about," Hermione reminded him. He took her arm again and turned back towards the castle. *So I have a time limit, do I?* she thought.

"I'm worried about Professor Snape."

Dumbledore stopped again and looked at her, clearly caught off guard. She thought he looked almost worried.

With a deep breath, she continued, "He's overworking himself, and he's not eating or sleeping enough." Hermione stopped, seeing the stern expression on Dumbledore's old face.

"Did he talk to you?"

"Yes, well, I heard a crash in the dungeons and went to investigate. He botched a potion, and he's, well, he's a Potions master, and it was a simple burn salve. He looks so much worse than I've ever seen him, and he didn't even throw me out. Well, he tried to but he gave up. He **gave up!** And then he fell asleep at his desk. Something is wrong. I'm really worried," Hermione took several large breaths of air; she had spoken so quickly that she wasn't certain whether Dumbledore had heard it all or any of it, for that matter. He seemed strangely relieved.

"So you came to him?" he asked, pulling her arm in the direction of Hogwarts again. Hermione stumbled for a moment before matching his slightly faster pace.

"Yes, but what does that have to do with anything?" She was confused and a little miffed that he didn't seem to be taking the matter seriously.

Dumbledore sighed deeply and suddenly looked as old as she remembered him. "Helena. May I call you Helena?" She nodded and he continued, "I am aware of the situation. I will try talking to Alastor, but I fear it will do as much good as the last time we spoke."

The only Alastor that Hermione knew was Alastor Moody, who would be head of the Auror Department at this time *But what would he have to do with Professor Snape not eating or sleeping enough? He must be speaking of a different Alastor,* she concluded.

"What exactly is the situation?" Hermione asked.

"It would be inappropriate for me to discuss this matter with you, but come," Dumbledore commanded, leading her back into Hogwarts. "I would like to give you something I have in my office."

Again, they walked in silence until they reached the Headmaster's office. It remained relatively unchanged by time, still filled with Dumbledore's bizarre odds and ends, but none of this registered to Hermione. She hadn't had a lot of exposure to the Headmaster's office, but she recognized Fawkes in the corner, on his golden perch, looking radiant.

"He's beautiful," Hermione said, captivated by the bird's colourful plumage. She didn't know there were so many shades of red, yellow, and orange.

"His name is Fawkes," Dumbledore told her as he pulled out a large book-shaped object, wrapped in brown paper. "It would be too dangerous for me to try to teach you myself, so you'll have to make do with this book." He sounded doubtful that this would accomplish anything, but, if there was one thing Hermione could do better than anyone else, it was learning from a book.

She smiled and accepted the parcel, confused. "Thank you?"

He waved her off. "No need. I would like you to start working on it as soon as possible, and, please, I know this is inappropriate of me to ask you, well, tell you, but I must insist that you avoid Professor Snape." He trailed off, making it clear that he would give Hermione no explanation.

She glared. *How dare he!*

"For the greater good?" Hermione asked, skeptically.

"Perhaps, but mostly for your own good." There was no twinkle in his eyes nor humor in his face.

Author's notes: the 5th chapter is with my beta, and I just finished the 6th and started the 7th chapter, but I am going to be going on two vacations in the next three weeks, so posting will be a bit choppy, but I will do my best to post something.

Thank you all for reviewing and lots of love for my beta, Bookofsecrets.

The Panty Thief Part One

Chapter 5 of 5

Hermione is just starting her life as an Unspeakable when something happens to her in the Department of Mysteries, forcing her to deal with her inner turmoil with some unwilling help from Severus Snape.

Chapter 5

The Panty Thief. Part one

Hermione was still angry when she reached her rooms on the second floor after having gone all the way to the sixth floor before remembering that she no longer stayed in Gryffindor tower. She tossed the brown parcel on her settee as she began to pace her quarters. How dare he! It took several trips around her quarters before Hermione's blood finally cooled enough for her to think clearly. She plopped down, grabbing Dumbledore's gift and tore into the brown paper, revealing the mysterious book, which she promptly dropped at her feet as realization dawned upon her.

How could I have been so foolish? she berated herself. Dumbledore had been right to warn her. It was so easy to overlook the facts in the face of everything that she knew Professor Snape had done or in this case would do. It was so easy to let her guilt cloud her reason, so easy to forget who he was...

Severus Snape was a Death Eater who had gone turn-coat because of Lily Evans. Nothing else, as far as Hermione knew, had caused his change of heart: not because he had changed his ways, or because he thought what Voldemort was doing was wrong. It had all been for Lily. He hadn't even cared if the Dark Lord killed the defenceless baby Harry, only that he spared Lily. He hadn't. Lily had died for her baby as any loving mother would have done, and the Dark Lord was gone, at least for the moment. Hermione wondered how recently those events had occurred. One year ago, perhaps two?

Dumbledore had trusted Professor Snape during the war. He had trusted him with Hogwarts and the students within, but he did not trust Professor Snape with her. It gave Hermione a feeling of misgiving.

I should be avoiding everyone... I shouldn't even be here, she reminded herself, while picking the book up from beside her feet. Dumbledore is right, more so than even he knows. I need to know this, I must protect the future. And with that thought in mind, she settled herself in to study the night away, even though she was already a little drowsy. If there was one thing Hermione was best at, books were it.

It was well into the night when Professor Snape came storming into Hermione's chamber, angrier than a wet kneazle, yelling at her and berating her as he took on his Professor role and stalked around her like a vulture would a carcass.

Hermione stared wide eyed, clutching a pillow to her chest, attempting to shield her heart from his verbal attack. He told her she was insufferable, pathetic, weak and that, most of all, she was undeserving. He added that she didn't belong in the magical world, that she was a poor excuse for a witch. He even went so far as to accuse her of letting him die, of watching him die.

"My death is on your hands!" he snarled at her, spit flying from his mouth with each word as he loomed over her. Hermione clutched the maroon pillow closer, not even daring to wipe his saliva from her cheek.

"Y- you're hurt," Hermione stammered taking control of her limbs and reaching for him, as if her touch would make the bleeding from the two puncture wounds on his neck stop. It didn't.

The moment Hermione opened her arms to him, Severus collapsed on her. Whether of his own accord or from the blood loss, making it impossible for him to stand, she didn't know, but she held him all the same. She cradled him even though his anger was as hot as his blood that was quickly soaking through her clothes and staining her flesh.

"You let me die," he accused. She squeezed him tighter, wishing he would hug her back. His limbs, like the rest of his body, were just dead weight pressing down on her.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. Her apology was more like a plea.

"I'm still dead..." he countered.

No, you're not. The thought was a slap of awareness, and she was startled awake to the sound of someone pounding on her door.

Hermione had fallen asleep on her settee, the book still lay open in her lap. Looking out her window, she could tell that it was early morning, very early. In about an hour, the sun would break over the forest, making it a very obscene hour for someone to be knocking on her door so insistently. In the week that Hermione had been living at Hogwarts, she had not had one visitor to her quarters other than house-elves, and they were mostly quiet and would never pound on her door.

Setting the book down beside her, she hurried to the door but stalled with her fingers lightly touching the handle. What if the Aurors have come for me? she fretted. It seemed unlikely; Dumbledore wouldn't allow them to disturb one of his faculty members, not at this hour, not without warning.

BANG, BANG, BANG.

Hermione jumped back as the door shook from the violence of its assailant. She reasoned with herself that jumping out of the window was not an option and opened the door.

She screamed.

It wasn't a loud blood curdling scream, not even close, but loud enough to echo down the hall. Severus, who was as angry as he had been in her dream, recoiled in shock from her reaction but, just as quickly recovered, stepping into her quarters. He was on her before she had even finished her scream. Moving behind her, Severus covered her mouth with his hand to silence her, kicked the door shut and pinned her arms to her sides with his free arm, dragging her further into her room.

Dumbledore was right, and he tried to warn me. He's a Death Eater! Hermione started kicking and struggling with everything she had, but it was futile as her legs seemed to hit nothing but air. She managed to hit his chin with the back of her head; however, that hurt her much more than him. In response to her struggles, Severus pulled her tightly against his chest, almost painfully so.

"Stop it this instant, you insufferable chit!" he commanded.

She didn't stop. She tried to bite his hand, and Severus growled in her ear. Pulling his hand away from her mouth, he spun her around to face him, gripping her upper arms roughly.

"Explain yourself this instant," he snarled, baring his crooked teeth at her.

"Me?" Her eyes flared in righteous indignation. "Let go of me! Do you have any idea what time it is?" Hermione tried kicking him again but he pushed her back before her leg could hit its mark. She stumbled and caught herself on the settee's arm, brandishing her wand before she had completely regained her balance. She pointed it at him as he levelled his own wand at her chest.

"Do you have any idea how much time you've taken from me?" Severus bellowed.

The stinging hex died in Hermione's throat and she almost dropped her wand. Oh god! He knows...

"You have no right! No reason to enter my personal lab, to disturb my work!" he stalked up close to her, pinning her to the side of the settee so that her only escape would be to fall back onto the cushions. His physical presence and raw anger were more intense than Hermione had ever witnessed and were more than enough to frighten her into attacking. But Hermione was too relieved to notice the danger. He's still upset over that, she sighed. The feelings of dread lightened significantly but did not dissipate.

He didn't have any idea about her true crime against him. Stealing time was a dramatic understatement of what she had taken from him, at least in her mind.

"And then!" he continued raging at her. "You dare to enter my chambers! To... to tuck me in like I'm some pitiful fist year!"

As in her dream, droplets of spit flew from his mouth and onto her face only this time she didn't remain unmoved. Hermione grabbed fistfuls of his robe as if her much slighter form had any chance of shaking him.

"I did no such thing!" she defended herself. "You're the one who barged into my room... in the middle of the night, no less!"

Hermione attempted to push him away from her, but Severus pushed back causing them both to fall over the arm of the settee. They hit the cushions first before rolling to the floor with a hard thud. Hermione's knees landed on Severus's chest, forcing the air from his lungs, and her feet were dangerously close to his groin.

He wanted to retaliate verbally, say something so completely mean and nasty that it would make her cry. However, from his experiences so far with this nameless witch, it was clear that she was more prone to violence than tears. Considering how easy it would be for her to kick him in an area in which he definitely did not want to be kicked, he refrained and held his tongue in check. Settling for just glaring at her while trying to breathe with her entire weight on his chest, Severus could not have any idea just how many times his harsh words would make her cry. As it was, she was older now, and he was younger in this impossible situation that was pushing Hermione to the edge of patience.

At the moment she was almost too frustrated to have any room left for guilt, almost. She shifted her weight off him, seating herself crisscross on the floor, her stare downcast, watching his chest rise and fall as he took in big gulps of air. There was a dull pain in his abdomen, and he wondered whether the little slip had bruised his ribs.

As both of their anger dissipated, they realized how ridiculous it was that they were on the floor after having physically attacked each other. The silence became palpable as they both refused to look at the other one.

Hermione, being the more verbal of the two, broke the silence. "Do you always treat the new professors like this?"

It was not a question that required an answer. Severus felt ashamed of himself. He always had a hard time controlling his temper and it was always more difficult during the summer when he felt that his life was owned by the Ministry. As much as he hated teaching Potions to dunderheads, which was for Dumbledore and everything for Dumbledore was for her. He could stand it for her, but not for the Ministry. He hated feeling like their slave.

His anger made him too obvious, and, as much as he distrusted this strange witch, he knew he had to be discreet about it. He would follow her, watch her and wait until he knew for certain what she was up to. His gut told him that she was most certainly up to something, and he suspected Dumbledore was well aware. He had told him how he had seen her run from St. Mungo's.

Confronting her had been a mistake, and now Severus needed to find a way to remedy this situation, make sure that she wouldn't mention it to Dumbledore. Dumbledore would try to stop him, try to keep him busy, to distract him. But Severus would not be put off course.

Glancing to his left, he saw the book that Dumbledore had given Hermione lying on the floor after having fallen off the settee along with both of them.

"What are you doing with this?" he questioned her, picking the fallen book up.

"Reading it," Hermione told him, reaching for her book.

Severus pulled himself into a sitting position, hissing through his teeth from the pain in his ribs. He held the thick tome away from her.

"Why?" He narrowed her eyes at her. So she is hiding something.

"Because Dumbledore told me to. Now give it back," Hermione demanded, reaching out for it again.

Severus stood abruptly, ignoring the slight pain the movement caused. "Is he teaching you?"

Hermione was confused that he was suddenly angry again. "No, he can't... he wants me to learn from the book."

She stood and this time tried to forcefully grab her book from him, but he held it over his head and had the audacity to laugh at her. He reminded Hermione of a school-yard bully from her childhood. Despite the similar situation, Hermione decided not to resort to violence and refrained from kicking Severus in the shins. She had never heard him laugh before. He had a mean laugh.

"You can't learn this from a book," he told her with a mocking smile. She thought he had a mean smile as well.

"I beg to differ." She glared at him.

"Care to test what you've learned so far?" he sneered pointing his wand at her face. "I could teach you."

Author's notes: I was hoping to post part one and part two as one long chapter but I sadly never heard back from my beta on part two, so for the sake of posting something before Christmas, I give you part one. I'm not sure when part two will be posted, as I am still looking for a new beta.